



# FRIENDS' OF HILLY FIELDS CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT JUNE 2014

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June 2014

### REVIEW OF PAST YEARS ACTIVITIES

This year the Friends, a voluntary community group, have met formally four times and continue to help improve awareness and the up-keep of our park.

The core group have additionally met to prepare for a meeting with John Thompson, head of Greenscene to discuss ongoing problems with park management.

**WILD ABOUT PLAY PROJECT:** the lottery offered post completion **Celebrate Your Space** grants to groups who had successfully completed their schemes. Grant was for a one off event, we successfully applied and held our first **GREEN FAIR**. We organised the event with the cafe. The money funded workshops, materials, hire of marquees. We had a series of sustainable, local produce, craft stalls.

Very positive feedback from the day and requests for a repeat.

We were invited to apply again and were successful with a grant for our **WILD PLAY DAY**. Working closely with Chelwood Families. It was eventually held on 11th March. We had 427 children attend including groups from Chelwood, Beecroft and Gordonbrock nurseries and Catherine House Nursery and Ladywell Playgroup. Activities included a fire pit, mud kitchen, mud painting, story telling, willow art and forest school.

**HILLY FIELDS ORCHARD:** The orchard has continued to be a success, but sadly Fran Rogers who was the instigator and champion of the orchard passed away in early January. On 19th January, 2014, LOP visited us and we had a pruning session and planted four additional trees, some replacing damaged or diseased and a new Malus 'Cat's Head' that has been dedicated to Fran's memory. The fourth Wassail was held 23rd February 2014, with musical contributions lead by Charlie Hart and supported by Phil and Dave Aylward.

Our new trees require regular watering and we have set up a rota for pairs to share the task each weekend.

Tom Moulton took over the lead on the orchard during Fran's illness and is now our orchard leader. Glendale have been providing the wood chip for mulching trees.

The additional fruit trees in the wider park, funded by London woodland and tree grant scheme have had one tree lost due to dog damage and two mulberries ring barked at higher level due to bad staking. Glendale will be responsible for replacing the mulberries.





**BIRD CHAMPION:** Now in its 7th year, regular bird surveys are undertaken by Tom and Sue. Our regular **BIG BIRD WATCH**, which this year took place in the park on 26th January, 2014 was well attended, despite the rain. The **DAWN CHORUS WALK** on 2nd April 2014 saw fine weather, and was similarly well attended lots of new faces.

### **BIODIVERSITY IMPROVEMENTS**

Tom has attended the Lewisham Biodiversity Meetings. We are continuing to build ecological improvements into the updated management plan and look to take these forward in the coming years.

**NATURE'S GYM:** Have carried out their regular work days in the park. They are mainly tasked with cutting back brambles, so that they can be kept at bay and clearing invasive thistles from the meadow. Their spring visit to the park also built a bug hotel in the shade garden.

**FRUITING HEDGE:** donated from the Tree Council, via the Brockley Street Wardens. The hedge was planted by volunteers to wrap round two sides of the orchard. Volunteers have been doing regular maintenance, mainly weeding.

**TREE STRATEGY:** our plans are still in draft form, awaiting the council's strategy. In the meantime we have met with John Thompson, who agreed to our request, particularly to stop the ongoing tree damage, that leaving grass long around the base of the trees could be implemented.

We have had mixed success with our sustainable plans to retain all fallen timber on site and to incorporate as part of a natural play strategy or for wildlife, as appropriate. Our request to retain the willow has been a great success and improved the use of this area of the park.

The fallen poplar proved near impossible, but maybe it would have been gone in its entirety if we had not tried. Greenscene have said that in the future, to go directly to them, so that all parties can meet and a sensible strategy can be adopted with the view to retaining fallen trees for play.

The fallen Lombardy poplar also had timber taken off site against our wishes.

The log circles, particularly the one by the cafe have been a great success and widely used.

Rachel gave a talk at the **BROCKLEY SOCIETY TREE CONFERENCE** on the trees of Hilly Fields.



**Memorial Tree for Park Keeper:** We collected money for a memorial tree for Keith Seabrook, our former park keeper. We purchased our own trees and found we had enough money for three. It was suggested we planted a rowan, so we now have three Rowans, two yellow berried, Joseph Rock and one red berried Sorbus aucuparia. Lee, the park keeper made up the team who planted the trees. They are being cared for by the cafe.

In line with our strategy, no trees are to be marked with a memorial plaque.

**Ongoing Park Management Plan:** due to the completion of many of the objectives on the original management plan, playground, eastern entrance gate, cafe (not claiming credit for that). it was agreed that the plan needed updating. This is to be circulated over next month and agreed at future meeting. The sketch drawing for a Hilly Fields sign should be ready sooner and we intend to apply for a notice board from the MPGA grant. The desire to develop a bespoke suite of furniture to match new signage and laser cut gates is to be reviewed in the light of the number of memorial benches which the council have insisted cannot currently be refused. These benches are only supposed to replace broken benches and only to be sited in sites of existing benches. No new locations are permitted. This means they should not site any further tropical hardwood benches.

**Midsummer Fayre:** for the third year running we had a stall at the Fayre. We used our new gazebo. Our Hilly Fields mug sold well as did the postcards. We had over 45 people try our quiz with prizes donated by Pistachios café and runners up won a mug.

### **Cricket Project:**

There are now two cricket clubs at Hilly Fields, Millfields and Hobgoblins.

There is a schedule of the latters fixtures on their website. They have kept us informed on their matches and are keen for new members.

### **Bowls**

Francis Drake Bowls Club and the friends continue to liaise and help promote each other's events. Some of us attended their family open day on 5th May, 2014. We have also been discussing how to improve security at the back of the bowls club, following a spate of vandalism.





**Octavia Hill Memorial Garden:** In December 2013, Rachel submitted a grant for new accessible path linking two new gates through the garden. Unfortunately the Veolia Grant was unsuccessful and they won't discuss why.

The gardens are regularly used by a forest school toddler group and some school groups and also for one off events such as the Wild Play Day, where they set up the fire pit. However, later in the day they can be taken over by partying adults, who caused grief to local residents this summer. After weeks of disruption, it was discovered that one of the revellers was rough sleeping in a tent.

Children planted the Chelsea donated plants to complement the existing planting and the previous year's Hampton Court Flower Show donations. Sadly they were mostly mown down in preparation for a Green Flag visit.

Apart from the replenishment with logs and bulbs little work has been undertaken post the Green Flag carnage.

**MGPA Bulb Planting:** Friends were successful with their application to the MGPA. The tulips and some ornamental daffodills were given to the bowls club, the Friends planted the remaining daffodills, iris, scilla in the shade garden or around the park.

## CAFE

**The** café continues to support the work of the friends and consult with proposed changes. Friends and cafe worked together organising the Green Fair, Wild play day and crucially provide a protected spot for our big bird watch. They again offered prizes for the regular midsummer fayre quiz.

They are supportive of our natural play, and help maintain the mud kitchen. They were also supportive of placing of cut logs from the storm felled trees, close to the cafe.

Greenscene had agreed to get the telegraph lines buried, as with other supplies in the park, but no progress has been made on this. Seems unlikely they will find a budget at this stage.

The friends are very grateful for this and their kind offer as a venue for our meetings.

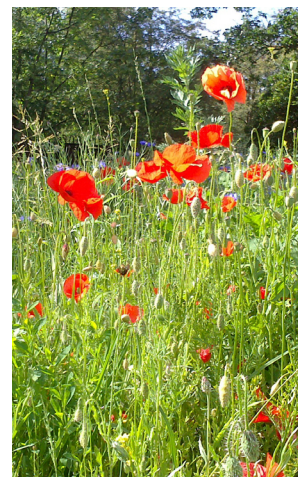


**Prendergast's Development:** Winter 2014 saw the removal of the portacabins from the park, November 2010, originally for two years, whilst the building works at Prendergasts school were undertaken.

At the planning meeting the further extension by two years saw a pro rata increase in the section 106 money, releasing the condition that it had to be spent on footpaths for the school and it was agreed that the friends be involved in the decision on how it was spent. Recently it came to light that the paperwork was not signed by the council, meaning the original £10,000 had to be spent on footpaths. Council say the additional £10,000 is not lost, but situation is completely unsatisfactory and we aren't convinced the park will see the money.

On removal of portacabins bare soil was left. The friends with agreement of the council, purchased a mix of cornflowers and poppies. On the 18th March, 2014 with students from Prendergasts, scattered them on the site. The Friends subsequently watered the meadow, there are signs of the cornflower about to bloom, poppies look a little scarcer. The planting will be repeated on a smaller scale during each anniversary year of the First World War.

**THE LANE:** as part of their responsibility under the lease of the land, Prendergasts have resurfaced the lane and footpath. Unfortunately, when the work was agreed, no-one informed the college of their requirement to consult with the Friends. The usual then tight timetable prevented much input. The post and rail which had not been repaired over the years was removed. They have also had yellow lines painted where the road turns to approach the school, in order to improve access. It was agreed with the Friends that no yellow lines would be put on the straight section of road leading up to the green gates, but the contractor painted one. At our request it has been painted over. Some drivers are now parking on the pavement to avoid yellow lines, we are pursuing action on this with the council and Glendale.





**The Lighting** in the park has been replaced with uglier higher columns. Prior to installation, the Friends pointed out that there were columns positioned under tree canopies. We requested that they were moved away from the trees. We also suggested that lights should only come on when needed and queried the change of colour to black columns.

We got nowhere. The new lighting was positioned further within many of the tree canopies and then a mass of poles appeared next to the columns with signage telling us which direction we should walk on the footpath and so on.

Greenscene confirmed that they should be removed. A meeting will be held imminently with Skanska to try to resolve.

**Other organisations in the Park:** There are is a steady increase of sporting activities in the park, and notably the very organsied national organisation Park run which holds a well attended 5K run every Saturday morning. The football camp on Saturday morning is also a regular fixture.

Tom Moulton has organised a regular Monday evening walk around the park with the Lewisham Healthy Walks group.

Along with longstanding activities such as the Saturday morning football, there are many more sporting activities are using the park, including pilates and boot camp. These are arranged by Glendale and we are none the wiser what is happening than any other park user.

**Green Flag:** as the park was awarded a high score in 2013, the green flag judges won't have a full visit this year, but will do a secret visit at some point in 2014. We have requested that the park is not blitzed in anticipation of any visit.

**Website:** We continue posting events on the website and have requested feedback on its use from webmaster Chris Wheal.

We have 150 on our email contact list and a 235 increase in friends on facebook.

There have been more queries and interest via facebook and the website this year.

Thanks to all those who have given their time, energy, expertise and good humour over the last year. Hilly Fields is a better place for it.

