

# FRIENDS OF MILL HILL PARK

**Autumn 2007**

**Circular 16**

## ***Chairman's Message***

This is my first contribution under this item, having succeeded to the office of Chairman at the AGM on 31<sup>st</sup> March, as a result of Marion Dewing's resignation. Marion's work for the Friends has been invaluable. It is very difficult to get people to take on the job of Secretary in community organisations. When this group was formed she became Secretary despite being very busy in the same position in the Mill Hill Preservation Society. When Joanne Anderson took over Marion remained as an active committee member and later, when Ted Anderson resigned, she kept us going by taking over as Chairman. We owe a great debt to Marion and I am very pleased that she continues to serve on the committee.

Sadly, I have to refer to the death of David Bailey. David was also one of our founders; in fact he was considered to have been the moving force behind the formation of the Friends. He served on the committee throughout until he resigned May 2006, when his failing health made it impractical for him to continue. He is greatly missed.

Once again, the Green Flag scheme has proved to be a strong motivating factor and encouraged the Council to have new flowerbeds prepared and planted, to replace damaged seats and to install a number of new seats. It also helped to bring about the improvement to the playground. Members may know that the Green Flag award was given to the park again this year. Although this has been very encouraging, there are worries about the present as well as the future. The sad reality is that the Council's Greenspaces department is under stress from understaffing and this affects what the Friends can get done.

More details of these matters follow.

*John Smith*

## ***Playground***

Having obtained a good number of responses to the questionnaires that we distributed, the committee considered the views expressed and then visited other playgrounds to see what equipment they had and how popular the features were with the children. We studied equipment catalogues and had discussions with our Green Spaces Officer, Mark Evison (who, unfortunately has since left Barnet) and agreed upon the new features to be installed. Perhaps the main new attraction is the pedal roundabout, which the kids love. There was a misunderstanding in that the balance installation was supposed to be something else, which we thought would be more fun, but the new equipment was already in place before we became aware of the confusion, so we just had to accept it.

After this work had been completed the contractors left the site but the security fencing remained in place. Soon, children (and some parents) managed to make gaps and the new equipment was quickly in use unofficially. We made numerous attempts to get the Council to chase the contractors to remove this fencing.

The next stage was that the Officers decided that the new green metal fencing should be placed all round the playground area, included the picnic tables. For some time the two swings for older children had been removed because of defects to the ground surface. After pressure from us, resurfacing has been carried out to this area which also includes the sea saw.

Finally, we were pleased to find that the Council had decided to tarmac the whole of the new extension around the new equipment. We now have a very attractive and well-equipped playground and it is being very well used. It only remains for the seat that the Friends are donating to be installed. It is in the Council's



possession and it will have a plaque to say that it has been so donated.

### **Other Improvements**

Seats: Those who have walked round the park will have noticed that there are now 15 new seats. They have the Council's original crest. The manufacturers had retained the mould of the original park seats and so were able to supply seats with a reproduction of the crest. So far we have only suffered slight vandalism, but we remain apprehensive.

Litter Bins A number of new and smarter litter-bins have been installed. Although they have lids and it was hoped that this would stop the litter being scattered about, it hasn't worked and almost every night or early morning, the crows and foxes combine their efforts and rummage through the day's collection, making a mess for the park keeper to clear up.

Flowerbeds: The beds and the shrub areas have been much improved. There was almost an overnight transformation a few days before the Green Flag inspector's visit. In fact the beds on the left (as you enter) of the main entrance were empty one day, and completely planted out a day or two later.

### **Council Officers**

We are very concerned about the fall in the number of officers in the Greenspaces section, which is responsible for the operational management of parks and open spaces. Some years ago there were seven officers in post, with two or three senior managers, and chief officers above them. The number of first-line officers was reduced to four in the course of various "restructuring" exercises during recent years, and some senior management posts were lost. Then in January this year, a decision was made not to replace Jim Rea on his retirement, thus reducing this basic grade to three.

We were very concerned regarding the workload carried by the remaining officers, and, sure enough, one left in April to work elsewhere, followed by a second in May. June saw the departure of the remaining senior manager, leaving the Borough's 100 parks and open spaces in the care of one officer and one chief manager.

We wrote to Councillor Matthew Offord, Cabinet Member for Transport and the Environment, in July, expressing our view of the situation, and asking that a properly managed and resourced service should be provided. It seems that the number of posts is to remain at three, however. Interviews have been held over the summer, and we have been told that appointments to some posts are about to be finalised. Our fear is that the reduced establishment may no longer be viable in terms of recruiting and retaining properly qualified staff.

Finally, Andrew Hunter, our popular Park Keeper has been transferred. This is disappointing as we liked having a Park Keeper who we knew well. It seems that the Council now has a policy of moving people around. It is probably too early to form a view about whether this will bring about any improvement. The new incumbent is Bruce Warner.

### **Friends**

We feel our role is more important than ever in view of the present difficulties. We continue to be in frequent contact with the Council over various matters, and to carry out our twice-yearly audit of the park, following which we submit a written report. (We are accompanied on these by Councillor Wayne Casey, who has been regularly involved since the beginning; we are very grateful for his continued interest.) We feel it is important to increase our membership, in order to strengthen our voice in all matters relating to the park, so we ask for your help in recruiting new members. Please contact John Smith or Joan Telfer (telephone numbers below) if you would like additional copies of this Newsletter and membership application forms to pass on to friends. We shall also be printing a leaflet shortly, which we shall hand out to visitors to the park.

#### **Committee members**

John Smith (Chairman)	8959 7138
Jean Smith (Secretary)	8959 7138
Joan Telfer (Treasurer)	8959 1499
Marion Dewing	8959 5013
Peter Keeley	8959 2864
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