



Annual Report 2022

Overview

The Friends of Keston Common (FoKC) began in October 2007 and is a voluntary non-profit making organisation. Our main aims and objectives are:

- To help to secure and promote the conservation and protection of Keston Common, Ravensbourne Open Space and Padmall Wood; hereafter all three sites will be included in any reference to Keston Common.
- To monitor its plants, animals and wildlife habitats and maintain and improve its biodiversity.
- To promote its use as a place for quiet, informal enjoyment, recreation and study.
- To help with practical conservation through voluntary action for the benefit of wildlife and the community under the supervision of the London Borough of Bromley through its appointed parks' management contractors.
- To assist in providing an educational experience for the general public in the history, natural history and biodiversity of Keston Common.
- To maintain a sound financial base and seeking other funding or donations to further activities which meet the above aims and objectives.

Committee

Your committee met three times in 2022 to oversee the activities of the Group. Its members during the year were: Larry Herbert (chair), Tudor Davies (treasurer), Françoise Harrop, Angela Godfrey, Wendy Wiseman & Alan Brooks.

Chairman's Statement

Following the peak Covid period activity levels have by and large returned to normal with regular weekly meetings. Attendance numbers throughout the year have remained at a moderate level with perhaps 12 or so at peak. My estimate on activity hours spent is around 1450 hours which is some 400 higher than those for 2021. Well done everybody and thanks for all the hard work and effort to keeping the Common looking its best.

This year's activities have been a mixture of scrub and bracken clearance, improvements to the bog and valley mire areas, gorse clearance and scalloping work in the meadows. There has been a tremendous effort on the Heathland where large areas of holly have been cleared and the heather allowed to flourish.



As you are no doubt aware the pandemic has brought us an increased level of footfall, which thankfully appears, at the start of 2022, to have returned to more normal levels. This increased footfall brought with it a lot of damage, in the form of erosion and extension of pathways, huge amounts of litter and some very unwelcome behaviour. There has also been a lot of fly-tipping of late and it has been a terrific effort to keep on top of it all.

I'm pleased to report that we have been able to retain our Green Flag and my thanks go to idverde for their support enabling this to happen. This year we had a secret visit and as far as I'm aware all is in order.



As you may recall, the Green Flag organisation has previously commented about the poor state of the water's edge at Pond 3 and I'm pleased to say that with the Council's support a major reworking of the water's edge has been completed. The pathway has been re-sited at a higher level and a small number of steps created to ease progression to the bridge area (see photo on page 4). In the coming year it is planned to extend the post and rail to further delimit the pathway and discourage access to the water's edge. It is also planned to install a bench as a viewing point over the pond and potentially, longer term, an interpretation board will be erected to explain the conservation status of the area. As reported previously we have received funding from the Co-op to support this venture and I'm most grateful to them for helping us achieve this outcome. We have received a further £2k this year which will help us complete other small projects and plans across the site.

With regard activity mornings Steven has been with us throughout the year and we are most grateful for his guidance and expertise. I think the relationship has worked extremely well and his report on progress is available under a separate report.

During the year there has been a lot of contractual tree management work, primarily holly across the site. This has been concentrated in areas close to both the valley mire and the bog. In most cases the vegetation has been used to delimit pathways and boundary lines but in some cases there has been some burning on site. Although this might at first appear destructive, thinning brings important environmental benefits by allowing increased light to reach the woodland floor resulting in more woodland plants and flowers growing, and new trees regenerating. The increased space and light encourages the remaining trees to grow strong and healthy and for the ground flora to grow. The unfortunate wet weather has made the area and pathways particularly very muddy. Once this has had a chance to dry out further remedial work of restoring the pathways will be undertaken.



As is usual we have had a number of issues throughout the year. We have had an incident of wildlife cruelty where one of the geese has been shot and killed and there have been occasions where horses and cyclists have roamed freely across the site contrary to the prescribed bye-laws. Fortunately, out and out vandalism has been relatively minor (e.g. posts and rails broken, wire netting removed). Littering and fly-tipping remains a continual nuisance.

Issues that remain on our to do list include several areas of pond work. On pond 1 the islands keep wandering about, the waterfall between pond 1 and pond 2 needs repair and the sluice gate at pond 4 needs further restoration work. There are also a number of swing gates which are in a state of disrepair and require replacement. Some of this work will need substantial funding and the FoKC Committee will need to consider a variety of options to take these forward. Over the coming year we plan to install more benches around the site and will look at the possibility of erecting further interpretation boards, potentially one at Caesar's Well to explain its history.

As some of you will be aware the Council has announced a Parks Jubilee Fund of £1million, with each of Bromley's 22 wards being able to bid for up to £40k worth of funding (with no one project greater than £20k). FoKC have yet to make a bid for some of this funding but proposals to revamp our playground are being considered. This could include some new play equipment and/or replacement of existing equipment. The possibility of a Community Day involving a major clean-up and a re-painting exercise is also under consideration.

On a final point the electricity supply to our store room was cut off in June 2021, and so far attempts to get this re-instated have failed. I have discussed this issue with the portfolio holder and remain ever hopeful that this will be restored in the not too distant future.

In Memoriam

During the year two new memorial benches have been installed across the site. The first was the picnic bench at the side of pond 1 in memory of Shirley Richards, our on-site ice-cream lady. The second was a rustic bench by pond 4 in memory of Michael Collins, one of our founder members.

Events

There were no events planned or attended in 2022. I have been in discussions with the Keston Village Residents Association and it has been agreed they will take up the mantle of organising a summer event in 2023 (and presumably in future years). They have decided to rename this as the Keston Village Festival (rather than Countryside Day) and it will occur on the last Saturday of June, so the 24th this year. FoKC have agreed to have stall alongside the KVRA one and it is most likely we will be involved with some of the organisation and potential set-up volunteering on the day.

Walks

Our monthly walks continue to prove popular and we have attracted a regular quorum of attendees. More are always welcome. They are held on the first Wednesday of each month starting at 2pm from the Keston Village sign. All walks will aim to explore the wonders of Keston Common and the surrounding areas of Hayes Common, West Wickham Common, Downe and Leaves Green. Some walks, as determined by attendee choice, will focus on the historical landscape whilst others will be purely for enjoyment. Well behaved dogs are always welcome.

Publicity

Our social media presence continues to attract followers and our website has now had over 82,630 visits up from 78,600 last year. The About and History pages continue to be very popular attracting the most views with the What's On page not far behind. On Facebook our followers have risen from around 700 last year to 840 this year, a steady increase which is very welcome. We will endeavour to post more regularly in the coming year with a hope of attracting more interest and potential volunteers.

One of our purchases in the year was a workday sign as shown here. This has proved to be quite popular and hopefully will encourage new members to join us.

I would also like to thank Sally Churchus, editor of the Keston parish magazine, who continues to support us and publish a variety of FoKC progress reports. My thanks also to Tudor and Bob, as occasional contributors.



Training

The Bromley Friends Forum has organised a number of training courses throughout the year. These included Amphibian & Reptile Ecology, Hand Tool Maintenance, Invasive Species Identification, Winter Twig Identification and Leading a Work Party. FoKC has sent delegates to most of these courses and we would like to thank the various course leaders for their time and expertise. All courses have been very well received.

Summary of Accounts

A summary of accounts for the year ending 31st December 2021 are as follows:

Income		Expenditure	
Volunteer Donations	£20	FoKC printed clothing	£72
Clothing Sales	£112	Tools	£85
Filming Donation	£250	Insurance	£76
Co-op Grant	£2014	Website Costs	£80
		Admin Costs (including workday sign)	£163
<u>Total income</u>	<u>£2,396</u>	<u>Total Expenditure</u>	<u>£476</u>

We started 2022 with a balance of £2,563 in our bank account. As shown above we have increased our income by £1,920 giving a closing balance of £4,483.

Full audited accounts will be presented under separate report.

Larry Herbert
Chair, Friends of Keston Common
1st March 2023