



Annual Report 2023

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 2023 to oversee the activities of the Group. Its members during the year were: Larry Herbert (chair), Tudor Davies (treasurer), Alan Brooks, Angela Godfrey, Françoise Harrop, Diane Stalker Muir, Wendy Wiseman & Yana Wolanski.

Chairman's Statement

Following the 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 16 or so at peak. My estimate on activity hours spent is around 1650 hours which is some 200 higher than those for 2022. 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 & gorse have been cleared and the heather allowed to flourish.



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 were visited by two judges and both I and Steven Lofting accompanied them around the site. They appeared to be well impressed with our site and all the hard work that continues to be undertaken.



With regard activity mornings we have ended the year with no particular idverde ranger in charge. Steven Lofting left us in September and his replacement Jonathan Lynch left in December. Idverde are currently recruiting for a biodiversity manager and it is anticipated that this person would be given responsibility for Keston Common. In the meantime, Ian Wright is our first point of contact and will be organising matters for the time being. We are pleased to note that Steven remains a Friend of the Group and has very kindly responded to a number of queries in a timely manner.

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. The Countryside Volunteers have introduced a new leaky dam at the bottom end of the bog and this is proving its worth in retaining the water levels for that bit longer.

Although the tree work 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 encourage the remaining trees to grow strong and healthy and for the ground flora to grow. The unfortunate wet weather has made some of the areas and pathways particularly muddy.

Recent surveying work has included a bat survey in mid-September which showed that the bat boxes on the Common are well-occupied (albeit only with soprano pipistrelles, but common pipistrelle and Daubenton's continue to show up on bat detectors). Butterfly surveying this summer with Bob and Diane turned up some interesting records: silver-washed fritillary and purple hairstreak, to name a few.

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. During the year we have installed a new bench (see photo). 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 erect an interpretation board to explain the conservation status of the area.



One of the main developments and successes of the year has been our application to the Platinum Jubilee Parks fund. We applied for £19.5k (the maximum amount that was available to us) to upgrade our playground with some new equipment and replace the ageing roundabout with a new inclusive spinner. Our application went in on 1st April 2023 and we were informed that it had been approved in June 2023. Over the following few months specifications on the exact equipment was discussed and agreed and we were given a timeframe of December for installation.

In the end the equipment was installed during the week 4th to 9th December.

This included moving the picnic bench to a more central location, which as well as providing space for the new climbing frame (see photo) also meant it was now in a much better place for wheelchair access. It is expected, as part of the ongoing project, that we will organise a Community Action Day in the Spring of 2024 to undertake a re-painting exercise of some of the older equipment along with a general tidy-up of the whole area.

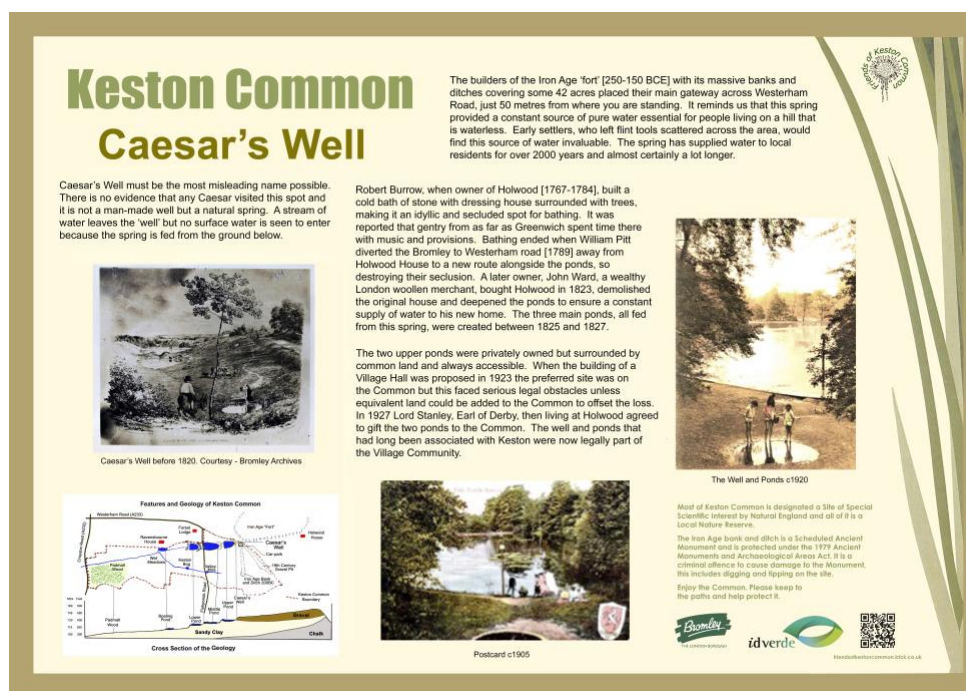
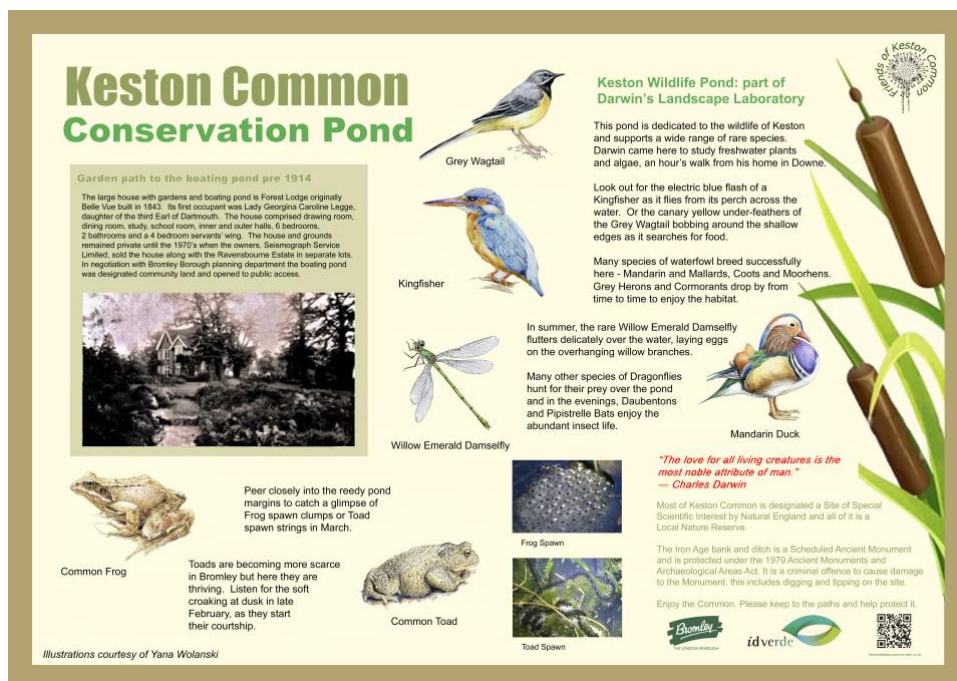


FoKC would like to express its gratitude to the Council, idverde and all other parties involved in the completion of this project. It has made a distinct improvement to our playground and visitor feedback has been very positive.

As reported last year we have received funding from the Co-op and your committee decided to invest some of this money in the production of two new lectern style interpretation boards. One of these boards would be located at pond 3 and describe the conservation nature of that area, whilst the second would be at Caesar's Well and describe its history and hydrology.

I'm very pleased to say we have been able to design and format these boards in-house. I'm most grateful to Tudor, Bob and Yana for their support in this matter, which has allowed us to save on the cost of using a professional artwork designer. The designs were completed at the end of 2023 and are currently with the board builders in the final stages of production. As another cost saving exercise your committee took the decision to purchase boards made of wood effect recycled

plastic, its use of which was approved by idverde. Permission has also been granted from Natural England to install the board at Caesar's Well, which lies inside the SSSI. There is no such issue at Pond 3. I am hopeful that we will take delivery of the new boards within the next month or so and they can be installed soon thereafter.



As part of other future work we plan to install further rustic benches on the site, in particular a couple at Padmall Wood and perhaps a more formal bench in the playground. We are also looking at replacing our drinking fountain close to the storeroom, following suitable surveys and agreement from the Council. As most of you will know the electricity supply to our store room was cut off in June 2021, and so far, attempts to get this re-instated have failed. It remains in our plans to get this re-instated. It is understood that there is interest in converting part of our storeroom to a takeaway café, so clearly a electricity supply will be needed.

Over the past year many issues and FMS reports have been raised. The high level of rainfall and some of the storms have certainly not helped. It remains very muddy in places and there has been a lot of tree damage. The photos on this page give you a brief flavour of some of the repairs that



have been necessary. 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. The dam between ponds 1 & 2 leaks and will

need some major structural repairs at some future date. Some of this work will need substantial funding and the FoKC Committee will need to consider a variety of options if these are to be taken forward.

There have been a number of initiatives undertaken by the Council/Idverde across the borough this year and I'd like to complete my chairman's statement by reflecting on these here.

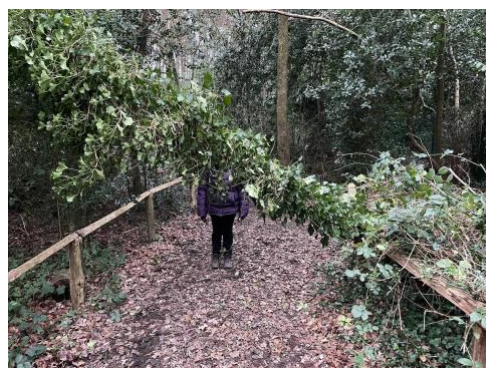


There has been a nature friendly verges trial across eleven different sites, where mowing has been reduced to just a single cut in the autumn. This has resulted in a 70% approval rating and will be repeated again during 2024.



There has been a sustainable planting trial across ten sites. This will see a move away from degenerative single use products to regenerative planting making use of perennials. Comments from residents is awaited.

LBB's 'Treemendous' project seeks to plant 5000 trees across the borough over four years. We are now into year 3 of the project, with a further 1510 trees due to be planted this winter/spring season. The project is accompanied with an interactive online App, where you can gain information on any planted tree.



And finally, LBB has reviewed its dog control public space protection order and a number of revisions have been made. A maximum of four dogs are now allowed to be walked together and prohibited areas are to be more rigorously enforced. Typically, at Keston, this means no dogs are allowed in the ponds. Signs to this effect have been produced and installed in various locations around our three main ponds. It remains to be seen if a) the signs remain there and b) they are adhered to.

Events

The Keston Village Residents Association organised this year's Countryside Event under the banner of KestFest, which was held on Saturday 24th June. FoKC had a stall and contributed towards the organisational arrangements. We ran a prize draw of 'guessing the weight of the tree popper' as well as selling plants, cards and leaflets. We were able to make a profit of £160. The event in 2024 will be brought forward to Saturday 1st June and we again expect to be involved. Ideas for our stall are being discussed within committee.



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 87,500 visits up from 82,600 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 840 last year to over a thousand 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.

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 2023 are as follows:

Income		Expenditure	
Friends Forum	£150	Donation to Keston Magazine	£50
KestFest	£160	Tools	£400
		Website Costs	£93
		Jubilee Park Fund (playground refurb)	£1,140
		Admin Costs (including AGM drinks)	£83
<u>Total income</u>	<u>£310</u>	<u>Total Expenditure</u>	<u>£1,766</u>

We started 2023 with a balance of £4,483 in our bank account. As shown above we have decreased our account by £1,456 giving a closing balance of £3,027.

Full audited accounts will be presented under separate report.

Larry Herbert
Chair, Friends of Keston Common
1st March 2024