

# The Friends of Queen's Park Gardens (FQPG) Annual Report 2019

## 1. Background summary

The Friends of Queen's Park Gardens (FQPG) re-formed in 2012 (a group had existed previously in 2005/6). This was in response to complaints by several local residents on the state of the Wildlife Area (which had been created in 2007/2008) and a request by Westminster City Ward Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg for people to come forward and help restore and maintain it.

The objective of FQPG activities in Queen's Park Gardens (QPG) is to:

- Provide a peaceful outdoor space for the local community to enjoy
- Encourage an appreciation of nature in the local community through the provision of an attractive, safe and sustainable area
- Provide and maintain a habitat for native species in the Wildlife Area
- Encourage community involvement in the use, development and maintenance of QPG

Although the main focus of FQPG activities is within QPG, the FQPG will consider work on other green projects and incentives in Queen's Park Ward.

## 2. Who we are: our people

### a. FQPG Committee

Our committee aims to ensure that the objective of FQPG is met, by providing co-ordination and support to gardening volunteers. All of the committee members are volunteers who give their time free of charge and without any remuneration.

In 2019, the committee comprised Astrid de Cosson as chair, Simon Walton as treasurer (including managing Time Credits), and Alison Low Madigan (who joined the committee at the beginning of the year).

At the 2019 AGM Astrid gave notice of her intention to resign as chair by end of 2019 at the latest, although saying that she planned to continue as a gardening volunteer.

At the end of 2019, Ray Lancashire (an active FQPG volunteer, former FQPG chair, and a Queen's Park Community Councillor) kindly volunteered to take on the post of chair, an offer that was warmly welcomed by the committee. Ray takes over as chair from 1 January 2020.

We would like to thank Astrid for her tremendous contribution to FQPG during her time as chair, co-ordinating and inspiring gardening sessions, liaising with other organisations and many additional hours of administrative support.

### b. Gardening volunteers

The gardening work of FQPG is undertaken thanks to a dedicated base of gardening volunteers,

comprising six–10 local residents, who take part in volunteer sessions throughout the year. We are also joined at times by other volunteers and we are also grateful to anyone who gives their time, whether regularly, for a few hours, or a single session.

Although the volunteers are not paid, we are lucky enough to be part of the Time Credits Scheme, whereby volunteers receive a time credit for each hour worked in the park. These are much appreciated by the volunteers and used for various cultural and sports activities, as well as for learning opportunities.

#### **c. Communications co-ordinator**

We are grateful to another volunteer, Susan Chedgely, who manages all FQPG communications (website, blog, twitter, notice boards) as well as sharing administration of emails etc.

As at 1 January 2020, the Twitter account has 417 followers (compared with 368 followers in January 2019), with 49 new followers, which equates to an increase of 11.75% over last year. We have 145 Facebook followers and 130 Facebook page likes, up from 104 over the same time period.

### **3. Key partnerships**

We work closely with the following groups and organisations.

#### **a. Queen’s Park Community Council (QPCC)**

We are particularly grateful to the Queen’s Park Community Council for supporting the FQPG in many ways, including most importantly funding through their grant scheme

In March 2018, we received a grant of £400, of which we spent £354.62 within the 12 months March 2018–March 2019. The remaining £45.38 was carried over into our 2019 budget and spent within 2019.

In March 2019, we received a grant of £354.62 in response to our grant application for the year.

This funding is invaluable for enabling us to carry out our work through the purchase of tools, seeds, plants, compost, etc (as detailed below).

#### **b. Westminster City Council and Continental parks management team**

Close working with Westminster City Council and their parks management contractors Continental is essential as they have overall responsibility for the maintenance of Queen’s Park Gardens.

We are grateful for the support they have given us over the year, including gifts of plants for the Wildlife Area (witch hazel and hops) and the triangular rose bed (lavender); also for opening up the yard giving us access to water and for cutting the wildflower meadow at the end of the growing season to help the spread of seeds for the following year.

However, more work is needed to ensure our work is more closely aligned (see challenges, below).

#### **c. HCGA**

HCGA (Healthy Community Gardens Association, previously Hammersmith Community Gardens Association) is another key partner, running complementary volunteer gardening sessions in Queen’s Park Gardens on different days and in different parts of the garden from FQPG.

We are grateful to HCGA for sharing their gardening expertise with us and we are keen to strengthen this relationship.

#### **d. Other networks/organisations**

Simon Walton continued to attend at London Friends Groups meetings and QPCC meetings on behalf of FQPG.

FQPG continued to support Grow-Wild Website (run by Kew Gardens to encourage people to visit and volunteer at green spaces near them).

FQPG supported the Silver Saturday/Sunday initiative and ran a gardening session designed for older people (however it rained and nobody other than local volunteers turned up).

FQPG are also proud to support London as a National Park City.

## 4. Our activities and achievements in 2019

### a. Gardening sessions: volunteer hours

We aim to run at least one gardening session a month in the Queen's Park Gardens, focusing in particular on the Wildlife Area and other areas of the garden that are not within the remit of Continental or HCGA.

In 2019, we ran two or three sessions most months from spring to autumn, and somewhat less frequently during the winter. This variation reflects seasonal gardening needs and weather conditions.

In 2019, a total of 266 volunteer hours were recorded. These hours reflect time spent gardening; most of this work was undertaken in group sessions, supplemented by additional work by individuals, especially for regular watering during the summer. They do not include time spent on other activities such as administration, procurement of materials and organisation.

	2019	2018	2017
<b>Quarter 1 (January-March)</b>	60 hours	76 hours	64 hours
<b>Quarter 2 (April-June)</b>	80 hours	121 hours	94 hours
<b>Quarter 3 (July-September)</b>	70 hours	99 hours	131 hours
<b>Quarter 4 (October-December)</b>	46 hours	64 hours	75 hours
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>266 hours</b>	<b>360 hours</b>	<b>364 hours</b>

The drop in total volunteer gardening hours in the past year reflects a reduction in the length of gardening sessions on Saturdays from three hours to two hours. We are planning to increase the session length to three hours in 2020.

### b. Gardening work undertaken in 2019

Over the course of 2019, we focused our gardening work in three main areas. In addition to continuing to develop and maintain the Wildlife Area and the triangular rose bed near the Fourth Avenue entrance, we added the circular bed near the Third Avenue entrance to our regular activities. This bed had previously been largely neglected for many years apart from pruning by Continental of the New Zealand broadleaf shrub in the centre of the bed.

Our planting schemes are designed to be largely self-sustaining and sustainable, with the aim of maximising the impact while taking account of our limited financial resources and the small number of volunteers we have.

FQPG activities and achievements within the gardens in 2019 have included:

#### Wildlife area

- Planting hops and foxgloves
- Seeding and weeding the wildflower meadow
- Maintaining the compost and leaf mulch heaps – and using the results to enrich the soil in other parts of the garden
- Maintaining and repairing the birdbath on top of the bug hotel
- Spreading woodchip on the paths in the Wildlife Area

### **Triangular rose bed**

- Growing plants (marigolds, nasturtiums) from seeds in sheltered indoor spaces away from the park in the winter and transplanting seedlings into the park in the spring/summer
- Planting new rose bushes
- Maintaining and pruning rose bushes
- Spreading mushroom compost manure to promote growth of the roses
- Persistent watering and weeding

### **Circular flowerbed**

- Planting a mixture of annuals and perennials, including marigolds, pansies, calendula, poppies, clary sage, petunias and a range of other bedding plants, supported by watering and weeding
- Planting bulbs (croci, daffodils and tulips) for flowering in spring 2020 and beyond

### **Other activities**

- Pruning the hedge alongside the Wildlife Area
- Planting marigolds along the fence in the Children's Play Area
- Providing general gardening and maintenance support in other parts of the garden, including leaf sweeping and litter picking

### **c. Special events**

As in previous years, we have taken an active role in a number of community events in the gardens, including:

- Participation at the Queen's Park Summer Festival, including running a stall and a nature treasure hunt in the Wildlife Area to help children identify different plants and trees (prizes were strawberries and grapes)
- Participation in the Queen's Park Winter Festival, including running a stall
- We also ran a bird count for the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch in January 2019. We were lucky enough to get a member of the RSPB (Andrew Peel) to help us identify birds, and we spent a wonderful hour counting and learning about birds.

## **5. Special thanks**

Over the past year, we have been indebted to the generosity of many supporters. We would like to give particular thanks to the following groups and individuals whose contributions have made a great difference to us:

- Father David Ackerman of St John's the Evangelist Church Kensal Green, who kindly donated £100 to FQPG in 2019, which enabled us to buy a crab apple tree, rose shrubs and sheers, purchases that would otherwise have been beyond our means
- Charlotte Chesney for gardening advice and various plants for the Wildlife Area and triangular rose bed, and for propagating new willow whips to try to repair damage to the willow dome in the Wildlife Area
- Ulla Johnson of HCGA for her invaluable horticultural advice; and Cathy Maund and Ulla Johnson, who organise corporate workgroups in the gardens and have turned the compost heap several times, as well as other tasks that we lack the muscles and manpower for
- Ryan Dalton (Queen's Park Community Hub) for gardening equipment and for kindly hosting our AGM
- Meanwhile Gardens for gifts of seedlings and plants for the circular bed
- Pritesh Mistry of Good Gym Brent for bringing his group of volunteers to help in the gardens on a couple of Monday evenings in the summer
- Rob Dowling from The Royal Parks for visiting the garden and sharing his horticultural knowledge, in particular for improving the biodiversity of the wildflower meadow
- Simonetta Wenkert at Ida for her kindness on our AGM day
- Thompsons of Crews Hill for reducing their delivery costs for mushroom compost for the triangular rose bed

## **6. Feedback from park users**

One of the greatest pleasures we enjoy when we are gardening is the chance to meet other garden users. The gardens are extremely well used, especially on fine Saturday mornings, when others spending time in the gardens include keep-fit groups, families and children, people with friends, people alone or in groups wandering through and others just enjoying a quiet place to sit down.

Many people stop and talk to us, are interested in what we do and appreciate the results of the work we do in making the garden a more pleasant and safer place to be. These conversations are also an opportunity to share our enthusiasm and knowledge about gardening with others.

In addition to the many other people who visit the park and use it for a range of activities, two local pre-school groups and a primary school use the Wildlife Area on a weekly basis with excellent reports.

We also get various requests from private parties to use the Wildlife Area for picnics or birthdays, and as long as they do not exclude other people from entering the area, and clear up after themselves, we are delighted for them to use it.

## **7. Challenges**

### **a. Vandalism and antisocial behaviour**

FQPG ensure sight lines are maintained within the Wildlife Area and encourage use of the area to discourage antisocial behaviour.

However, vandalism and antisocial behaviour continue to be an issue throughout QPG, and litter is a persistent problem. Vandalism in 2019 included damage to trees and shrubs in the Wildlife Area, some of which was irreparable. The information sign in the Wildlife Area was also pulled out of the ground repeatedly, despite being firmly weighted with a concrete base.

Reports of the area being used for dogs continues to be a problem, and we are thankful to Crissie Chambers of Canine Culture and the Westminster wardens for keeping an eye on the Wildlife Area during their dog patrols.

### **b. Coordination with other groups**

While we enjoy good partnership working with the park management organisations, some of the challenges of the past year have highlighted where better communication and closer coordination are needed.

There were difficulties with the access to the yard and water tap being locked during some of our Saturday sessions, meaning that during the hot weather we had to transport water into the gardens. We are grateful to members of the Continental team for opening up the yard and giving us access to water. However, we would appreciate a more sustainable solution to enable us to access the tap more easily.

Difficulties have also arisen from work undertaken by other groups in the Wildlife Garden that has not been communicated with us in advance, such as the chopping down of trees and shrubs that we had planted/maintained, trampling on beds where things were growing, and the dumping of things on the compost heap. This has resulted in damage and additional work being needed to redress it.

Another challenge in the past year has arisen from new financial processes introduced by QPCC. The change has meant that instead of receiving the QPCC grant in total once it was approved, payment is now in arrears based on receipts following payment. While we fully appreciate the need for tight financial governance, the introduction of the new system has added to the time FQPG committee members have had to spend in financial administration and has put added financial pressure on FQPG when waiting for repayment.

### **c. Volunteer numbers**

The amount of work we are able to undertake is dependent on the number of volunteers joining the gardening sessions and we are keen to encourage more people to join FQPG.

## **8. Looking ahead: plans and priorities for 2020**

Projects proposed for next year include:

### **Extending gardening sessions**

- In order to increase the number of hours we spend working in the garden and thereby increase the impact we have on the garden, the gardening sessions run by Ray Lancashire will be extended to three hours from two hours. Gardening sessions run by other volunteers might be two hours or three hours, depending on availability.

### **Wildlife area**

- Willow dome: rebuild and replant the willow dome, returning it to its former glory following damage due to vandalism that has happened several years in a row.
- Bug hotel: reinforce the bug hotel, filling empty spaces in the structure with more wood logs and drilling holes for bugs to nest.
- Wildflower meadow: continue to work on encouraging a greater diversity of wildflowers to take root and reduce the amount of grass, with a focus on bee-friendly natives.
- Continue to maintain and enhance the wildlife area.

### **Triangular rose bed**

- Fill out the border of the triangular rose bed with more lavender.
- Continue planting with annuals such as nasturtiums and English marigolds, which provide colourful flowers over a long period of the summer and are relatively low maintenance.
- Consider adding other additional plants to add more variety.

### **Circular bed**

- Continue to develop this bed, building on the work started in 2019, with a mixture of perennials and low-maintenance annuals to provide long-lasting colour.

### **Tools and equipment**

- Review equipment and see what is needed for next year both to replace damaged tools and to better equip us for specific tasks; priorities include a hoe and leaf rakes.
- We will look at how we can work with the HCGA gardening team to share access to tools in the longer term, once the hut in QPG has been refurbished. But the timeframe for this is uncertain.

### **Events**

- Participate in 2020 RSPB Bird Watch (27 January 2020).
- Participate in Summer and Winter Festivals.

### **Environmentally sustainable practices**

- Water bottles: to aid in cleaning up the environment, we have decided to stop providing water in plastic containers. Alternatives include asking volunteers to bring refillable water bottles, or purchasing two refillable water bottles to take to each gardening session (bottles will need to be sterilised before each session). Hopefully the refurbished hut will provide a longer-term solution with access to drinkable water.
- Paper: we already use very little paper other than for notices; to further reduce paper use, we will print these on both sides.
- Prizes at Summer Festival: as in the last two years, we will give fresh fruit such as strawberries as the prizes for winners of the nature treasure hunt, rather than anything plastic wrapped.

### **Volunteer recruitment**

- We will continue to search for new volunteers to assist both with gardening and with administrative tasks, supported by social media and direct communications with local residents.

## 9. Finances

### a. Funding

As referred to above, our funding in 2019 was generously provided by the following sources:

- **QPCC 2018 grant:** residue of £45.38 from grant of £400 carried over into 2019
- **QPCC 2019 grant:** £354.62
- **Fr David Ackerman of St John the Evangelist Church Kensal Green donation:** £100

### b. Accounts

Balance on 1 January 2019	£207.73
Balance on 31 December 2019	£12.21
Total Spent (2019) (see attached for summary)	£550.50