

Chairs' report

24 March 2024 – Friends of Hillside Gardens and Palace Road Nature Garden meeting (Woodlawns Centre).

Spring has sprung in the park and nature garden, with the first of the cherry blossom coming into bloom over the warm weekend, and daffodils and crocus providing a welcome splash of colour after the winter months.

The regular Saturday morning group continues to provide a healthy cohort of people each weekend, with a focus largely on the Park since the February Friends' meeting. With the warmer weather it is disappointing to see an increase in litter and dog mess in the park, which falls to the Friends to clear up, with the Council only focused on the bare minimum of emptying the bins.

Some positive progress has been made on the depot building, with a meeting taking place on 06 March between the Friends and Lambeth Parks. It was a refreshingly constructive meeting, with Lambeth showing real support for the Friends utilising the depot building in a way that best suits our needs.

We set out a proposal that we wanted to take an incremental approach to utilising the space, with a short-term aim to open up the hatches and/or park-facing doorway to serve refreshments on an ad hoc basis (for example events, Saturday morning group etc), as well as continuing to use the building to support volunteer groups/tennis. We said a staged approach to refreshments would help determine demand for any larger commercial endeavour, but that we don't want to put forward a full commercial business plan until we'd tested the water first.

Following discussions with the Council, we agreed that exploring a 'licence to operate' model would provide a good jumping off point to test this approach, which would enable to us open the hatches, secure continued use of the building for volunteer sessions, and allow us to provide refreshments to park users on a donation-basis.

We also welcome the steps taken by Lambeth to remove all the graffiti on the murals, and install a new bench in the dog-free area following our previous meeting.

We are very grateful for all Nick's efforts in securing a £6k grant via a Starbucks initiative to invest in local nature areas, which is earmarked for the relining of the larger pond in the nature garden that is currently leaking.

Looking ahead, we have our next partnership meeting with the Council at the start of April, and we look forward to hosting an event in the Nature Garden on the Mayday weekend, with a focus on family-friendly nature based activities.