

## 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

The last twelve months have been a period of intense activity for the Friends, as plans for the future of Wanstead Park have gradually begun to crystallise.

Since 2010 the City of London, which administers most of the park as part of Epping Forest, together with the other landowners and stakeholders, have been working together to build sustainable plans for the park's future. The Friends of Wanstead Parklands have played a key part in this process.

A comprehensive Conservation Statement has been followed by a series of expert reports on heritage, hydrology and other matters. Since late 2014 the stakeholders have been working with LDA Design, the landscape consultancy which designed the Olympic Park, to formulate plans for the park's future. These aim effectively to address the issues which led English Heritage (now Historic England) to place Wanstead Park on their register of historic landscapes "At Risk" in 2009.

The "Parkland Plan" is intended to enhance the value of Wanstead Park as an amenity, and make its historic character more easy for visitors to understand, while maintaining its semi-natural character and significance as an informal wildlife sanctuary. A first draft of the plan was unveiled early last year, and it is currently being revised in line with feedback from the public and project partners.

The Parkland Plan is expected to go before the City of London's Epping Forest and Commons Committee at its May meeting. As well as deciding whether to support the Parkland Plan in principle, the Committee will need to resolve issues over funding and the time-scale for implementation.

This is a critical moment in the park's history.

The various stakeholders have worked together over the last few years with a remarkable degree of harmony, with few serious disagreements about what is wrong with the park at present, and what - in an ideal world - should be done with it. As ever, the main stumbling block is how improvements should be funded.

The Friends of Wanstead Parklands favour a lottery-funded bid under the "Parks for People" programme, which could bring a grant of up to £5m. The alternative approach would be for the City to carry out a more incremental programme of works over a longer period of time.

While the Friends understand the latter approach would give the City greater control over the project and its costs, we would regard it as a wasted opportunity. It would also open the possibility of plans being derailed in the future by budgetary constraints or changing priorities. A "Parks for People" bid, by contrast, would most effectively leverage the City of London's contribution, to their benefit and that of the park, and would ensure that some of the most urgent works could be carried out relatively quickly.

The Friends regard the Parkland Plan as an exciting and imaginative response both to Wanstead Park's problems and to its unrealised potential. We hope that the Epping Forest and Commons Committee will make the right decision in May. In the meantime, we are grateful for the support we have received from an all-party group of local MPs, led by John Cryer; as well as Dr Syed Kamall MEP,

Conservative leader in the European Parliament, the London Boroughs of Redbridge and Waltham Forest and a number of individual local councillors.

While we wait for the big decisions to be made, many of you will have noticed that some welcome changes are already taking place around the park. Clearance work around the Perch Pond and Ornamental Water have opened up long-lost views. Preparations are being made to tackle the Perch Pond's infestation by floating pennywort. Also, interim repairs are being made to the Heronry Pond prior to longer-term decisions on its future.

A development strongly welcomed by the Friends was the successful application by the London Borough of Redbridge for funding of its "Riding the Roding" project. This is not only for the direct aesthetic and ecological benefits to the Roding Valley, but because it would complement plans for the regeneration of the adjacent Wanstead Park. In particular, the new riverside cycle path will improve local connectivity. Redbridge and the Wanstead Park stakeholders have been working closely on both projects. Separate funding is being sought from within Redbridge's own budget for restoration of the much-missed Coronation Bridge. We attach high importance to this, as the historic landscape of Wanstead Park is not currently as accessible as it should be to many Ilford residents.

During the course of the year we were approached by campaigners concerned at the lack of children's play facilities in the Aldersbrook area, and have lent our support to the provision of a natural play area in Wanstead Park. We hope this will be incorporated as a key objective in the final version of the Parkland Plan.

Another initiative from outside the group to which we have lent our support is the installation of a weather station in Wanstead Park. This will be part of the Meteorological Office's national network and will provide specific rainfall data which can be fed into future hydrological work for the park.

Turning to internal matters, we have welcomed several new committee members over the course of the year. We are also grateful for the contribution of those who have retired or are about to do so.

This year has seen a long-term objective come close to fruition, namely the Friends' decision to seek charitable status. Following the Special General Meeting in October, trustees were appointed and a formal application made to the Charities Commission. The initial response was very positive, and we are currently working to incorporate a few final drafting changes suggested by the Commission to our objectives. Charitable status will open up new funding opportunities for the Friends, and we are particularly grateful to committee member Simon Skelding for his help and advice on this matter.

As ever, the Friends have organised a full and varied programme of activities.

Our largest fundraising event this year was the very successful Agatha Christie themed dinner in October at Wanstead Cricket Club, which raised some £1,200.

In the summer the Friends curated an exhibition at The Temple on the theme "Images of Nature". This was well-received, and we are grateful to the talented local photographers who made their work available. In addition, we have sought to maintain public awareness of the history and natural history of the Park by regular articles in the local press.

In May a group of Friends members and supporters "road-tested" Olivia Bellas' Memento Sound Walk of Wanstead Park. Lasting about an hour, the walk was followed by a de-brief at Wanstead Park's Temple, over tea and cake. The Sound Walk was compiled from a series of interviews with park users. The Friends have recommended it as an original and worthwhile addition to online resources for Wanstead Park.

We have had stalls at Music in Wanstead Park, the Wanstead Festival and other local events to raise our visibility and sell merchandise.

The Friends have continued to build their presence on social media, and currently have 282 members in their Facebook group, and 1,160 followers on Twitter. We have also been circulating a regular newsletter to members, which is ably edited by Diane Gardner.

Five organised walks were held in the park over the year, along with three additional special events for particular groups or occasions. This year the largest group was 35 people.

Two successful litter picks were held in April and October, and we should like to find ways of holding them more frequently.

For the second time, Historic England recognised the Friends' work in the Heritage Angels Awards with a special certificate of recognition.

The Friends' finances are currently healthy. As at 10 February, our total funds stood at just over £9,000.

At this point, I always make a plea for more volunteers. We know that people are often nervous about trying to juggle raising families and building careers with voluntary activities. However, we won't pressure you to take on more than you are comfortable with. Please contact us if you think you might be interested in helping out, or come along to one of our monthly meetings without obligation to meet us and see for yourself what is involved. That said, even if your contribution consists being a member and coming to events the Friends this is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your support in the past, and with your help we hope to build on our success in the future.