

FRIENDS OF QUEEN'S WOOD

Chair's report to Annual General Meeting, 20 March 2019

2018 was very much a year of ‘business as usual’. While we had no major projects on the go, we remained very active. The seasons came and went with their usual challenges: a wet winter, interspersed with forays from the Beast from the East leading to muddy paths and a plethora of ice-breaking sticks in the ponds; a hot and dry summer, with the upper ponds drying up and the ever-present threat of fires (that fortunately did not materialise to any great degree); and the odd storm, with its usual legacy of fallen trees and branches. But the Wood is a resilient place, with the trees and wildlife determinedly healing themselves. We in the Friends can give but a helping hand in these processes.

The one major specific event that stands out was the appointment of Ed Santry as Haringey Council’s Nature Conservation Officer. His post had been left vacant for two years following the departure of the highly respected Ian Holt, leaving a conspicuous hole in our capacity to interact with the Council. Ed arrived in the spring and bedded himself with remarkable speed, brimming with new ideas and keeping in close touch with us as far as his wide range of functions permits. That he is a ‘local boy’, having grown up in Fortis Green, is especially helpful.

More generally we continued to maintain a good relationship with the Council. Our role as their eyes and ears on the ground is ever more important as the resources they have available to exercise their responsibility to manage the Wood come increasingly under strain. Our joint Management Committee remains a vital medium for taking action to deal with problems and initiating new projects. But on more day-to-day matters the lack of resources has manifested itself in greater delays in sorting things out. Over the last few months the Council has restructured its organisation in areas of most concern to us and we hope that this will bear fruit. Looking to the longer term they are undertaking a fundamental review of their open space strategy and we look forward to engaging with them on how this can be translated into a new management plan for the Wood, which is due in 2020.

There were two other general developments worth noting. First, we were very pleased to learn that the Council granted a new five-year lease for the Café, and the organic garden alongside it, to the existing leaseholder when the previous ten-year lease expired in May. The Café is an excellent facility, acting as a magnet for drawing people into the Wood. The garden too is a superb adjunct to the Wood and there is no doubt we have been able to bathe in its reflected glory. We have not seen a copy of the new lease but we have no reason to believe that we shall not be able to continue to enjoy a very fruitful symbiotic relationship with the leaseholder and his staff. Second, we were delighted to learn that in a series of a ‘mystery shopper’ exercises by the Keep Britain Tidy organisation the Wood was one of only three open spaces out of 20 visited in Haringey that was granted a retention of its Green Flag status without qualification. That the visit took place a day or so after the major work was undertaken on the main pond (see below) was a fortunate coincidence!

Turning to particular areas of activity:

- **Ponds.** In the early part of the year the frogs duly visited and left their mark in all the ponds and mallards were spotted from time to time. Good use has been made of the small pond with a fine brick surround which was cleared restored in 2017 and an informal path has been beaten from it through the thick coppiced area to the Wood Vale exit. At last some positive developments to report for the main Frogpool,. The unsightly broken wooden palings around most of it the majority of the main pond were removed and replaced by a wire fence in the late summer. The pleasing thing was that by the end of the year the fence was still wholly intact! The aim, realised in early 2019, was to plant a three-line whip of mixed native whips (bare-rooted saplings) just behind the fence to provide a more attractive long-term protection for the pond.

- **Coppiced areas.** No further coppicing projects are as yet being considered. However we shall be reviewing the position with Ed Santry, in particular the idea of creating smaller-scale glades. David Bevan has continued to monitor growth in the most recently coppiced area.
- **Paths.** While no significant work was done to improve the paths, we apprised the new Parks Development Manager of the dire state of the paths and the need for action. We hope that some real steps will be taken in 2019 to tackle the problem.
- **Rough sleepers.** This has been an increasing problem in recent years. We worked with the responsible unit in the Council, and their contacts in organisations that can give help, to identify sites that had been or were being used, by people sleeping rough and to clear these up.

Maintenance of the Wood. Our Working Parties have continued to meet almost every month to undertake routine tasks. We are also grateful to TCV, who have continued to undertake more substantial tasks and who have also joined in some of our own working party sessions. This work is vital in keeping the Wood in the state that makes it so attractive to everyone who visits it.

We continued to carry out a full **programme of events** over the year. The year was launched with a very well attended New Year party, again generously hosted by Michael Johns, and by the end of the year plans were well in train for the 2019 party, to be kindly hosted by Margaret Kennedy. As usual we organised several walks over the year, including our usual flower walk in the spring, a two-session bird walk in April; another popular bat walk in the summer; one on fungi in September; and another joint walk with Highgate Wood, this time on the health and vulnerability of oak trees in the two woods. We also joined with Maggie Scrimgeour and Janine Young, who had run the highly successful event for children in the celebration of the anniversary of the Tree Charter the previous November, to lay on a Family Fun Day in July. Well over 100 children took part, enjoying a wide spread of activities.

Membership. A lot of hard work has been put into keeping up the numbers, particularly through the publicity stalls organised in the Wood and we also gave a presentation of our activities in the Highgate Library. **Financially** we remain in excellent health.

Finally our thanks go out to all the members that have made such a contribution to the success of the Friends in the last year in all our various activities.

John Dorken
Chair, FQW
20 March 2019