**FRIENDS OF QUEEN’S WOOD**

Chairman’s report to Annual General Meeting, 14 April 2016

If 2014 had been a year of action and implementation 2015 was a year in which there was well deserved recognition in the wider world of how wonderful the Wood is and what has been achieved in recent years. In the course of the year the Wood was not only awarded Green Flag status but it both won a Gold Award and was placed first in category for large nature reserves in the London in Bloom awards for 2015. Many factors are taken into account in the judging process for these awards, but not least is the contribution that local communities make to these open spaces, and more particularly that of friends groups like ourselves. So we can rightly enjoy a bit of the limelight. We should also recognise the important role that the Lodge café and the organic garden played in the making of these awards.

Our own contribution could not have been made without the close collaboration that we have enjoyed with Haringey Council. Of course we have had our differences, and we would have like them to do more, but we have to recognise the increasingly severe resource constraints that they have undergone in recent years. It was with some sadness that we learned that Ian Holt, the Council Nature Conservation Officer for the last eight years, was leaving in the new year to take up a post with Bexley Council. Ian was a fierce defender of the Wood and a good ally of ours and without him our achievements over the last few years would have been very much less. We wish him all the best in his new post. It remains to be seen how Ian’s work will be reorganised in the future: we are lobbying for a direct replacement but the signs are not good at present.

Otherwise the year was very much business as usual. Turning to particular projects:

* **Ponds.** The state of the ponds continues to be a source of controversy. On the positive side the vegetation continues to slowly improve with some help from the Hampstead Heath conservation team; breaches in the stockade around the main pond have reduced and though dogs are still accessing the pond the damage done is less than it was. Also frogspawn appeared in all three ponds and sightings were made of tadpoles quite a way into late spring. We continue to monitor developments with the ultimate aim of removing the stockade around the main pond when we are satisfied with the level of vegetation.
* **Coppicing**. With some ecological input from ourselves the Council re-coppiced an area on the west side of the Wood which had been previously coppiced many years ago. This marks the end of the programme of major coppicing works but it is expected that some thinning in selected areas will be carried out together with continuing removal of holly.
* **Lodge Garden boundary works.** The work to landscape and reinforce the boundary between the Garden and the Wood, funded from a grant from Awards for All and money from Haringey, supplemented by a small contribution from ourselves, was at last completed in April. A low key opening ceremony was undertaken in the presence of the Mayor of Haringey alongside the celebration of Green Flag status for the Wood in September. The funding did not stretch to the installation of a bat information board as had been originally planned but we plan to rectify this during 2016.

* **Paths**. The dire state of the paths continues to be the biggest blot on the landscape, not helped by continuing wet weather in recent months. We continue to lobby the Council to do something about them but we have to be realistic. To bring even the main paths up to a remotely acceptable standard requires a huge injection of cash and there is no white knight on the horizon ready to come to the rescue. We can only continue to look for funding opportunities for limited schemes and do what we can to address the worst spots. At our request The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) created a French drain at the edge of the worst patch on the path between Connaught Gardens and the Lodge, and some work is planned for 2016 to deal with the overflow of the stream near the ‘Witches Coven’ where it crosses the path to the Wood Vale entrance.
* **Benches**. Two new benches have been installed thanks to generous donations from specific members. One, for which we must thank Rebecca Dowman and Alex Zeman in celebration of their marriage earlier in the year, overlooks the newly coppiced areas to the north west of the Wood. The other - given by Vivien Preston in memory of her husband, David, and son, Stephen. – is situated on the upper path from the Lodge towards Connaught Gardens.

**Maintenance of the Wood.** The Working Parties continued to meet almost every month, doing a fine job in undertaking routine tasks. TCV continued to make a substantial contribution to keeping the Wood in good trim, undertaking tasks which went beyond the capacity of the Working Parties. The Wood benefited from TCV being able to spend more time in the Wood than in previous years.

We continued to carry out a full **programme of events**. Michael Johns again kindly hosted our annual New Year party in 2016. We started off the year with a walk on the theme of veteran trees, followed by our regular flower walk in the spring. A joint Queen’s Wood/Highgate Wood walk, focussing on the differences between the two, was held in October. We also had a walk in November looking at coppice management. We continued to combine our AGMs with a talk, with Diana Clements giving a stimulating talk on the geo-archaeology of Highgate and Queen’s Woods, which we plan to follow up by a combined walk in the two Woods focusing on this theme. June saw charcoal-burning return to the Wood for the first time in living memory, with Iain Loasby operating his charcoal-making retort and telling a large number of visitors about the benefits and history of British charcoal.

**Membership** continued to be stable in 2015 at around 200 households. There has been a bit of a dip in the early part of 2016, which we hope to be able to rectify. Our **financial** position remains broadly healthy.

Finally I would like to **thank** to all members for their support, in particular those that have been able to engage actively in what we try to do. It is not possible to thank everyone individually but I would like to single out Gemma Harris who does a sterling job in monitoring litter and dog waste bins. We recognise that in this very busy age active involvement is not always possible but every little bit counts.

John Dorken

Chair

14 April 2016