

# FRIENDS OF MILL HILL PARK

Spring 2008

Circular No.17

**Notice is hereby given that the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be held Saturday 12th April 2008 at 10.30 a.m. at the Bowling Club.**

## Developments since the last Newsletter

**Council Officers:** we had particular concern about the decline in the number of Council officers in the Greenspaces section (one officer had responsibility for all the Borough's parks and open spaces during the summer while posts were being advertised). There are now two new officers in post, including one senior manager, and it seems that this is the new 'structure' – a senior manager with two junior officers, one covering sites in the south of the Borough, and the other having responsibility for the north. This is an enormous workload, but our experience up to now suggests that tasks are being carried out reasonably well. We feel that it is up to the Friends to support the officers in their work, as far as possible, and to help by identifying priorities in the face of pressure of work and the Council's limited financial resources.

**New Park Keeper:** Bruce Warner has now had time to settle in, and some of you will have seen him around and about in the park. He is a strong believer in the value of Friends groups, and recently took the opportunity of attending a meeting of the committee to explain his remit and inform us of events that are being planned for this year. We look forward to working with him. If you want to know where to find him, he will shortly be moving from his office at the rear of the Bowling Pavilion into the recently refurbished old toilet block near the Wise Lane entrance. We should point out, however, that he works five days a week, and sometimes gets called to other parks, so he will not always be there.

**Playground:** we were very pleased when the new seat was installed just before Christmas. In donating this, we wished to commemorate

the 10th anniversary of the Friends of Mill Hill Park – founded in 1997. We are also very pleased to have had favourable comments about the new layout and equipment in the playground, although we realise that it still does not offer sufficient activities for older children (something highlighted in response to our questionnaire in 2006).

## The role of the Friends

We feel it is more important than ever to have a strong Friends group to take a close interest in the development of the park and to press, when needed, for action on particular matters of concern. We are gradually building up our membership, and will continue our recruitment drive throughout spring and summer. Our core membership has been very committed, but we have to admit we are a fairly elderly group! Thankfully, it seems we are beginning to correct that imbalance. Our new membership leaflet will be available at the AGM, or you can contact John Smith in the meantime if you would like to help.

Twice yearly audits of the park continue to be carried out, and are an important means of fulfilling our aims, as above. Last year, for the first time, we had to do this without a Greenspaces officer present, because of staff leaving, but on both occasions items that needed attention were raised in our written reports, and were dealt with effectively. Our next audit is due in April, and this time it is expected that an officer will be present.

## Toilets

This topic has appeared regularly in the Newsletters over the years because of various inadequacies. Accessibility has improved since the café reopened, but there have been shortcomings in cleaning and in provision of essential items, such as soap, and paper towels. Toilet roll holders had not been replaced, and redecoration was needed, as well as improvements to lighting. The disabled

(also known as the accessible) toilet was well below standard, and there were no signs to indicate the way in – necessary, as this involves a tortuous route, starting at the rear of the cafe and negotiating the veranda to the front. We are pleased to report that, following our audit in October, the condition of the accessible toilet has been given priority: new fittings have been provided to conform with current regulations and the interior has been completely redecorated. Signs will be attached to the pavilion. Regarding the other toilets, the park keeper is keeping records regarding the cleaning programme, problems with soap dispensers and toilet roll holders will be rectified, and redecoration and improved lighting will be considered in the new financial year.

### Community Forest & Nature Reserve

The trees that were planted in the reserve are growing steadily, and we have asked the Council to thin them out to allow as many trees as possible to flourish. If done now, it should be a relatively easy and inexpensive task. The trees are young, so volunteers under the supervision of tree officers could do much of the work. Our Greenspaces officer has told us that arrangements will be made for this operation to be carried out in the course of the year. One of our members suggested at last year's AGM that the reserve would benefit from planting additional wild flowers, and we were hopeful of being able to organise this, with the Council providing the plants. We were waiting for the meadow to undergo its annual mowing first, but unfortunately this did not take place, despite repeated requests. We think this omission was due to pressure on the workforce. We will continue to explore this matter.

### Other tree plantations

Mill Hill Park is well endowed with trees, with two other major plantations dating from much earlier times. One of these, the Silver Jubilee plantation, between the A41 and the zigzag path, was reported by us to the Council in 2006, as being the one where remedial work might still be possible. This will be a major expense to carry out, however, as the trees are so well developed, and it was acknowledged at the time that external funding, perhaps in the

form of some special grant would be needed. This illustrates the need for timely intervention in the Community forest.

### Green Flag Award

The park will be visited shortly by the judges to see if it merits an award again this year. It has to be shown that improvements have not only been maintained, but that further progress has been made. On their previous two visits the judges met a representative from the Friends group. We hope, and believe, that the park will retain the flag this year.

The Green Flag Award scheme began in 1996 and the first awards were made in 1997. The scheme is managed by the charity, the Civic Trust on behalf of the Department of Communities & Local Government.

The criteria for the award include the following:

- (1) the park must be "welcoming".
- (2) it must be healthy, safe and secure, clean and well maintained.
- (3) there must be sustainability in the methods used for maintenance (i.e. environmentally sound, relying on best practices available).
- (4) conservation of natural features, wildlife and fauna.
- (5) There must be active community involvement in the management of the park, - hence the importance of Friends of the Park groups.

### AGM

Please join us if you can (notice on front page). Tea, coffee and biscuits will be served before the meeting, so come a few minutes early.

**Subscriptions:** *renewal forms are attached, only for those members whose subscriptions are due in April.*

### 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
Chelle Paice	8959 4504