

Annual Report 2016

Ground Force

Started in 2014 this sociable get-together for gardening and other tasks is emerging as one of the most popular areas of our work.

Typically 8-10 people volunteer for two hours working on areas we have made our own. This year we have:

- completely re-planted the bandstand flowerbeds, which we also maintain year-round
- pruned the rose beds in the rose garden
- planted and cared for 200 whips alongside the South Park Avenue side of the pitch and Putt to create a deeper hedge of native trees (with TCV)
- watered, pruned and cared of our small orchard
- supported Norwich City Council in creating new perennial meadows beside the model railway
- cleaned paintwork in the rotunda colonnades (blue doors and false windows)
- cared for borders beside the boat and lily ponds
- planted up a new lavender bed
- planted spring bulbs beside the lower car park and at the main entrance on South Park Avenue

Eaton Park Café

After years of disappointing service we now have a cafe that is where it should be, at the heart of the park.

The Friends were closely involved with the recruitment of the new café. Having provided a wish list that was used to create the tender brief, the Chair was invited to sit on the selection panel alongside City Council and NPS staff. The number and quality of applications reflected the increased and improved profile of the park, in which the Friends have played a defining role.

The Bicycle Shop had only three weeks to decorate and fit out the sadly neglected space before the busy Easter Holidays. They have turned the café into a lovely, welcoming place to go that is full of life and attracts all kinds of people. They provide a wide range of foods for all tastes and pockets, work with local suppliers, have long opening hours that meet the needs of all park users, and are bringing lots of ideas of their own too – Friday and Saturday evening music, Sunday roasts, and craft fairs are just three.

In Rob Howe and David Potter, and their super young team, the park at has the café it deserves - one that with the Friends and others is bringing even more energy, good spirits and creativity to Eaton Park.

Communications

One of our key roles is to promote the park and what goes on here – a need that we identified in research seven years ago.

Eaton Park now has a well-established online presence. We have 1818 likes on Twitter and 2758 Facebook friends. The latter is an increase of 1200 on last year, and it is now possible for posts to reach as many as

15000 people, most of them local to the park or Norwich-based. Social media provides a powerful voice for the park and all that goes on here, and a communications channel for people to share their enthusiasm for the park and any concerns they may have.

Our new website is working very well. It has had regular updates and checks. A new page has been added for the café, and this also includes information on other options for food. News and events are covered in the blog section and there have been eight posts on subjects such as band days, tennis in the park and Bluebell School. We respond to about 8 enquiries a month through the website.

Heritage

Eaton Park is Norwich's finest historic park, with several listed buildings and a powerful local story to tell.

Heritage Open Days

Pat Garner coordinated participation in this year's HODs and, with Geoff Mickleborough, ran a highly successful tour that was for the first time in partnership with NDSME (model railway) and Norwich Model Boat Club. The tour was over-subscribed and we plan to take part again next year. Additionally Christine Wilson gave the Norwich Guide's a tour of the park.

Rooftop tours

The Friends have been working with Simon Meek at Norwich City Council on a Risk Assessment and Safe System of Work that will enable the Friends to offer roof-top tours. These documents are now signed off and tours will start next year. In the spring we will sweep and tidy the quadrant roof and access stairway, and train up interested volunteers in both the health and safety requirements, and the short historic talk that we will offer as part of the tour. The idea is to offer tours on band days, and to raise funds by making a small charge.

Education

Bluebell Road School

Pat Garner has led a second year of activities with Bluebell Road School. Working with Duncan Reekie and his class of thirty 7-8 year olds, Pat and other members of the Friends have organised and worked with Duncan and teaching assistants on:

- a Green Flag clean up, washing benches and litter-picking the day before judging
- an RSPB mini-beast and birds hunt
- an art in the park day and summer exhibitions on band days of children's artworks
- bulb planting for the 'Purple for Polio' campaign.

This is an immensely fruitful partnership that we hope to build on further in the coming years.

Dickinson College

This liberal arts college from Pennsylvania has a long tradition of student visits to Europe. FOEP members David and Ceceile Strand coordinate and support students on their year abroad at UEA from their base in Unthank Road. The Strands have been active, supportive and inspiring committee members, hosting two social events and taking an active role in Ground Force and events days.

We have recently been talking about how to consolidate and hopefully make sustainable the link with Dickinson College. Catherine Munger, from this year's intake of students has joined the Friends, is coming to meetings, and next year will work with the Chair on some research to follow up the influential research we undertook in 2009. The Chair has met the Strand's colleagues Christine and John who will take over from later in 2017 and it is hoped that they will wish to continue the link.

Fundraising

A year of continued success and laying foundations for future growth.

Events, donations and grants

The Friends have raised over £400 by selling plants, books, CDs and DVDs, and jigsaws on band days. There have been donations of £120 and membership income of £350. We received a grant of £450 from Norwich City Council.

Benches

This year we have installed three new benches commissioned specially from Norwich designer and craftsman Andrew Smith. These have been installed near the miniature railway.

Last year we reported that the Friends now promote the option of buying benches for the park and direct enquiries to the council to coordinate. Funds go through the council do not appear in our accounts. Since 2013 thirteen new benches have been installed in the park. Eight were paid for directly by the friends (to a value of £5,453) and six further benches (over £4,000 worth) have been paid for by donations from individuals and families, all of which came initially through the Friends.

Crowd-funding

We are in discussion with the city over the future of the broken rose garden fountain and if a permanent solution can be found will liaise with city officers who are offering advice and support, over a possible 'Save our Fountain' crowd-funding appeal.

Charitable status

The recruitment of an Honorary Treasurer opens up the possibility of exploring and potentially taking up the option of applying for Charitable Status. This will mean that more charities and organisations (including NDSME) will be able to make donations to the Friends, and will open up the option of claiming gift aid on donations.

Committee and membership

Friends of Eaton Park had sixty four members. Our committee was Pat Garner (Hon Secretary and Membership Secretary), Judith Lubbock (Vice Chair), Bryant Mickleburgh, Geoff Mickleburgh, Helen Mitchell (Chair and Hon Treasurer), Ceceile Strand, Christine Wilson and Susan Yallop.

Liz Davies is co-opted from the Community Centre. Ann Balls is press officer and Aaron Brown environmental consultant. The committee met nine times to plan and monitor events and activities.

Recent interest from park user groups has suggested the possibility of launching a membership scheme for groups. In addition to earning more income for the Friends this would be a way to extend and improve communications both within the park, and with other groups or organisations in Norwich.

Across the board, involvement from members is increasing. This year has also been our most sociable yet. We had a very successful summer garden party hosted by the Strands and a Christmas party is planned for Friday 9 December.

Conclusion

Our walks, ground force sessions, tours, school visits and band day stalls are all friendly, sociable occasions that also further our core aim of – *helping Eaton Park thrive*.

Eaton Park has retained its Green Flag for a third year. Our successful partnership with Norwich City Council is based mutual respect and our shared cause – *helping Eaton Park thrive*.

We are getting clearer about what we do best, and more focussed in using our energies. We are also gradually attracting more people to our cause – *helping Eaton Park thrive*.

We are involving more individuals and groups in the park and will finish the year on a high, with a Christmas Carol event with Norwich Community Choir and a Christmas fair organised by Eaton Park Café.

A warm thank you to our friends and partners...

Active Norfolk, Age Concern Norwich, Bluebell School, Broadbeat Choir, Darren Leader Studio, Norfolk Community Foundation, Dickinson College (Pennsylvania), Earlham Library, Eaton Park Café, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Norwich in Bloom, Norwich City Council, Norwich Community Choir, Norwich Norse Environmental, Norwich Parks Tennis, RSPB, Starfish Design, TCV (Trust for Conservation Volunteers) and Visit Norwich.

Adrian Akers, Terry Bane, Ian Couzens (our auditor) Brian Dermott (Band Coordinator), Chris Evans, Maggie Finck, Max Griffiths, Andy Harmer, Becky Harris (PCSO), Dan Harris, Matt Hewes, Richard Hoey, Emily Harvey, Paul Holley, Martin Adcock, Andy Lambert, Simon Meek, Debbie Murray, David Potter, Kate Price, Duncan Reekie, Mark Rhodes (NDSME), Andrew Smith, Rob and Ruth Trown (Eaton Park Crazy Golf), Michael and Norwich Norse Environmental's grounds men, Martin Webster (Norwich Model Boat Club).

Helen Mitchell, Chair, Friends of Eaton Park, 24 November 2016

