

FRIENDS OF QUEEN'S WOOD

Chair's report to Annual General Meeting 7 July 2022

The last twelve months have been dominated, as had the previous year, by Haringey Council's plan to drive through a **flood protection scheme** in the Wood. At the time of our last AGM the then very recent one-in-30 years rain event in the vicinity had provided a vivid reminder that flooding was a real threat. We had then reasonably expected that the whole issue would be resolved one way or another by now. But, alas, that has not been the case, and the saga continues. We had all along accepted that there was a real need to offer those on the watercourses downstream from the Wood greater protection from flooding, but we had not been convinced that the scheme being pursued was the right way to go. At the very least it was vital to ensure that radical changes were made to any scheme in the Wood itself both to mitigate its ecological and amenity impact on the Wood and in return to bring some positive benefits to it.

In the course of the latter part of 2021 the Council seemed to recognize this in principle by endorsing the notion of 'co-production' with stakeholders, though it was not until this spring that it began to be effective. In the autumn we secured the Council's agreement to make some substantial changes. These then needed to be reflected in a more detailed design and specification. The Council duly postponed the planned start date of March to July 2022. However, in the spring we were still waiting for new plans, leaving us with precious little time not only to review them and get any changes agreed, but also to give our members an opportunity to comment. Throughout we had vented our concerns about the near-impossible timetable facing us, not least because the necessary consultants' work to analyse the revised scheme was running late. The start date was later postponed again - to September.

The present position is that amount of flood protection the scheme would now deliver is still uncertain, and the timetable is in flux. We have agreed to what we can to help, but we are far from sanguine that acceptable changes can be identified. All in all the fate of the scheme, at least in its current form, is in the balance.

The saga to date has been very frustrating, particularly in the light of the large amount of work we have put into the process, but it has produced some **real positives more generally**. First, our pressure was material in persuading the Council that the management of the scheme needed to be put on a more focused basis. Second it was we who made the running in spotting the pitfalls in the scheme and identifying the changes needed to improve it. As a result our reputation with the Council as having a unique knowledge of the Wood has been enhanced and it should stand us in good stead in the future. Certainly there has been a greater realisation that engagement with stakeholders is not a matter of formal consultation but working with them actively throughout the evolution of a project. The notion of co-production is a good one but has still to be embedded fully in the way that the Council actually goes about things. Moreover at the end of the day it does not mean joint decision taking and we always need to retain the right to object if we wish to. Third, as a result of work on the scheme our **understanding of the Wood**

has itself been enhanced. For instance, in part through the interaction with specialists brought in by the Council, we now know more about the hydraulics of the Wood, the hardware in the Wood to manage the water dimension, the pollution risks, the nature, depth and role of the soil found in the Wood and the detailed ecology of the Wood.

This is all grist for the mill in the development of the new **management plan** for the Wood, spearheaded by the Council, to follow on from the last plan, which had covered the period 2010-2020. The delay has been primarily due to pressure on resources in the Council but it has enabled the plan to reflect the development by the Council of its wider strategy for open spaces and more focused thinking about the management of the Borough's ancient woodlands. It has also been possible to take into account the impact of the proposed flood scheme and draw some important lesson from the massive increase in footfall in the Wood during the pandemic. The plan is vital because it will be an important factor not only in determining the state of the Wood in the period of the plan but its state in 50 years' time and beyond.

Over the last few months we have been able to resume our usual **programme of events and activities**. Sadly this did not include a new year's party but we have organised a number of walks including bat and bird walks, the spring flower walk and other activities focusing on trees and wildlife. And we shall shortly be holding a Family Fun Day after an absence of two years.

Over the last year our **membership** has reached its highest ever level and our **finances** are very healthy. Participation in our working parties has also been very strong and as always we have benefited hugely from our partnership with The Conservation Volunteers. Our thanks go out to all involved. And the **Committee** has been strengthened by some new (and younger!) blood. This is always greatly welcome, not least because it is important that the knowledge and experience we have gathered over the years is passed down as seamlessly as possible as one generation hands on the baton to its successor. The **active engagement of more members** with relevant experience, particularly in ecology and the practical side of things, as well as in simply helping to manage our work and activities, is always most welcome.

John Dorken
24/6/2022