



SAFELY GRAZING
LONGHORNS RETURN
AFTER DECADES

Off yer bike

**WHERE YOU CAN
(BUT MOST CAN'T...)
CYCLE IN THE PARK**



POND LIFE
ARE THE SWANS
UNDER THREAT?



FRIENDS OF WANSTEAD PARKLANDS *newsletter*



ULTRA VIOLET: A locked-down Chalet Wood in April, normally the height of the annual bluebell display. For Gill James's 'diary of a park in pandemic', see page 6 (Picture: Paul Clements)

'A crisis like we've never seen before'

RECORD VISITOR NUMBERS HAVE CREATED A RUBBISH PROBLEM. RICHARD ARNOPP REPORTS

THE CORONAVIRUS lockdown coincided with a long spell of warm, sunny weather, and Wanstead Park has seen unprecedented numbers of visitors.

According to the City of London, which manages the Park, there was a 122 per cent increase in users this spring. While it's great that so many new people have been discovering and enjoying our green spaces during

this difficult time, litter bins in the area have been routinely overwhelmed.

Meanwhile, a minority of users has spoiled the experience for others by leaving their rubbish behind.

One member of the Friends of Wanstead Parklands Facebook page reported witnessing a family

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



TO BECOME Chairman of the Friends of Wanstead Parklands in a time of Covid is, I hope, a unique experience.

The plans in mind at the beginning of the year are of necessity being modified, and we are revisiting what can be achieved in the next 12 months.

The Committee now meets via Zoom, which also supports Committee sub-groups working on revitalising the website, producing the Newsletter and critiquing proposals for the Park.

When I became Chair, I sketched out some objectives which I've shared with the Committee. Top of my list was to improve communications with Members.

In addition to the quarterly Newsletters, I envisage a more regular series of short updates either through email, Facebook or linked to the website. Regardless of the Committee's virtual existence, I am still hopeful that this can be realised.

The communication dynamics of our organisation have shifted significantly over the past year, and even more so over the last three to four months when the Park has been increasingly used.

Thanks in no short measure to Richard Arnopp's efforts, the Friends Facebook page now has over 1,900 followers. This far outweighs Membership numbers, and we have to juggle Committee resources to best serve both of these separate groups.

Over time, the Friends website infrastructure and content has become partially dysfunctional, and we are in the process of

...continues over

finishing up after their picnic by simply kicking around their empty drink bottles and food wrappers before leaving.

Building contractors unable to use municipal tips have also been blamed for a dramatic increase in fly-tipping around Epping Forest as a whole, including Wanstead Park. Some 40 bags of domestic rubbish and garden waste was dumped at the Park's Warren Drive entrance at the start of lockdown in March – which was still there in July.

The furloughing of key members of staff within the City of London Corporation created a backlog of illegal dump reports to contend with.

But according to one Park worker, who wished not to be named, the amount of the rubbish in Wanstead Park is proving to be "a crisis we've never seen before".

A number of freelance volunteers already collect litter in Wanstead Park and



PILING UP: Rubbish left by visitors at the Ornamental Water (Charlotte Keane)

the Flats, but their efforts were overwhelmed by the piles left behind.

To help keep on top of the problem, the Friends of Wanstead Parklands arranged a series of organised litter picks in Wanstead Park, to be held once a month from June to September. And, to date, members and supporters have come out in their droves.

The first event was held on Sunday June 7, in collaboration with Epping Forest, which provided trigger-action litter pickers and builders' bags. It was



COLLECTED: A dozen bags of litter picked up by volunteers around The Temple (Richard Arnopp)

publicised on social media and we expected about a dozen volunteers. We were astonished when nearly 40 turned up – a measure of public concern about littering.

Fortunately, we had erred on the side of safety in terms of providing

upgrading the platform and updating the substance. This won't be a quick fix so do bear with us.

On the bigger picture relating to the much publicised Parkland Plan, I am waiting to hear back from the City of London on whether Covid will impact on the implementation schedule.

It is clear that Epping Forest's operational team have been overwhelmed by visitor numbers and their own staff shortages due to necessary self-isolation. This has caused a shift in their own priorities and we are yet to learn of its potential strategic bearing.

It is of course a joy to see so many more people using the Park – an ironic benefit of Covid!

Walkers and cyclists have both increased significantly. As a Committee, we have to weigh up and try balance the views of Members, some of whom will support greater freedom for cyclists while others will not – see Gill James's article on page 4.

It is a tricky balance which will ultimately be arbitrated by the City whatever we propose but a very contemporary topic and your views will be welcome.

Lastly, I'd like to encourage a more interactive dialogue between Members and the Committee. We are here to represent you and would welcome both positive and negative comments on what we do and how we do it, and any other Park related ideas you may have.

Also, if you believe you can make a contribution at Committee level or anything else, then please drop me a note at wansteadpark.org.uk@gmail.com

JOHN SHARPE Chairman,
Friends of Wanstead Parklands



equipment: most individuals got a litter picker, and most couples got at least one between them!

Fanning out across the park, they collected a huge quantity of discarded rubbish: around 50 bags during a 90-minute sweep. Although in an ideal world they shouldn't have to do this, a number of our volunteers commented that litter picking, as well as being satisfying, is also quite fun.

It is also appreciated: as we worked, many passers-by expressed thanks for what we were doing.

The July litter pick was smaller, with last-minute issues over equipment. However, Epping Forest has since provided us with 25 litter pickers and we have bought a similar number of our own, as well as a supply of rubble bags.

At future litter picks, we will be charging a returnable deposit of £5 for litter pickers (which roughly covers the cost price, so people can keep them). Epping Forest has also asked us to collect volunteers' details so they will be



BAG IT UP: Volunteers at the first litter pick in June (Richard Arnopp)

covered by their public liability insurance. We hope to see lots of new faces over the coming months!

As well as organising group events, we are drawing up a set of guidelines, in consultation with Epping Forest, for people who would prefer to litter-pick on their own.

Littering is, sadly, just part of a spectrum of antisocial behaviour witnessed across Epping Forest land. In recent years, fly-tipping has become a major problem, with hundreds of incidents each year. But Epping Forest has become a leader in tracking down those responsible, accounting for a significant proportion of prosecutions nationally.

Also, despite recent devastating fires on Wanstead Flats in 2018, there have been a number of barbecues on Forest land in the warm weather.

Park keepers need the public to act as their eyes and ears. If you spot anything – fly-tipping, fires and obstructions – call **020 8532 1010**, or email the team responsible for Wanstead Park at epping.forest@cityoflondon.gov.uk.

For regular updates on litter-picking and other activities, sign up to the Friends of Wanstead Parklands Facebook page ([tinyurl.com/fwpfacebook](https://www.facebook.com/fwpfacebook)) and follow us on Twitter [@FWP2009](https://twitter.com/FWP2009)



STAY IN YOUR LANE: a 1950s bylaw forbids cycling in the Park except on one 200m stretch

Isn't it time we got on our bikes?

CYCLISTS ARE ASKING FOR NEW ROUTES THROUGH THE PARK. **GILL JAMES** REPORTS

THE LAST few months have been tough for everyone, so it is good to have silver linings.

During lockdown, Wanstead Park has been a godsend to those wishing to get some fresh air and exercise. Park wardens report a 122 per cent rise in visitor numbers.

To all of us who care about the climate crisis, the exponential growth in the popularity of cycling has been another real positive.

However, judging from reports of altercations between cyclists and other users, not everybody understands that the use of bicycles in Wanstead Park, though not prohibited, is certainly highly restricted.

At present, a 1950s bylaw restricts cycling in the Park to a 200m stretch from the entrance at Wanstead Park Avenue up to the tea hut, then bearing left along the north-eastern edge of the Heronry Pond (see map, overleaf).

Cycling is forbidden in all other parts of the Park, but the signposting is, at best, erratic.

During lockdown, the Friends of Wanstead Parklands

Facebook page witnessed some lively discussion, including complaints about cyclists not sticking to the sole designated route.

Offline, users have also reported more serious incidents, including an altercation between a cyclist and a dog-walker, and bikes being ridden in Chalet Wood, home to a notable colony of bluebells, which are easily damaged by trampling.

Since the park's keepers began returning to work, the bylaws have been more rigorously enforced, notably around the Ornamental Pond, where cycling is off limits.

However, in July, the 'No Cycling' sign by the Warren Road entrance was vandalised, pulled from its mount and snapped in half.

One Forest Keeper, speaking off the record, said that cyclists are "ruining the environment".

At their July Meeting, the Committee Members discussed the possibilities of expanding cycling in the Park.

Our evidence shows that the current layout is an area of dissatisfaction for all parties. Cycling has become a free-for-all, which is antagonising some pedestrians. In contrast, Government and local Council support for increased use of bikes has stoked demand for greater cyclist access to routes through the Park.

The FWP Committee supported in principle the opening up of some additional routes to cyclists, taking the form of shared-use routes for pedestrians and cyclists which could be trialled as part of a feasibility study.

The Committee fully supported the opening up of a shared-use route between:



VANDALISED: A 'no cycling' sign (Gill James)

