

FRIENDS OF MILL HILL PARK

Autumn 2008

Circular No.18

ABOUT THE PARK

Many of you will know that Mill Hill Park was successful in retaining its Green Flag status this year. We would like to thank the Council staff for all the hard work which went into achieving this - for the third year in a row – and offer congratulations. This is not the end of the story, however. Work goes on apace, not only in the day to day maintenance, but in various schemes for improvement. Here are details of some of the work completed or currently being carried out.

Playground: renewal of bark safety surface; additional 'themed' litter bin ordered.

Park entrances: new signs at The Rise, Flower Lane and Daws Lane car park; removal of trees and undergrowth to create a wider path at the A41 entrance (which leads directly into the Nature Reserve); new fencing along the Rise and two new shrub beds. These initiatives are part of the effort to make the park a more welcoming place; this is one of the criteria for the Green Flag award.

'Garden' for nursery children: a fenced area has been created outside the park keeper's intended new office (the old toilet block!), so that children attending the nursery on the site can gain first hand experience of gardening. This is a combined venture, involving staff and parents as well as the park keeper, Bruce Warner.

Restoration of the pond in the Nature Reserve: the pond 'disappeared' a few years ago, due to a combination of drought and damage to the pond lining. Work is to begin shortly on digging it out, and replacing the lining with a clay liner, which is said to seal itself if punctured. If all goes according to plan, this pond will be a real contribution to biodiversity and a continual source of interest for nature lovers.

Trees: a programme of tree work has been underway, with a few trees felled and others

pruned; the tree officer has plans to increase the number of native oaks in the park (further details in this Newsletter).

ABOUT US

Membership: there has been an ongoing recruitment drive for the past year, but following discussion at the AGM in April, one of our members, Stanley Busby, proposed a new initiative. He volunteered to set up a table near the café, 'one fine sunny day', and distribute leaflets. Peter Keeley said he would join him, and the outcome was that one Saturday in June, in the space of two hours, they signed-up about sixteen new members. They were very impressed by the level of interest shown, and by the fact that people wanted to know what the Friends *did*, and how they could help

We shall certainly be repeating the above exercise. For new members, who would like to know more: we have a small committee, which meets four times a year, and there are twice yearly 'audits' of the park, when we meet Council officers and take stock of what needs to be done. We are in regular contact throughout the year regarding ongoing matters.

If you wish to receive notification of events occurring between Newsletters, or would like to contribute in a practical way when volunteers are needed, you can forward your email address to hutton-smith@waitrose.com, or you can phone John Smith on 8959 7138, and give us your phone number.

PARTICULAR TOPICS

Dog walkers' petition: in April the committee received a petition, signed by over forty dog walkers, asking that gates should be fitted to two gaps in the hedge directly opposite Arrandene. The petitioners pointed to the danger arising when dogs, attracted by something in Arrandene, suddenly dart across the road. There was concern for motorists, as

well as dogs, and the fear that there was a potential risk for small children. We agreed with this assessment, and therefore approached the Council. The outcome is that one of the gaps is to be closed (they are only a few yards apart) and a swing gate fixed to the other. In addition, a larger swing gate, allowing access for wheel chairs and buggies, will be installed at the regular park entrance, nearer Parkside. Estimates have been obtained, and it is hoped that the work can be carried out during this financial year.

Litter: this is one feature that can spoil efforts by staff to maintain and improve the park. A few months ago, shortly after Green Flags were awarded to a number of parks, there was an item in the local Press – with photographs – suggesting that Barnet Council did not have so much to be proud of, when it allowed litter to accumulate on such a scale. Joan Telfer immediately replied, presenting the problem in another context. This letter was written on her own behalf, but part of it is copied below.

"With regard to the litter on one of the days mentioned in Nick Griffin's article – Friday 25th July – I saw a large party picnicking in the middle of the big field, sitting in a circle about 30' across. On passing the field in the late afternoon I saw that the group had gone, leaving behind a similar sized circle of carrier bags, drink cans, bottles etc.

Perhaps Nick Griffin should be appealing to those thoughtless and inconsiderate members of the general public who discard their litter, rather than criticising the Council and the park keepers?

Park keepers have a never-ending and soul-destroying job cleaning up other people's rubbish, and would much prefer to use their time attending to their other duties."

There are, so it seems, two aspects to the problem of litter: (1) the actions of the public, as instanced above; (2) the duty of the Council to maintain adequate frequency in emptying litter bins in the park, so that not only is the amount of litter reduced, but members of the public are not encouraged to think that 'anything goes'. We have only recently learned that bins are currently being emptied once a week (on a Wednesday), instead of a 'minimum of three times a week', as set out in

the *Five year Management Plan*. We are pressing to have this rota reinstated, with one of the days being Monday, so as to clear litter accumulating during busy weekends. (Children from Goodwyn School recently did their bit by joining the park keeper on a 'litter-pick'.)

AUTUMN PROJECTS

The tree officer is to organise an '**oak planting**' day, when saplings will be removed from the Nature Reserve and replanted in the park extension (this is the area on the other side of the A41, bordering Flower Lane). One of the aims is to foster the native oak, rather than relying on plants grown in Holland – which is what happens when the Council has to buy Nursery grown plants. We have been asked to help, so please contact us – see details on the front of this Newsletter – as quickly as possible, if you would like to be involved. A date has not yet been fixed, but it will be during the working week.

A further initiative, which was suggested to us, is to '**grow our own oaks**' by planting acorns in pots! This idea appealed to us, and we hope members will join in.

Top tips from the RHS: - "*Collect the acorns NOW – don't store. Pot them up, using good quality compost – John Innes N.1. to which you can add some sharp grit. Plant your acorn about a thumb's width deep. Cover with netting or wire mesh, as a protection against rodents. Leave in a cold frame or cool position, and wait for germination".....Good luck!*

Looking forward - Spring 2009

Tree walk to be led by John Smith in May. Sowing of wild flower seed in the Nature Reserve. Details in the next Newsletter.

Committee members

John Smith (Chairman)	8959 7138
Jean Smith (Secretary)	8959 7138
Joan Telfer (Treasurer)	8959 1499
Marion Dewing, Peter Keeley, Chelle Paice Liz Reid, Philippa Welch	