

Committee(s):	Date(s):
West Ham Park Committee	21 July 2014
Subject: Friends of West Ham Park – Annual Update	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces Sue Ireland	For Information
Summary	
<p>In July 2006, following public consultation on the West Ham Park Management Plan, the Friends of West Ham Park group was formed. This report sets out the projects that the Friends have successfully achieved throughout their seventh year.</p>	
Recommendation	
<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the report 	

Main Report

Background

1. At the meeting of the Committee of Managers of West Ham Park in July 2006, approval was given to form a Friends group to work with the park staff in implementing the Management Plan through consultation, meetings and volunteer activities.
2. At their first meeting, the Friends agreed that their purpose should be to work closely with the City of London, bringing together the skills, strengths and experience of its members for the common goal of assisting the Park management team in implementing the Management Plan for the benefit of the whole community.
3. Throughout the year, the Friends have completed a number of successful projects that have been of great benefit to the local community. At present, there are 12 regularly active members in the group and 169 additional corresponding members.

Current Position

4. Over the past year, four public meetings have been held by the Friends at the local Scout hall and on occasion on the bandstand in the Park. At their annual meeting in June 2013, the Friends re-elected their eighth Chairman, Ms Nicky Brown, and Deputy Chairman, Mr Ron Innell. At this annual meeting, the Friends suggest projects that they would like to be involved in and agree a timetable of events for the forthcoming year.
5. On 26 September 2013 the annual Bat Walk was led by Friend's member Lyndsay Jones. Due to popularity, a booking system for attendance on the walk was introduced a few years ago, despite this, the Park still accommodated over 70 children and adults on this popular walk. The local radio station also joined on this occasion, and did an excellent piece on the event, recording the sounds from the bat detectors and noises from the excited crowds on seeing the Pipistrelle bats. The event successfully promotes the importance of local green spaces as habitats for nature and community engagement.
6. On Saturday 2 November 2013, the Friends assisted in building and hosting 'Newham's Biggest Leaf Pile' in the Park with the help, for the fifth year running, of Newham 11th Scout Group and members of the public. This year they were joined by the Sea Cadets, creating a friendly rivalry between the Scouts and the Cadets as to who could collect the most leaves. This was a productive day with over 90 members of the public, both adults and children, raking and adding to the leaf pile and joining in the related craft activities, which this year consisted of making your own dragon.
7. On a very cold December night, supported by a grant funded by John Lewis in the Westfield Centre, Stratford, the Friends hosted 'Park in the Dark'. Over 80 children and adults created lanterns, which were supplemented with glowing bracelets. A torch-lit procession was led from South Gate to the Bandstand, where the Christmas tree was lit and hot and cold refreshments were served. For the second year running at this popular event, children from the Newham Academy of Music sang Christmas carols on the bandstand, with everyone joining in to create a seasonal atmosphere. Many remarked that it was a wonderful opportunity to experience the Park at night and gave very positive feedback.
8. In January, as part of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' (RSPB) national survey of birds in parks and gardens ('The Big Garden Birdwatch'), members of the Friends bird watching group spent a morning taking Park visitors around the site and teaching them how to identify various common birds. 24 people joined the event this year and very positive feedback was received from the day. A variety of species were observed this year including Mistle Thrushes, Greater Spotted woodpeckers and Chaffinches.

9. A new Stargazing walk was held in February this year and proved extremely popular – with the 15 places being snapped up within 24hrs. A Friend of the Park, who is a Fellow of the astronomical society, gave a short presentation and then led the fascinating walk around the Park. Thankfully the sky was relatively clear allowing Jupiter to be a key point of interest, as well as a number other stars, constellations and even a nebula.
10. The Friends Spring/Summer event this year, was held on Saturday 28 June 2014, and was a commemorative event to mark the centenary of the First World War. The ‘Poppies for Peace’ event involved a nature walk around the spectacular poppy wildflower meadows planted by the Park and local school children in October last year, as well as a craft event making poppies and an opportunity to write messages on a peace tree. In spite of inclement weather, approximately 60 people attended the event, joining the walk, making poppies and writing messages on the peace tree.
11. Throughout the year the Friends have carried out monthly bird surveys in the Park. The information is recorded and then collated in a report to other Friends’ members at their meetings. The information is also promoted through the West Ham Park pages on the City of London’s website, and provided to the London Natural History Society for their national records.
12. In addition, the Friends helped to carry out a snapshot survey of park users in August 2013 – completing a very useful 90 surveys in 2 hours with Park users.
13. The Friends have their own web-site which can be viewed at www.friendsofwesthampark.btck.co.uk and face book page. The site is managed by the Friends and provides information about the group including membership and promotion of the wide variety of activities available. The Friends have also adopted the phrase ‘Friendly, Welcoming, Helpful and Positive’ as their strapline.
14. A selection of images depicting various events undertaken by the Friends is included as an appendix to this report.

Proposals

15. In accordance with the Terms of Reference for the Friends, a new Chairman would have been elected at their Annual General Meeting on Thursday 19 June 2014, however for logistical reasons the AGM will be held on the 11 September.
16. The Friends will agree a proposed list of projects for the next 12 months. This list is likely to include their current successful craft and wildlife events, but ideas for additional activities are always welcomed. Once agreed, the timetable for these projects will be circulated to the Friends’ mailing list and publicised on the Park notice boards in order to encourage volunteer

assistance with site based work. Planned events will also be publicised on the Friends' website.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

17. The projects strongly link and support four of the five community strategy themes:
 - Supports our communities – by encouraging well-being and participation in volunteer activities
 - Protects, promotes and enhances our environment – by raising awareness and encouraging enjoyment of the City's open spaces
 - Is vibrant and culturally rich – by providing opportunities for people of all backgrounds and abilities
 - Is safer and stronger – evidence suggests increasing legitimate use in open space can discourage anti-social behaviour

18. The projects link to the following three of the five aims identified in the Open Spaces Department Business Plan:
 - Inclusion: Involve communities and partners in developing a sense of place through the care and management of our sites
 - Environment: Deliver sustainable working practices to promote the variety of life and protect the Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations
 - Promotion: Promote opportunities to value and enjoy the outdoors for recreation, learning and healthy living

Conclusion

19. Now in their eighth year, the Friends have been extremely successful in providing a diverse programme of activities that has enabled Park visitors to assist in a range of projects centred on conservation, heritage, and community involvement. The Park has benefitted greatly from the support of the Friends, as many of the projects could not have been achieved without their support.

20. The assistance provided by the Friends is greatly appreciated by the park team. Officers will continue to work with and support them in order to encourage more of the community to become actively involved in park projects and initiatives.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - The Friends of West Ham Park: highlights from the past 12 months.

Rosie Thornton

West Ham Park Manager

T: 020 8472 3584

E: rosie.thornton@cityoflondon.gov.uk