



CLISSOLD PARK USER GROUP CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT

March 2016 - February 2017

The Clissold Park User Group has existed for over twenty-five years and is open to everyone who uses or cares about the park. We hold six meetings a year to which everyone is welcome. We work closely with Hackney Council to improve the park.

1. The role of the User Group

We have had another busy year with increasing engagement from park users. Our focus continues to be on ensuring that everyone feels welcome in the park, that park users are well informed and their voices are heard, that the park and its facilities are of high quality and are well-maintained, and that we encourage considerate, decent and friendly behaviour from everyone.

The Heritage Lottery Fund five year revenue funding came to an end in December 2016. This has coincided with our receiving clear messages from Hackney Council that we are like to see cuts to the funding of parks over the coming years as limited resources are focused on statutory service such as social care. We have become accustomed to high levels of staffing and maintenance in the park and we are concerned that this will be adversely affected by any cuts. We will be working closely with the Council to mitigate the impact on the park as the history of the park shows that when the park declines fewer people use it. We were amongst hundreds of individuals and organisations that made submissions to last year's Select Committee inquiry into public parks. One of our key messages was that the funding of parks should be made a statutory requirement for parks. Disappointingly, the report, in which our submission was quoted, said very little except that parks are a good thing and people like them and that park 'friends' groups should talk to each other more. You can read our submission and the final report online¹.

We have continued to work closely with the Council on all matters to do with the park. The Park Manager, Elle Potter has been on maternity leave for most of the year but we have been extremely well served by the Interim Manager Laurence Pinturault who leaves us this month.

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<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/communities-and-local-government-committee/public-parks/written/39457.html>

We are well represented with four of our elected officers on the Clissold Park Development Board which exists to ensure that the Heritage Lottery targets are met and to look strategically at the big issues facing the park.

We held six public meetings in 2016, each one attended by between 20 and 40 people. We know that many people are not able, or do not want, to come to our meetings and we have continued to build profile in other ways as well as holding a number of social and community events. We now have 1350 members of the Facebook page (up by 200 from last year), 1889 Twitter followers (up by 479 from last year) and 657 people on our email mailing list (up from 570 last year). Our website continues to be well-used especially for the information it provides about the park and its facilities.

We have a small but dedicated team of volunteers who have contributed 750 hours (that's over 18 working weeks) of their time to the group by talking to park users in person and online, attending meetings with the Council, representing particular groups of users such as dog walkers and older people and organising and running community and fundraising events.

2. Key issues for the user group

Park

- Work was completed to fox-proof the deer enclosure. Traps were set but no foxes were caught so it is now assumed that foxes are no longer able to enter the enclosure. Five of the older deer were retired to Devon and the have been replaced by six new deer who are settling in well.
- A new water tank for the house was installed under the café garden and the affected beds are due to be replanted soon. Because of the issues with the water supply before this work was done, there were portable toilets in place over the summer but it is hoped that these will not be required this year.
- We have had talks with the Council about improving the biodiversity of the park. This has led to changes in some of the management regimes around mowing, leaf clearing etc. A detailed report on biodiversity prepared by the park manager in consultation with the group can be found on our website.
- 25,000 bulbs were planted in the park of which the User Group planting 2,000 on the banks of the New River.
- A decision was made that from 2017 the butterfly dome will no longer be a home to exotic butterflies as it is no longer considered suitable. It will become redeveloped with the aim of attracting native butterflies instead.
- Conversations are beginning to consider the future of the aviary as the birds are not being replaced and numbers are therefore dwindling. Some park users have expressed concern about the park having caged birds. Consultation with park users is expected before any decisions are made
- In response to comments and complaints, we started the process of getting an extra baby swing in the playground. We are currently running a crowd-sourcing project where people and organisations can pledge a contribution (see SpaceHive – extra swings for Clissold Park). We need to raise £8,000 by the middle of April and any offers of help would be very welcome!

- A number of public events were held in the park. Management of these events has improved considerably but there are still some issues with amplified sound and parking around the park.
- We are in the process of designing a new 'pocket map' of the park which will include all the key landmarks, trees and animals and a timeline telling the history of the park and house.

Clissold House

- The running of Clissold House as a venue has moved from GLL to Hackney Venues in September 2016. The hope had been that the House (which includes the 'venue' hired out for weddings, meeting etc and the café) would be breaking even by the end of the 5 year HLF funded period but this has not happened and the House is still being heavily subsidised by Hackney Council. Some immediate steps have been taken to address this and a new business plan is being developed in order to ensure that sufficient income can be generated from 'commercial' events to allow the continued subsidised use of the House by community groups paying appropriate and affordable rates for room hire.
- The number of baby buggies in the House was causing difficulties because fire exits and through-routes were being blocked. Buggies also cause significant damage to the fabric of the building, increasing the cost of maintenance. In order to address this, an interim solution has been to create a 'buggy' park in the dining room but this has resulted in the loss of the very popular 'quiet room' (indeed one of the most attractive rooms in the house), and means that this room cannot be hired out during the week. A range of possible solutions is being considered.
- The café made further changes in response to calls for better service and better value and is taking some steps to offer more healthy choices. There remains a view amongst some park users that the café is overpriced and the menus are not appropriate for a public park.

Ending of HLF funding

- Because of the ending of the HLF funding, the park is no longer able to offer education and volunteering programmes. The Bowling Green and Pavilion which were used as a learning centre and outdoor classroom have been unused since summer 2016. The 'Pumphouse' has also been empty for over a year. There have been ongoing delays in the tendering process which means it is quite likely to be empty again this summer. We are very concerned about the fact that these assets (on which significant public money were spent only five years ago) are not being used for income generation and/or providing services to park users. We are sorry to see the end of the schools programme which brought hundreds of children into the park each year and we urge the Council to consider how this could be revived.

3. Events and fundraising

- We ran a very successful fundraising quiz which raised £1000.
- We hosted three popular Sunday afternoon talks: one by Margaret Willes about London parks and gardens, one by Travis Elborough about his book 'A Walk in the Park' and one by local historian Amir Dotan about Joseph Beck and the campaign to create Clissold Park. Tickets cost £5 and included a glass of wine or beer. They raised £250.

- We contributed to Open House London in September 2016, showing our slide show, Amir presented the Beck Archive and we took well over a hundred people on guided tours around the House.
- We ran several free events for families and children as part of the Stoke Newington Literary Festival in June and two very successful evening events which had to be moved at short notice to Ryan's Bar owing to rain. Thanks are due to Tom Nash at Ryan's Bar for his last-minute support! We hope that this will have generated some money for the user group once the Lit Fest accounts have been finalised.
- We ran two free evenings of live summer music in the café garden – many thanks to the various local singer-songwriters who contributed and all those who attended and to our sponsors, the café and London Speaker Hire.
- We provided a team of volunteers for the Fireworks Display in November.
- We hosted a stall at the very popular Christmas Fair for two days providing information and selling books, bags, postcards and Amir's calendar of historic images of the park. This raised £250 and also paid for the printing of two CPUG banners for future events.
- We took over Clissold House one Sunday in January and offered a range of treatments such as massage and exercise classes. The practitioners volunteered their time for free and, as a result we made over £250.
- We received donations of £1,250 from filming in the park.

4. Thanks and goodbyes

Thanks, as always, are due to all the park staff including the park keepers and gardeners. Thanks too to the Park Manager, Elle Potter and the Interim Park Manager, Laurence Pinturault who both work tirelessly for the park. In summer 2016 we said goodbye to Lucy Gijzen, who ran the schools and volunteering programme and to Emma Finch and her team from GLL who have run the venue to great acclaim for the last five years. Thanks also to the café for providing refreshments for our meetings, for attending the meetings to listen to park users' concerns and compliments and for their sponsorship of our free music events.

We were very sorry to hear during 2016 of the death of Arthur Disney who, along with his wife Christine who was Chair of the group for many years, contributed so much to the park. Arthur was particularly passionate about the park's trees and we were happy to contribute £100 to a fund to plant a number of new trees in the park. A total of £800 was raised and several trees have now been planted near where Arthur and Christine lived on the Queen Elizabeth Walk side of the park.

Finally, thanks to all our officers: Ken Worpole our Honorary President, John Hudson and Mark Forsyth our Vice Chairs, Theresa Boden our Secretary, Anna Gualtieri our Treasurer; Delilah Jeary our minutes secretary, Amir Dotan our Park History rep and Isabelle Gore who designs and runs our website. Thanks are also due to: Yvonne Hill and Hilde Oord who set up and ran the fundraising quiz; Daphne Steele our dog walkers' representative; Richard Crawford our biodiversity rep, Anthony Larvin our disability rep; Davin Pitcher our cycling rep, Sylvia Anderson our older people's rep, Lee Stacy our runners' rep, John Dye our skaters' rep and Roderick Ryan, Cath Willgress and Theresa Boden for their help events. Finally thanks to Betty Manning for printing and posting the minutes and all the other volunteers who have helped out at different times.