

Chair's Annual Report – Friends of Kennington Park AGM 2025

We had hoped that 2025 would bring good news for “Kenny” the park’s iconic skatebowl. We’ve been discussing its refurbishment with Lambeth for nearly five years. The plan included a safe spectator area and ramped access and the bowl becoming part of the park again. It was always going to be a technically challenging and expensive project, but at the end of last year it looked as if the money was in place, the contract was about to be let and everything was ready to go, then silence. This spring the Council revealed that it was facing an “extremely challenging and perilous financial future”. Spending on all Lambeth’s Capital projects was frozen and put under the microscope. Current Council reports actually show a large underspend on the Capital Programme, but this is largely from delayed and paused projects rather than efficiency savings. Twenty four hours after our AGM Lambeth will decide whether the allocated funding for our skatebowl will be pulled. If this happens it is likely the opportunity to save Kenny will be lost for ever and the public money already spent on it wasted.

The Friends launched a “Save Kenny” campaign asking people to sign an online petition by 24 September so that we can let the Council know the level of support for this much used and much missed sports facility in the park.

In spite of the support of our Lambeth project officers and the local councillor, no progress was made in convincing the Council’s Planning Department of the need for modern toilet facilities in the park. On aesthetic grounds they favour the retention and expensive refurbishment of the old red brick cottage style buildings. As a result of this stalemate the Capital Programme funds for the toilets and the proposed youth activity zone were transferred to the skatebowl project and now it seems possible that we won’t get a refurbished skatebowl, so potentially a loss to the park all round.

Another planning issue was the application for a building with 17 storey tower at 409 Kennington Road, opposite the park. This created a lot of discussion locally; currently 506 comments have been made on the plan, 42 in favour and 456 against. FoKP reviewed the plan in relation to its buildings impact on the park and

commissioned a survey on the effect of any shadowing. It is understood that the proposal may go to the Planning Committee next month.

Climate change continues to challenge the park – with cold winters, hot summers little or masses of rain - but the park continues to bloom. We hope to retain both our Green Flag (for the 15th year) and awards from London in Bloom. Much of this is down to our very successful monthly volunteer gardening scheme made possible by a generous anonymous donation and expertly led by Ruth Morgan and now by Catherine Morland. Since February there have been over 166 hours of volunteer gardening.

This month some FoKP funds will pay for a day's work by a small group of professional gardeners to do some skilled work on the Flower Garden's wisteria and olive trees.

Lambeth runs the park, but the FoKP email continues to receive numerous park enquiries – everything from toilets, to litter, events, vandalism, rough sleepers, BBQs, football games which Rita, our gallant secretary, responds to. Following concerns about speeding bike and e-scooters, we are hoping to get some "Pedestrian Priority" signage up in the park.

Since autumn 2023, as part of cost saving, Lambeth Council trialled leaving the park gates unlocked overnight. As Lambeth's finances have further deteriorated, this is now likely to be permanent. Possibly as a result of this and the dry summer the park has had numbers of rough sleepers, often in tents in the park and flower garden where hedges were reduced in height for sight lines and damaged benches had to be removed. We have continually reported this to Streetlink and the Council.

The Friends are still on the case on the state of the large dog area in the north of the park (formerly the Northern Line Extension work site). The matter is still not resolved, though there has been an undertaking by TFL that they will pay for Lambeth to replace the dead trees and maintain them. The site has yet to be formally handed over to Lambeth.

We continue to work in a close partnership with Lambeth Council and our local MP and councillors. Kevin Crook continues to do his best to get funding for Lambeth parks. 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.

A surprise visitor to the park last month was Bensons Funfair – their arrival was very much last minute as their intended location was Brockwell Park, fortunately the dry weather followed by rain meant that the grass has been able to recover. We realise commercial Events are a balancing act, they do bring in much needed money, but can also cause damage. The Friends are mindful of both the differing sides of the argument and the need for investment in the park.

Through the year FoKP has held a range of events – these included the dog show on a very wet October day, the RSPB Garden Bird Watch, a very successful Easter Egg hunt in the Flower Garden, two history walks, bat walks and a tree walk which ended in some tree hugging. Plans for a small early autumn musical evening in the park didn't come to pass and, having failed to find an organiser, the proposed Dog Show has had to be postponed. For all of these we would welcome help.

Sunday 13 July was the fifth Kennington Park Festival organised in conjunction with Melanin Health & Wellness, a free fun day for all the family with music, samba, workshops, punch & judy, face painting, games and food – the free fruit was a great hit. Surrey County Cricket were again in the park organising cricket practice games. The event strengthens our ties with local businesses and traders and community groups, schools, churches and colleges. Raising funds for the event proved far more challenging this year and a big thank you to Rita and Lindon for all their work.

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 and Vilde on the finances; 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 led the gardening sessions until the spring and Catherine Morland who has succeeded her and to Anne who keeps the war memorial planters tidy and colourful. We now have a regular link with the Family Volunteering Club with children from 0 to 9 and their grown-ups help with litter picking and some Roots & Shoots students have also done some gardening work.

Over the past year we have kept in touch with the membership through Marnie's regular and colourful electronic 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.

Future plans include more FoKP events - a bat walk in late September. A 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 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. We need to be a pro-active group, but we need to be a bigger 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

17 September 2025