

The Friends of Kennington Park (FoKP) Trustees Annual Report 2020/21

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.

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.

This is the Trustees first Annual Report, and it describes a far from normal year. We came into existence as a charity just after the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. The continued pandemic, its restrictions and lockdowns has drastically reduced the number of park-based and other community events we have been able to arrange or attend and has created added complications for the events which have taken place. It also meant that we were unable to hold our usual AGM, turning instead to sharing documents via the website and receiving comment via email. The process worked well but lacked the more detailed discussions which usual characterise our AGM. The absence of a face-to-face AGM and of other local events has had a negative impact on our income, reducing the number of members recruited and those renewing, limiting the opportunities for donations and book sales. All this, despite the park being much more heavily used than usual.

Despite these difficulties, a lot of work has been taking place to support the improvement and protection of the park by trustees and other volunteers. The following sections of the report summarise what has happened in the first year since our registration as a charity.

Park-based Activities and Events

Several FoKP events had been planned for 2020/21 including an inaugural Easter Egg Hunt. We had also expected the park to become the location for a new Junior Parkrun in the late Spring. Neither of these events occurred and our regular activities such as volunteer gardening sessions, local history walks, and celebration of the 1848 Chartist Rally also had to be cancelled.

We liaised closely with Lambeth Council to ensure that we were aware of, and complied with, their requirements as each stage of the pandemic unfolded. As a result, we were unable to hold events over an extended period. We did manage to hold **two Bat Walks** with restricted numbers of attendees who all pre-registered. We reintroduced **volunteer gardening sessions** as soon as this was permitted but continued restrictions limited the numbers who could attend and reduced our ability to work with Goodgym and other volunteer groups. Those sessions that have taken place have been well supported. The significant increase in use of the park, while positive in many respects, had a number of detrimental impacts. As a result, we were in regular liaison with council staff about ways to both prevent and manage problems.

As a more positive reflection of the use of the park during the year, in March 2021, at the suggestion, and with the financial support, of a park user, we launched a **'Love Kennington Park' competition** designed to capture what the park had meant to people during lockdown. Large posters

and signwriting were featured in the park and the competition was promoted extensively through social media. Categories included photos, videos, poetry, drawings and prose and there were prizes for adults and children. We received a wide range of entries; winners' contributions were displayed in the park at the end of June. Again, a considerable amount of volunteer work contributed to the success of this project.

As a more permanent recognition of the place of the park in the local community, we have been working hard on the research, design, and development of a **local history display for the park**. The display, which has been partly supported by Lambeth Council and by Surrey Cricket Club, is designed to provide information about people and events associated with the park and the immediate surrounding area. In addition to the work by expert advisers, commissioned by us, many volunteer hours have gone into the research and into the design. One of our trustees is leading the project and has undertaken all the final design work. For this work she received a fee of £2500, paid by Lambeth Council.

As a reflection of unusual times, the London in Bloom inspections for 2020 were virtual, as were those for the Green Flag Award. As on previous occasions, we worked closely with the council to ensure that the park and the FoKP activity programme were well presented. The Park has been highly successful in recent years winning both gold and silver awards.

Major TfL Works and a new Capital Development Programme by Lambeth Council

Over the last few years, the park has been the site of a major TfL development associated with the Northern Line Extension. The Chair of FoKP has been extensively involved in the many meetings associated with this project since its inception. The frequency and importance to the park of these meetings has increased throughout the year as the project reaches its conclusion and areas of the park will be returned to the council and parks users. The changing financial profile of the project, the time lapse between the initial agreements and its completion and several other factors have made the handover discussions complex and time-consuming. Extensive lobbying by the FoKP Chair has resulted in a far better outcome for the park than seemed likely at the start of the year. Work on this will continue until completion which is scheduled for Autumn 2021.

Following many years of engagement and negotiations by FoKP, Lambeth Council have agreed to invest a sizeable capital sum into the park. As well as **essential improvement work on some badly deteriorating toilets, drains and pathways**, we have campaigned for the **restoration of the iconic 1970s skatebowl**, one of only two of its type remaining in London, the **extension and improvement of the children's play area** and a **youth activity zone** focused on exercise and leisure for teenagers and young people.

Work on the skatebowl restoration was initiated by us before formal agreement was reached with the council. This included securing expert advice from a UCL professor about the design of the bowl, contacting a structural engineer with relevant expertise and drafting a design brief for the council to use in commissioning the first stage of its investigative work. The council has since established a Skatebowl Restoration Steering Group, led by a senior project manager. The Group's membership includes the UCL professor, the structural engineer, local skaters and an FoKP trustee.

Considerable progress has been made in undertaking investigative work and early-stage planning and the project will continue through 2021/22 and 2022/23.

In addition, we have also identified representatives for the overarching Capital Development Project Steering Group and for two other Project Groups. These groups are yet to meet but in preparation

we have already undertaken an initial survey of park users about the capital development programme, and further consultation is scheduled. We also undertook a month-long survey of the use of the children's play area which demonstrated just how popular the current facility is despite its now rather battered look.

Trustee Development

When we sought to register as a charity, the committee were confident that many elements of our previous practice and procedures as a community organisation would still apply. However, we were also aware that there were additional responsibilities on us all individually and collectively, as well as new reporting requirements. To ensure that we were as prepared as possible for our new role, we undertook a number of actions.

To help us assess the areas we may need to strengthen as an organisation, we undertook a self-assessment questionnaire. Called **Better Friends**, this is a tool published and assessed by Parks Community UK. The effectiveness scores we received from the assessment were as follows:

- Organisation and Structure – 76%
- Meetings and Activities – 83%
- Strengths - Numbers, Skills, Inclusiveness & Partnerships – 68%
- Effectiveness and Ambition – 77%

The scores and commentary were considered by the trustees and other committee members, and it was agreed that our focus should be on diversifying and increasing our membership base, building and recruiting new skills, and on partnership working and inclusivity. These reflected issues we had already identified in previous committee discussions.

A number of the projects described above and planned for the period 2021 - 2023 will provide excellent opportunities to help us achieve these goals.

In addition, we have started planning with some local community groups with a view to holding joint events in the park eg a **Summer Fun Event** in late August 2021. We have also held initial discussions with some local businesses seeking to become involved in supporting the park through their Corporate Social Funds. Furthermore, we have started discussion with schools' representatives with a view to planning a **schools-based local history project** later this year, focused on the local history display.

In a further response to the assessment, we have sought to develop best practice by registering with advisory groups and related bodies, attending training and information sessions, contributing comments, and sharing ideas. For example:

- Registration with Small Charities Consortium (SCC), which led to:
 - Various committee members attending training courses
 - SCC weekly bulletins and information being shared with the committee when appropriate
 - Approaches to SCC linked organisations for funding and support eg The Fore

- Registration with national and local bodies working in parks eg National Park City, Parks for London, Go Parks, London Green Network, etc giving us access to good practice examples and advice such as Guidance for working with volunteers during the pandemic

We continue to be active members of the Lambeth Park's Forum which allows us to comment on local developments and to share ideas and experiences between parks. Meetings are regularly attended by senior Lambeth Council officers giving us additional direct access to them.

Financial Reporting

There have been many fewer transactions this year because of the extended periods of inactivity. The usual financial protocols have been followed and the accounts have been submitted to our Auditors for review and approval in the usual way. These will be submitted to our AGM which takes place in early July 2021.

Public Benefit Statement

Despite these difficulties, the committee and individual officers have continued to act in accordance with the required protocols and legislation by ensuring 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

Trustee Resignations and Appointments

In accordance with the constitution, two trustees are required to stand down each year, although they may seek re-election.

Adam Blacklay is resigning as a Trustee and Committee Member with effect from this AGM.

Rita Sammons has agreed to stand down in accordance with the requirements but is standing for immediate re-appointment.

There is no requirement to elect additional trustees at this stage, but the Committee are keen to add expertise so would welcome recommendations and nominations.

Summary

Our first year as a charity has been an unusual one due to the Coronavirus pandemic. However, it has also given us the opportunity to refocus some of our efforts and to make significant progress on some of the projects which will support the continued improvement and development of the park in the coming years. Engaging the community in these and other activities and securing the additional funding necessary to ensure completion of the full programme will be the focus of our activity in 2021/22, alongside the return of our regular programme of activities.

Signed & dated

Marietta Crichton Stuart – Trustee and Chair of FoKP

