

## FRIENDS OF QUEEN'S WOOD

### Chairman's report to Annual General Meeting, 18 April 2013

It seems to be the norm on such occasions to say that the past year has been a busy one, and this report is no exception. The year has been the usual mixture of success and progress on the one hand and delays and some frustration on the other. What drives us on however is the strong belief that in Queen's Wood we have an unusual, if not unique, asset for London, and it is vital to do all that we can to protect this asset for the enjoyment of those in our neighbourhood and others further afield.

Key to our success is working closely with Haringey Council as owner of the Wood. By and large we share the same aims and aspirations and enjoy good relations with them. However overshadowing our relations over the last two years has been the ever increasing squeeze on their resources, whether manpower or finance. I am pleased to say that when it comes to basic services – such as emptying litter bins, dealing with reports of fallen or dangerous trees/branches, responding to reports of sleepers in the Wood – they still come up to scratch. On less urgent issues however they are less responsive than they used to be, for example completing the signage work on cycling. We recognise the pressures on staff and appreciate the efforts that they make, but it does mean we now have to work harder to get things done. In the meantime we have to be constantly alert to the implications of further cuts and, where they are threatened, to respond accordingly, whether individually or collectively through the Friends of Parks Forum.

Turning to particular projects we can report that on some there has been good progress. The external refurbishment of the old toilet block to form a toolshed for use by the working parties had been completed by the time of last year's AGM, but it had yet to be fitted out. We were fortunate enough to benefit from extra moneys made available from the Council's small grants awards scheme to fit out the inside as well, instead of dipping into our own funds for this purpose. That work was complete in the spring of 2012. That is not the end of the story as far as that particular patch of the Wood is concerned. Over the past year we have been working with Groundwork, the body used by the Council to develop environmental schemes, to plan out, and seeking funding for, further improvements in this part of the Wood, in particular reinforcing and re-landscaping the boundary area between the Lodge garden and the Wood proper. This has proved to be a long drawn out process, not helped by changes in personnel at Groundwork. We have had one option turned down but we hope that with improved presentation of the project by Groundwork we shall achieve success.

We have also been closely associated with two other projects spearheaded by the Council. The principal one of these is the further coppicing that has now been carried out in a section of the Wood close to the back of the houses running along Muswell Hill Road. This is part of a long term coppicing programme, included in the Management Plan for the Wood which had been agreed some three years ago after consultation. Coppicing always invites some controversy, and this was no exception, but generally it has been well received. We have seen from the coppicing done in the valley floor close to the Wood Vale entrance how quickly coppiced areas can be transformed into vibrant areas of new plant life and it will not be too long before the new area will receive a fresh lease of life. With David Bevan we shall be monitoring the newly coppiced area just as we have continued to do so with the old. The other new project is the resurfacing of the path along the valley floor from the edge of the Bond & White site to the main pool, for which the Council managed to get a grant from the

Forestry Commission. This is but a small step towards improving the paths more generally, something which is sorely needed, but it is a start.

We continue to do what we can on a routine basis to keep the Wood in a tidy and orderly state. The Working Parties do a terrific job in doing what is necessary and these are consistently well supported. We continue also to benefit from the help of The Conservation Volunteers (the renamed BTCV), who come from time to time to do jobs of a more substantial scale which are a little beyond the capacity of the Working Parties. The three new ponds remain of some concern. We have been hampered by the fickle weather conditions in bringing the main pond into the state we would like, and persistent breaches of the stockade by one or two dog-owners in allowing their dogs in for a swim have not helped. We hope that the planting work done last year, coupled with some selective cutting back of trees around all three ponds, will now help them to mature better. At least some new wildlife has emerged, including frogspawn both this year and last, and a heron has been caught on camera staring somewhat disconsolately into the muddy waters of the main pond!

We have continued with our programme of events. This year the Warrens kindly took over the hosting of the New Year party from Margaret Kennedy who had provided generous hospitality in both 2011 and 2012. We held our regular walks in the spring and autumn, with a bat walk in September and an additional winter walk earlier this year. Again we held a very successful Woodland Arts and Fun Day in July; numbers were down somewhat from the previous year, probably because of dire prognostications on the weather, but fortunately the weather gave us a break and all who came had an enjoyable time. We continue of course to combine our AGMs with a talk.

Membership has remained broadly stable at around 200 households and our financial position has remained very healthy. Though we have been fortunate still to benefit from external funding this past year we cannot be sure that this will remain the case and we stand ready to use some of our reserves for projects which cannot be otherwise funded, while of course scouring other coffers for suitable funding options.

I shall end again by thanking fellow members of the Committee for all the hard work put into our activities and projects over the last year. We all have our various roles but we all muck in together when needed. Sadly Rebecca has decided to stand down from the Committee. She has been an effective promoter of our cause and a highly professional editor of our newsletter, and we shall miss her. Fortunately she has agreed to continue to help out on our communications, and I am sure she will not be allowed to escape too lightly! I would also like to thank all others, from both within and outside our membership, for the multitude of ways they have helped the cause over the year.

John Dorken  
Chair  
18 April 2013