

Friends of Queen's Wood

Chair's Report March 26th 2009

This has been my first year as Chair and it has certainly been a very busy one with many activities for the Friends' group. However with the able help of the committee we have accomplished many things and I think that this year we have also received more help and co-operation from the Haringey council in a number of ways.

The membership so far this calendar year is 145 households, a little down on last year's total, but the finances are healthy due to a number of donations. These funds have enabled us to pay for part of the Bird Survey, continue with the annual spring flower walk, fund the Woodland Fun Day in June, and pay towards the flora survey, as well as our ongoing costs. The council have funded three new benches, design and printing of a wonderful map leaflet, contributed to the costs of the coppicing and carried out work on the Capital Ring path. We thank them for that.

Our work groups have continued nearly every month and have been excellently supported with as many as sixteen volunteers on one occasion. Volunteers turn out in the bleakest of weather conditions and ages range through young families, teenagers, and willing people in their 30s, 40s and even eighties! I believe we have an active pool of 50 volunteers which is very encouraging. In addition we have been helped again by Catherine Price and her BTCV volunteers from time to time and sensitive ecological management has also been undertaken by a trio of FQW members under the guidance of Sarah Graham Brown. The woods remain free from litter thanks to the friends both official and unofficial. We have also been asked to work in the future with scouts groups and CleanupUK.

Work in the wood by volunteers has included coppicing overgrown hazels to promote longer life and more catkin growth, dead hedging to prevent trampling where re-generation is needed, clearing invasive holly, keeping the ditches flowing when they are blocked, and changing direction of small paths where they are threatening young oak growth. The main work, funded by the SITA Landfill Trust, Haringey Council small grants scheme and FQW, has been the coppicing of a large area towards the lower Wood Vale entrance. This radical work has opened up an impoverished area of the wood which had no ground flora or shrub layer and where the topsoil was being washed away. We hope that we shall soon see re-generation here of species such as the wood anemone, bluebells, and even the broad-leaved helleborine orchid. The coppiced hornbeams will re-grow, as they have in other areas after coppicing, and we hope that new oak trees will have a chance to grow in the lighter conditions. Work to monitor re-growth will start in the summer under the able tuition of David Bevan. I would also like to thank Ian Holt, Haringey's Nature Conservation officer, for his vision and encouragement to get through the paper work hurdles to obtain the SITA grant.

We have been in touch with the council frequently through our Management Committee, guidance from Ian Holt, help from the manager Tony Healy with litter collection and safety aspects, and through our regular representation at the Haringey Friends of Parks Forum. We have also been involved with the work on the Capital Ring path, which is now completed, and which has made this through route more accessible. This was funded by the Transport for London budget. We have been promised new signage for this route including a new entrance sign at Muswell Hill Rd and Priory Gardens. We have been told that this will include logos for 'No Cycling' and also no picking of plants or removal of dead wood. The contacts for the council officers responsible for the wood also need to be renewed on all the existing boards. However we are still no further towards getting other paths repaired and made more accessible for pushchair users. In fact some wood users have said they do not like the new path and prefer the muddy wild aspects of the wood!

Events arranged by FQW since the last AGM include three guided walks, a bird walk, a bat walk, a talk on the results of Bird Survey and the very successful Woodland Art Fun Day followed by an exhibition of children's work. This last event was on a sunny day and it was a pleasure to see children and carers enjoying their picnics, creating drawings, paintings, poetry and prose, and taking part in a quiz and scavenger hunt. This event saw all the committee, plus other Friends, helping in some way. At our last AGM Ian Holt's talk on 'Woods for people or plants' gave us food for thought. I hope we have been able to get the balance right between maintaining this nature reserve and protecting its special plants, and on the other hand encouraging access for woodland activities such as dog-walking, exercise, tree climbing, picnicking, and general relaxation.

A new project has been suggested which concerns the old paddling pool, and a sub group of the committee, together with the charity Froglife, are investigating turning the pool back into a natural wildlife pool as it was before 1930. (You can see pictures of this in the booklet we sell about the wood in the 1900s) This would probably involve the removal of the old concrete and insertion of a clay liner and planting of some native plants, though we would hope that the area would re-colonize naturally to a great extent. All this is in the future and would involve major funding. Please make your views known to us about this. The pool will never be restored to its original use given the lack of a keeper in the wood and present financial restraints..

I would like to say a special thank you to all the committee who have worked so hard this year and for helping me to settle in as Chair. You might like to know what they have all been doing on your behalf so that they are not just names on the newsletter. Alison Watson carries the burden of membership and the newsletter. She also contacts the council about external events in the wood, such as filming, art shows, and even orienteering. John Dorken is the treasurer. Rebecca Dowman is in charge of publicity and with her team of Gemma Harris and Mike Hacker has in addition worked tirelessly on the new map. John Barcroft has liaised with the council over litter collection and put up the monthly notices in the wood. Jane Warren has been an inspiration for the Art Fun day and is also on the Management Committee, David Warren has dealt with the infrastructures of the wood – paths, drains, pool, water leaks, pollution, and in addition has been involved with planning permission matters. Michael Johns has helped me with grant applications and also planning. Sue Smith has shown a keen interest in the frog pool idea and written a helpful report on this and also wrote a wonderful application for a Capital Woodlands Award. (Sadly we did not win it this time). Sue also hosted the great New Year party. Sarah Graham- Brown was co-opted to help with ecological matters and her guidance and recording of management work has been invaluable. So everyone has had a job and the team has worked well. Thanks also to all who deliver the newsletter and to Eddie Green for his help with the newsletter design and Glen Covacic for updating the website.

The Friends continues to be an active community group in this area and I am sure this will continue with the goodwill we have had from all our members and the continuing contacts with Haringey Council.

Lucy Roots March 2009