

# *friends of* Waterlow Park



## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: 8 May 2014** **Report from the Committee**

### **Overview**

Life in the Park gets busier and busier. The year has been dominated by discussions about the future of the Park. A stakeholder group has been meeting to discuss how to deal with the projected severe cuts in the Park's maintenance budget as a result of Central Government's dramatic cuts to local authorities' budgets. At the same time our horticultural work and team of volunteers goes from strength to strength. We are also developing a strategy for sports in the park.

### **Relations with Camden**

We have been very active members of the Stakeholder group set up by Camden Council to consider how the Park should be managed and financed as a result of the extensive cuts that affect parks. A community management committee called Waterlow Park Committee [WPC] is being proposed and it is likely that its members will include a Camden Parks representative, a local councillor from Highgate Ward and some members of the current Stakeholder group. This committee will need to be operative by September 2014 and its terms of reference are still to be finalised. FoWP is likely to have some real input into the strategic management of the Park through this but there will also still be a role for FoWP outside the WPC.

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.

### **Website and social media**

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. It has proved difficult at times to provide up to date information on forthcoming events and current issues and consultations relating to the Park. Short summaries of the issues discussed at our monthly committee meetings are made available. The website also contains a changing display of excellent photographs displaying the beauty of the Park.

Following the launch of the Orchard's Twitter Page in 2013, the Park itself started tweeting in early March 2014, already boasting over 100 followers. We regularly tweet pictures - of views, plants, trees, animals and curiosities - as well as updating followers on ongoing works and events. We also retweet 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)).

### **Horticulture and volunteering**

This year has seen major improvements in the horticulture in the Park with the clearing and replanting of the northern perimeter shrubbery done in collaboration with the FoWP. The worn areas of the Lauderdale tea lawn have also been re-turfed with heavy duty turves and this will be ready for the public to use in June. Regular visitors to the Park will have noticed lots of small improvements that the head gardener, Mark Walters, and his team have made, usually from shrubs and herbaceous plants which are surplus to need by contractor OCS.

The Friends' faithful group of regular Thursday volunteers last year replanted the terraces around Lauderdale House with hardy lavender. The rose circle planting was completed in November by members of the community who sponsored the roses, however tending the roses has been held up because of remedial work that had to be carried out to the damaged pillars. In the meantime the group has turned its attention to the triangle in the southern perimeter that is currently being planted with an understory of hydrangea and vinca.

To celebrate the forthcoming 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Waterlow Park in 2016, the Friends are working in close collaboration with Camden, Mark Walters and our volunteers to restore some of the herbaceous gems for which the Park was once famous. These include the four borders outside the kitchen garden and the half circles at the St. Joseph's entrance that were once a focus of the Park. A grant has been sought for this work which we hope will be carried out in the autumn, and the Friends, together with Mark Walters, have invited award winning local garden designer Peter Reader to design the first two borders.

If anyone wishes to join the volunteer team please check the notice board for contact details. We meet every Thursday at the Lauderdale Café at 9.45, until the end of November. Everyone is welcome. No experience or equipment needed.

### **The Community Orchard**

Since being planted in February 2013 the orchard has done well, with our team of volunteers watering the trees throughout the relatively dry summer months. Sadly one tree, the Red Windsor Apple, died of unknown causes. The people who provided the tree in the first place, the London Orchard Project, surmised that it didn't live because it had originally been offered as a gift to the Duke of Edinburgh and it couldn't survive the rejection when he declined it! It has now been replaced by a Doyenne du Comice pear tree, bought from orchard funds. The orchard's 13 trees have now been supplemented by four Cox's Orange Pippin apples - generously donated and planted by the Waterlow Park gardeners!

We do not expect a fruit harvest this year since fruit will be removed early to encourage root growth but hope to see a fruit yield by 2016 for the Park's 125th Anniversary. The orchard has its own website at [www.waterlowparkorchard.org.uk](http://www.waterlowparkorchard.org.uk) and occasionally tweets @WaterlowPkOrchd

### **Kitchen Garden**

The kitchen garden continues to flourish. The ten plots have looked good this year especially during the summer months when they burgeoned with vegetables, herbs and flowers. Volunteers have worked on the wild flower patches at the bottom and sides of the garden but, at times, the weeds do manage to take over. For the past four years we have been asked by the Open Garden Squares organisation to welcome the public to the kitchen garden for their Open Weekend in June. Last year, we had a record number of visitors during the two days, counted at 241. We also organised several activities including a pilates demonstration and a session of poetry dramatisations. We applied for a grant from Waitrose and were given £214 for compost. This was shared between the plots which used it to feed their crops. Children from the two schools with plots, Brookfield and Hargrave Park, contribute to planting and harvesting their own plots. Brookfield grew a giant marrow that was used for their school dinner. We regard our food growing efforts as a great community success.

### **Trees, Views and Maintenance**

A number of initiatives being worked on by the Friends have taken something of a back seat this year due to the discussions about future management. This does not mean there have been no developments in these areas, and in many cases there have been active ongoing consultations with Camden. The Camden tree department has been active this year as a full audit was undertaken, following which a number of trees were felled which were diseased or might present a public danger. The tree department has also been consulting on replacement species and sites. There is an outline plan in preparation covering trees and views, and this is now broadly being applied.

Around the Park there has been quite a bit of maintenance activity, some planned and some in response to issues which have arisen. The lower ponds flooded badly in the wet winter weather due to blocked drains. It became apparent that the pipe-work was cracked and clogged with roots. A decision was taken to replace the drains from the pond to the edge of the park and Camden found the required funds for this not inconsiderable expenditure. There is further drainage work still to be done on the main carriageway (the 'lime avenue'). The top path behind the tennis courts has also been largely re-surfaced as it had suffered root heave leading to a trip hazard. The retaining wall behind the Park Centre is currently being prepared for restoration work.

The TCV Conservation Volunteers continue to contribute to the Park, working principally in the nature areas around the top and lower ponds. They also staged their conference in the Park this year and ran activities in tandem with this including helping prepare wild flower areas in the kitchen garden.

### **Wildlife**

The Friends have met with the new conservation officer, Caroline Birchall, and are developing ideas to support wildlife in collaboration with her. Meanwhile funding applications have been made for some monies to develop wildlife infrastructure. Nothing has happened as yet with the proposal to have bees in the upper pond area but this is still an aim.

### **Sport**

FoWP has long wanted to develop a strategy for sport in the park, particularly to see the tennis courts used more productively and to encourage children and young people to use the Park more, ideally on the courts. We have met with Camden to discuss how to take this forward and also what other healthy sports could be developed such as an outdoor gym. Camden have agreed an arrangement with the Coolhurst tennis club who are now running some coaching events on the lower courts for youngsters on Saturdays and in the holidays. These are pilots as yet as we are worried about pressure on courts on Saturdays. More needs to be done but events move very slowly. There are also some maintenance issues which need to be resolved. We would welcome a couple more members onto our sports committee to help us develop ideas.

### **Memories of the Park**

125 years ago Sir Sydney Waterlow offered the grounds of his Highgate property Lauderdale House to the London County Council to be a "garden for the gardenless". To mark this and the anniversary in 2016 of the formal opening of Waterlow Park in 1891, FoWP continues to gather historical information and memories via its website from people worldwide as well as locally from residents. A joint initiative is planned with the HLSI archives to display some of their holdings in the Victoria Hall this coming September and the Friends are already planning one or more events later this year and for 2016. Please do offer your memories, your material and your time to help make this happen.

### **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. As in past years, the Friends have continued to participate in external events to ensure that the Park is represented both locally, by taking a stall at the Highgate Fair, and in London-wide initiatives such as the London Parks & Gardens Trust's Open Squares weekend in June which continues to attract a large number of visitors to the kitchen garden. Other events have been related to activities detailed elsewhere in this report, for example fund-raising bulb and plant sales and re-planting the rose circle with commemorative bushes.

Only one of our periodic trails events around the Park has taken place over the past year but we hope to increase this in future and to provide visitors with an updated leaflet to guide them to the outstanding features of the Park. Much of our effort in the coming two years will be focused on celebrating the 125th anniversaries of the bequest of the Park and its opening.

## **Future plans**

While all the work around horticulture, wildlife and general maintenance will continue, all our chief efforts in the next six months have to be around sorting out how the Park will be run and financed. Any new committee will need at least one dedicated member of staff as running the WPC cannot not be done by unpaid volunteers. This will need to be funded and therefore funding sought. All this is presenting your FoWP committee with sizeable issues to resolve.

We will be consulted on the renovation of the two lodges which are to be turned into high rental properties and are currently trying to come up with ideas for the Park Centre as this has tight planning restrictions and needs to have some group take it on. There is concern too about the funding appeal for Lauderdale House, as it is essential for the Park as a whole that the Lauderdale House Society manages a successful transformation and is successfully integrated into the Park's future.

## **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. Membership has risen slightly this year and we now have 140 members. Although some people have not renewed, usually because they have moved away, they have been more than replaced by new members. This is a regular pattern.

We changed the year start to May, so that it more nearly occurs just before our annual general meeting. This means that those of you who joined last year had an extra four months membership. Nevertheless we have held the cost to £5. In light of the great changes to the running of the Park, we intend to have a membership drive this year and increase the number of people we are in contact with. We have about 400 people on our contact mailing lists. It would be great to convert our mailing list to membership. 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.

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 [Treasurer], Patricia Walby [horticulture], Catharine Wells and Patricia Adams. Catharine Wells is standing down so there is clear vacancy. Ian Henghes and Ceridwen Roberts have served the three + two years which means they need to stand down. They are willing to continue in their current roles if no one else wishes to join the committee to replace them. We are particularly keen to recruit someone from the committee from south of the Park as this area is not represented on the committee with Catharine's departure.

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**

**May 2014**