

## The Friends of Queen's Park Gardens (FQPG) Annual Report 2022



### 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 in 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 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 Queen's Park Gardens.

## 2. Who we are: our people

### 1. Friends of Queen's Park volunteers

The gardeners of Friends of Queen's Park Gardens (FQPG) are local residents who come together as a group of unpaid volunteers to share the pleasure of gardening and with the hope of giving pleasure to others who use and visit the park.

We are for the most part amateurs and our gardening work complements that undertaken in the park by Continental Landscapes (contracted by Westminster Council) and Hammersmith Community Gardens Association (HCGA, contracted by Queen's Park Community Council).

At present, we have a core group of six to 10 gardening volunteers, joined at times by other volunteers.

We are also grateful to another volunteer, Susan Chedghey, who updates our website, Facebook and Twitter account.

We always welcome new volunteers, regardless of whether they have any gardening experience and whether they would like to garden with us regularly or occasionally.

### 2. Friends of Queen's Park committee

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

In conjunction with the other gardening volunteers, they run the gardening sessions, select and order plants, and manage the administration for the group.

In 2022, the committee comprised Ray Lancashire as chair, Simon Walton as treasurer and Alison Low Madigan.

### 3. Our volunteer gardening sessions

Weather (and other circumstances) permitting, we aim to run weekly gardening sessions, working mostly in the Wildlife Area and a number of other flower beds around the park.

Our main sessions are held on Saturday mornings between 10am and 1pm.

Additional ad hoc gardening sessions with a smaller number of FQPG gardening volunteers often take place on Wednesday mornings between 10am and 12 noon.





### 3. Key partnerships and funding

The Friends of Queen's Park Gardens do not generate any direct income and we greatly appreciate the partnership support and funding we receive to be able to carry out the work we do.

#### 1. Queen's Park Community Council (QPCC) and local residents

We are extremely grateful to Queen's Park Community Council (QPCC) for supporting FQPG in many ways, including funding. Our main source of funding is provided through the stipend QPCC receives from Westminster Council, which is paid by Queen's Park residents as part of their local Council Tax. We are always mindful that this money comes from our local community and we aim to spend it carefully and wisely, to be cost effective and give best value for the benefit of our neighbours. In the past, FQPG received funding from QPCC through their grant scheme. In 2020, this changed and since then FQPG has been provided with QPCC funding via HCGA (as detailed below).

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

#### 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 very grateful to HCGA for their funding and procurement support during 2022 and would like to give special thanks to Cathy Maund and Ulla Johnson, both for ordering plants, seeds and bulbs on our behalf 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.

One major development this year has been the installation by the council of new segregated rubbish bins in the park, allowing people to dispose of general waste separately from materials that could be recycled. This is something the Friends of Queen's Park Gardens have lobbied for in the past, as part of our commitment to promoting environmentally responsible practices.

We are also grateful to the council for arranging for specialist tree surgeons to carry out work in the Wildlife Area, cutting back damaged branches on some of the large plane trees, with the added benefit of letting more light into the area.

#### 4. Other networks/organisations

In 2022, 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. Activities and highlights in 2022

#### 1. Wildlife Area

The Wildlife Area was the first section of the park to come within the remit of FQPG. It remains at the heart of our gardening work, with a focus on providing a natural environment with native English plants, as we seek to encourage the growth of wild flowers that attract pollinators, insects and birds, while controlling brambles and nettles that could easily overwhelm the area.

In 2022, we focused on revitalising the Wildlife Area, in particular the wildflower meadow, following two years of drought. This included sowing seeds and transplanting plants from other parts of the

garden where they were unwanted 'weeds' – an example of our holistic approach to gardening by recycling plants within the garden, which is both good environmentally and minimises costs.

An exciting development in 2022 was the building of a new 'bug hotel' to attract insects, beetles and grubs. Made out of recycled pallets and logs, this replaces the previous structure, which was destroyed by vandals in 2020. A big thank you to Ray Lancashire for leading this work.

As an enclosed area within the park, the Wildlife Area is regularly used by local nursery schools and families with young children. Maintaining the safety of the area is therefore particularly important. We pruned the hedge to ensure good sightlines into the area; and cleared leaves and laid woodchip to make the paths less slippery. The leaves were added to the compost heap, where they will mulch down to be used for enriching the soil in future years. With help from volunteers from Equinor and Vodafone, logs were embedded to mark out the paths (see **Special thanks** below).

We also maintained the compost and leaf mulch heaps throughout the year, using the results to enrich the soil in other parts of the garden.

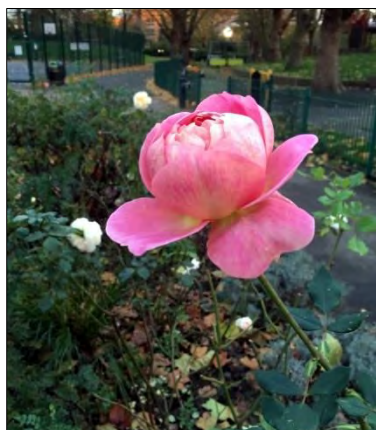


## 2. Triangular Rose bed by Fourth Avenue entrance

This is the most mature of the formal 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 2022, we planted new rose bushes to replace bushes that had died and maintained the other roses, which make up most of the bed, including regular deadheading and pruning. This successfully prolonged their flowering season from spring into the late autumn – as demonstrated by the photos below, which were all taken on 22 November 2022. In the autumn, we planted tulip bulbs for flowering in spring 2023, adding to bulbs planted in previous years.

Thanks to volunteers from Vodafone, a dead cherry tree was uprooted and removed from the bed.





### 3. Circular flowerbed by the 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.

The planting in this bed has focused on sustainability, with a mix of perennials and other plants that self-seed, along with spring bulbs that should flower year after year. This was put to the test in 2022, when we stopped watering it during the summer drought, and we were pleased to see how many plants revived in the autumn.

In line with our principle of maintaining low costs wherever possible, additional planting in the bed during the year was of seeds and bulbs recycled from other parts of the park.

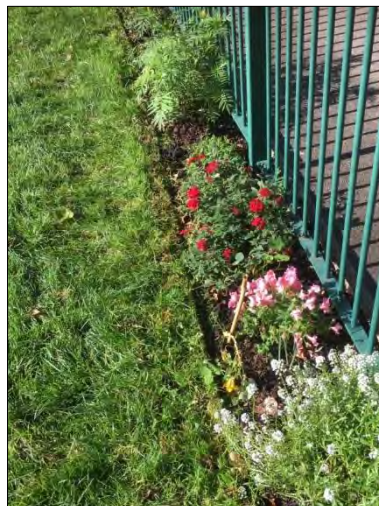


### 4. Railings bed along the play area close to the Fourth Avenue entrance

This bed is in a prominent position, especially for people arriving in the garden from Fourth Avenue and 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 (pictured below), who brought new life to the bed in 2020 and whose continuing efforts have transformed it.

In 2022, we continued to develop the bed, in particular with seeds collected in previous years and gifts from gardeners, including nasturtium, alyssum and verbenas. In the autumn, we planted miniature daffodil, crocus and grape hyacinth bulbs for flowering in spring 2023.



## 5. Benches bed along the main path between Third Avenue and Fourth Avenue

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 and again in 2022.

Following an extensive planting programme in 2021 (which included camellias, ferns, hellebores, foxgloves and daphne), we watched carefully to learn which would thrive in the combined challenging conditions of shade and drought, and gradually introduced a range of additional plants, including cranesbill geraniums, sweet rocket, perennial borage and hellebore seedlings (many of them generously donated by Charlotte Chesney).

Unfortunately, as well as losses of plants due to meteorological conditions, this bed suffered a number of thefts (see **Challenges of 2022**, below).

## 6. Other gardening activities

As well as the gardening they carry out in the Wildlife Area and the flower beds, the volunteer gardeners often give general gardening and maintenance support in other parts of the garden, including leaf sweeping and litter picking.



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

### Queen's Park Summer Festival (6 August 2022)

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. In 2022, the Friends of Queen's Park Gardens hosted a stall in the Wildlife Area, giving out information about their activities.

### Queen's Park Winter Festival (10 December 2022)

FQPG also hosted a stall at the Winter Festival.

### QPCC Gardens clean-up sessions

FQPG volunteers took part in a number of Gardens clean-up sessions organised by QPCC, helping clear up litter following the Summer Festival, Fireworks and Winter Festival events held in the park.

## 5. Challenges of 2022

### 1. Gardening safely during the Covid-19 pandemic

As in 2020 and 2021, Friends of Queen's Park Gardens were impacted in 2022 by Covid-19. Because of the limitations and heightened stress experienced by many people during the pandemic, we wanted to ensure the garden continued to be well-maintained and as beautiful as possible in order to give pleasure and wellbeing to the people in our local community.

We, nonetheless, wanted also to ensure that gardening was carried out safely to protect ourselves and others from the risk of catching or spreading the virus. We, therefore, continued to be mindful of Government restrictions and precautions as they applied at different times of the year.

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

In addition – more than in the two previous years of the pandemic – many of our gardeners were directly affected by Covid and were at times unable to work in the gardens, either because they were ill with the virus or were self-isolating.

### 2. A summer of drought

In common with many parks and gardens throughout the country, Queen's Park Gardens suffered from the summer drought due to several months of very little rain. This resulted in parched, brown lawns and plants that shrivelled and died. Well before the official hosepipe ban was imposed by Thames Water, we decided to adopt a water-conservation policy and reduced watering to a minimum.

This was challenging as it meant we lost many plants just at the time of year when they would normally have been full of flowers. However, we felt this was the only responsible approach in the circumstances, and, in line with our principle of promoting gardening sustainability, we took this as an opportunity to observe how different plants coped – or not – with the drought.

We were delighted by how many plants revived once the rain came. This supported our choice of self-regenerative plants and our decision to reduce watering. It will also help us plan which plants we will choose for the future.

### 3. Vandalism and plant thefts

One of the greatest sadnesses for the FQPG gardeners this year (as in previous years) has been the loss of plants, especially after they have been carefully planted and nurtured. This has been in part as a result of wilful damage by vandals, who destroy plants carelessly. There were also people who picked or cut flowers, sometimes whole bunches of them, leaving the bare stalks behind; and in the summer there was a spate of thefts with a range of plants deliberately dug up and stolen, including lavender in the triangular rose bed, camellias in the benches bed and a crab apple tree in the Wildlife Area.

Another form of vandalism we have suffered from this year has been the repeated dumping of large mounds of soiled cat litter in the compost bins in the Wildlife Area. Some cat litter might be advertised as being 'compostable', but it can in fact only be composted at extremely high temperatures, such as those reached by industrial composters. It is not suitable for the garden compost heaps that we have at Queen's Park Gardens.

In addition to contaminating the natural composting material in the heaps (leaves, cuttings, grass, etc), the cat urine and faeces in the litter are toxic and are a particular risk for the many children who play in the Wildlife Area, as well as to the gardeners who clear it out week after week. The FQPG gardeners have displayed signs about the dangers of the cat litter, but regrettably these have been ignored and this is a continuing problem – but hopefully it will not be one by the time of next year's annual report.



## 6. Special thanks

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

### 1. The time and expertise of our chair and treasurer

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.

### 2. Gifts of plants and seeds

During 2022, we have received a number of generous gifts of plants, bulbs and seeds. Many thanks to everyone who has added to the beauty of the garden in this way, in particular:

- Charlotte Chesney
- Claire Hickey
- Henie Lustgarten and Phil Weitzman
- Jessica Clements
- Mary Acton Adams, Meanwhile Gardens
- Richard Dean and Deborah Jones

### 3. Paddington Partnership and employee volunteer groups

This year, we have benefited from the contribution of groups of employees from two companies based in the Paddington Basin, who have worked in the gardens as part of corporate social responsibility programmes.

Many thanks to the employee volunteers from Equinor and Vodafone, who came and carried out specific projects, including embedding logs to delineate paths in the Wildlife Area and digging out a dead cherry tree in the triangular rose bed. We hugely appreciate their efforts.

We are very grateful to Emily Parkes, community programme manager at Paddington Partnership, and Shuwanna Aaron at Queen's Park Community Council (QPCC) for making the introductions, liaising with the groups and arranging the gardening sessions.

Thanks also to Simon Walton for guiding the groups' gardening.

We hope this is a relationship that will continue into the future.





#### 4. And above all thanks to our volunteers

As with every year, we would like to give our biggest thanks of all to the people who make the garden grow, turning up on cold wet days as well as in sunny weather, enduring the disappointments of plants that die or are stolen alongside the pleasures of tending those that bloom.

Together, they have made an outstanding contribution to Queen's Park Gardens, bringing huge benefits to the many local people who use the gardens. Without their efforts, there would be far fewer flowers and many more weeds in the park.



#### 7. 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, and 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.

#### 8. Looking ahead: our plans for 2023

Projects proposed for the coming year include:

##### **Wildlife Area**

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

- Completing the building of a new bug hotel to attract a diversity of beetles, grubs and other insects. It will replace the previous one which was damaged beyond repair by vandals in 2020. This will continue work started in late 2022, when the main structure was put in place. The project, using logs and other natural materials recycled from around the park, is expected to last around six months, followed by ongoing maintenance.
- 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.
- 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.

### **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.
- Exploring options for a replacement for the flowering cherry tree that died and was removed from the bed in 2022. We will consider whether to replace it with another tree or with additional rose bushes.
- Continuing to monitor the remaining winter-flowering cherry tree in the centre of the bed, which seems to be in poor health and could be heading towards the end of its natural lifespan. We will take this forward with HCGA and Westminster Council.

### **Circular bed**

We will continue to develop this bed, 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.

### **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.

Linked to this, we intend to develop a seasonal planting cycle, with the aim of extending the flowering season and growing more plants that will attract bees, butterflies, insects and birds through the year.

We will also look at ways to attract more bats to the gardens; the last recorded bat visit was in 2011.

### **Special events**

We look forward to taking part in the QPCC Summer and Winter Festivals.

### **Volunteer recruitment**

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



## APPENDIX 1: Volunteer gardening hours 2022

In 2022, a total of 677 volunteer hours were recorded. 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	2022
<b>Quarter 1 (January-March)</b>	64 hours	76 hours	60 hours	114 hours	113.5 hours	174.5 hours
<b>Quarter 2 (April-June)</b>	94 hours	121 hours	80 hours	93 hours	146.5 hours	177 hours
<b>Quarter 3 (July-September)</b>	131 hours	99 hours	70 hours	141 hours	177 hours	179.5 hours
<b>Quarter 4 (October-December)</b>	75 hours	64 hours	46 hours	103 hours	130 hours	145.5 hours
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>364 hours</b>	<b>360 hours</b>	<b>266 hours</b>	<b>451 hours</b>	<b>567 hours</b>	<b>676.5 hours</b>

## APPENDIX 2: FQPG on social media

As of 31 December 2022, the FQPG Twitter account has 553 followers (an increase of 30 compared with 523 followers at the end of December 2021).

We have 411 Facebook followers (74 more than at the end of 2021) and we had 367 Facebook page likes during the year, up from 296 over the same period a year ago.