

Friends of Eaton Park, Annual Report 2018

PARK UPDATES

Green Flag

Eaton Park gained this prestigious award for the fifth year in a row. Recommendations for future consideration included gathering grey water for watering and solar powered lighting.

Events

Eaton Park is starting to be used by Norwich City council for large events which are outside hires rather than city council events. Eaton Park hosted Fakefest and Oktoberfest on the large field beside the children's play area. The area was fenced off and there were large marquees, sound systems and generators etc. The Friends are watching to see how this new development unfolds.

Anti-social behaviour

There were some rare instances of anti-social behaviour. These were traced to a particular family and location, and local services worked together to address the problem. Thanks to Judith Lubbock for her work on this as a councillor, and for keeping us in the loop.

Friend's Room and equipment

At the end of the year, and after the decision was taken to cease doing book sales (see events below), we took to charity shops several bike and car loads of second hand books, and various items of furniture. This allowed us to re-arrange the Friends Room and storage area. We bought a wheelbarrow and gardening gloves.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Good Gym

Helen Mitchell liaised with Steve Hitcham of Good Gym to set up a new partnership involving quarterly visits from this inspiring group. Members run together to and from the place where they are going to help out. For us this meant 15 to 30 volunteers helping out for thirty minutes of, depending on the time of year, cleaning gates, sweeping leaves, weeding, litter picking and watering fruit trees.

Eaton Park Café

Still in just its second year Eaton Park Café is developing an excellent reputation with park users and has been a responsive and generous partner in projects such as the petanque celebration, carol concert and RHS raised beds. Reflecting both the latter project, and the cafe's own potted plant displays, the café this year won Norwich in Bloom's 'Best Commercial Premises' award.

Royal Horticultural Society

We worked closely with Alison Findlay, Community Outreach Advisor on a project that was part of the RHS' programme 'Greening Grey Britain'. See 'Gardening' below.

EVENTS

May Plant sale – in the months before the plant sale, Pat Garner, Sarah Scott and Joan Mitchell potted up, cared for and transported plants. Several members contributed plants on the day.

Book sales – we ran two book sales on band days. At the end of the summer we decided that, as an activity, book sales don't related to the park and are time-consuming to run for the income generated. The books take up a lot of space and are heavy to move. We concluded that Norwich's many charity shops and second hand bookshops are better placed to do the sales than the Friends, and that we should focus our energies on activities that relate to the park.

Tree Walk (with Richard Hobbs) – nineteen people came on this Saturday morning walk. Income more than covered costs, and feedback was excellent.

Rooftop tours – these took place in August and September. Ruth Pearson joined Helen Mitchell and Stuart Beard in delivering tours, and we decided to experiment with asking for donations instead of making a small charge. Tours were well-attended and we had excellent feedback – people are fascinated by the park's history and its many inspiring stories. Throughout the afternoon we also invite people to come and see displays in the Friends Room. It's a chance to get feedback from people and tell them about the Friends, as well as generating some income.

90TH birthday celebration – this was marked with a traditional birthday party. Ruth Pearson made a beautiful celebratory cake, and many other members also contributed cake which we shared with park visitors after a cake-cutting ceremony coordinated with flair by Sabine Virani. The sun shone and Andy Anderson (writer of 'The Captain and the Norwich Parks') and Courtney – two of the oldest and youngest users of the park, cut the cake. Andy made an excellent speech.

We offered rooftop tours and invited people into the Friends Room to find out more about the history of the park and what we do. Helen Mitchell added four new panels about the Friends and their work to existing displays on park history.

Fungus Day (with Kay Yeoman, UEA) – this very successful drop-in event was attended by 150 people including good numbers of children who enjoyed the craft activities on offer. Some people stayed longer than an hour looking at displays and sharing stories of mushrooms foraging and finds.

GARDENING

Friends' Gardening days

Our gardening team comprised Judith Lubbock, Helen Mitchell, Joan Mitchell, Bryant Mickleborough, Ruth Pearson (coordinator), Sarah Scott (who provides gardening expertise) and Sue Yallop. The group met every first Thursday from February to October to work on the bandstand flower beds, lily pond and the boat pond raised beds. The schools group has also helped out with bulb planting in several locations.

Sarah Scott devised a new planting scheme for the bandstand flower beds. Vulnerable to both flooding and small children, these beds present a particular challenge. The new plan included a 'landing zone' for small children at the back of the beds – a response to the natural use of the bandstand as a playground, and intended to lessen overall damage to the plants and soil.

Norwich City council paid for a plaque to tell people about the Friends' looking after these flower beds. We worked alongside park staff to install the sign and its re-cycled concrete base.

New project: Eaton Park Café raised beds

Helen Mitchell led this project in which the Friends worked with Royal Horticultural Society, The Clare School and Eaton Park Café, to build two raised beds in the cafe garden. The large new planters are symmetrically positioned and made of attractive wood. They are planted with a wide range of herbs, edible plants such as nasturtiums, and plants that will attract insects.

The project involved planning meetings, a building day, two planting days and several follow-up sessions. RHS were generous with advice, help and plants. Clare School pupils were closely involved, and café staff watered the beds throughout the dry summer.

There was an end of project celebration and we got a full page in the Evening News. The raised beds have transformed the feel of the café garden and our gardeners are looking forward to nurturing and developing the beds.

WOODLAND WORK

A new Friends' team

This is a new area of work for the Friends, and one we want to develop. Members of the emerging new group included Stuart Beard, Ian Harvey, Maggie Knox, Helen Mitchell, Ruth Pearson and Sarah Scott. Gillian Beard and Peter Mitchell helped with litter picking and we were joined by new volunteer Julia Corney.

Bluebell Wood

Helen Mitchell set up spring and autumn sessions in which the Friends worked alongside Norwich Fringe and TCV staff and volunteers to root out brambles and unwanted saplings from Bluebell Wood. The work was to encourage bluebells alongside the main footpath and in adjacent glades.

The session raised awareness of Bluebell Wood with Norwich Fringe, and Project Officer, Matt Davies charged colleague, Matt Hewes to draft a ten-year management plan. Maggie Fink (Norwich City Council's park's officer), Matt Davies and Helen Mitchell all fed into the plan. Recommendations include pathway improvement, bramble management, and installing steps from Bluebell Road into the wood and the park from the south west corner.

North Park Wood

Additionally, Helen set up a day with Norwich Fringe in the newer wooded area between the meadow and North Park Avenue (which we are calling 'North Park Wood'). The Friends paid for the

hire of a chipper and Matt Davies brought a chainsaw. With the support and expertise of the Fringe we created clearings, coppiced trees and thinned congested areas of the woods. We also learnt a lot.

HERITAGE

A 90th birthday call-out for memories and artefacts attracted various submissions and donations including some super photos of visiting circus posters, and an approach from John Chilvers. John is researching Eaton Cricket Club, which began life as Fitness Cricket. As he trawls through the EDP archive John is going to feed through Eaton Park news items.

SCHOOLS WORK

The schools team comprises Linda Chapman, Maggie Knox, Ruth Pearson, Lyn Preston, and Pat Garner, who leads the group. The group worked with Bluebell and Clare Schools, with sessions taking place in the spring, summer and autumn.

Bluebell School took part in rose garden bench cleaning, a highly successful art session with Linda Chapman (artworks were displayed in the rotunda on several band days), a summer picnic with games, and bulb planting.

With RHS and the Friends, Clare School pupils planted seeds, potted up, and then planted out some of the plants for the new raised beds. Pupils were fully involved in all stages of the project including presenting their work during a visit from Anglia and Norwich in Bloom, and being part of the final celebration, in which they were the stars of Evening News coverage. Clare School pupils also helped out with litter picking and planting bulbs.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Petanque

July saw the opening by the Lord Mayor of the new petanque terrain. The project was coordinated by Helen Mitchell and Peter Scott, who worked closely with Maggie Fink from Norwich City Council's park's team. It included purchase and installation of:

- petanque terraine (10m x 17m)
- small notice board
- three benches
- four bike stands

We also negotiated with Norwich City Council for two existing benches to be moved and plastic slats replaced with wooden ones. This has really brought together the area behind the cafe, with benches lining up well with the outdoor ping pong tables (installed by the Friends in 2013), and the petanque.

Benches

Liz Heighton's family bench was installed in October on the west avenue (from the bandstand to the lower car park). The family meet there for special occasions and Liz, who is a member of the Friends, says things have come full circle as she and husband now use Eaton Park just as much as her parents.

Three benches were installed as part of the petanque project. They are for people playing petanque but also for others making use of this part of the park, which now hosts various attractions.

We commemorated the 100th anniversary of the end of World War One by installing a bench in the Pitch and Putt. It commemorates the use of this area of the park as a military training ground. The bench can be found near the South Park Avenue pathway, overlooking what remains one of the trenches from the time.

Depot and East Car Park

Norwich City Council contacted Helen Mitchell about plans to upgrade the depot and East Car Park. She suggested taking the opportunity to address off-road parking, and use logs to add enhance the woodland environment here. Some parking will be freed up by the creation of parking space for Norwich Norse in the compound.

The idea was incorporated into the plan, which will be delivered in early 2019. In addition to enabling restoration of the damaged woodland Eaton Park East entrance, the idea supports the Friend's interests in encouraging park users to use sustainable forms of travel.

MEMBERSHIP

Our committee was Stuart Beard (Honorary Secretary), Pat Garner (joint Membership Secretary), Judith Lubbock (Vice Chair), Bryant Mickleburgh, Helen Mitchell (Chair), Ruth Pearson, Alan Shirley (joint membership secretary), Sabine Virani (Treasurer) and Susan Yallop.

We met in January, April, May, July, September and November. As agreed in the 2017 AGM, the 2018 AGM was postponed from November to the following April.

Christine Wilson stepped down from the committee. She was one of the original members and had been highly influential in championing heritage and creating and running the first Friends' website. She was the group's second Chair, sometimes doubling up as Treasurer too. In recognition of her work, Christine was honoured with life membership of the Friends.

Membership rose to 96 – a record number which included 18 new members. Peter Scott, who is also Chair of Norwich Croquet Club organised a summer evening's croquet which was attended by nineteen people.

Eaton Park Café discount – the cafe trialled a 10% discount voucher for members of the Friends. The offer was continued on a rolling basis throughout the year.

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) – Helen Mitchell researched and wrote a Friends' Privacy Policy to ensure the Friends comply with this new legislation.

INCOME GENERATION

Grants

The following applications were made and were successful:

- £500 from Norfolk Community Foundation fund marking 100 years from the end of WW1 (Judith Lubbock)
- £8002 from Sport England (Helen Mitchell and Peter Scott)
- £500 from Royal Horticultural Society (Helen Mitchell and Hayley Strivens).

Donations

We received several generous donations, mostly from members of the Friends:

- £8000 from FOEP member Bryan Heading for the Petanque project.
- £1300 from FOEP member Liz Heighton for a family bench. (paid direct to Norwich City Council who install the benches).
- \$140 from FOEP members David and Ceceile Strand.
- £100 from Thurne Group, Acle. (The group was testing new equipment on the miniature railway track. Norwich & District Society of Model Engineers suggested a donation to FOEP by way of thanks.

FINANCES

Thanks to our Treasurer Sabine Virani, and to Pat Garner who took on the difficult task of changing banks from Nat West to Lloyds Bank.

COMMUNICATIONS

Members received four newsletters. We maintained the two park notice boards, promoting our own events and general information on the park and sporting activities. Stuart Beard continued to build our considerable Facebook following, and to obtain monthly articles in Just Eaton and Cringleford. Helen Mitchell and Ann Parton obtained press coverage and listings throughout the year.

CONCLUSION

2018 was our busiest and most productive year so far. We brought in more money, worked on more substantial projects and generally made more good things happen in the park than ever before.

More members get involved in volunteering, and group leaders, and their groups grew in confidence and ambition. We stuck with our aim of holding less committee meetings, and we spent more time working together doing the things that we love doing in Eaton Park.

We became clearer about our strengths and our priorities, deciding to stop doing some activities (Friday Walks and book sales), while working to develop new areas such as Rooftop Tours, gardening and woodland work.

Our focus is very clearly on Eaton Park, its wellbeing, heritage, gardens, wildlife and wild areas; the people and groups who use it, on *helping Eaton Park thrive*.

WARM THANKS TO OUR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS...

Adrian Akester, Louise Curtis, Maggie Finck, Max Griffiths, Matt Hewes, Simon Meek, Imogen Mole, Mike Parker, Emma Penfold and Suzanne Parkinson, (Norwich City Council), Terry Bane (Norwich in Bloom), Ian Couzens (our auditor), Alan Dawson and Andy Brazil (Butterfly Conservation), Brian Dermott (Band Coordinator), Chris Evans (Norwich Park's Tennis), Matt Davies and Matt Hughes (Norwich Fringe), Becky Harris (PCSO), Ryan Hughes (Active Norfolk), Rob Howe, David Potter and the team at Eaton Park Café, Alex Hurrell (Just Eaton and Cringleford), Debbie Murray (The Conservation Volunteers) Duncan Reekie (Bluebell School), Mark Rhodes (NDSME), Stella Sheldon (Age UK Norwich), Martin Skipper (East of England Apples and Orchards Project), Nick Stone (Starfish Design), Anna Gok and Hayley Strivens (Clare School), Rob and Ruth Trown (Eaton Park Crazy Golf), Andy Harmer, Andy Lambert Michael Ottaway, and Norwich Norse Environmental's grounds team, and Vanessa Trevelyan (The Norwich Society).

Helen Mitchell, Chair of Friends of Eaton Park, 2018