

Chair's Annual Report – AGM 2024

At last year's AGM we welcomed the opening of Kennington Park's brand new children's playground, this has been a great addition to the park and is very well used.

This year we hoped that the Capital Programme would have achieved a refurbished skatebowl, however, there have been major delays as the project has proved to be both technically challenging and far more expensive than anticipated.

In spite of the support of our Lambeth project officers and the local councillor, progress has not yet been made in convincing the Council's Planning Department of the need for modern toilet facilities in the park. They favour the retention and expensive refurbishment of the old red brick cottage style buildings, this is based solely on their aesthetic value. As a result of this stalemate we have been able to transfer the funds allocated to this project to the skatebowl budget. A youth activity zone was another part of our Capital Programme and there had been some preliminary consultation on this, the monies allocated to it were transferred to the skatebowl as we believe that funding for the youth zone may become available. The Capital Programme did pay for the re surfacing of some paths around the park café – an area that can suffer from winter flooding. Monies have also gone towards some new and larger litter bins, but, despite frequent chasing they won't be available until the end of summer!

Judging by the numerous enquiries to the FoKP website, many park visitors seem to think that the Friends run the park. Rita, FoKP's hardworking Secretary, handles many enquiries on everything from toilets, to litter, events, dogs, rats, vandalism, BBQs, e-scooters and bikes, football games as well as history enquiries. The Friends, in turn, are in frequent contact with Lambeth. We are all local people, volunteers, determined that the park doesn't slip back to "the bad old days" and keen to work with the local community and park users.

An example of our community working was the fourth Kennington Park Festival which was held on Sunday 14 July. This year it was bigger and better than in 2023.

Organised in conjunction with Melanin Health & Wellness, it free fun day for all the family including music, dance, samba, workshops, punch & judy, face painting, games and food – the free fruit was a great hit. This year Surrey County Cricket were in the park organising cricket practice games. The event strengthens our ties with local businesses and organisations such as community services, schools, churches and colleges, also with community groups and independent traders.

Through the year there have been a range of events – these have included the RSPB Garden Bird Watch, a very successful Easter Egg hunt in the Flower Garden, a Chartist history walk, bat walks and a Dawn Chorus Walk which set off at 0500 – the loud singing of a wren was a wake up call.

Despite the rain and heat this summer the park continues to bloom – unfortunately so does the bindweed. We hope to retain both our Green Flag (for the 14th year) and awards from London in Bloom. Much of this is down to our very successful volunteer gardening scheme made possible by a generous anonymous donation and expertly led by Ruth Morgan. Between February and July this year there have been over 150 hours of volunteer gardening.

We were lucky to be awarded funding from the London CPRE to purchase a large quantity of tree whips of assorted native species. These were to improve the park's biodiversity and to help extend the Bee Highway. With support from Lambeth Landscapes, in February three planting sessions were held on the park extension and in the park orchard, and over 600 whips were planted. This was the result of 70 hours work by 37 volunteers.

Over the past year we have kept in touch with the membership through Marnie's regular Mailchimp newsletters. For the wider community and park users, there have been a range of posters promoting events. Mark and Marnie have been our social media gurus.

Since last autumn, as part of cost saving, Lambeth Council has been having a trial leaving the park unlocked overnight, FoKP favours the gates being locked and we will be reviewing the outcome of the trial. We are still on the case about the dog area in the north of the park (formerly the Northern Line Extension work site). It

is something for Lambeth Parks and Planning to strongly pursue with London Underground and we will continue to push them.

Trying to calculate the number of volunteer hours devoted to park business would be a massive task, but much of what the Friends do has been down to the hard work of a small, dedicated group of committee members. Thanks to Rita for all her behind the scenes work especially on fund raising and organising our summer Festival; Marnie on the creative side; Sonia who also stepped into the breach whilst our Treasurer Vilde was away on maternity leave; Vilde who has picked up the reins on her return; Mark on IT; Ian for his work on our membership database and Matt for his finance help. A big shout out to Ruth Morgan who leads the gardening sessions and to Anne and Julie who keep the war memorial planters tidy and colourful.

We continue to work in a successful partnership with Lambeth Council and our local MP and councillors. Kevin Crook is doing his best to ensure Kennington Park gets the necessary fund and we look forward to doing a park walkabout with Paul Smith the new Parks Manager. Caroline Streeks, our Project Manager on the Capital Programme, retired at Easter and was replaced by Rob Kelly who we are working with particularly on the skatebowl. On the day to day we are grateful for the input from Theresa Hoare and Kevin Wallace while Iain Boulton is of great help on environmental matters. Our thanks go to all the park staff who valiantly work to tackle the litter and to keep the park looking good.

We continue to liaise with Lambeth's Events team, not only for our own summer festival, but in relation to other events to be held in the park. Commercial Events are a balancing act, they do bring in much needed revenue, but can cause damage. The Friends are mindful of both the differing sides of the argument and the need for investment in the park.

Future plans include more FoKP events - a bat walk in September and a dog show on Sunday 12 October. Also under consideration are a tree walk plus tree hugging and an outdoor art event. We will continue to push forward the Capital Programme projects and to look at ways of tackling the litter and sorting out the large dog area. A further project, for which we hope to secure grant funding, is to

update and improve the park's Nature Trail. The plans are at an early stage, but we are aiming for a mixture of park-based signs and online material. Suggestions for ways in which we can improve the trail would be very welcome.

The Friends need to be a pro-active group, our priorities remain improving the park and its facilities, seeking funding opportunities, liaising with Lambeth, gaining new members, finding champions for projects, recruiting helpers and people with skills to expand our reach into the local community. If you are interested in helping out, please get in touch or come to our events.

Many thanks for your support and help over the past year and for coming to our AGM. We all love Kennington Park and are pledged to make the park the best it can be.

Marietta Crichton Stuart

FoKP Chair

1 September 2024