

The report of Marietta Crichton Stuart, chair of the Friends of Kennington Park to the AGM held on Tuesday 23 July 2019 in the Durning Library

Welcome to the AGM of the Friends of Kennington Park. Our park is 165 years old, the Friends group is 17 years old and it is just one day since London was confirmed as the world's first National Park City – it is estimated that 49.5% of London is river and green. The City park charter aims to make London greener, healthier, wilder, enjoyable and diverse – in Kennington we have been working for the last 12 months towards this.

We have continued to run a range of small, regular park events, so we had an RSPB Garden Bird Watch in late January, red wings being the top spots; The Great British Spring Clean, lots of cans shoved into bushes apparently this is known as tidy littering. There was an April Chartist walk around the 171st anniversary, a Bat walk with another one planned in September; a dawn chorus walk, led by Erica, at 5am on International Dawn Chorus Day in May, chilly but amazing, 17 species were heard, we surprised the local fox and saw cormorants flying overhead.

Thanks to a generous anonymous donation there have been monthly volunteer gardening sessions in the Flower Garden led by Amanda and we have spent many happy, chatty hours tackling bindweed, tie-ing up roses, weeding and dead heading, these start again in September. In June in the run up to the London in Bloom inspection we clocked up 95 volunteer hours gardening and litter picking.

We have had help from outside groups of volunteers - these include several visits from the Brixton Good gym where up to 40 runners spend 30 minutes weeding and litter picking before jogging back to Brixton. A Network Rail group are booked in for September. Amanda has regularly brought groups of students from Roots and Shoots while Bee Urban continue their weekday volunteer sessions often working on the new fruit trees in the Green Link.

Communication is key and Adam has continued to run our Friends' website and I try my best not to delete everything when I add to it. Marnie has been a star producing colourful and informative Mailchimp newsletters, as well as Facebook and Twitter posts and many thanks to our friends at Winkworth Kennington for their kind sponsorship of "ParkLife" our annual printed newsletter which appeared in the autumn. We are looking at setting up a Tree Trail app plus signage and would welcome help in taking this forward.

Other highlights from the past 12 months include the 2018 London in Bloom award of a silver gilt for the park and gold for the flower garden and a Green Flag for a 8th year running. Our fingers are crossed for this year's results.

We were delighted that the park now has a cafe again – it was much missed – so welcome to Dominic and Charlotte.

On the day of the London in Bloom inspection we got extra brownie points for the noisy and exuberant school sports day in the park and a school visit to the flower garden, but with daily reports of knife crime, we feel that parks need to focus on things for young people aged 11 to 16 – we have ideas for a Youth Activity Zone in the park.

This year Lambeth Council ran a public consultation on events in parks which the Friends contributed to, the results are still awaited. We do our best to keep a watchful eye on the number, type and size of events the Council plans to hold in our park and we often attend pre and post event site meetings, last week I attended one about Friendsfest. As a result of the Council's financial position we realise that it is very difficult to get Lambeth to refuse events and so our park will be required to host events, but we believe they should be small scale, appropriate and not too disruptive with timely action to make good any damage. We continue to express our misgivings about Bensons Funfair and Friends Fest which result in the south field of the heritage park being fenced in for around two weeks. Today my heart sank when I saw the Benson caravans on the south field. Kennington gets some financial benefit from park events, but often this is spent on basic items like notice boards and litter bins, this year it covered the instruction board for the keep fit equipment and some planned history boards.

The Friends also attend Lambeth's Parks Forum which is a useful opportunity to learn what is going on in other parks and have input into the discussion of items such as the role of the park bye-laws which include stipulations about cycling, BBQs and organised football, of course, Lambeth does not currently have staff available to implement them.

Several years ago FOKP was supportive of the concept of London becoming a National Park City and yesterday I attended the launch event at City Hall which was a good opportunity to hear of initiatives throughout the capital.

Following Lambeth's re-organisation, events, parks and sport are now within the same directorate, so there should be some more joined up thinking, planning and implementation. It is hoped that there will now be some pro-active renovation and management of the park extension which is currently in poor repair with heavy usage by footballers and, to a lesser extent, cricketers.

The Northern Line Extension work is ever present in our area. Last year the Friends submitted a detailed objection to Lambeth Planning on the NLE's design for the ventilation shaft head house at the north end of the park; the functional building design seemed more suitable for an industrial estate rather than a heritage park. We also had

concerns about fencing and the proposed tree species and meadow grass. Planning permission was granted by Lambeth without it ever going to a public planning committee. FOKP attends the quarterly NLE liaison meetings and I have recently been pressing for discussions between NLE, Lambeth and ourselves on the reinstatement of the dog walking area which may happen next spring. Last week myself and a group of dog owners met Lambeth's Theresa Hoare to talk through what we would like to see.

Lambeth horticultural contract is now back in house. I used to say that Friends groups were the icing on the cake, but they are now a vital ingredient in the cake mix. Our role has changed with the greatly reduced park budget, we work together with Lambeth for the good of the park. We must thank Kevin Crook, recently appointed Assistant Director on the Environment side for his support on future projects; Iain Boulton (Lambeth's Environmental Compliance Officer) for all his help; Theresa Hoare our Park's Development Officer, Alex Draper who now organises the Corporate volunteering side and Helen Firminger who advises on fundraising.

On the ground our thanks to Kevin Wallace, our Park Operations Manager and Mick Penney, and especially the staff in the park Rasha and Reece and now Ben for all their work particularly for their hours of litter picking. If the park staff could spend less time picking up rubbish, there would be more time for gardening work. We welcome the addition of weekend staffing over the summer and Rudy and the team who reinstate grassed areas after events. We do regular walkabouts with Kevin Wallace, but money is tight, repairs are prioritised and now take far longer as we know in the Childrens' Playground and keep fit area and, sadly, many repairs are often making good vandalism such as sorting the metal gates which were cut through with an angle grinder. As you will know, the adult and children's toilets have been closed intermittently as a result of Anti Social Behaviour and vandalism, we pressed Lambeth to do the necessary repairs and they have just re-opened, but, long term, a different solution for park toilets seems necessary.

The Council's Tree Department are the new occupants of the Kennington Park depot and they are keeping a special eye on the plane trees which are affected by the massaria fungus which causes branches to die back and break off.

Our discussions with Lambeth Council include both the short term issues and long term capital projects for the park. The park Masterplan has been updated. Our priorities are the maintenance of facilities and infrastructure and the improvement and development of our play and fitness areas, however, as the necessary money for this is not present, Lambeth's Kevin Crook is actively putting in bids. Several years ago Lambeth undertook to ring fence for the park the £800k from the sale of the old park keepers lodge to the TFL

for the Northern Line Extension, this was to go towards toilets, paths and drains – the unsexy projects you can't get charitable funding for. There is no sign of this money and The Friends are back on the case!

Judging from some of the emails that come into the Friend's email account, many people assume that we are part of Lambeth Council. We are all volunteers, local people who want to make Kennington Park the best it can be and who do not want the park to return to the bad old days. My thanks to the Friends' Secretary Rita for managing these emails.

I now have a litany of thanks, firstly for the amazing work of the Committee members Marnie, Rita, Nichola, Rachel, Kathryn, Vilde, Nikki, Colin and Adam – the latter two on the sports issues - plus the hands on help of Ian dealing with the membership lists and Matt for his financial advice. A special shout out to Marnie, Frank and Richard Galpin for their work in putting together our two Chartist books. A particular thank you to Kathryn Penn-Simkins a long time Committee member who is now standing down. The remainder of the committee members are putting themselves up for re-election. Our constitution allows co option of committee members, so if you would be interested in joining the team, please come and have a word later.

Secondly, could I also thank Amanda Rew, our Expert Gardener, the brilliant band of volunteer gardeners, Anne and Julie who look after the planting around the war memorial, and not forgetting Cllr David Amos for including endless park information in his weekly email. The Friends continue to work with our park neighbours Trees for Cities, Bee Urban and Garvin and the keep fit group.

We liaise with our local councillors and with the much reduced Oval ward police team. Like most Lambeth Parks, Kennington does suffer from incidents of anti-social behaviour and vandalism, with open air drinkers and drug dealing, but we always hope that increased usage of the park is a bit of a deterrent.

Last year's AGM was three days after our big Kennington Chartist Project event in the park. This project, sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund, ran from April until the autumn last year. It enjoyed the support and involvement of the Kennington and Walworth community, local schools, groups and friends. Many more people are now aware of major Kennington's role in the history of democracy. We gave a talk at the Durning Library, a presentation at Lambeth's Local History Fair and organised several walks for Black History Month. The research work on local subscribers to the Chartist Land Company (CLC) is ongoing and Katrina Navickas from the University of Hertfordshire has done a massive piece of work mapping the Lambeth and Southwark names and addresses. Have a look at the Kennington Chartist Project website. I recently did a guided tour of the park for Jennie Street, her family story is that her great great and great

grandfathers were at the 1848 Chartist rally on Kennington Common, one as a special constable, the other as a Chartist. Interestingly her grandfather, who later lived next door to the White Bear, was a teetotaler and a printer of anti conscription pamphlets during World War One.

Tonight we launch the two books related to the Chartist project, we had so much material it wouldn't fit into a single book, one book is Our Story – the story of our project and the other entitled Another Look gives the historic background to the 1848 rally. The books are dedicated to Tom Collins who sadly and unexpectedly died a few months ago, he was our Feargus O'Connor at our Chartist events. Longer term we would like some form of permanent Chartist memorial in the park for the 175th anniversary in 2023. After the formal AGM, I am delighted that Richard Galpin the Project Manager will bring us up to date on the project.

The Friends will need to be pro-active in seeking funds for our costly park shopping list which includes modernising and extending the playground, creating a Youth Activity Zone and improving signage and, lurking in the background is the skateboard. Later in the meeting Rita will speak to her paper with the proposal that FOKP become a charity, this is now required by many grant funders. We're also thinking about how we can get local businesses involved with the park.

There is much to do, sometimes it is reactive, but it also needs to be pro-active, however there is a capacity problem. We are all volunteers and we would welcome any help, advice or people championing a specific project such as trees and tree walks, litter picking, the Childrens' Playground; the range of possibilities include social media, communication, fundraising and dealing with the grant related paperwork, then there's gardening, nature, sports and fitness, photography, lobbying, organising and helping to run events and any dog owner issues. Do come and have a chat afterwards.

Finally, since 2002 the aim of the Friends of Kennington Park has been to put the park at the heart of our community and to make it the best it can be. Thank you so much for attending our AGM and for your continued support of our park, together we can all make a difference.