

Friends of Eaton Park, Annual Report 2019

INTRODUCTION

This year's annual report is presented for the 2021 AGM, as Covid interfered with the plans for our 2020 AGM. 2019 saw the park gain the prestigious Green Flag award for the sixth year in a row. We also got "well loved" status in the Fields in Trust favourite green spaces competition. Whilst we didn't win, we and were reported in the press and on Radio Norfolk.

It was a sad year too as it saw the death of our friend and park champion Andy Anderson, author of 'The Captain and the Norwich Parks' and a supporter of the Friends over a number of years. He was very encouraging to the group and he also worked to raise the profile of the city parks generally. Andy was guest of honour at Eaton Park's 90th birthday celebration in 2018 where he cut the cake. He was an honorary life member of the FOEP. Helen wrote a tribute to Andy which was posted to his family and which was included in the FOEP winter newsletter. Christine Wilson's interview with Andy is available on the Friends website (<http://friendsofeatonpark.co.uk/memories/>). The Committee agreed to fund a park bench in memory of Andy.

EVENTS

2019 was perhaps our busiest year yet for hosting events in the park.

We held a day of rooftop tours, with different committee members taking the lead each time. The idea is build our capacity so we can increase the frequency of them in 2020, offering more opportunities for people to experience the park from this unique perspective. (Maybe 2022!!)

Our annual Fungus Day was a great success, there was a bountiful supply of fungi around the park to explore and be identified by Professor Kay Yeoman from UEA. More than two dozen different types were all collected in the immediate area. Kay brought along a microscope so that everyone could get a close look at all the different varieties.

Butterfly Day was less successful, the weather did not favour the insects and only a few made an appearance, though only a few days before we had done a preparatory scoping around the park and saw multiple varieties, particularly in the wild meadow area that has been so successful in promoting biodiversity.

Christine Wilson hosted two heritage walks around the park for Heritage Open Days. The walks were very informative and very popular, booked out well in advance. Apple Day was similarly well attended and went down well, the experts identifying various varieties that the public brought along. We hope to run this event again next year.

In June we hosted a Great Get Together event, a national initiative to unite communities inspired by the tragic murder of Jo Cox. It was a lovely day for a picnic in the park, and everyone agreed it was a very positive event. There was a variety of music and craft activities, with music from Stookey Blue (accordion), an energetic group from Norwich Samba Band and Duda Moleque from Brasil. Thank you to everyone involved, particularly coordinator, Sabine.

The year was rounded off beautifully with a heartwarming carol concert, which we organised with the café. Dereham Town Band played a range of traditional carols to a packed pavilion.

GARDENING (Report from Ruth Pearson, gardening lead)

It was a very successful gardening year. Because of regular flooding, drought and how the public use the park we have had to learn what works in different beds and now feel we are able to keep abreast of the work.

Our twice-monthly team work enthusiastically and are both reliable and fun to be with. It's helpful to have knowledgeable members of the group but everyone adds something to the mix. Great to have several new people joining recently, mostly through word-of-mouth contacts.

The numbers vary from 4 to 9 and we work on whatever areas need attention. We have enough tools now to do what we need, and the addition of a tree popper has added greatly to our work in the woodland areas

We were invited to take part in the Growing Communities seed-raising scheme for the first time. Seeds, compost and seed trays were provided by City College and volunteers (Joan Mitchell and Sarah Scott) sowed the seeds and nurtured the seedlings during the summer months. The resulting plants were returned to City College early in September for the horticulture students to pot on and – ultimately – plant out around the city. We were allowed to keep some of the seedlings and were given surplus plants to use in the park.

Having planted bulbs and a variety of different plants (many from City College) we are now satisfied that we have a plan which will work for the future. Having worked steadily over the last 2 years to divide and add to our stock of plants it is easier to maintain and fill the beds.

We put in what we are given and by trial and error are finding all the areas are developing well with a great deal of colour, giving pleasure to all who participate, and to park visitors. The café raised beds are full of herbs – many of which have over-wintered. Next on our wish list is finding a planter for some mint, also for the café garden.

We hope to continue with our regular twice monthly sessions. We feel we are able to add greatly to the enjoyment of park users – many of whom comment favourably on what they see.

WOODLAND and TREES

Helen Mitchell and Sarah Scott met with Tree Officer Imogen Mole. It was agreed that the Friends can undertake basic tree care such as removal of smaller broken branches and suckers. A Judas tree was planted, and we helped chose locations for planting two cornus controversa (Wedding Cake trees).

Two Pride of India trees (*Koelreuteria paniculata*) were planted near the Community Centre for the Baha'I faith community.

Bluebell Wood clearance day was a great success. Working alongside TCV volunteers we continued clearance of brambles, undertook a park-wide litter pick and cleared mud from sections of the path. A good range of wildflowers grow in the wood.

SCHOOLS WORK (report from Pat Garner, schools lead)

This was our busiest year yet and very enjoyable. We worked with 2 schools, Bluebell Primary , years 5 and 3, and the Clare school. The schools group comprises Pat Garner (coordinator), Linda Chapman, Maggie Knox, Ruth Pearson, Lynn Preston and Susan Yallop. The group met three times to prepare and plan a programme of activities for each school.

We began in April with the traditional Spring Walk and used the *Signs of Spring* worksheet devised by the Friends with UEA. This proved to be very successful and popular with both school groups.

We did a session with the Clare school on seed sowing, in their outdoor area, ready to replenish the herbs in the raised beds in the café garden. In May we organised litter picks with both schools to help get the park ready for the Annual Green Flag award judging. Maggie Knox, who is a Master Composter ran a session with Bluebell school on recycling/ composting in the Friends room. In June we planted the herbs in the Cafe garden ready for the Summer season.

We also ran a highly successful session of our annual Art in the Park with Bluebell School. The theme that year was painting "en plein air". This session was introduced by one Peter Evans, who is one of the Sainsbury Centre Guides. He introduced the group to the work of the French Impressionists, who often began their paintings out of doors. The children then followed suit, and we put on a display of their work in the Friends Room.

In July, on a very hot day, we organised a very welcome picnic for the Bluebell School children as a thank you for all their hard work during the year. This was followed by a game of rounders.

In the Autumn, we started with Duncan Reekie's new class, a year 3 group. They had taken on an outdoor area outside their classroom and hoped to grow vegetables using compost from vegetable food waste in the school. Maggie Knox did an excellent session with them on composting in their classroom, which was well received.

Our thanks to all the children involved for making the year go so well. Also their class teachers- Duncan Reekie, Bluebell school, and Anna Gok from the Clare school.

If anyone is interested in joining our group, please contact Pat Garner patgarnerpat84@gmail.com

INFRASTRUCTURE

In late 2018 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, using logs to add enhance the woodland environment. The plan included releasing some parking spaces by the creation of parking space for Norwich Norse in the compound.

The idea was incorporated into the plan, which was 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, then chair), Julia Corney, Pat Garner (Membership Secretary), Judith Lubbock (Vice Chair), Helen Mitchell (Chair, then ordinary member), Ruth Pearson, Sabine Virani (Treasurer)

We met in January, March, May, July, September, October and November. April's AGM saw Helen Mitchell step down as chair and Stuart Beard confirmed as new chair.

Total membership was 92, of which 4 were life members, 15 new, and 73 renewals. This compared favourably to the 96 recorded in 2018

INCOME GENERATION

We generated a little short of £1000 income in 2019 (£970 reported in October finance statement), £233 from donations, £321 fundraising, £415 membership.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Our partnership with Good Gym went from strength to strength. They visited the park quarterly, doing a mix of litter picking, clearing, and weeding. Also sweeping of the dried blossom around the lily pond made a great difference. In a similar vein Norfolk Gazelles borrowed our litter pickers to do some plogging – litter-picking while jogging.

We met with Andrea Auburn, Cycling Development Officer for Norwich for cycling UK, with a view to further develop the park as a community cycling hub.

We continued to work with Norwich Fringe, and several members had excellent training on safe woodland working and working effectively with volunteers.

COMMUNICATIONS

Members received three newsletters. We maintained the two park notice boards, promoting our own events and general information on the park and sporting activities. Our Facebook following rose to 4000+, and twitter around 2,500. We received monthly coverage of our activities in Just Eaton and Cringleford magazine.

CONCLUSION

2019 was a busy and productive year. Membership stayed steady, and we carried on our work with partnership bodies, and started to investigate future links with Cycling UK. Our events were popular and successful, and raised our profile in the local community and beyond. We maintained our clear focus on *helping Eaton Park thrive, for everyone.*

Warm thanks to our Friends and partners

Edward Bolton, Louise Curtis, Maggie Finck, Max Griffiths, Simon Meek and Suzanne Parkinson, (Norwich City Council), Cllr Matthew Packer, Terry Bane (Norwich in Bloom), Ian Couzens (our auditor), Alan Dawson and Andy Brazil (Butterfly Conservation), Andrea Auburn (Cycling UK), Brian Dermott (Band Coordinator), Chris Evans (Norwich Park's Tennis), Matt Davies (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), Rob and Ruth Trown (Eaton Park Crazy Golf), Michael Ottaway, and Norwich Norse Environmental's grounds team.

Stuart Beard, Chair of Friends of Eaton Park, 2019