



2010/11 Annual Report

It has been another busy year for the Friends. The group really has gone from strength to strength over the last twelve months, most obvious in the hugely successful Festival in July.

However, the year started with a blow when our Chair for the last three years had to step down very shortly after the AGM last October due to ill health. Alan Bailey had been a fantastic leader for the group and had stewarded the Friends wisely and diplomatically with energy and commitment. We missed him but were determined to keep the group going. Marcel Jenkins undertook to take up the reigns as deputy chair and the group will have met 6 times during the year: 2 December, 3 February, 7 April, 9 June, 28 July & 13 October (AGM). All the meetings were at the Ackroyd Community Centre except for the July meeting held on Blythe Hill.

Events

In addition to the Festival, a number of activities have taken place during the year - there was some scrub clearing and planting by young people on the Earn Your Travel Back scheme, more whip planting, an attempted stag beetle logger and a children's event sponsored by M&S celebrating one year since the planting outside the new playground.

The day the young people on the Earn Your Travel Back scheme came to spend a day on the Hill was a very cold and wet morning on the 22 January. They did a great job clearing the grass and brambles from around the whips we've previously planted. They also had time to do a little bit of whip planting along the back edge of the park, right of the playground. Many of the youngsters had not been to the Hill before.

The 26 February was a rainy morning but a small but dedicated group of volunteers turned out to continue our whip planting project round to Brockley View. A few weeks later on 16 April we were due to install the stag beetle logger but on the morning we all turned up, tools in hand, we discovered that someone had already helped themselves to the logs we'd stored just behind the playground so we had to abandon ship.

Of course, the biggest focus of the year and the main bulk of the Friends' efforts was on producing the fifth Blythe Hill Fields Festival. It was a huge effort from a relatively small group of people but what a day! We had brilliant weather, a fantastic turnout AND we made a record surplus! People have already been thanked but it should also be recorded in this report - thank you to everyone that took part in the organising and staffing of the Festival, giving so generously of their time and energy - it really wouldn't have been possible without them. The additional banners and signage hopefully got the message through that the Festival isn't organised by Lewisham Council or another large organisation.

Trees

One of our recent achievements was the grant award for 100 trees to be planted in the Fields. The planting was done in tranches and finally completed in December 2009. Sadly through natural wastage and vandalism, we've lost quite a lot of those trees, and the subject comes up regularly at meetings. Glendale did agree to replace any that died but to date only a few have been replaced. Most, if not all of the trees in the playground are dead or dying. It really needs constant attention - a real advocate from the Friends and a key contact at Glendale to try and keep the trees we have alive and to replace dead or dying ones. It also needs vigilance by all the Friends stopping children snapping branches and fledgling trunks or people letting their dogs hang from branches or strip off the bark.

Merchandise

One of the new ideas for trying to increase the profile of the Friends, Blythe Hill and generate some additional income was the production of some merchandise. We designed and purchased mugs and cotton shopping bags. The mugs were very successful and only a few remained unsold. The bags were less successful and that may have been down to the pricing. With a relatively small run, the bags cost around £3.50 to buy so in order to raise money they were sold, the same as the mugs, at £4.50. Selling the remainder at a much reduced cost may increase sales and get some money back into the bank account.

Incidents

Many of us have spent many a happy time on the Fields but sadly there have also been some instances where people have been harassed or attacked by mainly youths hanging around. We also lost a picnic bench to someone who sawed the legs off, some of the rubber matting in the playground was set on fire and the old tree trunks on the mound by the playground were also torched. We do have a good relationship with the community support officer and local police and have brought matters to their attention.

We are desperately keen that a few don't spoil our Hill for the many. It should be open and accessible all day and night. Some of the views at night from the top of the park are sensational and it would be such a shame if people felt they couldn't go and enjoy them.

Playground

The new playground has been an undoubted success and has been the single biggest tangible change to the Hill in many years. It is marvellous to see so many children and families enjoying the fantastic resource.

However, the grass banking has taken a real battering and is now a bit of an eyesore as well as being quite dangerous for smaller children. We need to press Glendale to repair and find a way to maintain the banks in a better condition. They are a crucial part of the aesthetic of the playground environment, leading the eye up and over the grass banks to the grass beyond.

Benches

One of the decisions we made in the December meeting was to spend some of the money raised in previous years. Benches and bins were a constant source of concern and as the money we'd raised was to make improvements to the Fields, we decided to buy two beautiful benches. They were finally installed in June and look absolutely fantastic. They were cited in the place to take in the best view of London and functional, enjoyable and well used. The plaque, telling people the benches were donated by the Friends was a great way to leave a legacy in the park and raise the profile of the Friends to more people. If you've not sat in one yet, give them a try.

Future Projects & Ambition

Trim Trail

The Friends worked with Glendale on an application to The London Marathon Trust for £10k submitted in August. It was for partnership funding against an Awards for All application for the purchase and installation of 6 or more pieces of fitness equipment around the perimeter of the park. The equipment would be made of materials sympathetic to our park. It is a project that has been talked about and consulted on for a number of years and we may be one step closer to achieving it. If successful, there would also be some money available to some initial training and awareness sessions.

Stag Beetle Loggery

A second attempt to construct and install a loggery for these wonderful beetles, only found in London and the South East. We hope to have some logs and dates soon.

Festival 2012

There is no question that our annual Festival is very much part of the local events calendar and has been enjoyed by many hundreds of people. However, it is by no means a guarantee that we will either have the money or volunteers to organise a Festival in 2012. Gavin Bolam has already submitted an application to a local community fund and we will hear whether we've been successful towards the end of the year. However, more importantly, we need people to work on and lead the planning and organisation – without that the Festival can't happen.

Bat Boxes

These were sold at one of the Festivals but so far have not been put up in the park. We need to make sure that these are installed in the park this year!

Whip Planting

In order to complete the hedging project, we need to continue the whip planting in the remaining quarter of the Fields – from the top of the Brockley View entrance round to the top corner where it all began - Bexhill Road/Bankhurst Road.

Trees

There needs to be more of a legacy of trees and perhaps we need to try and raise more money to buy and plant much more substantial trees that are more likely to survive both the weather and vandalism. The ones planted in Ladywell Fields, walking down from Ravensbourne Park are absolutely brilliant.

Wild Flowers

Although we had a good attempt at the wild flower meadow, we were defeated by the birds. Another attempt, perhaps with seeds rather than plugs might be a good option. It would be lovely to see more wild flowers in the park again.

Art/Sculpture

There has been much discussion over the last few years about commissioning and installing a piece of art for the park. The metal panorama, like in Greenwich Park, detailing all the sites you can see from the top of Blythe Hill was one idea – another was wooden sculptures from dead trees – keeping them in the park but using them in a different way. It would be good if the Friends could try and move the ideas forward in the coming year.

These are just some of the ideas, but that doesn't mean we couldn't do with more. If you've got an idea for something to make our Hill even more special, just come along to the meeting and tell us!

Finance

The accounts for 2010/11 show a small deficit on the year of £725 but with a previous surplus of £2,661, the overall position is an accumulated surplus of £1,536. The bank balance is healthy, with £3,838 and £101 in petty cash as at 30 September 2011. The main reason for the deficit is the purchase of the benches and supplying the "**LOVE Blythe Hill Fields**" merchandise, the only two areas of expenditure from last year.

Going forward the Friends have sufficient funds to run another Festival if alternative funding was not found but it would not leave any for other improvements or developments to the park we might want to make in the future.

Future of the Friends

Over the last five or so years, the core of the Friends has comprised a small but dedicated and committed group individuals. For lots of different reasons, many of those people are stepping down and there is space (and a real need) for new people to come on board and take the Friends on into the future. Over the last few years, the number of people coming to meetings has dwindled. Of course there are lots of very good reasons why people can't come but for me, it's sad that the range of opinions and number of voices is so small which also leaves too few people to push things forward. More worryingly though, it risks becoming unrepresentative and undermining our core mission – to represent everyone living around or using Blythe Hill Fields.

We have so much to be proud of and so many achievements under our belt – the playground, the planting, the flowers, five successful Festivals and the benches. There is a renewed energy and love for Blythe Hill Fields and that has to be a good thing. There is so much more to do and much more that could be done. We need the extended Friends to step up to keep it going, to revitalise and re-energise the group to tackle future projects and maintain the momentum.

Marcel Jenkins
Deputy Chair
October 2011