

friends of **Waterlow Park**

The Voice Of Park Users



Annual Report for the year 1 MAY 2018 to 30 APRIL 2019

Highlights

We can report progress on two fronts: leisure and sport. Barbecues [BBQs] may not be everybody's idea of leisure or pleasure or even whether they should have a place in this Victorian idyll of a park. But it is Camden's firm policy to allow BBQs. Your committee's view is that, if BBQs are to stay, they should be better organised. So I am happy to say this summer Camden will launch a trial of zoned BBQ areas in Waterlow Park, well away from the main meadow and all the smaller little hedged-off areas.

The two permitted BBQ zones will be north of the old bandstand circle and below the playground area at the bottom of the park. Publicity and signage is being prepared now. We will keep members posted and put announcements on the website and twitter.

Now sport. After about three years of discussion and consultation with members we are now about to build a pétanque or boules pitch below the tennis courts. The work for this will start any day now and should be completed by the end of the month.

The pitches – there will be three – will be free to use. There will also be one or two boules sets kept in the tennis court booth and times will be posted there when our pétanque expert, Brian Haddon, will be on hand to tutor those not already familiar with the sport.

Strategy for the Park

Waterlow Park was originally bequeathed in Trust and is now managed by Camden. There is one Trustee for the park who is an employee of Camden Council. Now that the council has set up a Trust Advisory Group (TAG), Camden has a representative on that body alongside other local neighbourhood groups such as the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Forum and the Friends group. This provides a forum for devising an ongoing strategy for the park. You can contact the Friends through our website to put forward your ideas or concerns. Should you witness any antisocial behaviour in the park you can also email direct to parks@camden.gov.uk

Park Upkeep and Horticulture

As park users we are lucky that Camden continues to ensure that all 26 acres are beautifully maintained and that for the moment budget is made available to sustain that. Outside organisations such as film crews who occasionally use the park also contribute financially but of course that source of funds is not predictable.

We as Friends supplement the efforts of the gardening contractors *idverde* with weekly volunteer planting sessions, often assisted by groups of corporate volunteers. The latter also bring money into the park for plants and projects. This year we have also organised the wildflower planting of the Mound with funds donated by a Highgate resident. A more permanent information plaque will be added this year. April Cameron, deputy chair of the Friends committee, along with Patricia Walby, have produced a detailed report this year on all the horticultural work they have put in hand [attached as an annexe below].

On behalf of the park Camden has obtained a grant to install a new drinking water fountain in the park. We hope to obtain funds to restore the existing two drinking fountains which have fallen into disuse. We also plan to restore the stone eagles on the steps below Lauderdale House and are waiting on a quote for the work.

The Kitchen Garden

The Kitchen Garden Plot holders now have a Chairperson, Paula Woodman and a Secretary, Jose Nicolson. They have met as a group twice in 2018 and will hold their next AGM in June 2019.

All the plots are occupied by different community groups. There have been one or two problems with produce being taken by visitors and large amounts of cigarette butts left by the benches, but also much lovely feedback from many park goers who appreciate the peacefulness of the space and enjoy chatting to the kitchen gardeners.

The Orchard

The Orchard didn't fare well in 2018. Two trees were damaged by vandalism. The Tomcot Apricot didn't survive but we managed to bind up the break in the main stem of one of the Cox's Orange Pippins, and it seems to have survived.

In addition, although the Orchard had been designated as a "No BBQ Area", people just removed the sign and continued to barbecue there. This has resulted in some damage to the grass and the accumulation of unsightly waste. We hope that the new zoning rules for BBQs will discourage this anti-social behaviour, but we are not particularly optimistic.

From a fruit harvest point of view, generally the trees produced what you would expect after six seasons. The yield was not unreasonable but none were allowed to achieve their potential. Any fruit that appeared, in particular from the damson and crab apple, was taken weeks before it reached ripeness and thus would have been quite inedible.

We pruned the plum in the summer, to improve its shape and stop branches from crossing over and damaging themselves, and a couple of the apples and pears were reshaped in the dormant season.

We hope for better fortunes this year, although we have always recognised that a Community Orchard will inevitably be subject to the whims of passing strangers.

Local Events and Future Plans

We are active in the wider community and took part in Lauderdale House's Heritage Day producing 'Bird&Bee' friendly seeds for sale. Climate change and actions we can take to help the environment will be themes for this year's Highgate Festival and the Fair in the Square, both in June.

We held our popular annual concert last June but this year hope to hold a musical event in September. We also hope to re-introduce our garden visits in the next year, which we know are popular.

We held several fun park and tree trails and scavenger hunts during the school holidays which children particularly enjoy.

By this time next year we will have completed a rather overdue website update which will help park users find information on events and developments in the park.

Membership

Our membership has held at a steady 130 this year. We have about 80-100 members who renew regularly, and the rest 'churn'. There has been discussion about whether we should increase the subscription or, indeed, whether we should charge at all. With electronic communication the costs are minimal but the subscription provides a useful steady income. We have compromised by holding the subscription at £5 each year but asking those who can afford it to make a donation.

So far this year, just over 60 people have renewed their membership and a few have standing orders that will come in during the course of the year. The Membership Secretary plans a membership drive in June.

Summary

It was the aim this year to try and bring some long-discussed projects to fruition. We have listened to your views on BBQs and welcome Camden's decision to introduce zones for a trial year. We look forward to opening the pétanque pitches very shortly and continuing to represent your views and interests for another year.

Fiona Murphy

Chair, Friends of Waterlow Park
6 May 2019

Friends of Waterlow Park – horticulture report 2018-19

Weekly Volunteers

A loyal group of volunteers met on Thursdays usually for 3-4 hours, to maintain various beds and borders around the park. These include all the beds around Lauderdale House, the sun and shade herbaceous borders, the rose garden by the helipad, the hydrangea bed, two beds in the kitchen garden, the half circles, the Swains Lane Lodge garden and a sedum/viola circle by the tennis courts. In addition, we keep a watching brief on the LUX garden. We also have a nursery area with a polytunnel where we look after plants either for planting out into the park or to sell, raising money to support our activities, at least in part.

Corporate Volunteering

This year we enjoyed the support of 3 groups of corporate volunteers from RBS, Santander and HS2. The groups make a financial contribution which enables us to buy resources to complete projects. In 2018-19 projects included sowing wildflower seeds, planting a pollinators' garden in the KG, improving the soil and replanting two of the half circles, planting a small herb bed just outside the Kitchen Garden and replacing wooden edging around the hydrangea bed. These are all jobs which we would otherwise not have managed.

Projects already completed in 2019

This year, with the Conservation Volunteers, the *idverde* gardening team and the generosity of a local resident, the Mound has been turfed with 'nature improved wildflowers'. The turf is seeded with 33 native wildflowers and grasses (just two of the latter) and up to 19 non-native flowers which have long been naturalised in the UK. This will make the Mound more of a feature and also be beneficial to wildlife.

Three areas on the main lawn have been planted with scarlet willow cuttings (*Salix alba var vitellina 'Britzensis'*). This is in order to partially dry out some of the wetter areas to facilitate mowing and also to create a feature which will be particularly interesting during the winter months when the red stems will be striking in the winter sun. At the top of the main lawn, in the muddy ditch just to the west of Sir Sydney's statue, whips of pussy willow (*Salix caprea*) have also been planted and we look forward to enjoying their catkins next spring. All plantings should be low maintenance, just requiring pruning in spring.

New Project

One project we have hopes of implementing Autumn/Winter 2019-20 is the planting of a bluebell dell on a bank on the north-eastern side of the bottom pond. Any donations to support this initiative would be very welcome.

Fundraising

We raised significant funds by selling plants at the Highgate Fair, but missed our Autumn bulb sale. The long hot summer allegedly resulted in a shortage of bulbs and our usual supplier was unable to deliver bulbs at the desirable time. We plan to hold the bulb sale in Autumn 2019.

We liaise closely with Mark Walters, Head Gardener, and his team. Without their support we would be far less successful.

April Cameron/Patricia Walby