

FRIENDS OF MILL HILL PARK

March 2004

Circular No. 11

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Before Christmas I informed the Committee that I intended to resign from the post of Chairman at our AGM in April. I have held this position since the inception of the Friends 7 years ago – it has been a bumpy but very enjoyable ride. I feel the Friends of Mill Hill Park are a very necessary and important organisation in our community of Mill Hill; the park has to be cared for and preserved both for us and for future users. **We now desperately need someone to come forward and take over as Chairman.** Come on, I know you are out there somewhere. Joanne is now giving up the post of Secretary after 5 years. We have been fortunate that Mrs Jean Smith has joined us and is willing to take over.

PARK KEEPER

The park keeper, Andy Hunter, has once again been transferred to a different section of the Council. In the seven years since the Friends have been established the Council Officers have been re-organising. Apart from the effect on morale it makes it very difficult to keep in touch and to know who does what. The park keeper's job description is still under review; at least that's what we are told when asking yet again for a copy.

At our request, and at some expense, as the central heating piping had to be re-routed, an office was constructed in the corner of the pavilion. Unfortunately it has no natural light but a window may be installed in the new financial year starting in April 2004. It would look over the mini-golf and children's playground. The office has apparently not been used to date. It is the Council's intention that their staff should wear uniforms. This would at least make the park keeper more visible and we would like him to be more accessible to the public. When on duty he is tasked with unlocking and locking the toilet and baby changing rooms at the rear of the pavilion. The security group Magenta is also supposed to share in these arrangements to prevent the vandalism that takes place.

DAWS LANE CAR PARK

At the time of writing this newsletter we are waiting for the council to publish its promised "consultation" notices about charging for the use of the car park. Members are urged to strongly oppose this proposal and its foregone conclusion. When the Mill Hill Park was opened on 24 July 1924, with due pomp and ceremony, the Estate was dedicated "as an open space for the benefit and enjoyment of the public forever" and "the Council has acquired the Daws Farm Estate as a public recreation ground forever". The Garden Centre, the Barossa building and the car park are all built on Mill Hill parkland. Charging the public to use the car park contravenes the purpose for which the park was acquired.

GREENSPACES ACTION PLAN FIVE YEAR PLAN (GAP)

This is operated by the Countryside Management Services (CMS) South, which is a partnership funded by about ten Councils. Your Committee co-operated with the CMS and Mark Evison, Greenspaces Development Officer, Barnet Council, in inspecting the park and suggesting work needing to be done over the five years. The CMS then produced a draft plan. On 23 October 2003 an Open Day was arranged in the park with a marquee erected near the Queen Elizabeth 40th Anniversary plantation, towards The Rise, and GAP exhibited. Not too many people visited during the day; possibly more notice should have been given and the site was a little out of the way, though we did circulate all the Friends about the event. The fencing round the plantation was removed as it had fulfilled its purpose in protecting the plantings until they matured.

FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Year one was scheduled for 2004/5. There were annual items for each of the five years and a long list of items for year one. Sadly, it looks as if all is lost. We have received a letter from the Countryside Management Service, to quote "London Borough of Barnet is facing a considerable budgetary deficit for 2004/5 and has been forced to identify significant budget cuts, some of which will lead to reductions in services.

Unfortunately, the annual financial contribution made for many years to the CMS by Barnet Council had been identified as a saving (approximately £37,000). If the cut is confirmed, the CMS will no longer be able to work within the borough and as a consequence will be unable to support your group after March this year."

Naturally we will protest and lobby to have the Borough continue its support for CMS.

AUDIT OF THE PARK

The last audit of the park took place on 12th December led by Councillor Wayne Casey, who is a staunch supporter of the Friends, and attended by committee members and Mark Evison, Greenspaces Development Officer. A number of issues remained outstanding from the previous audit and were to have been included in the five – year Greenspaces Development Plan (GAP). New items are largely waiting until the next financial year in April 2004.

TREES IN THE PARK

There is a wide variety of trees in the park, as we have learned during the very interesting walks led by Jim Rea. They need attention from time to time – some die or are vandalised, and recently one of the fine old oak trees, which are such a feature in the park, largely denoting the old farm field boundaries, was blown over. It narrowly missed one of our members, Mrs Iona Tremlett, who was walking her dog. She was more concerned for the dog! Mr Paul Mark, from the Council, appeared with contractors, who efficiently shredded the tree, except for the stump and a massive section of trunk, and cleared the tennis court into which it had fallen.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Members of your committee continue to attend those meetings where concerns about the park can be raised.

Matters raised at the Area Forums have to be reported on at the following Forum two months later and also the action taken, or information requested, provided. This can be a useful way of getting results.

The Mill Hill Community/Police sector working group is also attended and our interest is safety in the park, vandalism and graffiti.

At the Greenspaces Forum the main item on the

agenda was an update on the Best Value Review. Barnet has a great many greenspaces: 780 hectares managed by the Council and 120 hectares independently managed. This was broken down in to 35% sports fields, 30% parks and gardens and 22% natural greenspaces; quite a lot to look after. When it came to the following questions there was nothing new: we have been raising the same items for years with largely disappointing results. Under the heading "What do people want?" were the following:

- high quality and well maintained equipment and facilities
- clean public toilets
- good children's play area
- catering
- parking
- park keepers to develop better links with community and be more visible.

Under the question "What can the Council provide?" (ie paid for by the ratepayers) were the funding gap and alternative methods of provision such as charitable trusts, public private partnerships and prioritising resources. No further comment!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This will be held on Saturday 3rd April at 10.30 in the Bowling Pavilion in the Park. It is hoped that our local Councillors, a council official and a representative from the Police will be present. The minutes of last year's AGM are enclosed with this Newsletter.

Coffee and biscuits will be provided.

Some subscriptions are due for renewal and forms are attached for those people. **If there is not a form attached, your renewal is not due this year.**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Ted Anderson (Chairman)	8959 2979
Joanne Anderson (Secretary)	8959 2979
Joan Telfer (Treasurer)	8959 1499
David Bailey	8959 2373
Marion Dewing	8959 5013
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Jean Smith – co-opted member	