FoLP Chairman Report 2021

The Larkhall Park Partnership Board met for the first time on 29 January 2020. The Partnership Board was created by Lambeth Council and was the culmination of six years of work by the Larkhall Park Reference Group, a sub-committee of the Friends of Larkhall Park. This is a great step forward for the park, greatly increasing its annual revenue budget for the next 15 years so that Larkhall Park can be brought up to a good standard and future projects to developed in the local area.

The brief of the Partnership Board is to manage the £120,000 annual budget that the Friends of Larkhall Park have negotiated with Lambeth Council. A significant part of this budget will employ *a full time gardener for Larkhall Park, two apprentices and a park development officer.* £15K was allocated by the Board to finance the annual Stockwell Festival, which was unfortunately cancelled due to the lockdown restriction imposed last year. It's unlikely that health and safety conditions will improve to allow for this year's Stockwell Festival to happen. The under spend for this past year is being reallocated for various park improvements .

The Partnership Board is composed of two Lambeth Councillors one from the Larkhall Ward and one from the Stockwell Ward, two representatives from the Friends of Larkhall Park, two representatives from the Council Housing Estates adjacent to Larkhall Park, two reps from Oasis Adventure Playground with one of the Oasis reps being a youth representative, and two Lambeth Council Park Officers. The Board meets every two months. We can look forward to a brighter future for the park.

In the spring of 2019 2 large consignments of plants were ordered by the FoLP for Priory Grove and Wandsworth Road entrances and in April to June 2019 many volunteers assisted in their delivery and in planting them. With FoLP members agreement, these plant orders were funded from Park receipts allocated to us by Lambeth. It was a great effort and during 2019 to early 2020 these areas looked really good. Sadly during 2020 the Covid 19 restrictions, together with a drought in spring and continuing heavy theft of plants, have depleted these areas and allowed weeds to flourish. The theft of some of our watering equipment was also a problem. Small groups of 2-3 members working at a distance have done some basic work but we look forward to setting up regular planting/ weeding sessions as soon as allowed.

In spite of issues with Lambeth’s mowing of the four existing meadow grass areas the FoLP have worked to support the meadow grass areas. They have survived fairly well and are to be revived and expanded this year by Lambeth's Beeline project organised by Iain Boulton for Lambeth Parks.

There have been a number of park improvements since the last AGM. The timber fence between the Go Kart track and the Priory Grove entrance was replaced in February 2019. The astro turf surface on the 5 aside pitch was replaced in April 2019. The dilapidated timber fence around the Boules pitch was replaced with a metal fence in March 2020. The timber props supporting the leaning boundary brick wall near the toddlers playground were removed and replaced with new brick piers in October 2020.

The Cafe in Larkhall Park was re-advertised last October after lengthy negotiations by Lambeth with a very promising bidder fell through. The Council is evaluating various applicants at the moment. There is considerable repair work that needs to be done to make the cafe usable. It's unclear how long it will to refurbish the cafe to open again. Through the Partnership Board the Friends are following developments and pushing for rapid action.

The changing rooms alterations received planning permission approval in January 2020. Subsequent tenders for the alterations were all over budget. I'm waiting for an update from Caroline Streeks to find out how this project is going to proceed.

Nickie Bell, Ida Turn, Minna Cowper-Cowles, Paulette Lester and Linda Suggate, met 18 months ago to discuss expanding the playground. Since then they have visited various playgrounds, applied for and received a £1000 grant from the Lottery 25th Anniversary fund. Max Mueller, a play consultant has been employed to help develop the project.

The Partnership Board made a decision in November to issue a licence to the Friends of Larkhall Park for the Commumity Garden. The brief for this Licence is for this communal enterprise to be welcoming and open to all who wish to join. A draft of the new licence has just been issued by Lambeth Parks to the FoLP for comment.

The Three development sites on Courland Grove adjacent to Larkhall Park that was initiated by the FoLP Reference Group several years ago are currently being progressed by Architects Waugh Thistleton and Homes for Lambeth.  A very early presentation on Zoom from the architects took place on 20th October 2020.  The scheme on the main site at the corner of Larkhall Lane and Courland grove has changed from being a single tower to being two towers with no environmental ambition. The Reference Group submitted comments at the end of November but have yet to have any further official response from them despite asking for it.  However unofficially we have just heard that the project has been moving slowly so there is still a chance to engage. Also a special consultant has been appointed to lead the sustainability strategy which is encouraging. The Friends need to think carefully about what space or benefit we need from this development.  We also need to write a brief for the community space.

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 The FoLP has developed links with groups who did very useful work weeding at the entrance areas. One visit by about 12 volunteers from the Good Gym was possible in summer 2020 while keeping to Covid rules. The work with volunteer groups will also continue as soon as allowed.

Florence Deguerre de Hureaux and the group of volunteers she co-ordinates have taken on the litter issue in Larkhall Park. Convincing Lambeth to recycle much of the park litter is a daunting challenge.

I would like to thank everyone who help with this report and for all the voluntary work that has taken place in Larkhall Park over the past two years.

Carl Kowsky