



## **AGM: 9 May 2016**

### **Report from the Committee**

#### **Overview**

Two issues have dominated the work of the Committee this year

- discussions about the future of the Park, its funding, properties and the grounds maintenance contract renewal
- plans for the celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Park's opening in 1891.

The whole committee has worked very hard providing support on many different aspects of park life as this report shows and the horticultural volunteers are really making the Park look good.

#### **Relations with Camden and the future of the Park**

FoWP is a key member of the transitional Waterlow Park Committee set up to discuss how to deal with the impending cuts. Finalising the Waterlow Park Committee [WPC] has taken much longer than planned but the terms of reference are now agreed and the constitution just needs signing off. The WPC will be a strategic and consultative committee working with Camden in its role as the corporate trustee of the Waterlow Park Trust to protect the Park.

It is clear that a major part of the WPC's role will be to help manage the "assets" of the Park and begin fundraising to meet the costs as budget cuts bite. In the first instance, membership of the WPC will include a representative of each of FoWP and the Lauderdale House Society as permanent members and a representative of each of the Highgate Society, Highgate Neighbourhood Forum, Dartmouth Transition and Dartmouth CAC. The positions of Chairperson and Secretary will be advertised separately and these post holders may not be post holders in organisations represented on the WPC. The WPC will be charged with widening the network of organisations involved in the WPC and in ensuring that the committee reaches out effectively to the wider community. There will still be a role for the FoWP outside the WPC and over this coming year this needs to be clarified.

Camden still holds quarterly meetings for the chairs of its Friends' Groups which enables a useful exchange of views. The most important topics this year have been discussion of the restructuring of the grounds maintenance contract, about to go out to tender, and the proposal to introduce pilot schemes to try 24/7 opening in about 60 of Camden's parks including Waterlow. Working with the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum is particularly important as the drastic cuts to parks begin to take effect. These meetings are a useful source of information about developments in London parks and support for ideas in these very difficult times. Christine Farrell is our link person and it is clear that we are faring better than many other parks across London where poorer councils have had to make highly significant cuts to their park budgets.

### **The properties in Waterlow Park**

The two lodges have been let to private families and the rent will be ring-fenced for the Park. Initially a significant amount will be used to pay back Camden council for the monies used to turn the properties into lettable dwellings. After about 8 years all monies will flow into the Park funds. The Park Centre letting is virtually concluded and this will make a significant contribution to park funds. All three properties will reduce park costs as the utility and council tax charges will be met by the tenants. We are pleased by the prospect of the Park Centre being let to Lux and look forward to developing a good working relationship with them. It is as yet unclear as to how much income Lauderdale House will contribute to the running of the Park once it re-opens.

### **Horticulture and volunteering**

The past 12 months has seen a big step forward for volunteering. Through plant and bulb sales, coach trips and concerts the Friends raised enough money to replant two long herbaceous borders in the Park much in need of attention. Designed by local award winning garden designer Peter Reader, and with the help of extra volunteers from HSBC and Capel Manor, the borders were prepared over last autumn and planted up this spring, using recycled plants as well as new ones. This is on top of our tending the rose circle and the Lauderdale upper terraces. We have also worked with Camden to design and then plant up the front garden of Swain's Lane Lodge in a style appropriate for the age of the building and FoWP will take responsibility for maintaining this.

The hydrangea triangle, now mature, has been handed back to the OCS gardening team. In the autumn, as part of Waterlow125 celebrations, Camden has approved the creation of a commemorative circle of evergreen sedums to be designed by our local primary school children. The hard work of our volunteers (and we're always keen to recruit more should you be interested) may be the only way in which the herbaceous borders in the Park will survive since Camden, as part of the cost cutting imposed on it by government cuts, has indicated that herbaceous borders may well be removed from the borough's parks and open spaces and replaced with turf or low maintenance shrubberies.

### **The Community Orchard**

The 2015 season proved quite wet so the watering team had a fairly easy time of it - although most of the trees are now in their third season and are less in need of weekly water. We had a slightly sad season with our fruit - both the Greensleeves and Core Blimey fruited quite healthily but it had all disappeared by the end of August. This was possibly the work of squirrels, or children, or vandals - whatever the cause, we are having to learn to be philosophical. One day there will be enough fruit for all. Both pear trees offered us one pear each, but they too disappeared early.

Bucking the trend, the John Downie crab apple fruited well and Orchard Group member Louise Lewis asked if she could take the fruit. She presented us in committee with a delicious pot of the Crab Apple Jelly she made - we look forward to more fruit in 2016!

The most exciting fruit find was undoubtedly our first apricot - which put out a glorious singleton in July, but that too fell victim to (most likely) a trophy hunter.

In the dormant winter season we gently pruned the apples and pears and then were delighted to receive the gift of a Cherry (Prunus Stella), planted in the space previously occupied by our old cherry - so we look forward to some fruit in a couple of years.

The Orchard has its own web-site at [www.waterlowparkorchard.org.uk](http://www.waterlowparkorchard.org.uk) and tweets @WaterlowPkOrchd

## **Kitchen Garden**

Management of the Kitchen Garden has been transferred from Camden to a newly created Association of Community Groups with its own constitution (both to be ratified at an AGM in September 2016). This means that the community groups using the Kitchen Garden will be responsible for its management. Three people have volunteered to take on the posts of Chair, Treasurer and Secretary temporarily until the formal AGM is held in September 2016.

The garden will be welcoming the public on Sunday **19 June** for Open Gardens weekend. The Kitchen Garden continues to be a place for quiet pleasure and gardening activities and to give pleasure to visitors and plot holders alike.

## **Trees, views and maintenance issues**

Consultation with the Camden Tree Department about the siting and, occasionally, felling of trees in the Park has continued following the agreed outline plan covering trees and views. FoWP continues to argue that new trees must be appropriate to the site and not ruin historic and well loved views.

Yet again the fountain has had a difficult year with a number of problems interrupting smooth operation. As this is a continuing worry and cost we are reluctantly beginning to think about other uses for this space.

The issue of memorials continues to be tricky. While there is agreement that the Park has reached saturation level with Memorial Benches people still want to do something. Trees are popular but the Park has many trees and those suggested are not always suitable. In addition, the growing habit of leaving memorial bunches of flowers is proving unsightly. We would like to have a policy of removing them when the flowers have died.

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) continue to contribute to the Park, working principally in the nature areas around the upper and lower ponds.

## **Wildlife**

As of yet, nothing has come of the proposal to have bees in the upper pond area but this is still an aim. However, we have had discussions about improving the upper pond which has problems with algae in part a consequence of the shade and overhanging trees. Sadly the temporary Camden officer left before completing the costing for remedial action.

## **Sport**

It is proving difficult to take forward any substantive plans for sport in the Park. In large part this is because we do not have someone on FoWP's committee able to devote much time to this. Discussions have been held about having a discrete outdoor gym, developing a petanque site [a location has been identified], improving the fabric of the tennis courts and providing alternatives to tennis on the lower courts in the winter, such as basket ball etc. This would be done with additional court markings and we hope would attract young people from south of the Park where there are limited sport facilities. Coolhurst Tennis Club continues to hire some courts to run tennis for children on Saturdays. Recently Camden has had a consultation about their wish to introduce online bookings and to outsource some management of the courts to agencies able to generate more use. We have argued to protect some courts for private use and Camden has agreed to this.

## Events

FoWP initiated a fundraising concert held jointly with the Lauderdale House Society at Highgate School. This was much enjoyed by well over 100 people and raised a total of £1885 shared between the two organisations.

Once again we have run 'Explore the Park' days during the school holidays. We held one at Easter and plan to hold one in the spring holiday, one or two in the summer holidays, and one in the October half term holiday. We have added a new full colour tree trail this year, which should prove popular. Children love our scavenger hunts and adults are enthusiastic about our guide, *The Guide to Waterlow Park* which was produced in 2014, and has been a great success. The Oxfam Bookshop in Highgate has kindly put some on sale at £1 each.

## Website and social media

We recognise how important a website is as the main vehicle for communicating information about the Park to the general public. Maintaining a website however is quite resource intensive and this year we have not had enough capacity to do this to the level we would like. We really need someone on the committee with the time and skills to do this. We send email newsletters to our members and try to provide up to date information on forthcoming events and current issues and consultations relating to the Park.

Tweeting continues bring to information about aspects of the Park to a wider audience (447 followers and rising by the day). We also re-tweet the best of Park users' tweets. Follow us on Twitter @WaterlowPark and @WaterlowPkOrchd. The Park also now has a Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/waterlowpark](http://www.facebook.com/waterlowpark)).

## Future plans

While all the work around horticulture, wildlife and general maintenance will continue, our chief efforts in 2016/2017 have to be around delivering our programme of activities to celebrate the 125th Anniversary, bedding in the WPC and developing a new role for FoWP. A key part of any strategy for funding the Park has to be to increase our membership, and get park lovers to be a little more involved in helping the FoWP committee with its many tasks including the fundraising that will become increasingly necessary.

## 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the public opening of the Park - 2016

This is a significant year for Waterlow Park marking the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Park to the public. A series of events is planned throughout the year to reflect the interests of different park users and also to raise some funds – a musical concert at Dyne House in June, an on-going photographic competition with the *Ham & High*, two oral history projects and, if sponsorship can be found, a dog day.

But, in all the planned events, the underlying message is the importance of preserving and protecting such an important green space in our overcrowded city. To this end we are working with all six primary schools in the area to introduce them to the history and biodiversity of the Park with talks and visits and many activities from drama, art and music to science and technology projects. This will culminate on **Saturday 17 September** with **Lark in the Park** for the public to celebrate this exceptional open space. There will be music and

drama, entertainments of all sorts, food from five continents, a beer tent and lots of fun. Members of the Waterlow family from all over the world will be joining us. None of this would be possible without the help and support of so many other local organisations – the Harington Scheme, the HLSI, Highgate Horticultural Society, the six local primary schools who have each put an enormous effort into making this a success, as well as a band of local volunteers who are giving up their free time to help organise the many events. We thank them all.

### **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. Once again, our membership increased this year and we now have over 200 members and more than 300 further people on our mailing list. So, we reach many users of our beautiful Park. Our membership year starts in May so we want as many people as possible to renew their membership and encourage others to join. We offer several ways to pay including cash, cheque and bank transfers and, through our website, credit and debit cards and PayPal.

The committee this year comprised: Marcia Beer [secretary], Fiona Brown [PR], Robin Cartwright, Christine Farrell [co-chair], Louise Lewis [membership], Mel Manhine [sport], Ceridwen Roberts [co-chair], Richard Shipman [Treasurer] and Patricia Walby [horticulture]. Richard Shipman has completed three years as treasurer and is standing for a further two years. Louise, Mel and Patricia are on rolling terms – their formal terms have ended and they remain in post until candidates present themselves to replace them.

There is **one vacancy** and we are particularly keen to recruit someone for the committee from south of the Park as this area is still not represented on the Committee. We also need people with web skills, fundraising experience and an interest in sport.

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**

**6 May 2016**