

Friends of Eaton Park, Annual Report 2017

Friends Room

A rat infestation in the store room we share with Norwich City Council had happy consequences. The long due clear-out and clean was fast-tracked and we now have a tidy, relatively smart space that is entirely fit for purpose, and has allowed us to move our gardening equipment out of the Friends Room. The result is that the Friends Room is now much smarter, and we will be able to explore more fully its potential as a space for information, events and activities.

Nature Events

Saturday 24 June, **Tree Walk with Richard Hobbs**: Nineteen people came, many taking notes throughout. We received donations of £102, more than covering Richard's fee. In addition to promoting and coordinating the event, Sarah Scott prepared detailed, illustrated notes which are now on our website.

Sunday 6 August, **Butterfly Day with Butterfly Conservation**. Butterfly Conservation was delighted with attendance and wants to return next year. Recorded species included 12 types of butterflies, four each of dragonflies and crickets, and evidence of hedgehogs (droppings in the rose garden!).

Sunday 22 October, **Fungus Day** with Kay Yeoman, UEA. Forty people attended this drop-in session. There were microscopes, a selection of fungi – all found in the park – and literature to take away. Rain and cold cut the event short but this first attempt at a fungus day showed the interest and potential, and we plan to hold next year's session indoors in the Friends Room.

Various days in the summer, **Family wildlife activities**; Isabella McAdam, family activity coordinator at RSPB delivered drop in nature activities for families. This was organised with Pat Garner, our schools coordinator.

Trees

Many people have been shocked at the plan to cut down the partial avenue of trees between the rose garden and rotunda. The Friends were consulted a year beforehand and sought advice from expert Richard Hobbs. Unfortunately the city's tree team used standard signs to tell people about the work and these didn't explain why the trees were being removed or mention plans to replace them. Through Facebook and Twitter we were able to provide this bigger picture and reassure park users that the work is part of a well-thought-through plan. New young native walnut trees will be planted before Christmas and the Friends hope to plant bulbs around the trees in the coming year.

In a rare and sad error, most of the whips we planted to extend the pitch and putt hedge, were mown down. Norwich Norse Environmental has undertaken to replace like for like and to re-plant before Christmas. They are reviewing staff training to improve understanding of the diversity of mowing tasks.

Ground Force

This is where members help out with hands-on work in the park. This year we have dead-headed roses, planted bulbs and other plants, cared for and planted up flower beds beside the bandstand and the boat pond, helped with litter picking, cleaned park signs and notice boards and cleaned the rooftop and stairwell of one of the rotunda quadrants in preparation for rooftop tours. Separately, Ruth Pearson and Sarah Scott devised and installed a willow plant guard for a recently planted flower bed. (See photo back page.)

The pictorial meadow beside the miniature railway has been a profusion of flowers and a Mecca for wildlife. The Friends worked on it over a two year period with Matt Hewes from Norwich City Council.

Partnership working

Groundwork Trust

We have been approached by the national charity Groundwork who are keen to work with us. They have provided free advice on charitable status and supported us in an application to a Tesco scheme they manage, the result of which we will hear later next year. Through Groundwork, and with the help of Norwich Fringe Project, and the support of Norwich City Council, we are working towards being able to offer volunteering days in Eaton Park, for local businesses.

Norwich Fringe

As part of a re-organisation the Fringe is preparing management plans for its thirty five sites. Our broking of a new partnership between the Fringe and Groundwork led to Bluebell Wood in Eaton Park being prioritised, and this will now be the first plan to be written. The plan will look to maintain veteran oaks, improve pathways and create more space for bluebells. I am meeting with Fringe staff in January to discuss the plan and how other areas of the park can be incorporated. The plan will be signed off by the end of January and will act as a route map for future activities, providing possibilities and parameters for partnership working.

Other Norwich Parks Friends Groups

In November I was invited to attend the inaugural meeting of Friends of Waterloo Park. The meeting was chaired by Steve Morphew who credited Friends of Eaton Park as an inspiration for the new group. I gave a short presentation and joined in the discussion. Earlier in the year we were approached by Friends of Jubilee Park. I talked through ideas on the phone with the Chair and one of their members attended a Friends committee meeting to find out more. The City Council is actively encouraging the development of park friends groups and we have now provided support to four groups (the others are Friends of Kett's Heights and Friends of Heigham Park).

The Norwich Society

The Norwich Society has kindly provided the Friends with a number of its publications to sell including Andy Anderson's book *The Captain and the Norwich Parks* (for sale at half price - £5). The Friends take commission and in some cases the full cover price. We hope that further partnership working may follow.

Eaton Park Café

The café is thriving. It reviews the menu on an on-going basis, both seasonally and in response to feedback, and this winter it is again taking bookings for roast dinners. Throughout summer the café promoted music nights on Fridays and Saturday. Publicity is mainly through the Bicycle Shop's Facebook page which has over 7000 likes and these gigs are bringing a new, younger crowd to the park as well as helping extend park use into the evenings.

The café has put on several exhibitions, at least two of which have included new, specially created artworks featuring park scenes. Gigs, exhibitions and craft fairs all strengthen Eaton Park's cultural offer and provide opportunities for local creatives to get involved in the park.

Rob and David worked with us on our successful December 2016 Carol Concert and they are taking a lead on this year's concert – including sponsoring the band. This autumn the café offered members of the friends a trial three month 10% discount on hot drinks, meals and cakes. Rob will be reviewing the scheme and we hope that it may lead to a permanent scheme.

Events and activities

The Friends work hard to help promote activities in the park from regular band days and activities such as parkrun and junior parkrun, to one-offs organised by other groups and our regular Friday Walks. We manage two notice boards, provide comprehensive information on sporting activities on our website; and regular updates on social media.

We focus our own activity on band days which generally attract large numbers, and this year we also supported the City Council's 'Get Involved' day. Our Friends' stall is a chance for us to tell people about the work of the Friends, as well as raise funds from sales of plants, books, jigsaw puzzles and DVDs. Our Christmas concert was a remarkable success and this year's promises to be even better.

Our FAQ page on the website provides a growing source of useful information for people planning events and activities and the range and number of activities continues to grow. There has been a wedding reception, and many family parties; there are increasing numbers of film makers to be seen, and charities regularly host get-togethers and fundraising events here.

Communications

Social media

We have 2,084 likes on Twitter (+13%) and 3,378 Facebook friends (+22%). Stuart Beard now leads on social media. He is a professional photographer so the photos are now all excellent. Stuart regularly attends events in the park posting whole sets of photos. He also single-handedly ensured that Eaton Park had a high profile in this year's national 'Love Park's Week' photography project. Facebook is an effective way to communicate with park users and works as a 'friends-lite', a two-way channel of communication, and a trusted voice for the park.

Website

Starfish Design provide expert advice ensuring the website has necessary updates and is secure. This year, as well as routine checks and updates we've changed the structure to place greater emphasis on getting involved in the Friends' work, and made some design improvements. As our programme of work develops, so the website – as shop window and gateway to Eaton Park and our work – will need on-going updates.

Press

Stuart Beard has fed a steady stream of stories and pictures to 'Just Eaton and Cringleford', generating close to monthly coverage. Anne Balls obtains listings in the Evening News and EDP.

Heritage

Pat Garner and Christine Wilson coordinated and led our Heritage Open Day tour held in partnership with the model railway and boat club; and Christine led tours for two other groups.

This year we delivered our first three Rooftop Tours. Risk assessments and a safe system of work in place, we researched and prepared the script. Tours provide an inspiring 'snapshot' history of the park followed

by a chance to take photos of the magnificent views. Stuart Beard, Amanda Bradbury, Helen Mitchell and Ruth Pearson have been working on the tours. Pat Garner, Nigel Howard, Jane Sanders and Christine Wilson provided 'front of house' support. Over 100 people came on tours, including all ages.

The response was excellent and as well as nearly £80 in donations we picked up a handful of new members. The events felt special and were a great way to enter into useful conversations. It was also initially through a rooftop tour that we met Peter Larter, a collector of old photographs of Norwich. He has since sent us some super images, several of which may not have been seen for many years.

Schools (report from Pat Garner, schools coordinator)

We have expanded significantly our work with schools. This year we offered a more diverse range of activities and started working with fifteen year-11 pupils from the Clare School as well as thirty year 3 pupils from Bluebell Primary. In addition to activity sessions we've displayed exhibitions of artwork by pupils from both schools on band days.

Extending our work in this way has only been possible because more volunteers have come on board and I would like to extend particular thanks to Susan Yallop, Ruth Pearson, Maggie Knox, and Linda Chapman. Without them none of this would have been possible. Finally, next year we plan to develop guidelines for schools, to visiting Eaton Park.

Bluebell school

- Purple for Polio: planting 600 crocus bulbs behind the Community Centre.
- 'Signs of Spring: nature walk and litter pick.
- Seek and Find: composting game with Master Composter Maggie Knox.
- Art in the Park: work inspired by local artist Linda Chapman.
- Bulb planting around the crazy golf perimeter hedge.

Clare School (from May 2017)

- Two initial meetings to get to know the group.
- Litter pick and watering plants by the bandstand.
- Art in the Park: with local artist Linda Chapman.
- Bulb planting in the raised bed by the boating lake.

Income generation

Grants

Judith Lubbock submitted a successful application to Norwich City council's small grant fund and is applying for funding for a bench for the pitch and putt, which will commemorate this part of the park's role in World War One. Judith also organised our second Waitrose Green Tokens month which brought us an excellent £454. We have used part of the council's grant to buy new tools, and obtained a 15% discount and free delivery from Thorns. The grant also supported recent bulb-planting.

Donations

In addition to donations that come in with memberships, we received two large donations from members of the Friends: £500 from Brian Heading for the petanque, and £800 from David and Ceceile Strand on their return to the USA; while NDSME (the miniature railway) kindly donated £138.50.

Petanque

We have made great progress in our quest to install a petanque terrain. Christine Wilson has championed the idea and undertaken valuable research with existing local groups. Peter Scott is driving things forward on the practical, technical and fundraising side, including persuading Norse to quote on the basis of cost only, and to include a donation of £1000.

Peter and I will submit an application to Sport England for the balance and we aim for work to commence in the recommended window for the work: April to June. The new facility will be located behind the café, which has offered to host boules sets for people to borrow. Next summer we hope to hold a Friends' petanque evening, and we also plan to encourage interest in setting up an Eaton Park Petanque Club.

Charitable status

Last year I reported that we would be looking into whether the Friends should apply for charitable status. Peter Scott from the Friends and I have had detailed discussions, and I have consulted with Robert Horn, Community Support Officer for Groundwork Trust. Our recommendation, which has been accepted by the committee was that we would continue as an unincorporated association.

This research reinforced for the Friends that we have a good set of aims, all of which are charitable, and our constitution allows us to do all that we want to do. The lack of charitable status has not proved a barrier to fundraising and keeps administration to a minimum. We are able to be fleet of foot and efficient, concentrating our energies on making good things happen rather than tying ourselves up in extra administration. This decision could of course be revisited in the future.

Finance

Amanda Bradbury has had an excellent first year in the role of Treasurer and was instrumental in setting up online banking. We have simple and robust systems in place Pete and Pat Garner provide valuable support by paying in cheques and cash.

Our independent financial examiner has recommended that we create a separation between the financial year end and the AGM. The aim will be to reduce the pressure that is placed by current timings on the Chair, Treasurer and membership secretary. Additionally by moving the AGM to early spring we be asking people to attend our meeting at a sociable time of the year.

Membership

After a good number of years hovering around 55 to 65 members, this year we have eighty six members, an increase in one year of a third. Membership income has gone up by over 40% meaning more members are choosing to pay £10 instead of £5.

Over a quarter of the membership have been actively involved this year in one or more areas of the Friends work and we have contributed well over 1000 hours work to our aim of 'Helping Eaton Park thrive'.

Our committee was Stuart Beard (Honorary Secretary) Amanda Bradbury (Treasurer), Pat Garner (Membership Secretary), Judith Lubbock (Vice Chair), Bryant Mickleburgh, Geoff Mickleburgh, Helen Mitchell (Chair), Ceceile Strand, Christine Wilson and Susan Yallop. Geoff Mickleburgh resigned in May. In July Ceceile Strand returned to the USA and the same month we co-opted Ruth Pearson to the committee.

Liz Davies is co-opted as our Community Centre representative and Ann Balls is press officer. The committee met eight times to plan activities, fundraising and communications; and to monitor events and activities. We have separate sub-groups for schools, ground force, fundraising days, and roof-top tours.

Conclusion

Eaton Park received its fourth Green Flag, and won best large park and best public open space in this summer's Anglia in Bloom Awards. This has been a year of developments, increasing activity and new partnerships. Our membership has grown and more people are becoming active members. More people are using the park and the reduction in litter and dog mess reflects the affection and engagement that people feel. We are raising more funds for the park, and more events and activities are taking place.

We are streamlining our organisation to spend less time on meetings and administration and more time on helping Eaton Park thrive. Eaton Park is flourishing and there is still so much more that can be done. Thank you so much for your continued support in this work.

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, Groundwork, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Norwich in Bloom, Norwich City Concert Band, Norwich City Council, Norwich Community Choir, Norwich Norse Environmental, Norwich Parks Tennis, RSPB, Starfish Design, The Norwich Society, 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), Matt Hewes, Rich Hoey, Paul Holley, Rob Howe, Martin Adcock, Andy Lambert, Simon Meek, Mike Parker, Suzanne Parkinson, David Potter, Kate Price, Duncan Reekie, Mark Rhodes (NDSME), Rob and Ruth Trown (Eaton Park Crazy Golf), Roger Ryan, Michael and Norwich Norse Environmental's grounds men.

Helen Mitchell, Chair, Friends of Eaton Park, 30 November 2017



Clockwise from top left: new planting and willow guard, Ground Force, parkrun set of pics on facebook and a family enjoying one of our rotunda rooftop tours. Photos by Stuart Beard & Helen Mitchell.

