



Annual Report for the year 1 MAY 2020 to 30 APRIL 2021

KEY POINTS

We listened to your views about managing the Park during the three Lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 and engaged with Camden Green Spaces.

We ran a first professional, online survey of Park users' views. Results are published on our website and highlighted below

Gardening Volunteers worked throughout lockdowns. Plans were laid for building raised flower beds at the back of Lauderdale House (now in place and flowering) and a grant and donations helped to cover the costs.

The Biodiversity Group came up with a strategy to restore biodiversity in the Upper Pond area and to embark on a park-wide plant and wildlife survey.

Plant and bulb sales raised nearly £4,000 during a year when our usual fundraising activities had to be cancelled.

We applied for and won grants to run pop-up concerts in the Park in winter which are to be rolled over into the Summer of 2021

A membership drive was conducted mid-August to end September 2020 through fliers in the Park noticeboards and new pages on the website.

Response to Covid Pandemic

As last year's report rounded off our year at the end of April 2020, England was a month into Lockdown I. How did this affect the Park? We were allowed only one hour of exercise a day, the Park was open all night and barbecues were still allowed.

Parks and open spaces inevitably became the exercise lifeline. This brought many new people to Waterlow Park to join the regular Park users.

Inevitably this greatly increased footfall led to some problems. The grass verges wore away under socially distanced feet and there was damage to trees (used for exercise, climbing and even tightrope walking). Early on we had nitrous oxide cans left from overnight parties, and no public toilet facilities. Keeping the Park open round the clock caused more work for Park staff and Camden soon reverted to its dawn till dusk open hours policy.

Complaints came to us verbally and through the website so FoWP, your chair and TAG were in fairly constant correspondence with the managers at Camden Green Spaces, who run the Park and who themselves faced the first Lockdown with a 20% staff shortage.

Big, bold 'NO BBQs' banners eventually went up on the railings to discourage those continuing to barbecue.

By mid 2020 there were still no toilets available to the public. Finally in July the single disabled toilet was opened to the public. FoWP continues to campaign for refurbishment of the toilets.

The Somerset House forest designer Es Devlin observed recently, 'People have done the same walk every day during lockdowns, and they've paid attention'. The Park trees have been our constant companions. To this end we plan to name more of the trees for people to notice.

At the time of writing the thorny issue of whether Camden should allow BBQs again this summer will be tackled by Camden Green Spaces.

But it's fair to say Waterlow Park came through COVID in pretty good shape. So we must thank Camden, the idverde team, FoWP volunteers and your committee.

FINDING OUT WHAT YOU WANT

During the year your committee was also thinking beyond COVID issues. As the 'voice of Park users' we decided to find out what your Park priorities were. So in November and December 2020 we conducted an online survey to find this out. The survey, operated through *survs.com*, was publicised to our mailing subscribers and around the Park. It generated 328 responses. More than we have ever had in previous surveys. One caveat. The respondents were mostly local ...and female ...and over 65. So it is not representative of everyone who uses the Park but it's a starting point and gave us a flavour of people's likes and dislikes Park-wise.

The full results can be found on the website [The Park in 2021 – your views and ideas from the survey – Friends of Waterlow Park](#) This is just a snapshot:

62 people made very positive comments about the Park, its upkeep and the contribution made by the Friends

42 people were pleased that there had been no barbecues because of COVID and hoped the ban would continue indefinitely. The reasons cited were *the mess, the damage and the smoke pollution*.

Nearly as many people (32) disliked the bad behaviour they felt detracted from the Park's atmosphere. This ranged from unruly children to the drinkers in the north shelter, and from cyclists to out of control dogs, with litter an ongoing gripe.

On a positive note, there were some good individual suggestions that people made. Your committee was thinking along the same lines in some cases, such as mending the broken statues (this is on hold pending a fresh survey by Camden), restoring the drinking water fountains (now with TAG) and increasing biodiversity. We are working with Camden's Biodiversity staff on this subject (see Biodiversity Report below).

But your committee would also like to follow up on other suggestions. We agree it is overdue that there is no disabled access from Highgate High Street and the north end of Swains Lane. This we realise will take funds from the Camden budget but we will press the case. We would also like to see the toddler play facilities improved, especially by adding extra swings. And we do feel the Park is woefully lacking in activity for local teenagers. Discussions with Camden have begun over basketball in the lower tennis courts. There are already pitches marked out as there are for netball but no nets and no booking arrangements.

FUNDRAISING

The funding of the Park upkeep is the responsibility of Camden Council and the management, that of the Green Spaces team. Supplementary income comes from the two rented gatehouse properties, but it is still repaying the original refurbishment costs. Other income comes from rentals when the Park is used as a location for filming or small events. Covid will have put paid to most of those activities last calendar year and this. Nevertheless, apart from the extra footfall erosion of the grass verges, the Park's 26 acres were beautifully maintained and for the moment budget is made available to sustain that.

Our volunteer gardeners and corporate volunteers contributed in kind (and with funds) with their work in many of the flower borders and tasks around the Park. The Friends contributed funding such as for the raised beds at Lauderdale House and the replacement of the box cubes in the sun and shade borders.

Our own fundraising in any one year consists of the annual concert held at Highgate School's theatre and our plant sale at the Fair in the Square. The necessary cancellation of these meant a reduction in income of at least £5,000.

Meanwhile our horticulturists on the committee made sure that the plant and bulb sales went ahead online and in real time and succeeded in raising nearly £4,000. It's always worth calling up www.waterlowparkshop.org.uk after one of the sales as there are often more plants available online.

We made small donations during the year to the Lordship Rec (Friends of Lordship Recreation ground in Haringey) who support the Friends' Groups movement and to Sir Christopher Waterlow's crowd funding for his new book.

Our steady income comes from membership fees and generous donations.

MEMBERSHIP

We have been heartened by the support we have had from the members of the Friends throughout the year. Some people have had to move out of the area but they have been replaced by others, many of whom only really came to appreciate the Park and the amount we do, during this time of Covid.

With membership renewals, new members and new subscribers we have 500 people on the mailing list all of whom receive regular newsletters. This is an increase on the previous year. It has of course been more difficult to attract new members at face-to-face events like a public AGM, the annual concert, the Fair in the Square, or our Trail Days and Bat Walks. But many of you added a donation on renewal, giving us the resources to do still more for the Park.

We continue to seek new members and we would be very pleased to have some more of that membership join us on the committee. Then we would be able to do even more for our treasured Waterlow Park.

Louise Lewis

HORTICULTURE AND PARK UPKEEP

This year we saw our weekly volunteering numbers and diversity increase as many sought opportunities to find constructive activity outdoors; they included a vet, a retired diplomat, baristas, an IT developer and Capel Manor College students. Work continued through all the Lockdowns with masks and social distancing. Some helpers were on furlough and others had sadly lost their jobs. Many are still with us. The larger team enabled us to maintain areas to a more meticulous standard. Actually, we could say that, in addition, we benefitted from the social contact and stimulating conversations.

Our plant nursery continues to be a great success and provides volunteers with a different gardening experience. Our plant sales raised substantial funds to finance Park projects and we appreciate the support from loyal 'friends' who buy from us. Plants are either raised from seed or lifted and divided from the Park.

We funded the replacement of the diseased box cubes in the sun/shade border (near the kitchen garden) and volunteers have so far substituted *Euonymus japonicus* "Green Spire" for some of the box and will complete the task in the Autumn.

Planning for the raised bed project near Lauderdale house began in 2020. We had long wanted to do something to make a difficult growing area more attractive and a grant from the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association plus donations from two Friends made the finances feasible for us. Help from the idverde gardening team, who transported wood, soil and compost, and a group of students from Capel Manor's Regent's Park Centre, brought the project to completion in May 2021.

April Cameron & Patricia Walby

FRIENDS Gardeners Question Time

A first time Friends *Gardeners' Question Time* took place on 17 June 2020 via a Zoom webinar. An edited version is now available to watch and listen to again [here](#). Panellists included **April Cameron**, formerly head of garden design and horticulture at Capel Manor and FoWP deputy chair, **Deborah Schneebeli-Morrell**, author, artist and allotment holder, and **Peter Reader**, garden designer. The event was chaired by FoWP committee member, **Patricia Walby**. Fifty people signed up but in the end about thirty tuned in, partly due to technical hitches. We may well run another one but in the meantime there is the Gardeners Tea-time running every day during the Highgate Festival 19-27 June 2021 from OmVed and others.

The KITCHEN GARDEN

Despite the pandemic we've had a productive year at the Kitchen Garden.

Repairs

Working closely with Camden and the Friends of Waterlow Park we have managed to get essential repairs carried out including refurbishment of the Pergola.

Signage

In an effort to try and counter the pilfering issue, which continues to be a problem, and to give the sense of a more managed space and make clear that the efforts of plot holders are to be respected, we have agreed new signage to be provided and paid for by Camden:

- Signs to be on each gate requesting the beds are not disturbed.
- Each bed will be numbered with a new wooden carved sign and name plates renewed.
- Both blackboards will be repainted.
- If plants continue to be removed we will consider what further action, if any, we can take to resolve the problem.

Plot updates

We have two new plot holders:

- North London Walking Club, which comprises mostly older members
- North London Samaritans who have requested that they are allowed to install a sign on their plot advertising their services.

A further plot becomes vacant at the end of August which has been offered to the Harrington Scheme who are excited at the prospect of being able to offer an offsite growing opportunity to their students.

Rita from the FoWP has been working closely with one of the school groups and they are now more informed and engaged, with regular visits now fixtures in their timetable.

Plot holders have contributed £10 per bed to cover the cost of restocking and updating the Tool Box.

Camden's requirements

The borough is planning a training session to ensure all plot holders are aware of their responsibilities and that we comply with insurance requirements. Camden is also planning to introduce a fresh agreement with plot holders and we await the first draft.

Elaine Parker [enquiries about the Kitchen Garden to elainedparker@hotmail.co.uk]

The ORCHARD

The Orchard continues to flourish under the care of the Volunteers.

To further increase its role, the Friends Committee have suggested a noticeboard for the Community Orchard similar to the one in the Kitchen Garden. The idea arose when a group from FoWP and Camden did a walk round some of the Park areas just as lockdown measures started to ease in early Summer 2020.

The aim of the noticeboard would be to tell the general public what the space is and to promote it as a place of quiet relaxation, where people can retreat from the general activity of the Park. A QR code will link to the FoWP website where there is information about the Orchard including a plan showing the varieties of fruit trees planted.

One or two Park benches placed in the Orchard would be appreciated by the more senior visitors to the Park who enjoy this quieter space.

BIODIVERSITY

The Biodiversity Group is led by Rita Drobner. Other members of the group include April Cameron (FoWP), Ginnie Cummings (F0WP), Maria Schlatter (TCV),

Greg Hitchcock and Jevaughn Bailey (Camden). The focus of the group is the entire Park, and there are two areas of immediate interest: the restoration of wildlife in and around the Upper Pond and a biodiversity survey of all wildlife.

This latter is a major undertaking. Some assessments have already been carried out on the animal side, for instance the hedgehog survey by camera in 2020. This produced no hedgehog sightings but 1300 foxes were seen plus mice and dogs but interestingly, few rats or cats.

A grid of the Park's planted areas has now been produced and this will need several volunteers to scan the whole of the Park. From this it will be possible to see whether planting should be modified to encourage greater biodiversity.

Regarding the Upper Pond, there is general agreement that planting and hence wildlife/biodiversity in the area have been significantly eroded in recent years through increased visitor footfall and a little bit of vandalism. The pond itself has suffered from a lack of light, leaf litter falling into the pond and a build-up of debris/silt.

The area is used by adults who largely stay on the boardwalk, by schools for nature study and informal play and by small groups of children who primarily visit the woodland area for informal play, moving logs around, creating dens, bridges etc.

Whilst the area, woodland specifically, is great for informal play, it is small and thus somewhat incompatible with also being an area for nature study. Dead wood piles created to provide habitat for invertebrates disappear and heavy footfall has led to the predominant ground cover being reduced to ivy and nettles.

The recommendation is that the Upper Pond Conservation Area be closed from mid-Autumn 2021 to allow planting amelioration and pond dredging to take place. This is likely to require a whole growing season, i.e. at least a year, to be beneficial. The schools should be informed of the other areas in the Park where they can usefully observe wildlife. After closure a management plan for the area needs to be in place – possibly reaffirming the 2010 plan.

EVENTS AND FUTURE PLANS

We may not have been able to run the scheduled events for last year or, so far, for this but your committee has been busy planning ahead for a less restricted world. An art installation of Park birds will appear in the old aviary next to LUX as part of the Highgate Festival (19 – 27 June 2021) and the Winter Proms for which we were awarded a Camden grant will hopefully become Summer Proms.

Alas there was no Waterlow Art Park from the students of Central St Martin's this year, but we hear that Lauderdale House has some interesting arty installations coming up in the near future.

We held last year's AGM via a Zoom webinar and Sir Chris Waterlow recorded a presentation on his new biography of Sir Sydney. The 2021 AGM on 24 June will feature a talk by Dr Ian Dungavell, the Chief Executive of Friends of Highgate

Cemetery, in which we hope he will reveal the winners of the Cemetery Landscaping Competition. The Trust Advisory Group will for the first time present their own annual report. We will present a summary of this report and the Accounts and financial report. Sir Christopher Waterlow will do a book signing of the biography, before and after the AGM. The event will begin with drinks in LUX's hidden garden at 6.30pm for a 7pm start. We plan to finish by 9pm. Details will be posted on the website, via Twitter and on Park noticeboards.

SUMMARY

The three Lockdowns certainly affected our fundraising capability but our membership drive and reminders plus several plant sales did compensate. Other activity went on behind the scenes such as running our Park user survey, improving the website and setting plans for events when restrictions allow, including taking part in the 2021 Highgate Festival and starting our Pop-Up Summer Proms.

And we did get positive feedback from Friends and Park visitors to show that our efforts and those of the gardening team are greatly appreciated, this year more than ever. It would be good if this appreciation could also translate into new members! For £5 a year you can say thank you for this very special Park and be kept in touch with developments. We are also grateful to Park tenants, Lauderdale House, and LUX for providing space and support for our plant sales and meetings.

For all matters related to Waterlow Park we forward your views to TAG and to Camden Council Green Spaces department. There is a form for contacting FoWP on the website and a new Suggestions page.

Note: Strategy for the Park

Waterlow Park was originally gifted to the people of London and is now managed by Camden Council. It is held in a charitable trust and Camden Council are the corporate trustee thus giving the Council two roles. It has set up a Trust Advisory Group (TAG) and the Friends are represented on this Group alongside Camden and local neighbourhood groups such as the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Forum and the Highgate Society. TAG provides a forum for devising an ongoing strategy for the Park and keeping a watching brief on the day-to-day life of the Park. You can contact TAG through its website www.waterlowparktrust.org.uk or its constituent groups to put forward your ideas or concerns.

Should you witness any antisocial behaviour in the Park you can also email direct to parks.officers@camden.gov.uk and communitysafety@camden.gov.uk

Fiona Murphy
Chair, Friends of Waterlow Park
10 June 2021