



Friends of Hilly Fields Annual Report 2022

FRIENDS OF HILLY FIELDS CHAIR'S REPORT

December, 2022

We are an independent, voluntary local user group. We strive to promote amenity, history and wildlife in Hilly Fields, and have drawn up a long term vision with a strategy for fundraising and longterm park improvements. We are actively engaged through volunteer sessions with wildlife improvements, bulb and tree planting and we lobby the council for improved and sustainable management. We also have representation for the Lewisham biodiversity meetings, the Lewisham Friends' Green Space Forum and the London Friends' Green Networks (preserving and enhancing London's public green spaces).

REVIEW OF PAST YEARS ACTIVITIES (this report was prepared in 2023 to cover the year 2022)

Our community events are back on the calendar from the Big Bird Watch in January, the Wassail, Orchard pruning, summer fayre and monthly bird surveys and volunteering sessions. We did not establish our formal meeting structure post Covid, due to illness and time constraints, but were able to promote events and keep in touch via the notice board, facebook and emails. We met informally to plan events, discuss the feedback from tennis survey and for progressing nature conservation tasks. We continue to be represented at the Lewisham Green Space Forum and Symon K attended the latest meeting in person. Rachel also attended the 'meet the mayor' meeting by zoom on 23rd February, 2022.

BIODIVERSITY IMPROVEMENTS

Since 2006 our management plan has incorporated improved ecological habitats, new tree planting and improvements to the local biodiversity. In 2021 the council agreed a new action plan to help boost biodiversity, protect the borough's wildlife, and create a greener Lewisham. *"A Natural Renaissance 2021-2026", sets out how LBP will work with the Council, the local voluntary and community sector and other partners over the next five years to help protect local wildlife, plants and natural habitats".*

We are hopeful that our own biodiversity and sustainable plans for the park will be able to weave in, gain support and boost the council's objectives. Our volunteering events, surveys and engagement do all feed into the Lewisham Biodiversity Partnership statistics.

FLORA AND FAUNA

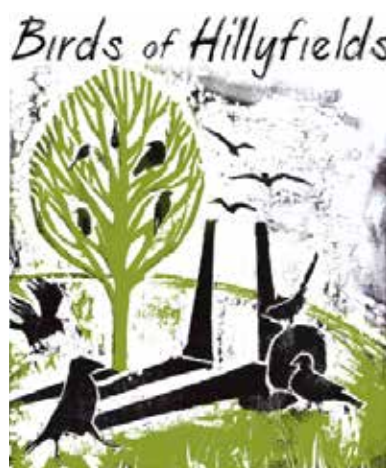
1. BIRD CHAMPION: In January 2022, we held our first Big Birdwatch event since 2020 and, not surprisingly after two years of Covid restrictions, we had probably the best ever attendance. It was particularly good to see so many children brought by their parents and making bird feeders at the Friends stall or coming round on the guided walk. A healthy total of 22 species were recorded including the nuthatch pair which have nested in the park recently, black-headed and common gulls, small flocks of starlings and goldfinches, plus chaffinches, goldcrests, a greenfinch, long-tailed tits and a redwing among all the usual regulars. Updates are posted on the blog: <http://hillyfields.blogspot.com/>

After that, we carried out a survey every month with an average count of 17 species per survey. Highlights included a sparrowhawk by the stone circle in February, a Red Kite flying at tree level over the park in May low enough to be mobbed by crows, eight swifts overhead in July and approx 130 starlings in November with some mini murmurations. Two pairs of blackcaps are likely to have nested in the park, great spotted woodpeckers were seen at various times including a juvenile in the Shade Garden and the nuthatches continued to pop up here and there.

Our booklet The Birds of Hilly Fields continued to sell well and a few copies are still available at Crofton Books who sell them for £5, and online: <https://supportmylocal.org/store/rachel-mooney/product/birds-of-hilly-fields/>. The Red Kite was the 52nd species we've since in the park since surveys began in 2007.



BGBW flyer



Birds booklet cover



Making bird feeders at BGBW

2. FAUNA: Butterflies seen in the park include the usual speckled woods in and around the little wood and the Lane, a pair of marbled whites in the upper south meadow (probably strays from the B&L cemeteries where they breed), red admirals here and there, many meadow browns and some gatekeepers in the south meadow. Emperor dragonflies could be seen cruising over the south meadow in June/July and a Jersey tiger moth was spotted on the lane in July.

3. FLORA: A plant survey of the south meadow was conducted on 2 July. A total of 48 flower species were recorded and 15 species of grass. Amongst the flowers were hedge bedstraw, lady's bedstraw and the hybrid version of those two plants, black horehound, cut-leaved crane's-bill and the lovely blue meadow crane's-bill, grass vetchling and meadow vetchling, common bird's-foot-trefoil, corky-fruited water-dropwort, meadow and creeping buttercup, oxford ragwort, hedge mustard, tansy and goat's-beard. The number of different grass species is remarkable, but the fertile grass does pose a problem for the meadow in that it reduces the growth and spread of other plants. The problem seems to be that the meadow is at the foot of a slope, thus water runs down and carries extra nutrients into the soil which overnourish the grass and the larger plants. We have planted yellow rattle which is semi-parasitic on grass and reduces its growth. This has had little effect to date, but we'll keep trying.

4. TREES: We began to re-look at the tree strategy which needs an update: it was first drafted 15 years ago to ensure new tree species and positions would complement the existing tree plan and character of the park, not block significant views and ensure the park had a more diverse age of trees, to ensure when natural loss occurred we weren't left tree-less. To this aim, this year we purchased four disease resistant elms, three sweet chestnuts, three wild service trees and one mulberry.

THE LANE: continues to develop (almost exclusively thanks so Sue and Symon - and Rob's hedge laying). The brambles continue to encroach in the area, but Sue has tirelessly kept the newly cleared area bramble free, allowing the new hawthorn to establish. Our plan was to re-create the 'twisted thorns' which predate the park (and are mentioned in Henry Williamson's novels) and sow native hedgerow seed with interplanted native provenance hypericums, primroses and wayfaring wild plants. However, the popularity of the planting has seen guerilla planting with garden species. As these tend to be good pollinators, we shall try to manage their co-existence. Maintenance has been ongoing over the summer, with particular attention to bramble removal.

VICARS HILL UPPER ENTRANCE: Sue has continued to maintain the wildflowers and bulbs at the Vicars Hill entrance. To improve the diversity of planting and reduce the maintenance, we purchased some smaller shrubs including rosa rugosas. We were also able to plant more bulbs in the area, thanks to the successful Bulbs for London MPGA with Taylors bulbs application. You do get what you're given! So they aren't typically native species, but included a welcome addition of Crocus tomassiana and some more snow drops and small daffodils. These have been planted at the Vicars Hill entrance and the lane. *(The tulips have been planted at the Montague/Hilly Fields Crescent Triangle).*

ECOLOGICAL CORRIDOR

As part of our commitment to improve the biodiversity, we continued to work on the outgrown hedging and shrubs along the back of Cliffview. Having dropped off the maintenance schedule, the hedging had become leggy with bare ground, offering poor screening and wildlife value. Rob lead the hedge laying and the initial stretch was a great success, but time commitments meant the next section wasn't undertaken. This year we held some sessions and wove in the vigorous growths and pruned as necessary. With no movement on care for the bothy, we cut down vegetation which was damaging the bothy roof and cleared the adjacent gutters. Colonies of sparrows are often seen in the hedge and hopping around the ground below for grubs.

Our previously agreed proposal to create a mini 'half' swale along the Hilly Fields Crescent boundary has been halted. We were hoping to use the existing onsite excavated soil to trial a small section (a couple of metres), but with the change of staff at Greenscene they have taken exception to it. They have not suggested a sustainable alternative to the excessive run off with soil after heavy rainfall. They did propose using traffic cones to stop the cars parking.



Newly planted foxgloves and woven dead hedging on the Lane Laid hedging and snowdrops

MEADOWS: We planted additional yellow rattle seedlings and sowed seed in the hay meadow this year, and had some success. To continue with the WWI meadow, we need it cutting and rotovating. The last time it was done by hand, but we need large numbers of volunteers with sturdy backs. We left it to its own devices this year and requested it be cut at the end of the year (2022) for the late flowering nectar from the hawkbit. The cutting did not happen.

We have had no success with Glendale taking on board the Plantlife's National campaign 'No Mow May'. We have been unable to explain to them that a short flower rich sward, such as a field of daisies or clover, which might come with one monthly cut is still an amenity area which can be actively used and does not need any grass collection post mowing. When Glendale said that it would cost more to mow monthly, we contacted The Plantlife Botanical Specialist, Dr Trevor Dines for advice, he said: "Leaving the grass unmown for a month will result in an extra few centimetres of growth, but a single normal grass cutting operation after that will without doubt return the sward it to its previous condition. After just a few days, the grass, clover and any other wildflowers will grow again and short, tidy sward will result (this would ideally be allowed to grow again for another month, before receiving another cut)".

He goes on to say:

"Amenity grasslands lend themselves well to a variety of cutting approaches that help accommodate all user's needs. The short, flower-rich sward that develops after a month without cutting will not curtail normal activities such as jogging and playing ball games, and areas can be rotated so there are always areas of newly cut short grass. These short-grass areas can comfortably sit alongside other long-grass areas that are uncut from March until August, providing ideal habitat for a wide range of wildlife".

It also conflicts with the Mayor's manifesto to "support biodiversity across our borough, aiming to increase wildlife in our parks and green spaces". We were able to flag up this conflict (after being shown their photos and ideas at the February meeting with the Mayor).

THE COPSE: Ongoing watering and mulching now means that the trees are mostly well established for their future. We spent some winter sessions thinning the new tree planting and ensuring mulch was clear of the base of the trees. Some of the trees have been transplanted into the the boundary hedge, but as they are mostly well established it becomes a little hard to move and then lots of work to settle them in a new location.

We mowed the white blossom avenue and some routes through the planting during the summer and Glendale did some of the area later in the summer. Wild flowers have been guerilla planted and naturalised and we have planted more fritillaries each year. Sue G and Henry (DoE volunteer) have been continuing to weed and mulch all the trees.

WALNUT WALK: the trees were planted as a celebration of 125 years of the National Trust and were to be maintained by Glendale. With no signs of watering and lots of die back Andrew began watering them throughout the drought of 2022. We had a joint care session with Sreet Trees for Living and a pruning session removing the dead wood from the canopy. .

HILLY FIELDS ORCHARD: Orchard pruning has been ongoing with the main winter prune for apples and pears on the morning of 7th February, 2022. Another successful wassail was held on 7th February later that afternoon - with thanks to Sarah Harrison, Phil Hall, Charlie Hart for organising and leading the music and our new singer to help lead, Liz. We also prune the plums when the season comes.

We received a donation of ten fruit trees as part of the Queen's Green Canopy. The trees are a commercial variety and on small rootstock, so realistically won't make much of a canopy. We took specialist advice from our expert Caroline on their locations. We helped plant with the donors and have included in the pruing programme.

We were successful with a bid from the council's greening fund for an orchard notice board, where we hope to provide information to help park users identify which fruit varieites and the best time of year to pick the fruits.



Marbled white in south meadow



Wassail in orchard

SHADE GARDEN: we undertook a couple of sessions to cutback overgrowing shrubs and remove brambles, we've planted bulbs and sown seeds over the years, but the popularity of the space means our work is trampled, so we have left for now.

NATURE'S GYM: Agreed to work on the encroaching brambles, which are in areas that are year on year left with no maintenance. Particular requests were for work around the orchard.

ONGOING MANAGEMENT PLAN: with ongoing progress the plan requires updating. Many of the initiatives are low cost and tie in with Lewishams 'Natural Renaissance', but are still difficult to get approval to progress.

We saw the roll out of new fox proof bins in the first phase of the greening fund, but are still awaiting our final bin (it was omitted from the Montagu and Hilly Fields Crescent corner and we are now suggesting it replaces the relatively new and failed (zintec) Broxap Bins on top of the hill) and another bin was located in the wrong place and needs relocating and the difficult to use dog bin on back of Cliffview was going to be replaced by relocated easier to use bin.

In 2022 we applied for funds to renovate the playground, but were told that this should be done by Glendale under the terms of its contract. We have flagged up that this isn't done and that timber equipment which is easy to renovate is left in disrepair. On request from Glendale we sent suggestions on how to renovate and improve the playability of the mound and slide, but have since heard nothing. We've still not seen the equipment or deck repaired, nor the brambles removed from the shrub bed.

Tennis and Basketball Courts

Marcus met with a sports specialist contractor to discuss options for the courts, with the view to understanding costs for renovating the court to help with a grant application (FOUR COURTS £150-160K +VAT including work to subbase, new permeable wearing course and fencing). We discussed with Greenscene on site. We investigated Sports for England Funding and Marathon Trust funding. Subsequently we found via a volunteer who had spotted a Telegraph Hill Meeting on social media that the council were undertaking a renovation of two tennis courts with LTA funding. In the absence of any council desire to discuss with the users, we undertook a survey to solicit opinion and understand how the courts were used. Details are attached at the end of report. Vince Buchanan wrote to say that in hindsight he should have told us and would keep us informed. *[We then heard via a resident that the proposals were going for approval on 28th February, 2023. Subsequently, Greenscene did not keep us updated on anything until an email late afternoon the day before work was due to start.]*

GRANTS

We submitted a greening fund application with requests for money to renovate the playground (as above) and to update the basketball court. Neither were successful. We were offered a grant (not sure how much) for a notice board for the orchard. We have now collated information on the trees, varieties and root stock sizes and background to the orchard and we are now planning the design work.

HILLY FIELDS COMMUNITY EXERCISE & WELLNESS PROJECT

We applied for funding from the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) - and in March 2022 received confirmation of an award for £17,514.

We are now putting the detail into the project, working alongside specialist gym equipment suppliers and coaches. Building on the existing area, we will remove and adapt the oldest equipment closest to the café and retain the green painted pieces. Our aim is to introduce new equipment which will allow more people to enjoy the benefits of exercise outdoors. Adding equipment that will be used is a primary focus.

To complement the exercise area we are exploring the following areas:

Walking routes in the park

Areas that can be used for mindful contemplation and yoga sessions in amongst nature

Once installed introductory gym sessions, as well as complementary yoga sessions will be offered.



Summer watering new elms



Team watering



Pruning die back on NT walnuts

Future Events: We have been investigating further grant funding for the complementary elements of the above, for the 'sheep in the park' event, for progressing the hedge laying to the Veda Road boundary, a tree trail and for a school engagement project.

Parkrun Bench: After a very long process, we finally managed to take delivery and install the sustainable social bench in memory of Lucreta la Piere (<https://www.parkrun.org.uk/hillyfields-juniors/news/2018/11/28/lucreta-la-piere/>). Glendale staff, Steve, Viera and *one other* were invaluable help on the day. Colloquial Collective filmed the installation, with interviews.

Green Flag: we were sent a national document to find the outcome amongst the long lists. Hilly Fields retained their flag, there was no official visit.

MIDSUMMER FAYRE: 2022. We had our stall and a new range of bags, bird booklet and postcards for sale. We discussed ongoing ideas and plans with visitors and had some interesting discussions with ideas for updated exercise equipment, the basketball court and tree planting. Over 50 people took part in the quiz, prizes were provided by Hilly Fields Cafe.

STORY TELLING and SEA SHANTIES: following a visit to our Wassail, we were offered free story telling from Beverley Casebow who was accompanied by Sarah Harrison on violin to some rounding renditions of sea shanties. It was a well attended event on 23rd June.

CAFE: continues to support the work of the friends. The friends are very grateful for their continued support in selling our postcards and helping the fundraising, donating prizes and their kind offer as a venue for our meetings. .

Local Businesses **Magi's Gifts** and **Crofton Books** continue to help us with fundraising, by selling our tote bags and birds of Hilly Fields booklets respectively. We were delighted that we had sufficient funds raised from Magi's Gifts to purchase a new mulberry tree. We are very grateful for this extra funding as park events and filming (via Lewisham Film Office/filmfixer no longer offer the funding that we had understood was requisite for use of the park).

PARK KEEPER

We said good bye to Lee who was looking forward to his new job. Glendale have employed a new park keeper, Thieric

VOLUNTEERS: Many thanks to all the volunteers, organised and others who have turned out to help with planting, pruning, weeding, mulching, watering, litter picking, topping up table tennis and exercise equipment woodchip, bringing their old pans for the mud kitchen, replacing our logs to the mud kitchen, hedge laying, pruning, wassailing, providing the music, helping with workshops, surveying the meadow and the birds, checking grant applicatinos, donating surplus native plants and spare tools. We have some tireless volunteers and are very fortunate in having such a dedicated core group of volunteers who have put in over a **1650 hours** of their time (half of which is probably Sue).

As ever Hilly Fields is a better place for your energy, time, expertise and good humour.



Signage for event



Story telling and sea shanties



Stall at midsummer fayre