

FRIENDS OF KENNINGTON PARK AGM 7 JULY 2021

REPORT OF THE CHAIR, MARIETTA CRICHTON STUART

The aim of the Friends of Kennington Park is to make the park the best it can be. We are all local people, volunteers, determined that the park doesn't slip back to "the bad old days" and we are working with Lambeth Council towards new and improved facilities.

Covid has meant that the last 16 months have been challenging. The Park has been a vital lifeline for many people, there has been a huge increase in the number of park users which, in turn, created issues such as masses of litter, problems with toilets and unofficial events. Throughout the Friends have worked closely with Lambeth and the park staff, kept our website and social media up to date with both Covid regulations and park news. We are delighted that the park café has been able to remain open, adapting to the changing regulations and we offer thanks to the ad hoc groups including Lambeth Friends of the Earth who have helped to tackle the litter.

This spring, at the suggestion, and with the financial support, of a park user, FoKP ran a 'Love Kennington Park' competition designed to capture what the park had meant to people during lockdown. You may have seen the large posters and sign writing in the park or perhaps some of the coverage on social media. The categories included photos, videos, poetry, drawings and prose and there were prizes for adults and children. The wide range of entries well illustrated the important role of the park; winners' contributions were displayed in the park and on our website.

One positive result of Covid was the lack of commercial events in the park and the opportunity for it to recover from the Friendsfest damage of October 2019, but such events will be returning to the park; the Friends will work hard to ensure that any future damage is minimized and quickly rectified.

Last July we had to hold virtual AGM, today we are delighted to welcome you in person to tell you what we have been working on for the park, often behind the scenes, but we have missed the opportunity of meeting people at local events,

hearing views, signing up new members and, sadly, we had to cancel various events including our first Easter Egg hunt, but we did manage a low key service with St Mark's Church for last October's 80th anniversary of the air raid tragedy and, on a lighter note, an RSPB Garden Bird Watch and two successful bat walks.

We are hopeful that the new normal is now starting and we already have plans for a Summer Fun Event on Bank Holiday Monday in partnership with local community groups, to be sponsored by Berkeley Homes. It would include music and dance, health and well being, food, stalls and activities. We'll need a lot of help with this, so please let us know if you would like to get involved. This is a part of FOKP's aim to have greater reach into our local community and working with local organizations, a small start will be a Junior Park Run in the autumn.

In April 2020 FoKP become a registered Charity with 7 Trustees, later in the meeting Rita will tell you more about this.

There are lots of things in the park that we would like to change and improve such as the toilets, the children's playground and the popular, but unsafe, skatebowl as well as the lack of provision for teenagers, we've got an update on this and the Capital Development Programme later on the Agenda.

Last year the park retained its Green Flag and won a gold and silver gilt award from London in Bloom – we are aiming for a repeat this summer. Historic England recognized the park as a Green Heritage Site. Much of this is down to our very successful volunteer gardening scheme made possible by a generous anonymous donation. Since April 2020, with the guidance of Lambeth we have run 15 volunteer gardening sessions under the expert guidance of Ruth Morgan, I estimate there were 200 hours of volunteer gardening last year. The sessions are increasingly popular with over 130 names on the email list. The work is not arduous, tools are provided, no gardening experience is required, and people have welcomed the chance to both chat and garden. A highlight was harvesting (and later eating) figs and olives grown in the flower garden. In a week's time the park is being inspected by London in Bloom, so extra sessions are being held. Help would be most welcome.

Runners from the Good Gym have also helped with gardening, litter picking and cleaning the marble of the Slade Fountain. It is hopeful that, in due course, the park will welcome back groups of Corporate Volunteers.

I suspect that many park users think that the Friends manage the park, certainly Rita, our tireless Secretary, who looks after the FOKP email deals with numerous enquiries on everything from toilets, to litter, events, dogs, rats, vandalism, football games and history enquiries.

Over the past year we have kept in touch with the membership through Marnie's regular Mailchimp newsletters and, for the wider community, Marnie and Nikki have been the social media gurus.

You will shortly see two changes in the park. Firstly, the Northern Line Extension (NLE) work at the north end of the park is coming to an end, its legacy the brick head house, however, it also means that the large dog walking area can be reinstated. Despite spending many hours in meetings with the NLE people trying to achieve an upgraded and improved dog area, I'm afraid what we will get, hopefully by September, is new fencing, benches and turf plus trees and wild meadow planting. The temporary dog area will be re-turfed and, longer term, the undergrowth around the dark park entrance by St Agnes Place will be thinned.

Secondly, thanks to Lambeth Landscapes the wooden shelter in the park has had a major restoration and next month 8 large colour boards will be installed, these will tell the story of the park and Kennington highlighting some notable local personalities and events. They have been designed by Marnie Searchwell, with Frank Kindred writing the script. These have been financed by FoKP, Lambeth Council and Surrey County Cricket Club. Recently we have been in discussion with representatives of local schools for a schools-based local history project centred on these new display boards and plans are being developed for September with a local secondary school, Archbishop Tenison.

Subject to Covid regulations, this October we would like to have a larger scale service of remembrance at the Civilian war memorial to remember the sad events

of 1940, followed by a proper Remembrance Sunday service at the park war memorial in November.

Not far away is FOKP's 20th anniversary in 2022 and we are asking for your ideas as to how this should be marked. One year later is the 175th anniversary of the "monster" Chartist rally on what was Kennington Common, again ideas are sought for a practical and appropriate way to remember this important event in Kennington's history.

Much of what the Friends do has been down to the hard work of a small, dedicated group of committee members. We are sorry that Andrew and Adam are leaving the committee, we are really grateful for their work on research and the website – we definitely need someone to replace Adam on the technical side. Thanks to Rita, now also a skateboard expert, for all her behind the scenes work; Marnie on the creative side; Vilde and Matt on the finances; Nikki and Rachel for taking on steering group roles; Nichola on the design side and Ian for his work on our membership database. A big shout out to Ruth Morgan who leads the gardening sessions, Catey who has been tackling the climbing roses in the flower garden and Anne and Julie who keep the war memorial planters tidy and colourful.

We have worked in a successful partnership with Lambeth – Kevin Crook who is doing his best to ensure Kennington gets the necessary funds; Theresa Hoare and Kevin Wallace on the day to day; Iain Boulton on green things and his tremendous bat walks and the new park gardener, Lucien, and the park team who have coped amazingly with the increased workload over the last year.

The Friends needs to be a pro-active group, a priority will be signing up new members, finding champions for projects, recruiting helpers and people with skills to expand our reach into the local community. The more help and support we have, the more we can do to make Kennington Park the best it can be.