

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1 MAY 2021 TO 30 APRIL 2022

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

According to our Constitution our fifth of five objectives is to be
A body dedicated to maintaining the beauty of the park

So let's look first at how we did in honouring that pledge in the last year

- **The horticulture volunteers worked Mondays and Thursdays** even in deepest winter and through their enormous efforts growing and nurturing plants for sale, raised well over over half our gross income for the park.
- **The Shepherd and Shepherdess statues and plinths were given a professional clean.** We campaigned for this project and the work will be largely funded by the Friends. The Eagles are next for a mend and a clean.
- **We added music to the park in the form of eight free concerts in the summer.** A Camden grant helped towards the costs.
- **Biodiversity Survey started as promised.** 'Beauty' in this era of climate concern has to include diversity and sustainability in plants which will then support a good range of invertebrates. If you would like to survey a little patch of the park, sign up at the desk (here at the AGM) or on the Friends' website
- **We created an ambitious art and sound installation of park birds** in the disused aviary next to LUX for the Highgate Festival 2021
- **The public toilets this year will receive a serious aesthetic upgrade.** Although announced outside the reported year, we have word from Camden that after our considerable representations this is going ahead right now.

We are also tasked to be '**a recognised support group for Camden's consultative processes**'

This came into play when we held the consultation in February 2022 on a possible temporary nature study area to replace the out of bounds upper pond trail. As the proposed study area did not receive overwhelming support it was deemed best not to proceed with the idea.

Summary of 2021-2022

Enjoying the park

In April 2021, the start of this reported year, Covid was still hanging over all our lives and the main restrictions were not to be lifted until February 2022 when we moved to 'Living with Covid' status. Many of the people who discovered Waterlow Park last year, during ongoing lockdown, have continued to use and appreciate it, joining those of us who have loved it for many years.

Magically it is still the beautiful park that seems able to accommodate those who seek peace and tranquillity along with those who want to socialise and play. In fact the 'magic' comes from all those Camden park staff, IdVerde gardeners, 'Friends', supporters and volunteer gardeners who work so hard throughout the year.

During the year we continued to press for the repair of the statuary and the John van der Nost - attributed shepherd statues have had their makeover and we look forward this year to the eagles getting a mend and a clean.

We ensured that there is some new signage in the kitchen garden and the orchard. And arrangements are in hand for new seating in the orchard – hopefully affording some quiet moments for park users

Last June we put an art installation into the old aviary for the Highgate Festival, probably the first time that use had been made of the aviary since its original purpose. Interestingly, making use of it was quite a popular idea in our previous year's survey so we are minded to find more uses for the space.

Over the summer, with some support from the Camden Festival Fund we organised eight outdoor concerts in the park, all featuring different musical genres. We have gained another grant for this year and so will continue with four concerts over the summer of 2022.

Idverde has made good the Petanque pitch so people will be able to have a smoother game this year.

We have made a start on our Biodiversity survey. More volunteers are needed and would be very welcome. You can find us in the park most Saturdays, check which days via info@waterlowpark.org.uk or on the website. See more below.

Public Engagement

The Consultation

As mentioned above, the little nature trail in parts of the Upper Pond Nature Reserve has been closed for regeneration. At the behest of Camden we held a consultation in February 2022 on designating another small area in the park for nature education. Unfortunately misunderstandings led to a separate petition against the proposal which created further misconceptions. Although more voted for than against, it was not an overwhelming endorsement of the idea so it was decided not to take it any further. We still hope to

increase biodiversity in this little area and we are sure that people will continue to enjoy it and make their nature explorations. The joint report from Camden, the Friends and TAG is published on the website with all the 110 submissions to the consultation.

Other Communication

We do our best to keep members up to date through newsletters, not too many for your sake, and are always there to answer questions and listen to views via the special form on the website. You are free to address chair@waterlowpark.org.uk or info@waterlowpark.org and it will be forwarded to the appropriate committee member.

You might be interested to know the manner of queries we received during the report year - or a little outside - June 21 to May 22.

There were 237 enquiries as follows:

Subject	Number	% of total
Consultation	96	41
Barbecues	48	20
Volunteering	25	11
Events	20	8
Flora & Fauna	13	5
Memorials	7	3
PR	4	2
The Friends	5	2
Misc	19	8

(inc dogs, kitchen garden, lost property, antisocial behaviour)

Representing you

As well as all the visible activities, in the background we maintain a good relationship with Camden, we have two representatives on the Waterlow Park Trust Advisory Group, and we maintain the website and a Twitter account to put out announcements – ours and local ones which you can see on the website.

Membership

Income from membership subs (and small donations) was up last year by £200. With the price of membership at only £5 that's quite an achievement! Interestingly we have over 500 people on our mailing lists but only 170 are actual Friends. So it would be great if we could convert some of our mailing list subscribers to be fully fledged Friends BUT we are nevertheless pleased to be talking to as many park users as possible, as that is one of our chief objectives: as '*a forum for people to discuss their concerns for and interests in the park*'.

The big change is the amount we now do online. When our membership secretary started in her office about 10 years ago (there's dedication) most of the mail outs were done on paper. It's now down to just eight people who are not on email.

The membership is the bedrock of the Friends group, both in terms of finances and involvement. So we have to thank you and once again ask you to be sure your membership is up to date so we can continue to do our very best for the park.

Louise Lewis, Membership Secretary

Horticulture

The greatest observable contribution from the 'Friends' is in horticulture where two leaders seem to be in the park all year round and with a team of about 10 volunteers prepare and run our popular plant, bulb and Christmas sales which raise money for more planting.

Last year we were again blessed with a terrific group of volunteers to maintain beds and borders in the park and even had a group who worked throughout the winter months. At the volunteers' request we now offer the gardening programme on both Mondays and Thursdays. Strangely this did not seem to significantly take the pressure off but instead gave us the chance to do horticultural activities we'd ignored before.

In the Orchard over the winter the gardening volunteers weeded around the fruit trees, reapplied mulch and carried out minimal winter pruning. Summer pruning, particularly of the stone fruit will take place within a month.

In 2021 we had just one group of corporate volunteers who planted up the wooden troughs along the south side of Lauderdale House for the Pink Café. Although they didn't end up in their intended location, they were and are enjoyed by all.

We held our usual summer plant sale, autumn bulb sale and in 2021 added a Christmas sale where we sold decorated willow wreaths made from park foliage. Over the year our volunteers labelled and prepped plants for the sales and enthusiastically participated in the fund raising activities. The gross earnings were £4,101 from sales, well over half the total income for the year.

Our horticulture volunteering has been added to the Social Prescribing Register. To date we have been approached by one person wishing to join us specifically for health and wellbeing. Sadly we have been unable to accommodate them because of timing difficulties.

Our dedicated Head Gardener, Mark Walters, has moved on but we feel confident that our work with the new Head Gardener, Victor Chinkit will be just as productive.

Plans for 2022-23 include a Jubilee project labelling some of the more significant trees in the park, selling dwarf sunflower seedlings to raise money for DEC's Ukrainian appeal and investigating (with Camden) the possibility of planting a Jubilee tree funded by the Friends. April Cameron, Deputy Chair, lead for gardening volunteers

Biodiversity

The original brief was a report by two FoWP members, Ginnie and John Cumming (dec'd) in January 2020, suggesting that there should be 'some sort of biodiversity strategy in Waterlow Park'. They suggested several potential areas for investigation:

- Changes to mowing patterns on grass banks, and other marginal areas.
- Doing an inventory of the biodiversity of the shrubberies and other planted areas.
- Investigating the potential of the wilder western side of the park including the new meadowland and the Upper Pond Nature reserve.
- Investigating the construction of new water and bog gardening to take advantage of the park's hydrology.

Following presentation of the report the Friends of Waterlow Park (FoWP) Committee formed a Biodiversity sub-committee (subsequently called the Biodiversity Group) with members from Camden, TVC, Idverde and the Friends to carry forward the investigation.

Short term aims:

The Annual Report produced in June 2021 mapped out progress so far. It was agreed that a major focus of the group should be to start biodiversity surveys of the park to ascertain the current situation, and enable positive and practical measures to improve biodiversity.

The biodiversity surveying initiative got under way in 2021, with a view to mapping areas of the park most in need of biodiverse management. Plant Surveys in 2021 included Spring Bulbs, the Sparrow Meadow, the Lux Rockery, the North Shelter Bed, Marvell's Walk, the Wildflower Bed at Lauderdale House, and the Upper Woods.

Some fauna has also been surveyed and that and other data will eventually sit alongside the flora data. The following surveys were undertaken and results were recorded and reported to Big Butterfly Count and GiGL: the Butterfly Count 2020 and 2021 (in selected areas - the Rockery and Upper Pond), is to be repeated in 2022; Bird Lists were supplied by park volunteers in 2020 and 2021. Bat surveys in the park, and bat walks for the public, have been proposed by volunteers.

It was agreed that three measures to improve biodiversity did not need to wait until biodiversity surveys are completed:

- **Grass and Meadow management:** The current mowing designations and maintenance schedules for the lawns and meadows needed to be produced and discussed.
- **Potential Bog Gardens areas** needed to be identified. It was suggested that the creation of a meandering stream in the meadow area, where a line of willows had been planted, would slow the water course and create damp areas for marsh and water plants.
- The Upper Pond has a separate designation as a Nature Reserve and it was agreed that it was in urgent need of attention and renovation.

Camden Council published a borough-wide Biodiversity Policy this Spring. It was agreed to hold off writing a specific biodiversity strategy for Waterlow Park before this in order to align a park policy/strategy as far as possible with that of Camden.

Progress to come in 2022:

- We have yet to have a conversation with Camden's Maintenance Officer to explore a more relaxed mowing regime in additional areas to see if it gives rise to an increase in wild flowers in those areas
- Biodiversity surveying has been started on the western side, and data is slowly building up ready to put into GiGL. Requests for volunteers are ongoing. We meet in the park for surveying on most Saturdays.
- Closure of the Upper Ponds Nature Reserve led to a proposal for a small alternative site in the Upper Woods for the groups (formal and casual) but this proposal was not taken forward owing to insufficient support in the public consultation.
- The Upper Pond has had several trees removed at its western end, which has brought much needed light onto the pond. A sycamore at the eastern end will be removed next autumn. Work on pond dredging and tree cover reduction has been undertaken under the guidance of Greg Hitchcock, Camden's Nature Conservation Officer, and carried out by a Camden-appointed contractor and TCV volunteers who have a remit from Camden to work in this area. The Friends funded the purchase of wildflower seed (specified by GH) and part of the meadow area has been seeded. Further biodiversity studies are also progressing: Pond Water surveying in the three ponds – taking pH, looking at turbidity and water levels since 2021; and a Genepools Water Biodiversity survey by the Natural History Museum (results awaited).
- No potential bog gardens have yet been identified.

How the group makes park users aware of what we are doing.

Hopefully this report will make the work of the group more visible and give park users some idea of what a biodiverse strategy could be like. They will see that it is largely non-controversial and incremental – more a question of improved or altered gardening and maintenance strategies, rather than radical change.

Conclusion: As a Biodiversity Group we feel the next step is to propose a formal strategy for the park in the form of a written document, which can then be taken to the FoWP and to TAG (the Trust Advisory Group). Camden has representatives on TAG, so they can then take any subsequent formal strategy to the Camden Green Spaces Team, and from there appropriate measures can become incorporated in Idverde's maintenance contract for Waterlow Park.

Ginnie Cumming and Biodiversity sub-committee May 2022

Kitchen Garden

We have had some churn this year at the Kitchen Garden with three changes of plot holders. We have re-let plots to a women's mental health project, The Harrington Centre and a local branch of the Samaritans. There are no vacancies at the moment and we currently have no waiting list. The AGM last October agreed that the next available plot would be let to a refugee group.

Repairs have taken place to the pergola and signage has been installed numbering each plot with a request that the beds are respected and produce is not picked.

We successfully bid in competition for two John Ystumlyn roses. These roses are named after an 18th century gardener who was the first well-recorded black person in North Wales. One rose has been planted in the main park, the other, which was in the Kitchen Garden, has alas been stolen.

Again, losses of produce are reported and in this respect the signage has had little impact on behaviour. The problem with pilfering remains demotivating for plot holders and we will be discussing what more we can do, if anything, at our next AGM. We fully understand that this is a common problem across the park.

There is a discussion to be had about the value of a Kitchen Garden where the plot holders feel unable to grow anything recognisable as it will be stolen. Perhaps there is a compromise which offers growers more security and by doing so, ultimately provides for a more interesting and varied Kitchen Garden which is tended with more enthusiasm and hence flourishes.

Elaine Parker, Secretary, Kitchen Garden

Friends Future Plans

Activities will again split between volunteering in the park, some fun events such as the concerts and having a go at biodiversity surveying. As to fundraising, the next possible concert with The Harrington Scheme will not be a possibility until 2023 but we hope that can be re-instated then. Fair in the Square was back this June and happily we were a part of the many stallholders, with our offering of inexpensive sunflower plants to raise funds for Ukraine. The Plant Sales will be firm features on the calendar throughout the year and on our shop website www.waterlowparkshop.org.uk

A major undertaking last year was the preparation of labels for some of the more significant trees in the park and this should be done over this year. The Biodiversity Survey will carry on during the year, bolstered hopefully with help from us all.

It may also be that we see a test run for basketball on the lower tennis courts, smoother entrances for disability buggies and prams at the north ends of the park, and even a new drinking fountain. These latter are aims we are progressing with the Trust Advisory Group and Camden Green Spaces.

As the *voice of park users* we look forward to more and fruitful engagements with all park users. There is a form on the website expressly for this purpose. As someone said to the membership secretary, 'Keep up the good work. The park continues to look wonderful'. My thanks as ever to our committee who steer all this activity and to the volunteers for their generous time and inspiration.

Fiona Murphy, chair Friends of Waterlow Park, 15 June 2022