

The Friends of Kennington Park (FoKP) Trustees' Annual Report 2021/22

Introduction

The Friends of Kennington Park were registered as a charity by the Charity Commission in April 2020. Seven Trustees were appointed. Our status is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), registration number 1188922. This report covers the year from the end July 2021 to July 2022.

Our purpose is defined as ***being for the benefit of the inhabitants of South London ("the area of benefit"), to provide or assist in the provision of facilities for recreation and other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare with the object of improving the conditions of life for the inhabitants of the area of benefit in particular by supporting the preservation, conservation, improvement and protection of Kennington Park.***

Our current income level means that we are classified as a small charity.

Park-based Activities and Events in 2021/2022

In the year prior to July 2021, very few events were organised due to lockdown restrictions. We had managed to organise a successful 'Love Kennington Park' competition, with prizes sponsored by a local resident, to reinstate our monthly gardening sessions and to organise some small events – in the park and online. The lifting of lockdown restrictions has allowed us to run a near normal programme of events and Committee and Trustee Meetings since Summer 2021.

When it became clear that restrictions were to be fully lifted, we decided to plan our first ever Kennington Park Festival. The aim was to create a lively, fun event which would celebrate the return to (near) normal life, showcase local communities and organisations and bring people of all ages into the park to share in the activities. One of the positives of the lockdown period was the increased number of local people using the park, in particular the increased diversity of communities and ages. The purpose of the festival was to build on this and to encourage further engagement. We established a partnership with a local CIC (*Community Interest Company*), Melanin Health and Wellness, and were supported with sponsorship from Berkeley Homes, a national developer with strong community links in the local area. Planning and running the event, held over on August Bank Holiday Monday, was a huge volunteer effort by all involved and we were delighted by its success in terms of number of attendees, the extent of the involvement of local dance and musical groups and the range of creative activities for children and adults.

Later in the year, we held the formal launch of our new History Hut with its colourful and informative display boards showcasing notable events in the park and immediate area over the last 150+ years, recording the contributions of famous, infamous and less well-known local people. The Hut was opened by our local MP in December 2021. Various councillors and local schoolchildren were present as well as FoKP members and local residents. The feedback on this project has been excellent and we believe that it has helped people of all ages understand the history and importance of the park. We know that it has been used by some schools as part of their local history curriculum.

An Anniversary Year

2022 marks the 20th anniversary of The Friends of Kennington Park, established in July 2002 to help restore what was then a much-neglected park. As well as marking the anniversary with a special 20th logo and leaflet, our aims for the year include increasing our membership, improving our

communication and continuing to hold events and activities which better engage and involve local people.

We started to try to fulfil these ambitions by launching an inaugural Easter Egg Hunt, originally planned for 2021 but, like so many things, a casualty of Covid. One of our committee members designed and managed an event aimed at young children. The event was promoted in a low-key way using our links with the recently established Kennington Park Junior Parkrun. We wanted to test the location and the egg-hunting challenge with a small group of children with a view to using the design as a template for a bigger event in 2023. Other small events in the park included the RSPB Garden Bird Watch where we partnered with another local organisation, Bee Urban, allowing us to offer tool sharpening advice and practice in addition to bird identification. Other FoKP events included a memorial service for a WWII bombing tragedy, history walks and our ever-popular bat walks.

One major achievement for the year has been to hold a second Kennington Park Festival! This time in mid-July while schools were still open and could take part. The success of the previous year's festival inspired us to create a bigger and better event. We continued our partnership with Melanin Health and Wellness and Berkeley Homes and were delighted to also involve Thriving North Lambeth and Active Communities. Again, planning the event was time consuming, but increased financial backing allowed us the opportunity to recruit some paid support. With greater planning time we were much better prepared with publicity and colourful posters decorated the park gates and fences for several weeks. On the day, we were blessed with excellent weather, over 1500 attendees and a wide range of artistic performances from local groups and schools. Many local councillors and our MP attended.

The festival and our attendance at another local event have allowed us to promote the work of FoKP and to substantially increase our membership numbers which now exceed the pre-pandemic levels. It has also allowed us the opportunity to establish relationships with new local councillors – recent ward boundary changes have resulted in significant changes. Our electronic mailbox continues to receive hundreds of emails covering a wide range of topics – queries, suggestions, complaints, plaudits. We do our best to respond to them all directly or refer them to a more appropriate source.

Earlier in the Summer, the annual Green Flag and London in Bloom Awards inspections returned to their normal format. This year the challenge to maintain the park has been even greater than usual as there has been very little corporate volunteering to supplement the work of the Council teams and our membership volunteers and the weather has not always been helpful! We have been awarded a Green Flag for the 12th year in succession and a Green Heritage Park Award for the second year – one of only two parks in Lambeth to achieve this. We await the outcome of this year's London in Bloom judging with eager anticipation.

In September we plan to hold an inaugural Dog Show involving prizes for fun categories and activities. This event is a response to the large increase in dog owners now visiting the park. If successful, this is likely to become an annual event, another important element of our plan to increase engagement with local communities and to build membership numbers and park enthusiasts.

Committee and Trustees Issues

A major consideration for the committee and the Trustees this year has been an end of year review of the Constitution and the operating principles which support it.

On application to become a charity we used a model CIO constitution. During the first year of operation we identified some operational issues which needed to be clarified and codified. Not as fundamental changes to the Constitution, but modifications to the operating principles we had used prior to charity registration.

The issues were initially considered by the Committee who made recommendations to the Trustees on some issues and suggested options for others. A report was prepared and shared electronically with Trustees prior to a face-to-face meeting. At this meeting, the issues raised were discussed in detail and the Trustees agreed specific modifications. These have been adopted as a new set of operating principles. The areas they cover include:

- Clearer definition of FoKP membership category requirements
- Clarification of committee membership requirements and performance standards
- AGM meeting management
- Representation of FoKP – media handling policy

During the year, our committee has undergone a quite significant change with 2 committee members standing down because of family commitments and one no longer being eligible to serve because of conflicts with work. We are delighted to have been able to welcome two new committee members who have already made excellent contributions.

As we seek to extend the number of events in our programme of activities, we recognise the need to increase our capacity so will be seeking new committee members and/or co-optees.

One of our Trustees will be leaving us at the AGM, but we are pleased that a former committee member has agreed to stand as a replacement, subject to election.

Our AGM this year will be held in early September, and we will be publishing a special anniversary newsletter to mark the achievements of the last 20 years and to highlight future plans.

Major Works – continuing involvement

Over the last few years, one area of the park has been the site of a major TfL development associated with the Northern Line Extension. In Spring 2022, their work was completed. Over the preceding years we had been involved in many meetings about plans to return the area to park use and so we looked forward to the early reinstatement of our large dog walking area, now even more important than before because of the large number of dogs visiting the park. Sadly, we were to be disappointed, and it was some months before the area was reopened and full reinstatement is yet to occur. This therefore continues to be one of our priorities.

The implementation of key phases of the Capital Development Programme for the park, also one of our major priorities, has not been without its issues. Due to complex technical issues, progress on the first project, the reinstatement of the iconic 1970's skatebowl, has been much slower than hoped. Committee members continue to be closely involved with all the programme groups and the FoKP Chair is a key part of the overarching planning group. Some initiatives will be implemented this year, eg new toilets and water fountains, but the reopening and enhancement of the skatebowl and the development work on the refurbishment and enhancement of children's play area are now likely to be deferred until 2023. Good progress is being made on the outline design proposals for the play area and we anticipate the release of procurement documents by Lambeth Council very soon. Once initial proposals have been submitted and considered we expect to run a consultation exercise with playground users on some aspects of the plan.

Partnership Working

Many of our events and activities are done in partnership with local organisations, but inevitably our most important partnership is with Lambeth Council. We work closely with the Lambeth parks team to enhance the natural environment of the park, deliver improvements and new facilities and ensure that the park is safe, enjoyable and accessible for all. We offer practical support through volunteering, ideas and proposals, securing funding and constructive challenge, keeping the pressure on them to deliver agreed objectives when these seem to be slipping. We benefit from their guidance and support when holding **our** large events. We have sought to formalise our working through a Partnership Agreement which the Council are currently considering.

Financial Reporting

Our finances and financial reporting have returned to normal this year because of the reintroduction of our events programme and the consequent increase in new members and membership renewals. We have also received a significant number of donations which is very encouraging.

The usual financial protocols have been followed and the accounts have been submitted to our Auditors for review prior to the AGM.

Public Benefit Statement

Managing the charity has been simpler this year with arrangements for Committee and Trustee meetings returning to pre-restriction practice. This has allowed us to more easily ensure that FoKP continues to act in accordance with the required protocols and legislation, meaning that:

- money is appropriately spent, managed, and reported.
- decisions are made through the committee process and in accordance with our charitable purpose
- the interest of the park and its users are at the heart of our decision-making and actions

Summary

The lifting of lockdown restrictions has allowed us to return to our normal operating practice and to hold many of our regular events. We have used our 20th anniversary year to add new events to our calendar and to repeat the success of the first Kennington Park Festival, changing the date to allow for schools to be more directly involved than in the first year. There has been a significant increase in membership applications in recent months and our partnership working has extended beyond previous partners.

Progress on major developments in the park have been slower than anticipated mainly due to technical difficulties or the need to secure action by others, but work continues, and FoKP Committee members are well represented on working groups.

We recognise the need to add new committee members to give us additional capacity and will work to achieve this.

Marietta Crichton Stuart – Trustee and Chair of FoKP

August 2022