



Friends of Waterlow Park

Report to Annual General Meeting on year May 2022 to April 2023

1. Membership Report

While we have a large number of people on our mailing list, over 500, many of them continue to look at our mailshots and maintain an interest in the Friends but, for some reason, this does not convert into membership. We continue to have a basic ongoing membership of about 120 people with a churn of about 40 people joining and lapsing each year. We currently have 162 paid up members. We would urge you make sure that your membership is renewed or that you rejoin if your membership has lapsed.

The individual subscription remains £5 (£10 per household) with many people making an extra donation when they feel they can afford it. Last year this generated more than £1700 of income which was a great contribution, funding not only general expenses, but the other work we do in Waterlow Park.

2. Statuary repairs FoWP made a £2400 contribution towards the cost of conserving and cleaning the shepherd and shepherdess statues at the step entrance to Lauderdale House lawn and repairing the eagles.

3. Biodiversity

A Biodiversity Report was produced in May 2022, and the one for 2023 maps out further progress:

Grass and meadow management. The Biodiversity Group which includes id verde, the gardeners, has reached agreement on a more relaxed mowing schedule for the park with some areas only to be mowed once a year.

The **biodiversity surveying** initiative is well under way, with a view to mapping areas of the park most in need of biodiverse management. Some early botanical surveying was being done on the eastern side of the park; more needs to be done on the western side of the park, and data put onto the London GiGL database.

Since May 2022 **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. There has been some dredging and planting, fencing and gates have been restored, and the small meadow cleared. More planting will be needed in autumn.

Bog and pond areas in the park There is at present no general agreement regarding the use of bog areas or use of water in the park. A proposal will be drawn up for discussion.

In 2022 biodiversity burst onto the **local agenda** as well. The FoWP was contacted by the Highgate Neighbourhood Forum to be one of a new Highgate Landowners Group investigating biodiversity in and around Highgate, including Queen's Wood, Hampstead Heath, the Townsend Yard centre, Highgate School and others. A day conference was organized at Highgate School on 9 September 2022 at which two representatives of the Waterlow Park Biodiversity Group (Rita Drobner and Ginnie Cumming) gave a presentation (now available on the new biodiversity web pages introduced during the year).

Since then, the HNF ran an Earth Day conference in April 2023 at the LUX Centre in the park, and more local groups came in to give their reports and compare notes. Rita spoke about creating small ponds and preserving their wildlife; and Ginnie talked about the history of the springs in Waterlow Park and the neglected state of the surface streams. (We incidentally discovered that water run-off from the park often quite severely affects Highgate Cemetery and parts of the Holly Lodge estate, further 'downstream'.)

Gradually it seems that the public, and local public bodies, are developing some idea of what a biodiverse strategy could be like. Mostly it is non-controversial and incremental – more a question of improved gardening, rather than radical change. But there are some initiatives which can particularly catch the imagination – for example, hedgehog preservation via green 'corridors' across the local boroughs, supported by Heath Hands volunteers.

Additional help and resources needed to achieve biodiversity aims:

At present most of this initiative is being driven by **volunteers**, including TCV.

Working with Camden officers and the idverde gardening team, we aim to gradually introduce more measures to improve biodiversity in the park.

Currently only a small amount of money is required to help with the **biodiversity survey expenses** (i.e. printing of survey sheets). What is lacking is expert help with future data management, which might need a budget.

The scientific analysis of the Upper Pond came back from the Natural History Museum Genepools Study and now forms part of the new biodiversity page on the FoWP website.

Ginnie Cumming

4. Gardening Volunteering

We are very lucky to have a team of great volunteers: 19 on the communication list, 12 regularly attending one or sometimes two days a week. Some have well-oiled joints, others are creakier, but whatever our situation we all agree that getting out in the fresh air and making the park look beautiful is very rewarding. We meet Monday and/or Thursday mornings and for the second year worked through the winter months including winter pruning of the Community Orchard under the guidance of a member of the London Community Orchard Project.

Although we focus our gardening activities on the more ornamental beds and borders, we also tend some wildflower areas including the Mount.

We have abandoned two areas we previously looked after. The Sedum circle at the top of the park we wanted to be fun and uplifting in commemoration of the Park's 125-year anniversary. But with our focus on sustainable planting (and lack of water supply) we did not feel we were successful so the area will be returned to grass. It also became apparent that the hydrangea bed at the bottom of the park was unsustainable. We are still exploring ideas for this area.

And speaking of uplifting.... we splashed out in Autumn and planted tulips in the half circles near St Joseph's – we hope you have enjoyed the bold dash of colour they bring to the park.

We have at this stage one Autumn project in the works: the renovation of a bed near Lauderdale House as a memorial garden for an ex co-chair of Friends, Dr Christine Farrell, who died last year.

Recently, with the support of Camden and assistance from the idverde gardeners, we completed the planting of prairie beds just outside the Community Orchard. Prairie planting is a mix of herbaceous plants and grasses which happily co-exist, are excellent for biodiversity and once established should be drought

tolerant and not too demanding on maintenance. These were designed by award-winning local designer, Peter Reader. When the plants have put on a bit more growth they will be mulched and the fences will disappear. But in order to ensure their success dogs need to be kept off the beds.

We have three fundraising sales each year: Summer Plant Sale, Autumn Bulb Sale and our Christmas Sale. We thank our members for their regular support at these events and also our volunteers who help 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.

April Cameron & Patricia Walby

5. The Horticulture leads from the committee and volunteers provided input into a small Lauderdale House art project for children on the park's biodiversity. This event took place on Earth Day, April 22.

6. Events

The year began with volunteers planting and nurturing 1000 sunflower seeds to sell at the Highgate Fair in the Square to raise money for Ukraine, raising £800 which went to the Disasters and Emergency Committee Ukraine Appeal. In December together with Highgate Neighbourhood Forum we organised a highly successful tree walk, hosted in the park by Riccardo Arnone (Camden Trees Team Lead).

To mark the Jubilee, and with a nod to the late Queen's request to focus on trees, the Committee organised the labelling of 70 species within the park – something which many members of the public had requested in our surveys. This was followed with a tree-themed contribution to Lauderdale House's Heritage Weekend where we launched the new Tree Trail map featuring the named trees, now available to download from the website.

Replacing tree(s) to commemorate the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee is also under discussion with Camden's tree lead. Biodiversity and sustainability are taken into account when selecting replacement trees.

Once again, the FoWP held the August Pop Up Proms concerts in the North Pavilion, originally begun to help musicians during Covid. The focus was on instruments from different cultures and included sitar and tabla and the Syrian oud as well as a jazz trio and the local Highgate Brass Band. A welcome contribution from the Camden Festival Fund helped towards the costs.

Patricia Walby

7. Kitchen Garden

At the plot holders' meeting this Autumn Valerie Doulton took over as the person in our group who would liaise in future with Camden.

Following on from this Valerie met with Rosa Fletcher, who is a Green Space Partnership Officer for the London Borough of Camden, in the kitchen garden in December 2022. They had a far-reaching discussion that day. Valerie explained that she and Victoria Wood had shared plot No 10 since the outset of the establishment of the garden. She also explained that although Camden would now like plots to be managed by groups in the community, this was not the original brief agreed when she and Victoria formed their partnership when the garden was established. Rosa said that the replacement of the compost boxes was in the process of being researched, and that they were waiting on costings for this. It was also agreed that the bay tree would be removed as soon as possible. They discussed the beauty of this garden, and Rosa said it was 'the jewel' in the allotments that Camden run. I agreed that our kitchen garden is a complete jewel.

It was raining hard that day and Rosa and Valerie then shared a coffee and chat together in the Lauderdale House café, after which Rosa went back to the garden to fix the padlock on the new arrangement for our watering tap. Both the tap and the toolbox will have the same code.

Following on from this Martin Payne took over Rosa's role in the New Year. Valerie had another meeting in the garden with Martin, who used to work for the RSPB. They discussed the bird life and flora and fauna. Martin said he would progress the removal of the bay tree and also the replacement of the compost boxes. The quote for the compost boxes has now been agreed and we will keep our signage of FRESH, COOKING and READY, with little explanations under each sign which Martin is going to have specially designed for us.

All in all, I can report that relations with Camden regarding the kitchen garden have been progressing very constructively. All plots are occupied with nobody on the waiting list.

Valerie F. Doulton

8. Applications for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) grants were forwarded to Green Spaces for equipment for the Toddlers Playground, cleaning the Sydney Waterlow Statue, and repairs and conversion of the Aviary into a park education/information hub.

9. Christmas Boxes for the idverde gardeners were delivered to the Head Gardener.

10. Petanque Court. We have requested re-surfacing to create a smoother pitch.

11. Drinking Water Fountains Thames Water has provided us with the route map and application guide and costs for installing a fountain. While FoWP can pay for this part it cannot undertake to pay for the ongoing supply of water and maintenance costs. This would have to be a park undertaking but the request from Green Spaces that we calculate the cost of water consumption is almost impossible to meet as water bills for parks, where we could compare, are not itemised. For the moment this creates an impasse on progress.

12. Trees and Views Group A 'Trees and Views' group has been consulting with Camden for some years on annual tree planting plans and, as its name implies, it tries to keep the park landscape and many vistas in mind as new trees are introduced. A notable view is of the London skyline and St Paul's from near the statue of Sir Sydney Waterlow. From this vantage point it is becoming increasingly difficult to spot the familiar dome of St Paul's. Unless there is some tree work this view could vanish entirely in the future. A public engagement will be launched shortly to get input on a proposal to preserve this view. It will be announced on the Friends website, by email and through local networks. We hope to hear from as many people as possible in order to determine what, if anything, to do.

Ian Henghes

13. Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) and dogs FoWP publicised this consultation process through social media but did not express a view. The new measures are now in place.

Other Aims for 2023 – 2024

We would like to see a test run for free basketball on the lower tennis courts, even though St Joseph's is planning a new sports centre open to the public. We understand that smoother entrances for disability buggies and prams at the north ends of the park are now a possibility and that a time schedule is being drawn up. These and the aims itemised above are being progressed with the Trust Advisory Group and Camden Green Spaces.