

friends of
Waterlow Park

The Voice of Park Users

www.waterlowpark.org.uk



AGM: 13th June 2013: Report from the Committee

Overview

Life in the Park gets busier and busier. The highlight this year is the establishment of the Orchard, but equally impressive is the continuing success of the Kitchen Garden and very importantly the growing band of volunteer gardeners and the increasing work they undertake. The year has been dominated too by discussions about the future of the Park in a time of dramatic government cuts to Local Authorities' budgets.

Relations with Camden

Discussion about the future of the park and its properties has dominated the last few months. There are currently two working groups looking at future management options for the Waterlow Park Trust and what to do with the 4 properties. A key issue here is how to protect the park and ensure there is enough income over time to maintain it adequately. We will keep members fully informed about developments.

Andrew Wright has been 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 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 Groups (FrOGS)

Sadly this network of Camden groups of Friends organisations that we set up three years ago, to share issues of common interest, has been discontinued. It was felt that such issues would be better discussed within the Camden Chairs of Friends group which is managed by the Head of Parks and her team.

Website

The website is the main vehicle for communicating information about the Park to the general public, in addition to the newsletters sent electronically to our members. The site provides up to date information on forthcoming events and current issues and consultations relating to the Park. It also carries regular reports on the activities of volunteers. This year we have introduced short summaries of the issues discussed at our monthly committee meetings. Finally – and very importantly – it contains a changing display of excellent photographs displaying the beauty of the Park.

Horticulture and volunteering

In 2012 our horticultural officer Patricia Walby began a well- attended volunteering session each Thursday between April and November. The horticultural year began with the design and replanting of the Sensory Border flanking the Lauderdale Tea Lawn and ended with the

re-planting of a proportion of the rose circle with every volunteer who had worked with us during the year being invited to choose and plant a rose in their name. We also held a successful fund raising plant sale in June and a bulb sale in September. We are holding another plant sale again this Saturday at the Highgate Fair.

Since April, we have replanted the upper terraces on the Lauderdale lawn and have secured a grant from the Municipal Parks and Gardens Association to replant the circle around the Waterlow sundial. This will happen over the next month. Discussions are also going on with Camden to re-turf the Lauderdale tea lawn in the Autumn to return it to its former glory and to repair and reinstate the urns along the terraces. Spinning off from the weekly volunteering is the organising of coach trips to famous gardens for the local community. This is proving very popular and has generated many new members. We expect to offer four trips this year. More trips will be organised next year. Also next year there are plans afoot for a lecture series on getting to grips with your garden. Anyone wishing to volunteer can talk to Patricia after the meeting or get her details from the noticeboards in the Park. Everybody is welcome.

The Community Orchard

Since the project was floated at last year's AGM, your committee has put in a great deal of work – co-ordinating with the London Orchard Project (LOP) and Camden – to make the Community Orchard a reality. Over £700 was raised from Park Users, and Camden contributed the costs of testing the soil for contamination (which gave us a clean bill of health). On February 28 our volunteers, joined by Cllrs Valerie Leach and Tulip Siddiq (and pupils from St John's School, Holloway) planted thirteen trees: Discovery, Saturn, Core Blimey, Red Windsor, Greensleeves and Tydeman's Late Orange Apples; a Concorde Pear; a John Dowie Crab Apple; a Merryweather Damson; a Tomcot Apricot; a Czar Plum; an Old Green Gage and a Morello Cherry.

While we are not expecting fruit for a few years, we have had handsome displays of blossom and the Orchard volunteers give each tree 15-20 litres of water per week to make sure that they thrive. The LOP is providing training and support for our Orchard Leaders.

The Orchard has its own web-site at www.waterlowparkorchard.org.uk and occasionally tweets @WaterlowPkOrchd

Kitchen Garden

Since Camden restored the Waterlow Kitchen Garden in 2011, it has flourished. There are 10 plots, each managed by a different local organisation including two schools, Age Matters, , the Friends of Waterlow Park, the Whittington Hospital and five local gardening groups. During the Spring and Summer months, all the plots grow a different of range herbs, vegetables and flowers. Last year and this, we were invited to join in the London –wide, Open Squares weekend in June. **This year we had 220 visitors to the garden for this event.** We have also agreed to take over the management of the communal areas of the Kitchen Garden. This involves plot representatives meeting three times a year, to make any decisions required. We are helped in this by a Camden Park Ranger.

The Garden is surrounded by a high yew hedge and offers a unique area of calm. So far there has been no vandalism and people using the park often wander into the garden and enjoy seeing people working on their plots and the general air of community.

Trees and Views

The Friends of Waterlow Park have been working with Camden to develop plans for trees that frame the unique views we are so lucky to enjoy. Some tree planting during the year has been reviewed and adjusted to maintain views for future generations. The Spring of 2013 has seen significant work by the tree department with both pruning and the removal of some trees where they have died or are in poor health and may present a risk if left unattended. Unfortunately a mature Ginkgo was felled opposite the Kitchen Garden. A meeting on site did consider the reasons for this carefully, and the work went ahead largely on safety grounds. There will be some further work, principally in the autumn.

Wildlife

The hard winter may have had an impact on wildlife, but on the ponds at least there are many young waterfowl. Bird boxes were cleaned out at the start of the year ready for the nesting season. An owl has been spotted nesting in a hollow high in the copper beech by the octagonal shelter, and in at least one site blue-tits have decided that if bats are not using the all the boxes provided for them they may as well take up residence. There was a discussion some months ago with the London Bee-Keepers Association about the possibility of siting an educational apiary near the top pond. A new Nature Conservation Officer, Caroline Birchall is now in post in Camden and is looking at this along with many other issues. The Friends have met with her in the Park and hope to develop ideas for wildlife in collaboration with her in the coming year.

Memories of the Park

Our website and public events continue to generate enquiries and information about the history of Waterlow Park going back 50 years and more. This ranges from childhood memories of enjoying the park to hearing from people who worked in the park many years ago or even lived with a park keeper father in one of the lodges.

2014 will mark the 125th anniversary of Sir Sydney Waterlow's gift of Lauderdale House, the extensive gardens and the 2 lodges to the people of London in 1889. The intention is to work with Lauderdale House and the HLSI (Highgate Literary & Scientific Institution) to make available a range of oral and visual material covering this period in an exhibition and on the web.

Events

As a small committee, FOWP lacks the resources to mount major events and is also conscious of the preference of many park users for relaxation and tranquillity. There are already throughout the year occasions when the Park is used by outside organizations or individuals, and Lauderdale House offers a varied programme of activities. We have therefore concentrated on ensuring that the Park is represented in appropriate local or London-wide events, such as the Highgate Fair and the London Parks and Garden Trust Open Squares weekend in June, when visitors to the Kitchen Garden are welcomed by volunteers and provided with information. For a number of years we have also offered occasional trails and activities for children and other visitors during the school holidays. These are well received but this year have been thwarted by the weather. However our recent "trail", despite poor weather, was joined by some very enthusiastic children and adults. The other role of the Friends is to comment on applications for events in the Park which are proposed

to Camden Council. We aim to draw on our knowledge and regular use of the Park to suggest where events might affect Park users or the fabric of the Park and its neighbours, and to make practical alternative proposals as appropriate.

Future plans

There are many plans afoot. Top priority for our work this year must be sorting out the three 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 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 is currently looking into health and safety and other concerns. A review of sports facilities in the park is underway –in particular we would like to encourage young people to use the tennis courts and we are investigating other sports and holiday schemes. Would anyone like to come forward and help?

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 for park users. Currently we have about 400 people on our contact lists and about 100 are members. It would be great to convert our mailing list to membership.

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 [co-chair] Ian Henghes [secretary], Louise Lewis [membership], Mel Manhine, Ceridwen Roberts [co-chair] 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. **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

10th June 2013