FRIENDS OF GREENWICH PARK

NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2025 Number 98

Spectacular sunset: The Observatory in its Autumn glory
Gwen Tew: FoGP Photography Group

Dear Friend,

Here's what you all think about our beautiful Park

As a member of the Friends of Greenwich Park you know what makes the Park so special to you - whether it's a misty early morning walk or catching Canary Wharf come alight as dusk falls on the quiet paths and avenues.

Now, nearly 300 FoGP members have shared their thoughts on what they love about our Park in our first ever survey, created with the help of the University of Greenwich.

The verdict? Our beloved Park is more than green space — it's a sanctuary for wildlife, friendship and community spirit.

From bird walks to jazz Sundays, members love the blend of tranquility and life.

Your feedback is helping us understand how we can help shape its next chapter for a greener, safer, and more peaceful space.

Full details on Page 2

Public service: Stephen Howlett

Meet Stephen, our new Patron

THE Friends have appointed their very first Patron and it's a name no doubt known to many of you.

Stephen Howlett CBE, DL, former Chief Executive of the Peabody Trust, has taken on the honorary role with the same civic spirit that has marked his long career in public service. Stephen, who has lived within ten minutes walk of Greenwich Park for more than 45 years, described his appointment as 'a huge honour'. "The Park is so beautiful, peaceful and inspiring," he said. "It's a wonderful and so needed amenity for everyone."

He and his wife Jane have been members of the Friends for many years, bringing their children to

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The highs and the lows... as revealed in our survey

THIS year we decided to ask you all for your thoughts about our Park.

With help from the University of Greenwich, we launched our first-ever survey to find out how people use the Park, what they value most about their membership, and how we might help shape the Park's future together.

Almost a third of members took part, with more than a third visiting the Park more than five times a week.

So, what did you tell us - and what have we done?

When we presented the findings to the Park management, it was clear that our members' priorities align closely with theirs. Both recognise that Greenwich Park is not just a heritage gem but an important living landscape used daily by locals.

Nature-led activities came out top of the wish list: from wildlife walks to plant talks and workshops and a focus on biodiversity. There's a deep affection for the Park's tranquil side and as a meeting place for friends and family, with cafe discounts being, unsurprisingly, one of the most popular member benefits. The Sancho cafe, part of the Greenwich Park Revealed project, was much praised. And there was appreciation for the enhancement of paths, viewpoints and habitats, though

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Golden moments: A stunning picture from Ian Welsby, FoGP Photography Group

'Keep the Park beautiful for generations to come'

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the playground and visiting the deer and the ducks, running and playing cricket. Now, the couple visit with their two granddaughters who he says, "love it too". The Greenwich Park Revealed project has particularly impressed him. "There always seems to be something new to discover," he said. "We were so pleased to see the deer in their new home."

Originally from Suffolk, Stephen's association with Greenwich began at nine, on a school trip, later returning as a student at Thames Polytechnic, now the University of Greenwich. His professional life saw him lead one of London's largest housing organisations, Peabody Trust, and later take on senior roles at the University of Greenwich and the London and South East Education Group. Honoured with a CBE and appointed a Deputy Lieutenant for Greater London, Stephen also chaired Transport for London's Sustainable Development Advisory Panel. "I'm delighted to see the efforts being made by the Park to promote sustainability," he said.

Stephen saw the Friends' committee in action recently and said: "The committee's energy and commitment are inspiring, and I look forward to doing all I can to help ensure the Park remains accessible and beautiful for generations to come."

Rockery on with Tom, a garden transformed

WITH the leaves almost all down, the Park is nearly ready for its winter sleep, *writes Head Gardener Tom Brown.*

I am very excited to share with you all that the renovation of the rockery - tucked behind the Park offices by the Blackheath Gate - is well under way. The original cascade will be repaired and several dead self-set cotoneaster plants have been felled and cleared for new planting. Building on existing themes, we will be planting Japanese maples and cloud-pruned conifers. We'll also be focusing on Autumn displays so we will follow these with flowering cyclamen and nerine bulbs.

In addition we have just completed the first phase of the Spring bulb walk, which will run from the Sancho Cafe all the way to the Rose Garden. A big thanks to all the volunteers. With herbaceous borders being cleared, hedge cutting and hedge laying, it's busy as ever for us but as always, come and say hello. And stay warm through the Winter!

Flash of colour: Late blooms among the grasses in the Rose Garden *Emma V Winn, FoGP Photography Group*

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members were more divided on the benefits of the "Grand Ascent". Members hugely enjoyed our live music, with Midsummer Jazz and the bandstand concerts highlights of the Summer calendar.

Communications from the Friends — through newsletters, the website and bulletins — were also rated highly for being both informative and engaging.

Concerns focused on a few recurring themes: safety; security and cyclists. The withdrawal of the dedicated Park police worried members. Unfortunately they will not return. However, we are pleased that community police have moved into the offices by the Blackheath Gate, so there will be a visible presence in the Park.

Fast-moving cyclists outside designated routes remain a source of frustration. Since the survey, the signage for highlighting cyclist routes and speed has been significantly increased.

Other suggestions were a plea for fewer dogs on long leads, more responsible behaviour from owners regarding dog waste, and free, functioning loos. The Park loos are manned and the cost goes into maintaining a presence and alerting maintenance about blockages.

Water fountains, which were often not working, have been repaired and are now in full flow.

More focus on biodiversity was a recurring wish. The Park has already taken many steps towards this in the seasonal planting cycle and in the new Rose Garden.

Looking ahead, members asked for local opera, classical concerts, more theatre and historical talks. You would like an art group, garden talks, walks and continuing archaeological events.

But we also heard your plea for peace in the Park - it's a rare green space so close to the city.

We are grateful to the University of Greenwich for their input and support.

And a big thank you to every member who took part. Your voices will help to shape the Park's next chapter which will ensure it remains at the heart of our community.

These are a few of our favourite things...

Framed... a perfect image of the Observatory *Will Lowe, FoGP Photography Group*

LET US HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

IF we don't have your email address, do please go to our website and add it to your membership details. You will then receive our monthly bulletins and other updates on our events. This will be the last Autumn newsletter, but you will still get Timeline, the Friends' annual review, in April.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

JULIA HOLLAND will lead the next Bird Walk on Sunday, November 30. Meet at the Blackheath Gate at 8.30am. There is no need to book, but bring binoculars if you have them. The walks last approximately two hours.

THE Christmas wreath-making events and the Friends' History Research Group's free lectures are now full, but you can join a waiting list on our website.

SAVE THE DATE: Next year's Midsummer Jazz concert will take place on June 14 with the Phoenix Dixieland Jazz Band. Ticket information to come in the Spring.

Owls, bats, butterflies and a hawkmoth

THIS year, the Wildlife Group has been quietly (and sometimes not so quietly) turning the Park into a living classroom enjoyed by more than 400 families and children.

In partnership with the Park team, the group hosted three wildlife sessions in the new Learning Centre, each fully subscribed.

There was seed sowing in Spring, barn owl pellet dissection, and bat-making workshops in Autumn. The butterfly and moth cabinet was a star performer, and its death's head hawkmoth provided a fertile source of spooky myths for the Autumnal Celebration.

The butterfly, bat and fungi walks were led by Mark Pritchard, whose encyclopaedic knowledge of the Park's secret residents can make even the humblest toadstool sound like a rare jewel. Under his guidance, walkers discovered fantastical fungi - the jelly ear, the fly agaric and the charmingly named hen of the woods.

Fantastical fungi near the Saxon burial mounds *Emma V Winn, FoGP Photography Group*

We've also been collecting valuable data for Greenspace Information for Greater London - records that will help shape future environmental policy. Our latest project is a survey of amphibians and reptiles around the Learning Centre pond, where initially there was little sign of life.

By year's end, however, frogs, toads and newts were all spotted, proving the importance of the pond for biodiversity.

Friends of Greenwich Park

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Friends' Website: www.friendsofgreenwichpark.org.uk
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The Friends of Greenwich Park is a registered charity in England and Wales (No 1029933)
To contact Greenwich Park phone: 0300 061 2380. There are police phone boxes in the Park at St Mary's Gate and Blackheath Gate. In an emergency dial 999; for other calls phone: 020 7161 9740.
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