

A report on the opinions of users of Waterlow Park

August 2010

An oasis of tranquility

In June this year (2010) the Friends of Waterlow Park took the opportunity to ask visitors to the Highgate Fair, to complete a short, self-complete questionnaire, on their use and views about Waterlow Park. Sixty seven forms were completed and provided up-to-date information about the park and its use by local people (mostly). This information complements the work we did last November (2009) when we interviewed people in the Park on one Saturday during the winter.

Use of the Park

Half of the people who completed the questionnaire this time, visited the park regularly (at least once a week) (34). Of these, 16 went several times a week, 11 went once in the week and seven went every day. Reasons for going to the Park were varied and often, people combined several reasons. For example, some people took their children to the playground(s) and visited the wildlife pond afterwards. Others went to play tennis and then stopped at Lauderdale House for coffee. Yet others met friends for coffee then walked through the park for enjoyment. In fact, the most common reason given for a visit to the park was, 'Just enjoying the park.' (49 people gave this as a reason for their visit). Nineteen people said they went to take their children to the playground(s); 14 went specifically to look at the wildlife, eleven went specially to play tennis and eight said they went to take their dog for a walk. A few people went running or jogging through the park (4), four people walked through on their way somewhere else, one person went to sit on a bench and another person went there to read.

Pleasures of the Park.

Enjoyment of the Park meant, for most people, enjoying the views, the trees, the water, the greenery, the wildlife and, above all, the tranquility created by the beautiful environment (49). Answering the question (multiple choice), *When you visit the Park are you....(walking your dog, taking children, visiting the Park Centre, looking at wildlife, just enjoying the Park, playing tennis, joining a planned event, visiting Lauderdale House)?*, three out of four people gave 'just enjoying the Park, as one of their answers. Quite a lot of people mentioned how well-maintained the Park is. *'It's just the perfect local park. Relaxing and always looking beautifully taken care of. I just love the lakes and the animals,' (Q25)* The views within the Park were mentioned by lots of people and all the facilities were mentioned as adding to the enjoyment of those who used them. *'It has all different types of trees. It's family friendly with nice playgrounds.'* (Q2).

Changes

Answering the question, *Are there any changes you would like to see in Waterlow Park?*, quite a lot of people said they didn't want anything to change (12). Other comments fell into a variety of categories.

Animals and wildlife

The largest single set of comments was from five people who wished to have the aviary re-opened for rescue birds. Three others just wanted the aviary to be re-opened. Three people mentioned greater control of dogs and more dog mess bins. *' Dog mess: controlling dogs. Some dogs look fierce and scary and some people let them run freely I am a dog walker myself but there have been some occasions when some 'bull' breeds have been loose without owners nearby' (Q30)*

One or two people mentioned better access to the (top) wildlife pond (Q30). And another said they would like more information and education about wildlife to be available (Q56). Three people said too many trees had been cut down and another person wanted more guided tree walks (Q47).

Horticulture

Several people mentioned the horticultural aspects of the Park. *I miss the rose garden that used to be by the bandstand and the English garden type planting of the flower beds. Also, it would be nice to see the rockery planted up with more variety. (Q58)* Others mentioned the need for more shrubs and one person suggested areas which could be used for *demonstrating gardening to encourage others. (Q43)* Several people would like horticultural changes with more herbaceous shrubs.

Culture

A few people thought it would be good if there could be more culture in the park. One person would like to see art/sculpture in the gardens; another thought *Shakespeare for kids* a good idea and someone else wanted a music festival; *A music festival a couple of times a year in the summer. (There was) one once with all sorts of music types. It was lovely.*

Lauderdale House

People generally liked the facility of a café at Lauderdale house but there were a few criticisms about the short opening times and the quality of the service. *The Lauderdale House café is not very well managed: poor service and quality of food could be better (Q16).*

Most people seemed not to be aware that Lauderdale House was the responsibility of a separate trust and not an integral part of the Park..

Structure

Two people said they would like more benches and one of them specifically said *by the tennis courts.*

One person said there should be fewer vehicles in the park and *no leaf blowers.*(Q12)

One young person thought it would be good to have a space for roller-blading and *a space for football.* (Q3).

It is clear that Waterlow Park is valued by local people and others who live further afield. It provides an oasis of peace and beauty for many as well as facilities for parents, children and for sporting activities.

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