



Annual Report 2022

Benches

2021 research – last year we researched and produced a plan noting the location and condition of all benches. The work paid off as this year, Norwich City Council used the plan to commission repair work, including to the bandstand seats.

All benches are now in good condition apart from the two broken benches in the rose garden. We did find sponsors to replace these though and they'll be installed in spring 2023.

New benches: Two new benches were installed – a Covid bench beside the lily pond paid for by Friends of Eaton Park (FOEP) member Elizabeth Groves and two friends, and a bench with the inscription 'Thank you for the days' overlooking the cricket pitches.

Bench sponsorship – we signed off with the council a "Bench Sponsorship Information Sheet". This is now on our website promoting and informing people on bench sponsorship, and streamlining arrangements.

Since 2014, championed by FOEP, thirty new benches have been installed, half paid for FOEP, half sponsored by members of the public.

Gardeners

Gardeners – the team is led by Sarah Scott and Julia Corney. It comprises Mary Deeks, Julian Flatt, Martin Hendry, Katrina Kirkwood, Gay Lind, Rory Fairfoot, Joe Mildon, Helen Mitchell, Louise Riches, Mike Pearce, Ruth Pearson, Carrie Phoenix, Karen Stickle and Linda Tansley.

The year's work – The group did a great job maintaining nine flower beds at their regular 'first Thursday of the month' sessions. The flower beds are the four bandstand beds, two lily pond, one boating lake and two raised herb beds in the café garden. During the year the group added to the bandstand beds Nepeta, Verbena and hardy Geraniums bought in by members of the group.

Meadows and wild flowers

Aconites, bluebells and snowdrops – were planted inside the park's southern edge, near the boat pavilion. The plants and a bird box are a memorial for Russell Rix (see income generation below). This area will now be managed with a 'conservation cut'. This is typically where bulbs are planted and grass is cut less often, making space for wildflowers and other forms for wildlife.

Snowdrops – Norwich City Council (NCC) kindly provided 1000 snowdrops. These were planted at the north end of the WW1 training trench and at the west end of the meadow.

New meadow – NCC has agreed that the small area of grass between the Community Centre and the multi-use games area can be developed as a meadow. This will bring the total number of meadows in Eaton Park to four (the other three are North Park Meadow, the railway meadow and the old heather beds).

Lily of the valley – we decided to mark the queen’s death by planting lily of the valley, a favourite of hers and featured in Simon Armitage’s poem ‘Floral Tribute’. This native species has been absent from the park and will be a lovely addition for its beauty and fragrance.

Family nature trails – Katrina Kirkwood produced Spring and Autumn Nature Detectives Trails for families to explore wildflowers in Eaton Park (see events and activities below).

Survey – lists of wildflowers and grasses were drawn together into a single spreadsheet which included where each plant had been found. We charted 97 wildflowers and 7 grasses.

Woodlands

Bird boxes – we installed six woodcrete bird boxes in trees either side of the boat pavilion.



Bluebell Wood pathway – in May, with the help of Volunteering Matters (a national charity that champions volunteering), we organised for ten Aviva staff (pictured) to lay down wood chip on the main path through Bluebell Wood. We managed to cover 90% of the path before running out of wood chip. The Aviva staff went on to do a litter pick with the remaining time. Since then, the path has had less muddy areas so more people stay on the path

rather than stray onto the bluebells and other flowers.

Schools

The group – Stuart Beard leads this small group comprising Linda Chapman, Lynn Preston and David Vaughan.

Bluebell School – the group worked with Ash Class (year 3) to offer the following sessions:

- *Signs of Spring* – exploring Eaton Park with FOEP’s Nature Detectives trail (February)
- *Litter picking* – walk together while making a difference in the park (March)
- *Art in the Park* – with FOEP member, artist Linda Chapman (July)
- *End of term celebration* (July).

In the art session the children specially enjoyed looking closely at the flowers around the bandstand and the architecture of the rotunda and bandstand. The final session is a treat, with mini-lollies, picnic and train trips for a proper day out.

Future plans – in the autumn plans were set in place for future working with both Bluebell School and Colman Road School.

Activities are educational but they're also about local children getting to know better and enjoy their park. We want children to understand and feel that it is their park and that they can be part of its daily life. We also want them to feel that children are valued in the park.

Events and activities (all of them free)

[Spring and Autumn Nature Detectives](#) – FOEP member Katrina Kirkwood researched, wrote and designed two family activity trails for families to look for and chart spring and autumn wildflowers and plants in the park. PDFs of the trails were made available to download off the home page of the website and Facebook posts and posters featuring individual plants and flowers were used to promote their availability. The trails have already been used for school visits.



Nature walks (pictured) – walks with experts Chris Durdin (birds), Richard (trees) and Aaron Brown (wildflowers and meadows). Designed to be accessible – free, 6pm to 7.30pm but stay as long as you like; these summer evening slots were very well attended with 50 people attending the last walk. Open to both FOEP members and the public, they are sociable, informative and enjoyable .

Three brass bands – after an absence of 2 years, and with no council funding available we decided to promote three brass band concerts. Eaton Park Community Centre and two members of the Friends volunteered to cover the cost of £200 per concert. The bands were City of Norwich Brass Band (15 May), Dereham Town Band (24 July) and Cawston Band (14 August). We estimate an average 400 people joined the audience for each concert.

Bike Day – activities included the chance to try different types of bike (tandems, cargo bikes, electric bikes and Brompton folding bikes), advice and maps of local cycle routes from Norwich Cycling Campaign, anti-theft bike marking from Norfolk Constabulary, free bike repairs from Little Riders and have-a-go cycle speedway cycle sessions from Norwich Stars, the park's resident club.

Heritage Open Day, Sunday 11 September – led by Pat Garner, with Lynn Preston and Christine Wilson. Tour, including train trip and visit to the boat pavilion, attended by 25 people. Pat and Lynn also hosted open afternoons on band days when members of the public were encouraged to share memories of the park and browse history displays.

Wildlife day with Norfolk Wildlife Trust, in a joint decision the event was cancelled as it was a clash with the queen's funeral. A scything day with Norfolk Wildlife Trust is scheduled for September 2023.

Christmas singalong and Fair – despite biting cold weather this was a huge success and attended by some 600 people. Eaton Park Café put on seasonal refreshments, decorated the bandstand, organised a Christmas fair of local makers and invited Brian McNerney as Father Christmas, giving him 200 free mince pies to give out.

The City Council supplied a load of grit, which FOEP, with help from parkrun, spread on the frozen ground that afternoon. FOEP booked Dereham Town Band, supplied song sheets and invited Sherriff, Caroline Jarrold to welcome everyone. We had a collection but as we prefer to offer activities for free, we kept it low key.

Eaton Park Community Cycling Club (CCC)

Monthly cycle rides – these took place throughout the year with a steady turnout of 9-12 people each time. Regular ride leader Joanna is leaving Norwich but it is hoped that training can be arranged for Brian Allerton. This will be paid for from remaining funds from a Cycling UK grant. These rides are now very well-established.



Riders with visual impairment – the group (pictured) has been joined on nine occasions by cyclists. They are able to join the group by riding with a sighted 'pilot' on the CCC's tandem.

Dr Bike sessions – Little Riders (a local cycle training and development organisation founded in 2018) ran three Dr Bike sessions (free, drop in, bike-mending sessions for local people) in addition to one on our Bike Day (see events below).

Day to day in the park

- *A hot dry summer* – Fields and meadows suffered causing members of the public to worry. The water level in the lily pond dropped worryingly and, for a time, this needed topping up. On band afternoons borrowed a gazebo to provide shade for volunteers.
- *Graffiti* – FOEP reported 7 incidents. These were dealt with by NCC's graffiti team, mostly in 24 hours.

- *Crazy Golf* – new concession holder, Simon Thompson is doing a great job with the crazy golf going. He's painted the holes in bright colours and visitors get a warm and friendly welcome. Simon also provides a lost property service for the park.
- *Green flag* – we supported the city council in updating the plan and meeting with the judge. This was the ninth year the park has gained the prestigious award.
- *Defibrillator* – we arranged for responsibility to pass from Judith Lubbock (with FOEP doing the banking) to a partnership between parkrun and Eaton Park Community Centre. This should provide a sustainable future for the facility and ensure efficient working.

Income generation

We started to look into new ways for members of the public to sponsor items in the park. Both options combine income generation with celebrating and strengthening people's connection with the park.

Sponsoring nature – when FOEP member Russell Rix died, his family wanted a place in the park to remember him. We used their donation to install a woodcrete bird box and plant bluebells, snowdrops and aconites around the tree.

Ash scattering – we researched and wrote a proposal for trialling the scattering of funeral ashes in Eaton Park. The practice has already been rolled out in the grounds of National Trust and English Heritage properties, and Kew Gardens amongst other places. A motivation is to support the growth in humanist funerals and memorials. A small charge would be made and this would go back into the park, possibly via FOEP.

Communication

Posters and notice boards – kept up to date throughout the year with information on events and activities, nature, sports, contact numbers etc. A new poster promotes cricket pitch and equipment hire.

Just Eaton and Cringleford – Helen supplied copy and Stuart photos for editor Alasdair McGregor. Our thanks go out to this excellent hyper local magazine for the coverage it provided us throughout the year.

Digital media – we continue to find the website and, for the most part, Facebook, excellent ways to keep in touch with a wider public. Stuart and Helen handle a steady stream of enquiries through the website and Facebook. We have over 6,700 followers and share information on events, nature, sports and activities in the park such as trains and regattas.

Death of the Queen – we responded with a simple statement in park notice boards and on Facebook, sharing Simon Armitage's poem 'Floral Tribute'.

Newsletters – seven newsletters and updates in February, May (x2), June, August, September and December.

Facebook – followers rose from 6000 to 6700.

Membership

Administration – Pat Garner stayed in position until the end of March. Renewals were organised by Julia Corney and Calum MacRae (Treasurer) who will work on membership together.

Membership – at the end of 2022 we had 105 members (15 new, 87 renewals and 3 life/discretionary).

The committee – Stuart Beard (vice chair), Julia Corney (membership secretary), Calum MacRae (Treasurer), Helen Mitchell, (chair), Lynn Preston, Jane Saunders, Sarah Scott (honorary secretary), and Linda Tansley.

Membership form – updated, converted into a self-completion PDF and on the website. With the bank transfer payment option this makes joining quick and easy.

Meetings – January, March, May, July, September and November.

Pat Garner – we belatedly marked Pat’s stepping down from the committee with the gift of a framed drawing by artist Linda Chapman of the large lime trees near the rotunda.

Presented at a tea party with her loyal schools group this was a thank you for her wonderful work on heritage, membership and schools.

Volunteering – we recorded 930 hours of volunteer work, plus an additional 60 from Aviva.

Finance

Income – was down by 24.1% on last year to £2,283. However, removing the one time effect of 2021’s Waitrose donation income increased by 13.8%. This was due to membership subscriptions increasing by 13.7%, and donations from members by 13.8%.

Expenditure – declined by 25.2% to £1,798. This was largely due to less spending on one-time infrastructure items in the Equipment and furniture category. With the easing of Covid-19 restrictions in the year we were able to put on a number of events and talks and they were the major constituent part of expenditure in the year with £970 spent in this category.

Cash balance including designated funds – at year end the cash balance stood at just over £4,900. This balance includes designated funds set aside for specific projects (cycling and the fountain). These account for under half of the Friends of the Friends’ cash in hand.

Park development

Eaton Park Management Plan – In May, Norwich City Council invited the Friends to co-write Eaton Park’s next management plan. This invitation reflected the close working between the city and the Friends. With Richard Green (Parks and Open Spaces Officer) Helen Mitchell scoped out a way of working and in the autumn, facilitated a session with the committee to draw up a vision, aims and objectives. The plan went on to be written in early 2023.

Investment in football pitches – the city council re-seeded worn areas and replaced goalposts with mobile ones that can be moved to spread wear.

Active Travel – recognising the need to encourage active travel, we set up a group to scope out ideas. The group identified locations for extra bike stands and discussed other options such as working with the café on incentives.

Parking charges – in November we received notice of a consultation around the city council’s planned introduction of parking charges. The committee decided unanimously not to challenge the introduction of parking charges. We provided a two-page response with detailed feedback and suggestions and shared this with our members, who we also encouraged to respond, whatever their views.

Conclusion

Covid saw some community groups fold. In Eaton Park the pandemic saw the Friends show their worth, in helping champion the park as a place where “all shall be well”. We kept on top of graffiti and helped with litter, cared for flower beds and benches, and created new ways to celebrate and engage people in the natural world of the park.

Online, FOEP shared good news stories and set a positive tone for the park’s engagement with its communities. Individual Facebook posts can reach over 3,500 people. The tone of communications with and from the public is nearly uniformly positive.

Preparing for the new management plan involved committee members in thinking clearly and carefully about the vision and aims for Eaton Park. The new plan will be shared publicly in spring 2023 but for now, here are the vision and aims.

‘For people, for nature, for sustainability’

- a place for pleasure, leisure and recreation
- a haven for people and wildlife
- an engine for individual and community wellbeing
- a beacon for sustainability.

Warm thanks to friends and partners

Edward Bolton, Louise Curtis, Richard Green, Max Griffiths, Simon Meek and Suzanne Parkinson, Cllr Kevin McGuire (Norwich City Council), Chris Wilson (Cycling UK), Ian Couzens (our auditor), Alan Dawson and Andy Brazil (Butterfly Conservation), Chris Evans (Norwich Park’s Tennis), Matt Davies (Norwich Fringe), Steve Hitcham (EPIC Norwich) Rob Howe, David Potter and the team at Eaton Park Café, Alasdair McGregor (Just Eaton and Cringleford), Duncan Reekie (Bluebell School), Mark Rhodes and Chris Eve (NDSME), Martin Skipper (East of England Apples and Orchards Project), Jon Osbourne, Little Riders, Michael Ottaway the and grounds team and Mark Webster (The Conservation Volunteers).

Helen Mitchell, Chair of Friends of Eaton Park, 24 April 2023

