

FRIENDS OF WATERLOW PARK

AGM: 30th May 2012: Report from the Committee

Overview

A busy but productive year with improving relations with Camden and the development of a range of plans for the park; Perhaps the outstanding success has been the setting up and fruitful maintenance of the Kitchen Garden and the development of our volunteer gardeners group. But many more plans are in the offing.

Relations with Camden

A year of some major changes and pressures: Clearly the major cuts local authorities have been forced to make as a result of government policy has left the Parks [a non-statutory service] under considerable pressure to find economies and therefore different ways of doing things. Very sadly, this has led to severe cuts in staff posts and we were sorry to see several key people go this March. Shaun Kiddell resigned with effect at Christmas and has been replaced by Jessica Gibbons who seems keen to work well with her Friends Groups in these difficult times. We have had several productive meetings with her and also Andrew Wright, who is on maternity leave cover for Gabi Howard.

Walkabouts with the Head of Parks have effectively stopped but Andrew has taken this on meeting committee members and bringing other Camden staff such as tree specialists as necessary. The issue of FoWP having some real input into the strategic management of the Park is still current. Camden is seeking Charity Commission permission to alter the terms of the Trust for the Park to allow it to issue leases for the 4 park properties and is also looking at whether a different management structure created by widening the trust membership to key stakeholders might be a way forward. They are discussing this with FoWP and it will be a key concern this summer. Camden still holds quarterly meetings for the chairs of its Friends Groups which enables a useful exchange of views. Christine Farrell is our link with the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum which is a particularly important and useful source of information about developments in London parks and support for ideas in these difficult times.

Camden Friends of Green Spaces

Set up last year this still exists but has not been as active as was hoped. However it still provides a key way of bringing Camden parks and open spaces friends groups together when necessary.

The horticultural committee

Yet again there have been two changes of garden contractor this year as Connaught became Fountains who then metamorphosed into OCS. The lesson we draw from this is clear. Selecting the cheapest contractor is not necessarily the most cost effective nor the most

beneficial option for the upkeep of our parks and open spaces. The changes inevitably lead to demotivated staff and much time wasting during the transition, Despite pressures on the maintenance team they are dedicated to the life of the park and we are particularly pleased with how our new Head Gardener, Mark Walters is taking the Park in hand showing creativity in how he is managing the allocation and distribution of plants.

Close liaison with gardening staff and Camden officers has resulted in the clearing of various overgrown shrubberies, the development of the composting bays and encouraging of a balanced use of perennials and annuals with in the parterres to cut costs without reducing park user's enjoyment of the formal gardens. But much of the work of the horticultural sub-committee has been directed towards the setting up of a volunteer programme for park users. A growing group of volunteers meets every Thursday morning for regular maintenance of the Sensory border by Lauderdale House and the rose circle and we are shortly to replant the sundial border – all areas that are currently excluded from the current maintenance Camden contract.

Finally, the committee comprising Patricia Walby and Christine Farrell would welcome additional members so do please contact us and offer your services.

Kitchen Garden

The KG was opened formally in June last year and the 10 beds were tended with enthusiasm by a variety of community groups who grew an impressive range of produce. The wild flower border sown by Camden looked spectacular and was much admired by visitors who found their way into the garden often just to sit in its usually tranquil surroundings.

The beds were managed in different ways – some planted communally, some with regular rotas, others divided between individuals and yet others combining more than one bed to share responsibility. As this was the first year, the practical details were worked out as time passed and Camden provided useful additional materials and enhanced the facilities in the garden during the season, in particular to provide storage to solve the theft of equipment.

Contact was maintained amongst the groups using computer discussion facilities. Regular meetings to discuss planting were held with members involved in the FOWP and HICAN beds and advice sessions open to all were organized to provide information to the gardeners.

So a very successful first year though a hosepipe ban combined with a cold and wet period has given the 2012 planting season a slightly difficult start. Transition Highgate are now also involved with HiCAN as a plot holder.

Current issues

A number of issues has been raised with Camden this year and are still current.

The **review of the Park Centre** is now part of a **general review of the uses the 4 park properties** can be put to, to minimise costs for Camden and to raise income. FoWP regards this as the biggest issue facing the park at the moment. As we understand it, it has been accepted that the 4 properties are not part of Camden's regular housing stock but sensible uses must be found for them urgently.

Lauderdale House: will be let on a proper lease to its current occupants and will continue as an Arts and Educational centre. Extensive plans for its upgrade as a property are to be put to the HLF in early June and FoWP has been in discussion about these with both Camden and the Director and General Manager of LH. These are essential if there is to be a sustainable

future for the house and Camden is a joint partner in the bid putting in about £350,000. Fundraising will begin in earnest once the outcome of the HLF bid is known in September. To summarise the plans encompass:

- a) Creating a new public entrance which will make the house much better able to use different rooms for different events and thereby increase income generation
- b) Providing disabled access to the first floor
- c) Creating a new enlarged education space opening onto the garden by the sensory border (this is the only notable change to the structure)
- d) Developing a heritage discovery and education program

FoWP's views on the other 3 buildings are that as far as possible these should be used for clear public and park benefit. This is particularly true for the **Park Centre** and **Swain's Lane Lodge**. The former because it was built entirely out of public money for the public benefit and the latter as it was an integral part of Sir Sidney Waterlow's bequest of the park.

FoWP is setting up now a small working group to look at these properties and to make sensible and well thought out suggestions about their economically effective park futures.

Please contact us if you can help.

This indecision has had a knock on effect of what will happen to the **Aviary**.

The upper pond is now open on a permanent basis but we have not had feedback on its usage or the effect on wildlife.

The trial of the **wild flower meadows** is over. It is unclear what is happening now. FoWP is willing to let the section running down to the ponds continue as it is but feel that the unattractive appearance of the grass near the Swain's Lane entrance needs attention. We gather that while the trial was not particularly successful for sparrows it was for other wildlife. We are asking RSPB for information for a report.

Vehicles in the Park appear to be improving in that fewer are being reported to us and the use of electric vehicles by the contractor is helping. Please tell us if you see problems. However, the bollards at the Swain's Lane entrance have been replaced by very ugly gates without any reference to us. These do not appear to be used to any extent at all and the rationale for them completely escapes us. We have alerted Jessica Gibbons to them and asked for them to be removed and will press for this. We feel they are very ugly and inappropriate.

Events

As usual, in 2011 the Friends had a stand at the Highgate Fair in June and members of the public were encouraged to record their likes and dislikes about the Park. Once again the peace and tranquillity of the Park scored very highly. Through the year - weather-permitting - a number of small-scale events were put on near the children's playground offering trails, 'treasure' hunts and other information-gathering activities round the park to children and other park users during an afternoon usually in the school holidays. In July older park users were invited to the Park Centre for tea and to share their memories of the Park.

The Friends also had a presence at external events such as the July Love Parks Week picnic near the Houses of Parliament and a Transition Dartmouth Park gardening information and seed exchange session.

We have held fewer events this year but have spent more time in our Kitchen Garden, volunteering work and dealing with key issues about the future of the park. It would be good to hold more events but we do need more volunteers to help us organise these if members

want them. A major success was to have the Kitchen Garden accepted for the London Open Gardens scheme on the weekend of June 9th and 10th, this year.

Memories of the Park

FOWP continues to receive information about the history of the park 'within living memory'. It seems that many park keepers who worked in Waterlow Park up until the 1970s retain an enduring affection for the park and also in some cases for the lodges from the time when they and their children occupied them. It is hoped to run another memories event in the early Autumn when we can present what people have shared with us and show some digitised photographic images from the 1960s which have come to light at the HLSI.

The HLSI has expressed its willingness to store and make available to the public any information we pass over to their archive about the history of Waterlow Park alongside oral and visual memories of people who have worked within it as well as those who have used and enjoyed the park since it was handed over to the people of London by Sir Sydney Waterlow. The intention is to run an archives evening at the institution in due course which will showcase all the available material about Waterlow Park and Lauderdale House resulting in a list of the holdings being available on our own and the FoWP websites.

Future plans

There are many plans afoot. Top priority for our work this year must be sorting out the 3 park properties whose future is uncertain. However as well as this we have been talking to Camden about developing a proper Tree plan for Waterlow partly to replace elderly, dead or dying trees sensibly but also to ensure that people who offer trees as a memorial are helped to choose ones which suit the park. Protection of the wonderful views over London is a major objective for FoWP. Please tell us if you would like to join a new Tree committee. We are also taking part in discussions about Highgate Neighbourhood Forum

Several other possible projects have been put to us, which we are considering. These are at different stages of development including:

An Orchard project. - at an early investigation stage

An educational apiary - London Bee Keepers Association wish to have a site in the park for a few hives. This would probably be in the wild area near the top pond largely hidden from view. Camden are currently looking in to health and safety and other concerns.

A review of sports facilities in the park - would anyone like to come forward and be part of a working party?

FoWP- the organisation, membership and publicity

We feel a large membership is essential to ensure that we not only cover the views of our many park users but are seen as a legitimate voice of park users. We keep our subscription very low at £5 and have moved to using email as much as possible to reduce our administrative costs. Do please encourage a friend or neighbour to join this year and also consider setting up a standing order for the annual fee. It does take our volunteer membership secretary a lot of time to chase up members with reminders. We are alive to the Data Protection issues created by having a database of members and also a database of people who want to be kept in touch.

The committee this year comprised: Marcia Beer, Christine Farrell [acting chair from September 2011] Ian Henghes [secretary], Louise Lewis [membership], Mel Manhine, Ceridwen Roberts [chair till September 2011] Richard Shipman [co-opted Patricia Walby [horticulture] and Catharine Wells [treasurer]. As this is proving to be a testing time for the

park with lots of changes afoot all the committee are willing to stand again and the committee would welcome this continuity. Christine Farrell and Ceridwen Roberts would like to stand as co- chairs as there is a heavy workload to share. **We would welcome additional committee members to make their contribution to Waterlow Park.** All the committee deserve our thanks for combining their work for FoWP with busy domestic lives and day jobs.

Ceridwen Roberts

Co -Chair, FoWP on behalf of the committee

28th May 2012