



Friends of Waterlow Park

REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 11 JUNE 2024

FOR THE YEAR MAY 2023 TO APRIL 2024

HIGHLIGHTS

Physick Bed designed & planted as Memorial to Christine Farrell

New Prairie Border planted next to the Orchard

Four new trees planted opposite LUX & in Cherry Tree Walk

*Nearly **£6,000** raised from plant sales & gardening work*

New soil for the Kitchen Garden Co-operative – all plots taken

Less mowing & more wildflower planting encouraged by Biodiversity Group

More habitat for fauna such as log piles

Pop-Up Proms – Jazz, Latin and Irish bands

A surprise DOG Show – Great success

Trees and Views Consultation

BBQ sub committee re-convened

Horticulture

We are lucky to have a loyal team of gardening volunteers who continue to help maintain many of the ornamental beds within the park – but we can always do with more. No particular experience is required apart from a desire to keep the park looking good. We meet Monday and/or Thursday mornings and work for 2, 3 or 4 hours depending upon the job and how long people are able to stay.

Although we focus our gardening activities on the more ornamental beds and borders we also tend some wildflower areas including the Mount plus we do the winter and summer pruning of the Community Orchard. The grasses on the Mount are currently competing significantly with the wildflowers so we have begun a 2 or 3 year programme of introducing yellow rattle to try to deal with this. In the Community Orchard we are fortunate to have the help of a volunteer from the London Orchard Project to guide our pruning.

In Autumn, for the second year, we planted tulips bulbs in the half circles. We aim to repeat the planting in Autumn 2024 but scale it back to make these beds more sustainable.

Last year we planted the prairie border which looked great. The wet and cool spring has delayed the reappearance of the perennials which are just now peeking above the soil.

We have begun the planting of the Physick Bed which is located at the western end of the Lower Terrace (against the high wall below Lauderdale House). The bed has been designed by Lauren Munton, one of our volunteers and a recently qualified local garden designer. The garden is dedicated to Christine Farrell, former co-chair of the Friends. Because of a slow start to the growing season generally some of the plants are not quite ready to be planted out. Details of the design and plants will soon be available on our website, with a link displayed on site.

In past years we have been very lucky to have had corporate groups spend a day volunteering. These groups usually bring some funds with them and enable us to focus on specific projects. This type of activity has dropped off a little in more recent years but on May 10th we had a group of Deloitte volunteers help us with some renovation work on the parterres. We have a longer term aim of working with the *idverde* team to make the parterres more sustainable and easier to maintain.

Our three fundraising events: the Summer Plant Sale, Autumn Bulb Sale and our Christmas Sale raised over £4,000. These activities contributed about 60% of the Friends annual income. The plants we sell are by and large propagated from plants in the park and our Christmas wreaths are mostly made from materials collected in the park. We thank our members for their regular support at these events and also our valued volunteers who help out at all our events. We hope you all enjoy the results of our efforts in the park which in many cases would not be possible without the help of the *idverde* gardening team.

Trees

Four new trees were planted in the park in Autumn/Winter. Three Crepe myrtles (*Lagerstroemia indica*) replace the ailing Sorbus in the grass opposite the Park Centre

and a second Carolina silver bells (*Halesia carolina*) has been planted on Cherry Tree Walk just below the Upper Pond.

Waterlow Park Kitchen Garden

Valerie Doulton took over the negotiations between the kitchen garden and Camden in 2023 and has subsequently had about 5 meetings in the garden with Martin Payne, Camden's Greenspace Partnership Officer.

On the first meeting Valerie discovered that Martin had previously worked for the RSPB. Valerie is a member so they shared common ground from the get-go. At this meeting Martin said the kitchen garden was 'the jewel in Camden's allotments', a sentiment that Valerie totally agrees with. This makes all the effort of running this beautiful space worthwhile.

All the subsequent meetings with Martin, come rain or shine, have been happy events. We have managed to negotiate the removal of the bay tree in Plot 8 with the park gardeners, who were most cooperative. The tree had grown to an unmanageable size in the small plot.

Also, negotiated has been a delivery of soil so that some of the beds which needed building up could do this. This took many months of negotiation, but when the soil finally arrived in April 2024 everyone was thrilled to see it was such good quality.

The one outstanding important action not completed yet is the refurbishment of the compost bins. Rather than replacing these, it has now been decided with Martin we will repair the woodwork. But the first quote is a disappointing amount, and we are continuing to work on a resolution. This has been a long time now with no result, and hopefully will be resolved very soon.

Prior to 2024 Valerie visited some of the plot holders who had not done a lot of work in summer 2023 to ask if they wanted to continue. These visits were illuminating. It transpired in conversation with the Harrington Scheme that their plot is integral to their work. If a student needs 'time out', they have time to bring this student to the kitchen garden for some gentle weeding and work on their bed, even watering all of the other beds, and then returning to their main site within an hour.

Valerie's visit to the Maya Centre was equally illuminating. The centre is dedicated to the care of all women who may need care after a violent attack or violation in the home or elsewhere. They think of the plot in the kitchen garden as a very important part of their recuperative care.

Two plot holders have decided they are not able to continue in summer 2024. Elaine, who for many years was the person who negotiated for us with Camden, has

decided she can't continue with her plot. And I discovered when I visited the school that Hargrave Park School had sent a message to say they had decided they couldn't continue, a message that hadn't reached us.

In agreement with everyone involved in the cooperative kitchen garden structure for the plot holders, these two plots I have now arranged to be taken over by Proud Sports and Helen in Lauderdale House.

April continues to be an invaluable help in all our negotiations, particularly with the park gardeners.

We are all looking forward to another happy growing season!

Valerie Doulton

Current state of our biodiversity strategy in Waterlow Park

The FoWP Biodiversity Subcommittee consists of representatives from the Friends of Waterlow Park, representatives from Camden (the Head Gardener and the Biodiversity Officer), and the TCV park volunteers. Rita Drobner, co-chair stood down this year after moving out of London and will be much missed.

The group was set up to help the Park adapt to biodiversity, guided by Camden's newly developed biodiversity aims (shortly to become statutory in law). The key points we have been covering can be updated for 2024:

** Changing mowing and planting regimes:*

There have been major changes to mowing patterns through the creation of new wildflower areas in the park, and some wider unmown verges. The innovation of 'No Mow May' was generally observed.

But there is certainly scope for increasing our biodiversity - perhaps especially by creating, (where possible, ie around the nature reserve) 'double hedges', which extend the width of the original hedge by planting another in front of it. Double hedging can have an immediate effect on the size of the bird population, and definitely benefits all wildlife.

We would also ideally like to see more planting of nectar-rich native shrubs, and increased underplanting in our shrubberies, including native woodland bulb species which we lack.

** Enriching habitat for fauna*

We have been successful with log piles, insect hotels, bat and bird boxes;

less so with introducing food plants and flora specifically for niche species. Perhaps that is because we don't specifically know what we have growing in the park - and where.

** Botanical Surveying 2023 - 2024*

Conceived as a way of 'seeing what is on our land' and for providing data for future biodiversity strategies, our wonderful amateur 'citizen science' volunteers managed to cover about half the park by the end of 2023. The surveying for 2024 has been put on hold until we can finish entering all collected data onto the GiGL (Green Space Information for Greater London) database and set up a Waterlow Park customised version.

If any people with computer skills would like to come forward and assist with this, please just email info@waterlowpark.org.uk (it can be done at home, using copies of the data entry sheets) and then we can complete the rest of the survey.

** Finally: Bog and Water Gardening in the park for the future?*

The Park has many boggy areas and ponds which have been largely forgotten or taken for granted, certainly in terms of horticultural biodiversity.

For example there are springs which could be guided to form undulating streams, with waterside planting, instead of the current fast flow of drainage and surface water across the middle of the park. Stream-work would help absorb the water and slow it down - or help - conserve water during drought - and bring yet more biodiversity to the park landscape. Meanwhile the Lower and Middle Ponds could be planted with water flowers, and water loving shrubs and trees.

There are so many possibilities for water gardening to investigate and discuss. It would be good for the Park to have a long-term plan, and certainly professional help from a chosen garden designer.

Ginnie Cumming

Events

Moving away from garden matters, we can report that we held the Pop-Up Proms again last August and the audiences were much entertained by the Jazz and Latin combos and a very lively Irish band, Burning Wheel. There will be concerts again

each Sunday in August in 2024, thanks to the creative input of Patricia Walby and Vivien Priestley. If you have any bands you would like to recommend, especially youthful ones, do get in touch via the website.

And the same two on the Committee's Events side, with much help all round, pulled off our surprise Dog Show in March, the first any of us can remember in the Park. It was opened by dog lover Caroline Catz of TV's Doc Martin fame and co-hosted with rescue charity All Dogs Matter.

Funds were raised for the charity which played a crucial role in making this event a success. A picture of Caroline appeared in the Camden New Journal, and the Ham and High ran a pre-show online piece as well. The show also got coverage in several other local media. All in all it was a great success.

Earlier in January 2024 the Friends took a stall again at Lauderdale House's Heritage Weekend and highlighted the eight listed structures that are in the park with a resumé of their history. A Heritage Trail featuring them was created and this can be downloaded from the website.

Membership

We have about 150 members giving us a substantial financial base, enhanced by the additional generous donations received. This number is part of a total subscriber base of over 500 so we are able to keep a wider circle informed of Friends' activities such as the year round fund-raising sales.

This is the time of year when most memberships are renewed. Interestingly it does sometimes happen that former members think they still have a direct debit, or standing order in place, and think they have paid, when we have no record of payment. The finest example was someone who thought they had been paying their annual membership but we hadn't received anything since 2011! We were very pleased to welcome them back into the fold and, although there was no fatted calf, I hope they are here to enjoy the nibbles and drinks.

We welcome any support we can get so please remind everyone you know of our beautiful park and encourage them to join us too and possibly consider an active role either in the gardens or on the committee.

Louise Lewis

Compiled by Fiona Murphy, Chair Friends of Waterlow Park 11 06 2024.