



Common Knowledge

April 2014, Issue 51

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Common Knowledge, the newsletter of the Friends of Streatham Common, is edited by Peter Newmark: tel. 020 8679 2908; email: peternewmark@gmail.com

From the Chair

Now is a critical time for the future of the Common and Rookery. In April 2016 we will see huge cuts to the budget. Despite the best efforts of the council and volunteers, it's hard to see how to avoid a decline in standards unless we do something different.

As Chair, I see all the work so many of you are doing right now that's really helping. The Rookery Centenary project has brought in new funds and is helping to restore the Rookery. The Green Flag award and declaration of the Local Nature Reserve help set the standards and goals for the future. The partnership with the London Wildlife Trust is putting woodland management back onto the agenda. The Community Garden has transformed the old Rookery Nursery Gardens and returned fruit trees to the Orchard.

The Park Watch scheme is feeding problems back to the police or council. The Youth Facilities project will provide new opportunities for young people. Working with partners such as the Challenge Network has brought in more resources. And then there are all the Friend's events.

We need to build on all this, which is why we have established SCCoop (Streatham Common Co-operative) to manage the Common more efficiently and effectively and put partnership and community at its heart, with a manager on-site making the decisions and working with people who want to help. We need to work harder to promote what we have, and the vision of the even better place it can become, and then secure the funding to build it.

We want you to be part of this by buying a share for just £1 at www.sccoop.org.uk, or by filling in the application enclosed. *Richard Payne*

16TH ANNUAL
STREATHAM COMMON
KITE DAY
SUNDAY 6TH APRIL 2014
11 AM - 5 PM

SINGLE / MULTI LINE KITE DEMONSTRATIONS
KITE BUYING / KITE FLYING / TUITION
FOOD & DRINKS STALLS
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FRIENDS OF STREATHAM COMMON
Lambeth

New Trees on the Common

During February and March, over 700 new trees and shrubs were planted on the Common, mostly adjacent to Streatham Common North. You may not have noticed them because they are just whips – very young trees that are less than a metre tall – but in years to come they should grow into fine copses of native species, although the eventual density and height of the trees have yet to be decided.

The trees have come to the Common as part of a demonstration project of what is called biodiversity offsetting, a relatively new and rather controversial scheme*. In this case, the trees are being planted largely to offset (make up for) the loss of about two acres of disused railway sidings at Thameslink's Selhurst depot. The land has been colonised by scrub, grass and silver birch trees for some years but has now become part of a new train storage facility. The new trees on the Common have been planted by the London Wildlife Trust (LWT) and its volunteers and LWT will be looking after the trees for the next three years. The scheme is funded by Network Rail, which is responsible for most of the UK's rail infrastructure. Brockwell Park will also be a future beneficiary. Planting had the approval of both Lambeth Council and the Friends.

All of the new trees are native species relevant to the locality. They include hawthorn, field maple, guelder rose, hazel, rowan and silver birch, which have been planted in mixed clusters of at least 100 whips. Between them, these species will provide wildlife habitat, shelter and food sources that are otherwise rather scarce on the Common, which is currently dominated by oak trees.



The project launch was attended by Environment Secretary Owen Patterson, whose department announced proposals for biodiversity offsetting in 2011 and instigated some pilot studies to test them*. He spoke briefly on how biodiversity offsetting could provide a net gain for both nature and business and then proceeded to plant a tree whip or two near the car park. Proper planting started in early February opposite the junction of Leigham Court Road and Streatham Common North and subsequently continued down the

latter, with substantial plantings on either side of the paddling pool, opposite the junction with Valley Road and opposite the memorial garden. Planting for the spring finished on March 7th with a cluster of trees opposite the builder's yard on Streatham Common South.

In addition some bramble clearance has been carried out with a view to further planting next autumn, when some work in the woodlands is also being planned. The Friends hope to round up some volunteers to assist with some of the autumn work.

The new planting has generated a certain amount of local friction. Part of this was because the initial planting was not altogether according to plan, although this has now been remedied. Some of the press releases from the various partners involved also created difficulties. Statements in one that 10,000 trees would be planted – a gross exaggeration – and that a part of the ancient Great North Wood would be created – which was pure 'spin' - led to unnecessary concerns that the whole of the lower Common would be turned into woodland. *Peter Newmark*

* *the online version of this article at streathamcommon.org/new-trees-common/ has more on the scheme and controversy.*

50 Common Knowledges

With the previous issue of *Common Knowledge* having been the 50th to have appeared*, it is worth a little look back at the history of our newsletter. The first issue was published in April 1997, before the Friends of Streatham Common had been set up as an offshoot of the Streatham Common Management Advisory Committee. The second issue mentioned the idea of setting up a Friends group, primarily to raise money for the MAC. And by April 1998, the fourth issue of *Common Knowledge* had become the newsletter of the Friends of Streatham Common.

Up until issue 10, *Common Knowledge* was edited by John Cresswell and was a single, double-sided A4 sheet, published more or less quarterly. Gerry O'Brien then took over as editor and it increased to four pages, while maintaining more or less quarterly publication. In spring 2002, after issue 20, Gerry handed over to an interim editor and publication stuttered, with only one issue published before Nick McAdoo took over in summer 2003. Under Nick, *Common Knowledge* doubled again in size to eight pages but was only published twice a year. In December 2006, Nick handed over to Peter Newmark, the current editor, who increased publication to three times a year but decreased the number of pages to six. From the start of last year, colour was introduced and the number of pages became eight again.

* While assembling a complete set of *Common Knowledge*, both for the purposes of this article and at the request of Lambeth Archives, it became evident that two consecutive issues were numbered 43. As a result, although the issue previous to this one was numbered 49, this one has been numbered 51 to restore the proper numbering. So although we can celebrate the publication of 50 issues, there is in fact no issue numbered 50! Thanks to Fiona Price of Lambeth Archives for pointing out the error and to John Brown for supplying us with many of the early issues. We are still missing issue 10, so if anyone has one, please let us know.

Looking back through the 50 issues, the origins of some of the current activities and projects are evident. Take Kite Day, now in its 16th year. It started life as March Wind Day in 1998 and



although kites were a major attraction, Aeolian harps, wind chimes and mobiles strung from trees also featured. By 2001, kites had become so predominant that the name Kite Day was adopted. Write ups of the day over the years record some Kite Days that have been more or less washed out, some that have suffered from too much or too little wind, and a number that have been blessed with perfect weather.

Some themes crop up over and over again. Take, for example, facilities for children. In 1997, "an imaginative series of adventure experiences made in wood...was voted as the preferred option" to replace "the decaying system presently at the lower pool". The winter 2003 issue reported the setting up of the *Parents 4 Play* group "aiming to improve the safety and quality of the facilities" in the playground. New equipment and fencing have been installed over the years but *Common Knowledge* has recorded instances of vandalism, the inevitable wear and tear and, on several occasions, the need for more up to date equipment. The latest initiative to redevelop the playground was reported in last December's issue.

Or take dogs. Early issues had frequent comments about the need for better behaviour of dogs and their owners, the provision of more bins and the possible designation of some areas for dogs while others remained dog-free. To judge by the decline of such coverage, most dog owners must have improved their behaviour, perhaps because many more bins have been provided.

At first, the Friends of Streatham Common were without a logo but in June 1999 *Common Knowledge* announced that “Desmond Masters, one of the Vale Artists, has kindly contributed a logo for the Friends. It took much agonising over how best to symbolise the uniqueness of the Common. The leafiness was an obvious feature, but to this was added the wishing well – a symbol of the days

when the Common was a resort for taking the medicinal waters.” The symbol, but with wording replacing the circle, has appeared on the newsletter's cover since 2000.



Problems in, or improvements to, the Rookery have been a constant theme over the years. In 1998 “Some of the Friends are also seeking ways to enhance the integrity of the White Garden, which is a rare feature and should be preserved”. This year the Friends will propose a new planting plan for the White Garden as it currently “lacks a coherent planting design and has had extensive bare areas”. Vandalism in the Rookery and problems with the public toilets by the cafe and by the playground have also been recurrent topics. Many articles over the years have been devoted to the ever changing ways in which the Common has been managed, including the coming and going of the Park Rangers, the need for a management plan for the Common and the outsourcing of maintenance work.

While many of these subjects may reappear in the pages of *Common Knowledge*, it is unlikely that we will be reporting the reinstatement of a splendid bye law reported in the winter 2000 issue as having been in operation in 1915: “Officers must remove from any seat any persons who are obviously in a verminous condition and ... are empowered to prevent such persons from lying on the grass”.

Orchard Revived

The Rookery Orchard is believed to have been an orchard since the 1800s but in recent times has not contained any edible fruit varieties. Streatham Common Community Garden, working in partnership with the Friends of Streatham Common and Lambeth Council, has now started to return the orchard to its original function.

The first part of the work took the form of the removal of five dead or diseased trees in early February, making space for the planting of the new trees. Then on 23



February, 20 volunteers, having learnt about planting bare root fruit trees, helped plant nine apple and three pear trees. Protective tree guards were installed around all of them and

mulch was laid to hold in moisture.

The trees have been sourced from *Grow at Brogdale*, specialists in rare and heritage varieties, and include unusual varieties such as ‘Bountiful’ and ‘Peasgood Nonsuch’. The selected trees include early and late varieties so we can expect a range of blossom and harvest throughout the season. Seven volunteers signed up to become orchard leaders, and will be responsible for caring for the trees as they get established over the next couple of years.

This is the first phase of a rolling programme of works to manage the Orchard. We hope to plant additional new edible varieties later this year.

Charlotte Dove

What's Up?

By summer, the raised floral bed in the Rookery will reflect this design by Sunnyhill Primary School's Eco-warriors, who won the competition to provide a replacement for the current centenary rook design.



Park Watch - launched in January, Park Watch aims to protect Streatham Common from vandalism, crime or anti-social behaviour while promoting safety and security for the people who use it. For more information or if you have any issues to report, email parkwatch@streathamcommon.org

SCCoop - The Streatham Common Cooperative that is set to take over the running of the Common and the Rookery became a reality in March when it was registered by the Financial Conduct Authority and the first £1 shares were sold at a launch event. Lambeth Council had agreed in principle in December to the establishment of the cooperative and, as long as they are happy with all the documentation now being prepared, will let Streatham Common Cooperative take over the running of the Rookery this October and the Common in 2016. To get involved, find out more and purchase a share, go to sccoop.org.uk

Safety - saplings and brambles along the path leading to Norwood Grove have been

cut back to open up sight lines following a sexual assault last year.

Stag beetle habitats - a group of volunteers has half buried some of the sections of tree trunks that line the top of Streatham Common South. Not only will this provide an excellent habitat for stag beetle eggs and larvae but it also means that the trunks can no longer be moved by anyone trying to drive on to the grass.



Filming - local residents and the Friends have taken up the issue of the increasing usage of Streatham Common South for vehicles associated with filming in nearby properties because of the ease of parking there. As a result of complaints, Lambeth Film Office now ensures that at least some of the vehicles use the closed-off road near the car park and is trying to find other ways to spread the load within Lambeth.

Green Flag - a flag-raising ceremony was held at the entrance to the Rookery on March 23rd. Iain Boulton, Lambeth's Parks Project Officer, congratulated all concerned in achieving Green Flag status for the Rookery and explained what



will be needed in order to ensure that the flag is still flying after the judges next visit the site.

Politicians speak

With the election of a council for the London Borough of Lambeth set to take place on May 22nd, we asked the three parties that topped the polls last time round to say how Streatham Common / The Rookery will feature in their manifestos. These were their responses.

Conservatives

Lambeth's Conservative Group recently produced an alternative budget for Lambeth, one that champions local people and supports them in deciding what is best for their own neighbourhoods, local facilities and communities. We have put much thought into how you pay for the delivery of services, so that the promises made in manifestos are in fact achievable.

Streatham Common would benefit from our desire to achieve greater cost savings on local services by outsourcing more of them and renegotiating existing contracts to obtain better value for money. Savings would then be re-invested into the community, particularly to support our green spaces. We would advocate the introduction of a dedicated manager for the Common and Rookery, other paid employees, the introduction of apprenticeships and work experience and the upkeep of the facilities themselves. Employing people who take pride in the Common and how it looks is crucial in ensuring we have an open space for us all to enjoy.

Conservative Councillors in Clapham have been adamant that the number and size of events on the common there should be limited to what is environmentally sustainable, to preserve the use for local residents, and that at least 25% of the generated income from the events should benefit the local community and go towards the improvement of the common itself. We would echo that notion in Streatham. Streatham Conservatives pledge to support the desire of SCCoop to run the common and positively support this

'Big Society' notion of people taking ownership of their communities and facilities. We would pledge to keep the 'red tape' to a minimum and avoid unnecessary work for those groups trying to set up these types of initiatives - using funds more efficiently and to much greater effect.

Many of our institutions in Streatham have been neglected by the Council in favour of other parts of the borough, but we want to see more focus and attention on this often-forgotten area of Lambeth and support for those who live and work here.

**Shirley Cosgrave, Councillor
for Clapham Common Ward**

Labour

At the moment there is a real risk that the quality of parks and open spaces, particularly in areas very hard hit by the recession and central government cuts to local authority budgets, will decline.

However, in Lambeth we don't want to see this happen. We know that our borough's parks and open spaces are highly valued. Despite the tough times – or perhaps because of them – public appetite for gardening and sustainability projects like food-growing is higher than ever. We want to harness this passion and energy to ensure our parks get the love and attention they deserve, so we can guarantee they remain thriving for not only current, but also future, generations to enjoy.

That's why we're currently working towards developing a co-operative model for running Lambeth's parks, in partnership with the Parks Forum and local Friends Groups across the borough. As Cabinet Member, I want to give Friends Groups a greater say in how their parks are managed and develop a borough wide investment programme to support them.

Lambeth has many wonderful parks, and over the last 18 months I've been out and about meeting Parks Friends and supporters. What I've seen happening so

far is really exciting, in places like Streatham Common in particular, where the Friends of Streatham Common are leading the way in setting up a Streatham Common Co-op.

I strongly believe that public parks, commons and green spaces are fundamental to our sense of place, to our enjoyment of life and to the wider civic culture in Lambeth; I want to be a champion for access to nature, beauty and fresh air, something many of us can so easily miss in busy London.

***Sally Prentice, Councillor
for Ferndale Ward and Cabinet
Member for Culture and Leisure***

Liberal Democrats

Streatham Liberal Democrat councillors recognise the vital importance of the Common to Streatham and its people. We are fully committed to protecting and promoting it as a place for relaxation, recreation and exercise.

The Liberal Democrats have a proud history of campaigning for our open spaces, which are becoming increasingly under pressure as the population of London rises. Thus in Streatham we fought to stop the Labour council building the temporary ice rink on the common, a crazy scheme which would have been hugely damaging.

We have opposed Labour's open space strategy which aims to fill holes in the council's budget by increasing the size and number of events on our open spaces. Our commons and parks need to be protected from such exploitation. And when damage is caused those responsible must be made to pay, and the money returned to the park which hosted the event.

We will protect commons and other open spaces from building and road widening. Labour Lambeth scrapped the Parks Rangers and put nothing in their place. We showed in alternative budgets how this

was avoidable and continue to believe they should be reintroduced.

Streatham Common is incredibly fortunate to have a superb and committed group of friends and dedicated users. The Co-op opens new opportunities for the Common and we will work with all involved to seize them. Any new arrangement for the management of the Common must be properly resourced. We will also ensure everyone giving their time and energy to improving management of the Common is properly supported by the Council, where final accountability continues to rest.

***Jeremy Clyne, Councillor for
Streatham Hill Ward and Liberal
Democrat Spokesperson for Culture.***

Mark Bennett

It was with great regret that the Friends learned of the sudden and unexpected

death in February of Mark Bennett, who had been a councillor for Streatham South for nine years and the Mayor of Lambeth for the past year. As



Mayor, he attended a number of our events, including the Rookery Centenary last year, at which he is pictured here alongside Councillor Sally Prentice.

Membership information

Annual fees for 2014 are £6 for an individual, £12 for a family and £2.40 for concessions. Payment or any queries should be addressed to the Membership Secretary at 13 Braxted Park, SW16 3DW, or emailed to friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com

Dates For Your Diary

Posters and streathamcommon.org/events/ will have more details of these events

April 6th, [Kite Day](#), 11.00-5.00.

April 14th, Brian Bloice talk on [History of Spas and Gardens in South London](#), 7.00pm. Woodlands Centre, 16 Leigham Court Rd, SW16 2PJ.

April 19th, [Rookery Volunteer Morning](#), 10.00-12.00. (Further dates to be announced.)

April 19th, [Easter Egg Hunt](#), in the Rookery, 2.00pm.

May 8th, public meeting on [Events on the Common](#), at Streatham Ice and Leisure Centre, 8.00pm.

May 10th, [Bird and Bird Box Survey](#), starting by the café, 9.30-11.30.

May 14th, [Comedy Night](#) fundraiser, at The Hideway.

May 16th, [Bat Walk](#), meet by the café at 8.45pm.

June 7th, [Cake Baking Competition](#), during the afternoon in The Railway, Greyhound Lane.

June 7th, [The Big Lunch](#), in the Rookery.

June 15th, [Open Garden Squares](#) in the Rookery from 10.00-5.00, including [Band in the Rookery](#) from 2.00-5.00.

June 25th, [Friends of Streatham Common Annual General Meeting](#), Streatham Ice and Leisure Centre, 7.45pm.

July 8th, [Walk the Nature Trail](#), along with bird, bug and plant experts, meet by the café at 7.00pm.

July 12th, [History and Natural History of Streatham Common](#), a walk starting by the café at 2.30pm.

July 12th, an evening of [Cabaret in the Rookery](#).

July 13th [Shakespeare in the Rookery, Comedy of Errors](#), 3.00pm.

August 10th, [Birds of Prey Display](#), on the lower Common, in the afternoon.

September 7th, [Fun Dog Show](#), at the top of the Common, in the afternoon.

Advertisements

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