

The Friends of Queen's Park Gardens (FQPG) Annual Report and Accounts 2021



1. Background: why we exist and what we aim to do

Queen's Park Gardens is a green oasis at the heart of the Queen's Park ward (Westminster), with consistently the best scores for air quality tests in our area.

The park is much used and appreciated by a diverse and multicultural range of local residents, including families with children, young people for sports, dog walkers, school groups, and people of all ages who come to exercise, walk through or just to enjoy some quiet time surrounded by nature.

The Friends of Queen's Park Gardens (FQPG) was re-formed in 2012 (a group had existed previously in 2005/06). This was in response to complaints by several local residents on the state of the Wildlife Area (which had been created in 2007/08) and a request by Westminster City Ward Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg for volunteers to come forward and help restore and maintain it.

The objectives of FQPG activities in Queen's Park Gardens (QPG) are 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 our main priority is within the garden, we may also consider work on other green projects in Queen's Park Ward.

2. Who we are: our people

1. FQPG committee

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

In 2021, the committee comprised Ray Lancashire as chair, Simon Walton as treasurer (including managing Time Credits), and Alison Low Madigan.

2. Gardening volunteers

The gardening work of FQPG is undertaken by local residents, who come together with a shared pleasure in gardening and the hope of giving pleasure to others as a result of their work.

We aim to run at least one gardening session a month in the Queen's Park Gardens, focusing in particular on the areas of the garden that are not within the remit of Continental Landscapes (contracted by Westminster Council) and Hammersmith Community Gardens Association (HCGA, contracted by Queen's Park Community Council).

The FQPG volunteers are not paid, but we were part of the Tempo Time Credits Scheme in Westminster until it ended at the end of 2021.

We welcome new volunteers, whether they would like to garden with us regularly or occasionally.

In normal years, our gardening sessions are on Saturday mornings and run for two to three hours with a core group of six to 10 volunteers, joined at times by other volunteers. However, in 2021, the Friends of Queen's Park Gardens were, for the second year running, considerably impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic (as described in **Section 4: Our activities and achievements in 2021**, below).

We are grateful to another volunteer, Susan Chedghey, who updates our website and Twitter account. As at 31 December 2021, the FQPG Twitter account has 523 followers (an increase of 35 compared with 488 followers at the end of December 2020). We have 337 Facebook followers (120 more than at the end of 2020) and we had 296 Facebook page likes during the year, up from 181 over the same period a year ago.

3. Key partnerships and funding

The Friends of Queen's Park Gardens do not generate any direct income and we are extremely grateful for the funding and partnership support we receive from the following organisations.

1. Queen's Park Community Council (QPCC)

The Friends of Queen's Park Gardens report into the Queen's Park Community Council (QPCC) through the QPCC Place Committee and are represented on the committee by the FQPG chair, QPCC Councillor Ray Lancashire.

We are grateful to the QPCC for supporting the FQPG in many ways, including funding. In the past, FQPG received funding from QPCC through their grant scheme. In 2020, this changed and in 2020 and 2021 FQPG was provided with QPCC funding under a new budgetary arrangement via HCGA.

2. Hammersmith Community Gardens Association (HCGA)

Hammersmith Community Gardens Association (HCGA) is contracted and funded by QPCC to organise and run gardening-related activities in the area, including volunteer gardening sessions, events and plant sales.

In 2020, HCGA's contract with QPCC was expanded to include a budget to enable them to increase the support they give to a wider range of community gardening projects, including the work of FQPG. We are grateful to HCGA for their funding support during 2021, which has enabled the group to purchase plants, bulbs and tools and continue gardening during this difficult period.

We would like to give special thanks to Cathy Maund and Ulla Johnson, both for supporting our

activities through the new funding and procurement arrangements and for sharing their gardening expertise with us.

3. 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 very much appreciate the support of both the council and the contract teams.

A much-appreciated enhancement to the park this year has been the provision of a water fountain. This has refreshed many visitors, including FQPG volunteers during thirsty gardening sessions on hot summer days, as well as reducing single-use plastic water bottles, one of our sustainability objectives.

4. Other networks/organisations

FQPG treasurer and volunteer gardener Simon Walton continued to participate in 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 are also proud to support London as a National Park City.

4. Our activities and achievements in 2021

1. Gardening safely during the Covid-19 pandemic

2021 was the second year of the global Covid-19 pandemic. As in 2020, much of the year was subject to varying levels of government-mandated restrictions limiting many activities and interactions. Throughout the year, the Friends of Queen's Park Gardens complied with government requirements to ensure that gardening was carried out safely to protect themselves and others from the risk of catching or spreading the virus.

As 2021 started, the country was in a national lockdown, with significant restrictions on many activities and limitations on contacts between people. Individuals were nonetheless permitted, and indeed encouraged, to take regular outside exercise. In line with arrangements initiated in March 2020 (at the time of the first Covid-19 lockdown), the Friends of Queen's Park Gardens agreed it was not appropriate to work formally as a group.

However, a small number of local residents (some, but not all of whom had been regular volunteers with FQPG previously) decided individually to use some of their permitted outdoor exercise time each week for gardening in Queen's Park Gardens.

Although these individuals weren't officially volunteering as part of FQPG, they spent a combined total of 567 hours gardening in Queen's Park Gardens in 2021 and their activities are included here in the FQPG Annual Report, because they took on gardening work that would in other circumstances have been carried out by FQPG.

These informal gardening sessions took place on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. The individual volunteers who opted to garden in Queen's Park Gardens during the pandemic chose to do so because of their enjoyment of gardening as well as the considerable benefits of gardening exercise for their physical health and mental wellbeing.

They also wanted to make a positive contribution to the wellbeing of people in the local community, by ensuring that the garden continued to be well-maintained and as beautiful as possible – something they felt was particularly important during a period of heightened stress for many people, and when so many other leisure venues were closed and activities banned because of Covid.

During periods of tightened restrictions, physical distancing was maintained by the gardening volunteers, with people working mostly in separate beds and using their own tools (rather than FQPG tools).

Other FQPG gardeners came separately at other times, doing activities such as filling the bird feeders.

2. What we did in 2021: gardening in Queen's Park Gardens

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.

During 2021, the volunteer gardeners continued to maintain existing areas of FQPG work, as well as developing new beds, chosen because of their high visibility within the garden.

Triangular rose bed (by Fourth Avenue entrance)

This is the most mature of the flower beds gardened by the FQPG volunteers, with a mix of rose bushes, spring-flowering bulbs, lavender and other low-level bedding plants and perennials.



In 2021, we:

- Planted six new rose bushes (three David Austin Hyde Hall and three David Austin Gertrude Jekyll), purchased on our behalf by Hammersmith Community Gardens Association (HCGA) with funding from HCGA/Queen's Park Community Council (QPCC).
- Planted two additional rose bushes kindly donated by Phil Weitzman and Henie Lustgarten.
- Maintained the other rose bushes, which make up most of the bed, including regular deadheading and pruning, which successfully prolonged their flowering season from spring into the late autumn.
- Grew marigolds from seed and collected the seeds at the end of the season for planting and flowering in 2022.
- Planted crocus and daffodil bulbs for flowering in spring 2022, adding to bulbs planted in previous years.
- Dug, weeded, watered and hunted for bindweed a lot!

Circular flowerbed (by Third Avenue entrance)

This bed is in a very visible location, especially for people arriving from Third Avenue. It was first adopted by the FQPG volunteers in 2019, after several years of being overgrown with weeds. Planting in 2019 and 2020 included a range of spring-flowering bulbs and seeds for a mix of perennials and annuals, which continued flowering in 2021.

In 2021, we:

- Maintained and tended the bed, including weeding, watering and cutting back plants throughout the spring and summer to extend the flowering season.
- Pruned the central bush – a big thank you to Nigel Snuggs on a very wobbly ladder.
- Planted tulip, crocus and daffodil bulbs for flowering in spring 2022.
- Planted Nigella seeds donated by Charlotte Chesney for flowering in summer 2022.



Railings bed (along the play area close to Fourth Avenue entrance)

This bed is in a prominent position, especially for people arriving in the garden from Fourth Avenue and for the many families and children who use the play area. It is a narrow, shallow bed, which makes it hard to grow many plants, with the added challenge of squirrels and foxes, which seem to enjoy digging up everything that is planted there.

We are very grateful to Claire Hickey, who brought new life to the bed in 2020, whose efforts during 2021 have helped transform the bed and who also donated many of the plants in the bed.

In 2021, we:

- Sowed marigold seeds, collected from the previous year.
- Grew calendula, rudbeckia and Californian poppies from seed, along with sweet alyssum, pink dianthus, chrysanthemums, verbena and nicotiana, many of which were donated by the volunteer gardeners.
- Enriched the bed with compost from our compost heap.
- Planted daffodil, crocus and iris bulbs and bluebell seeds in the autumn for flowering in spring 2022, in addition to bulbs planted in 2020.
- Weeded a lot.



Thank you to David Sears at Westminster Council for providing edging along the inner rim of the bed.

Benches bed (along the main path from Third Avenue entrance to Fourth Avenue entrance)

This is a highly-visible bed, which for several years was an eyesore with only a few straggly shrubs and a lot of weeds. Due to the overhang of some large London plane trees, it is a very shady bed, which makes it unsuitable for many plants.

In 2020, the gardening volunteers decided to revitalise the bed by planting spring bulbs and wallflowers, which first flowered in spring 2021.

In 2021, we:

- Continued to maintain and develop the bed.
- Planted evergreen plants that thrive in shadier woodland positions and flower at different times of year, including camellias, ferns, hellebores, foxgloves and daphne.
- Pruned existing shrubs and bushes.
- Dug over the ground area and enriched the soil with compost from our compost heap.
- Planted daffodil and tulip bulbs, for first blooming in spring 2022, adding to bulbs planted in 2020 which had their first flowering in 2021.



Wildlife Area

With a focus on attracting pollinators, insects and birds, the aim of the Wildlife Area is to provide a natural environment with native English plants – in other words to create a corner of countryside in central London. As an enclosed area within the park, it is regularly used by local nursery schools.

For many years, it has been at the heart of the gardening work carried out by the Friends of Queen's Park Gardens. However, this became more challenging during 2020 and 2021 for a number of reasons, especially during the Covid lockdowns, when schools and many other sports and leisure venues were closed.

The increased use of the wildlife area by local residents and other visitors for picnics, exercise and as a place for children to play made it more difficult for gardeners to work with appropriate physical distancing. As a result, less work was carried out in the Wildlife Area than would normally be the case. While it was wonderful that the garden was so popular and appreciated as a green space, the increased use of the wildflower meadow made it more difficult for plants to thrive and many died.

Several weeks of drought in both 2020 and 2021 also impacted on the growing season.

In addition, the garden sadly suffered from quite a bit of vandalism, especially in 2020, with long-term consequences.

In 2021, we:

- Focused on revitalising the Wildlife Area and in particular the wildflower meadow.
- Sowed seeds collected from plants growing in other parts of the gardens during the winter and spring.
- Transplanted wildflower plants from the more formal triangular rose bed, where they were unwanted 'weeds' to help regenerate the wildflower meadow – an excellent example of our holistic approach to gardening by recycling plants within the garden.
- Transplanted plants from the Rose Garden (which is tended by HCGA) into the wildflower meadow with the agreement and advice of Ulla Johnson at HCGA.
- Planted foxgloves and teasels in the wildflower meadow, generously donated by Charlotte Chesney in the autumn for flowering in 2022.
- Repaired damage caused by vandals wherever possible and cleared away broken trees and plants where the damage was irreparable, including the much-loved willow dome.
- Maintained the compost and leaf mulch heaps – using the results to enrich the soil in other parts of the garden.
- Cleared leaves in the autumn to make the paths safer for visitors and improve growth in the wildflower meadow. The leaves were added to the compost heap, where they will mulch down to be used for enriching the soil in future years.



We would like to give particular thanks to Westminster Council and their contractors at Continental for providing a long hose pipe, which extends from the tap in the yard by the park hut to the Wildlife Area. From mid-summer, this transformed our ability to water the wildflower meadow and other areas in the gardens, considerably reducing the time needed for filling and carrying watering cans from bed to bed.

Thank you also to Westminster Council and Continental for rebuilding the two compost bins, replacing the previous ones, which had rotted away over time, and to Ulla Johnson and HCGA for arranging for the compost heaps to be turned.

Other activities

- Pruning the hedge alongside the Wildlife Area.
- Providing general gardening and maintenance support in other parts of the garden, including leaf sweeping and litter picking.

3. Special Queen's Park Community Council (QPCC) events

Queen's Park Summer Festival (7 August 2021)

The Queen's Park Summer Festival, held in Queen's Park Gardens and organised by Queen's Park Community Council, is one of the highlights of the neighbourhood calendar with a wide range of stalls and live entertainment for local residents and visitors of all ages.

The Friends of Queen's Park Gardens hosted a stall and organised activities for families at the 2021 QPCC Summer Festival. This followed a year (2020) when the festival had been cancelled due to Covid-19. Despite heavy rain in the morning, the festival was very well-attended in the afternoon.

Queen's Park Winter Festival (4 December 2021)

The Winter Festival is another event organised by QPCC and held in Queen's Park Gardens. As part of the preparations for the QPCC Winter Festival, Friends of Queen's Park Gardens volunteers took part in the Gardens Clean-up Session organised by QPCC, collecting litter and raking up leaves. The litter was divided into recyclables and general rubbish.

5. Special thanks

As in previous years, we have been indebted to the generosity of many supporters, including our partner organisations listed above.

We are also extremely grateful to Ray Lancashire, as Chair of FQPG, and Simon Walton, as Treasurer. These are important administrative roles for the overall management of the Friends and we are very lucky to benefit from the generous contribution of their professional expertise and their time.

In 2021, we would like to give particular thanks to Simon Walton and Claire Hickey (pictured below), and also to Nigel Snuggs, Helen Mulvein and Charlotte Chesney, who have all made an outstanding contribution to Queen's Park Gardens, gardening on cold wet days as well as in sunny weather throughout the year, bringing huge benefits to the many local people who use the gardens.



A big thank you to Nigel, Charlotte and Claire for their many donations of plants and seeds, which have added diversity and colour to our planting in many parts of the garden.

Without them and the other volunteers, the gardens would have become neglected and overgrown with weeds, while other plants would have died off from lack of watering.



Thank you also to everyone who has provided photographs of the gardens and gardeners – including Jill Forgham, Claire Hickey and Simon Walton.

6. Feedback from park users

One of the greatest pleasures we enjoy when we are gardening is the chance to meet other visitors to the gardens.

The gardens have been much used during the year, especially at times when other leisure venues were closed due to Covid restrictions. Many people have made a point of stopping and thanking the volunteer gardeners, expressing their appreciation of their work to make the park a more pleasant and safer place to be.

7. Looking ahead: our plans for 2022

Projects proposed for the coming year include:

Triangular rose bed

We will continue to maintain and develop this bed, including:

- Sowing seeds for nasturtiums and marigolds harvested from last year as these provide colourful flowers over a long period of the summer and are relatively low maintenance.
- Adding other additional plants to add more variety.
- Continuing to monitor the two winter-flowering cherry trees in the centre of the bed. These seem to be in poor health and could be heading towards the end of their natural lifespan. We will take this forward with HCGA and Westminster Council.

Circular bed

We will continue to develop this bed, building on the work started in 2019, 2020 and 2021, with a mixture of spring bulbs, perennials and low-maintenance annuals to provide long-lasting colour.

Railings bed

We will continue to work on developing this bed, in particular selecting low-level, long-flowering plants, including plants sown from seeds harvested from previous years.

Benches bed

We will work with HCGA to source and purchase more flowering plants to bring colour to this bed across several seasons. This is a particularly shady bed which limits planting options. Ideas under consideration include aconites for spring, snapdragons, and wild geraniums for ground cover.

Wildlife Area

We will continue to maintain and enhance the Wildlife Area – including:

- Laying woodchip on the path which has become very muddy and slippery, working in partnership with HCGA to source a reliable ongoing source of woodchip, preferably locally.
- Rebuilding the bug hotel, which was damaged beyond repair by vandals in 2020. This will require sourcing pallets and other materials as well as the construction itself.
- Continuing to work on regenerating the wildflower meadow, encouraging a greater diversity of wildflowers to take root and reducing the amount of grass, with a focus on bee-friendly natives.

Tree management and pruning

Many of the trees in the Queen's Park Gardens are very large. This is in many ways a pleasure, but it also restricts the access of sunlight in some areas. Working with HCGA and Westminster Council, we would like to see some trees pruned back to allow more natural light into the garden, allowing other plants to flourish.

Environmentally sustainable practices

We will continue to garden in a sustainable and environmentally responsible way, including collecting and sowing seeds harvested from plants in the gardening, recycling plants across the garden, and growing plants that are bee-friendly and butterfly-friendly as well as drought-resistant plants to reduce the need for additional water use.

As in recent years, we will give fresh fruit such as strawberries and grapes as the prizes for winners of the nature treasure hunt, rather than anything plastic wrapped.

Litter is unfortunately a constant problem in Queen's Park Gardens, despite the provision of several rubbish bins around the park. Although litter collection in the park falls primarily within the remit of Westminster Council/Continental contractors, FQPG volunteers regularly collect up litter, disposing of it in the on-site bins. The litter is a mix of general rubbish and recyclables, but at present there is no way to segregate them.

Working with HCGA, Westminster Council and Continental, we would like to see the introduction of separate bins for general rubbish and recyclable materials in order to reduce the amount of rubbish going for incineration/landfill. We would also welcome separate bins for the disposal of garden waste that is not suitable for composting in the garden.

Special events

We hope that circumstances will enable us to take part in the QPCC Summer and Winter Festivals once again.

Volunteer recruitment

We will continue to search for new volunteers to assist with gardening, in particular among local residents.

APPENDIX 1: Volunteer gardening hours 2021

In 2021, a total of 567 volunteer hours were recorded (up from 451 hours in 2020). These hours reflect time spent gardening; they do not include time spent on other additional volunteer activities, such as administration, procurement of materials and organisation.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Quarter 1 (January-March)	64 hours	76 hours	60 hours	114 hours	113.5 hours
Quarter 2 (April-June)	94 hours	121 hours	80 hours	93 hours	146.5 hours
Quarter 3 (July-September)	131 hours	99 hours	70 hours	141 hours	177 hours
Quarter 4 (October-December)	75 hours	64 hours	46 hours	103 hours	130 hours
TOTAL	364 hours	360 hours	266 hours	451 hours	567 hours