

FRIENDS OF QUEEN'S WOOD

Chair's report to 2020 AGM

This is an unusual - and hopefully unique - report in that it covers a period of some 18 months instead of the usual 12. This is because our constitution requires that the report be made for the period since the last AGM and for reasons of the pandemic that has been greatly extended. The pandemic has of course been the defining factor in what we have been able or not able to do over the past few months and that does not look likely to change for a fair time to come. But for most of the period of this report it was largely a matter of business as usual.

Over the near 30 years of our existence our relationship with Haringey Council, the owner of the Wood, has been largely characterised by our pushing them to do things, with varying degrees of success. Rarely have they themselves taken the initiative to undertake significant new projects. That changed in 2019, with the Council's proposal to install what they called a welfare unit – a unit which essentially would provide toilet and changing facilities, largely for the benefit of disabled and special needs groups, but possibly with additional office space.

This move presented a challenge for us. We had to think hard about what we were about. In essence, as a membership organisation, we have to have a mind to the wishes of our membership and they are a broad church. In that sense, although we are united in a wish to do our best to preserve the environment, as users, we all have an impact on the environment whenever we visit and we have to think about where the balance lies between protecting nature and providing an ambience which all can enjoy. Usage is growing and the greater the recognition of the value of visiting woodland for health and well being reasons the greater will be the footfall. Once a major development has taken place it is simply not possible to reverse the process and restore the woodland if the decision is poorly based. Our first reaction to the proposal was that, while we were not opposed in principle to improving the welfare facilities in the Wood, the case for both the concept and any particular option within it should be the subject of a proper environmental impact assessment, embracing a much better idea of who was using the Wood and who the unit should be serving. The response from the Council was ambivalent suggesting that there had been none of the fundamental thinking required. Everything has been put on hold by the Council as a result of the pandemic but we shall be ready to fight hard for proper evaluation and full consultation to be undertaken if and when work resumes.

2019 also marked the surprise resignation of Haringey's Nature Conservation Officer, Ed Santry, after a mere fifteen months in the post. Ed had quickly made great inroads into the backlog of work that had accumulated over the three years in which the post had been vacant and he became our chief contact in the Council, with a willingness to help out on things that were not strictly his responsibility. The good thing is that the Council filled the post fairly quickly with the appointment of Annabel Foskett, Annabel's first few months has been devoted to working on Borough-wide plans but we understand that she will soon be able to move to work on specific sites, such as ours.

Another highlight was that the Wood came out very well in the full review of its Green Flag status in the latter part of 2019.. Fortunately the Council provided additional resources to the parks department to ensure that all designated parks regained their Green Flag status, and the Wood benefited from a share of these. Improvements included repair work to a few stretches of pathways; replacement of litter bins; removal of graffiti and refreshing the no cycling' signage, The Wood duly retained its status and the assessors complimented the Friends highly in their report.

One further issue of note was the threat by the Council to fell four mature oak trees at the fringes of the Wood close to a house in Wood Vale. This had been the price demanded by the insurers of the house to settle a claim for dealing with extensive subsidence allegedly caused by these oaks, the alternative being that the Council itself met the substantial costs of underpinning itself. We had strongly opposed the felling of these trees but the Council felt it could not meet the costs itself at the expense of other Council programmes. The felling was about to take place but was suspended in the

face of a strong locally based protest campaign. The matter remained unresolved at the time of writing.

In other ways it has been business as usual. More generally we continued to maintain a good relationship with the Council. Looking to the longer term they are undertaking a fundamental review of their open spaces 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. Completion of the strategy has been delayed but it looks as if a new plan will start being drawn up in the next few months. We intend to make a substantial input into it.

Turning to particular areas of activity:

- **Ponds and watercourses.** The line of mixed native whips (bare-rooted saplings) planted in early 2019 just behind the newly installed wire fence to provide a more attractive long-term protection for the pond fared reasonably well, bearing in mind that much of it is in the shade, The fencing itself survived! Looking further ahead planning work is in train for a major flood protection scheme, which, if implemented, will have a major impact on the Wood. We will be looking for opportunities to bring our own ideas about the future of the Wood to bear on the work.
- **Litter picking.** Gemma Harris and her cohort of litter pickers continued to do an excellent job both in the Wood and in ensuring that litter was not a problem in Queen's Wood Road. The Council installed replaced the existing litter bins with larger ones. Though they have more capacity they are obtrusive but we understand that the Council intends to clad them.
- **Rough sleepers.** We continued to work with the Council, and relevant charitable bodies, to identify sites being used by people sleeping rough. The number of such sleepers did fall over the year but we have to remain vigilant.

Maintenance of the Wood. Until the lockdown restrictions were imposed our Working Parties continued to meet almost every month to undertake routine tasks. We are also grateful to TCV, who continued to undertake the more substantial tasks up to the point of lockdown, working from time to time with our own working party sessions, to the benefit of all.

We continued to carry out a full **programme of events** over 2019. We held the traditional New Year party, generously 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; an autumn fruits walk; and a River Moselle Walk in September and one on fungi in October. We laid another Family Fun Day in July. Well over 100 children took part, enjoying a wide range of activities. Unfortunately, after another successful party in January this year, again hosted by Margaret, our usual programme of activities was curtailed and it is only in the last few weeks that we have begun tentative steps to resume it.

Again we devoted a lot of energy into keeping **membership** numbers up, particularly through the publicity stalls in the Wood, which also give us the chance to spread the word to visitors about the history and wildlife of the Wood. **Financially** our bank balance has remained very healthy.

Finally the thanks of the Committee go out to all the members who contributed so much to the achievements of the Friends over the last 18 months.

John Dorken
15 September 2020