**FRIENDS OF QUEEN’S WOOD**

Chairman’s report to Annual General Meeting, 23 March 2017

Compared with the two previous years 2016 was a year of few headlines for the Friends. The ‘grand projects’ on coppicing and landscaping the Lodge area had been completed and no new major projects were in the offing. That does not mean that it was not a busy year. Being the eyes and ears for the Wood and keeping it as spick and span as resources permit are always major tasks and indeed the continuing shrinkage of Council funding makes our role on these fronts even more important.

We continued to work closely with the staff of Haringey Council, with whom we kept up good relations. We are also glad that the Council has been continuing with its Small Grants Scheme, which has been hugely important in enabling us to fund smaller scale works. I reported last year that Ian Holt, the Council Nature Conservation Officer for the previous eight years, was leaving in the New Year to take up a post with Bexley Council. We were one of many bodies that lobbied hard for a direct replacement and we understand that in principle the post will be filled, albeit with wider responsibilities; however as yet no appointment has been made. Other colleagues in the Council have continued to do their best to fill the gap but we do miss the vital contribution of a specialist officer, who can not only give professional advice but also help us root out potential sources of funding.

With continuing spending squeezes at national level the future of public parks has been the subject of scrutiny at various levels. One particular inquiry was one undertaken by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee into the Future of Public Parks. The Friends responded to a call for evidence from Cllr Peray Ahmet, the Cabinet member for the Environment, with a detailed submission and was one of only two Friends Groups to be quoted in the submission she herself made to the Inquiry. We later met up with her in the Wood at her request and we were able to let her know first hand of our concerns.

Otherwise the year continued to be one of business as usual. Turning to particular areas of activity:

* **Ponds.** These can be best described as still work in progress, with the progress remaining slow. The main pond continues to be dogged by canine intrusions and the persistent presence (despite our best efforts) of the invasive pennywort, both making it difficult to build up the vegetation necessary to enable us to remove the unsightly fencing. On the positive side however the wildlife seems to like things as they are! The title ‘Frogpool’ for the main pond is certainly not a misnomer and there has been every evidence of frogs doing their bit in all three ponds. There have also been sightings of newts. We shall continue to monitor progress carefully and hopefully in the not distant future get the ponds into such a state that they will be seen by all as a positive asset to the Wood;
* **Coppiced areas**. With the main programme of coppicing having been completed in 2015, the focus has been on monitoring the impact. David Bevan has continued to undertake this and keeping us abreast of his findings;
* **Lodge Garden boundary works**. At last the work on landscaping and refurbishing the area alongside the Lodge Garden was completed with the installation in thesummer of the bat information board, which was mainly funded by the Friends but benefited from the award of a grant of £500 from the Council under its Small Grant Scheme. The whole area is now much more appealing and should benefit further from more recent tree work, which will let more light in and allow the vegetation to grow up;

* **Paths**. The paths remain the feature of the Wood of most concern, and we can do little more than try to improve the worst stretches. The biggest success of 2016 was the installation by The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), aided by funding from the Friends for materials, of a board bridge to replace the ineffective pipework where the stream (the young Moselle) intersects the path to the Wood Vale entrance close to the Witches Coven. This should put a stop to the perennial flooding that occurs in winter.

**Maintenance of the Wood.** The Working Parties continued to meet almost every month to undertake routine tasks. TCV make a substantial contribution to keeping the Wood in good trim, undertaking tasks which go beyond the capacity of the Working Parties. A successful innovation introduced late in the year was to combine some of the TCV sessions with our own monthly Working Party sessions; this means that more manpower is available for particular tasks at any one time, and our own volunteers can both participate in activities outside the normal scope of the monthly sessions and pick up useful skills from TCV.

It is good to see the Wood used so much for **educational purposes**. Although we did not run any such events ourselves we have actively helped groups doing so in choosing sites and advising on how best to protect the woodland environment.

We continued to carry out a full **programme of events**. We kicked the year off with Michael Johns again kindly hosting our annual New Year party. We organised a number of walks over the year, including our usual regular flower walk in the spring; a very popular bat walk in the summer, coinciding with the unveiling of the new bat board; a herbal walk; and another joint walk with Highgate Wood, this time on the geo-archaeology of the two woods. A number of members have also been participating in Citizen Science project with the Woodland Trust, in which they have been charting the first signs of spring.

A much improved **website** was launched in August; this was designed and installed for free by Colin Morton, who has never even been to the Wood! We are most grateful to him.

**Membership** continued to stand at around 200 households. Keeping up the numbers requires a lot of hard work, with running publicity stalls in the Wood and at local events being particularly effective. The help of members who manned these stalls is particularly appreciated. Our **financial** position remains broadly healthy.

Finally, once again my **thanks** go outto all members for their interest and support, in particular those that have engaged actively in what we try to do. We know that only a minority are able to get actively involved but it is a great boost to know that we have behind us a substantial body of interested people to support our efforts.

John Dorken

Chair

23 March 2017