

# FRIENDS OF MILL HILL PARK

Autumn 2009

Circular No. 20

## Future of the Park

The spring Newsletter opened with an account of Barnet Council's scheme to change the way services are delivered in the Borough – the *Future Shape of the Council*. We had written to Councillor Andrew Harper, Cabinet Member for the Environment, expressing the committee's concern that privatisation of parks and open spaces would have a damaging and long lasting effect on the parks, and asking him to make our views known. Following this, the matter was a key topic for discussion at the AGM in April, with members unanimously opposed to any form of privatisation. Many members praised the way the park had been managed over recent years, and expressed appreciation of current developments. Privatisation could not deliver the same quality of service, and there was great regret at the prospect of the loss of the present management team. We were asked to write again to Councillor Harper, putting the view of the meeting.

His reply was, again, sympathetic to our view, but he repeated that he did not see the *Future Shape of the Council* as a threat to the quality of parks and open spaces. He also said, "decisions about specific services in the future will have to be addressed on a case by case basis, some of which might well require formal consultation". Reports appearing in the national press at the end of August regarding Barnet's plans to become a "budget airline authority", and the need to make large scale cuts, suggest, however, that the chance of a particular service being 'spared' is very unlikely. We will have to wait and see. It seems that firm proposals are unlikely to come forward before the Council elections in June 2010.

## Update on recent work

**Swing gates** have now been installed at two entrances on Wise Lane. The larger one, at the entrance nearer to Parkside, allows for access by buggies, wheelchairs and such like,

while the single gate in the hedge opposite Arrandene is for walkers – with or without dogs! We understand they have been well received by those who petitioned for them, and we are pleased that a potential hazard has been removed. Dogs regularly darted through the gap in the hedge, attracted by scents or sounds in Arrandene, and it was thought there was the potential for a nasty accident in Wise Lane involving dogs or small children - and an unfortunate motorist. The other entrance is on a bend in the road. We don't know the cost of the gates and their installation, but we understand it is 'a lot'!

**Pond in the Nature Reserve:** plants were introduced into the pond in the spring and wild flowers sown in the surrounding area. These did very well, and by July the scene was worthy of Monet with lilies and aquatic plants flourishing, and the wild flowers blooming. In addition, newts and dragonflies had been seen visiting the pond. The pond tends to dry out after prolonged draught, however, so we must hope for rain this winter! There was a suggestion at the AGM that a rustic type bench placed nearby would provide the opportunity for visitors to sit 'in quiet contemplation'. This seems an excellent suggestion, and if funds allowed we would gladly provide it ourselves. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and the Council is not likely to have money to spare, so it must remain an aspiration at the moment. If you would like to see the pond, but don't know where to find it (there are no signs, for obvious reasons), walk to the rear of the Wyevale building, then take the path on your right running along side the wall.

**Park extension:** (this is the area bordered by Flower Lane). The policy of leaving some areas of grass to develop as wild flower meadow, has been very successful, and adds much of interest to this section of the park.

## Future needs

**Playground:** regular visitors to the playground will be aware that one of the two large swing

seats has been missing for much of the year, which is obviously regrettable, as the playground has few facilities for older children. It was removed for safety reasons, and it appears that a specialised repair will be needed before it can be replaced. This matter is now in hand, so we hope that it will not be too long before it is put right. It is a fact that most of the equipment in the playground is nearing the end of its expected life span, so the question of replacement of some items is quite pressing. We are currently looking into the possibility of obtaining charitable funds to replace the junior multi-play unit (one of the main features in the playground), but, at the time of writing, the indications are not very promising.

We were pleased to read in the local press that Barnet Council has been awarded £1.1m from the *Playbuilder* scheme to spend on local playgrounds. We have asked for information about what this could mean for Mill Hill. It seems the money may have to be spent on 'natural play' provision.

**Flooding in park:** this matter was discussed at length at our AGM. Some sections of footpath and certain areas had been underwater for long periods in the winter, which was a serious problem. The committee agreed to raise the matter at the next park audit in April, but unfortunately the parks officer could not be present on that occasion, and although we referred to it in our written report, no further progress has been made. A better approach would seem to be to tackle the issue head on the next time flooding occurs, so that we can demonstrate the problem, and find some answers. The Chairman, John Smith, sounded a note of caution at the meeting, when he gave his opinion that it could be difficult to find a solution that the Council would be willing to finance in the current economic position.

**Wild flower meadow in the Nature Reserve:** we were dismayed to find this had been cut in mid-September, thereby preventing the plants reaching the stage when seed dispersal could occur. The two horticulturist members of the committee, Chelle Paice and Liz Reid are writing a note on this to be forwarded to senior management, in the hope that better practices can be written into the management plan.

## Other matters

**Trees in the park:** we have a new tree officer for this part of the borough. She is Pamela Holt, who has been covering Chipping Barnet for some years. Pamela trained at Kew Gardens and is very experienced and knowledgeable. She walked round the park with the chairman, John Smith and noted a number of trees where work is required for safety reasons. She also confirmed the identification of two trees that had been doubtful and we now have the identity of 59 species recorded. Our park's trees are a very special asset.

John Smith led a tree walk on 31st May with a small but enthusiastic group. This will be repeated next year and details will be given in the next newsletter.

**Jim Rea:** those members who know Jim will be very pleased to hear that an oak tree has been planted at the lower end of the path running past the tennis courts; a plaque has been affixed to commemorate his forty years with the Council. He is said to be "very well".

**Finally:** people have told us that that the park has never looked better than it has this summer. We agree, but must point out to members that for the last two years Barnet has relied on just two Greenspaces officers (the individuals who are responsible for commissioning and overseeing work), to cover all its parks and open spaces - hundreds of different sites. We must thank them for all they have done, and recognise that there are bound to be delays in implementing requests in some cases.

### Committee Members

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

**Subscriptions:** *renewal forms are attached, only for those members whose subscriptions were due in April 2009*