



# Common Knowledge

April 2015, Issue 54

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## Events Coming Up

**Kite Day**

*As You Like It*

**Bird and Bat Walks**

*White Garden Opening*

**Comedy Night**

*Band in the Rookery*

**Cake Bake-off**

*Community Planting Days*

**& more - see page 8**

## From the Chair

2015 marks the start of a challenging time for parks, although there is also plenty to celebrate. As usual we are putting on a great line up of events this year, and a fundraising comedy night in May. Thanks to all our executive members and the huge number of volunteers who make it all possible. Over the coming months, the new planting in the Rookery should become increasingly evident in the restored White Garden and the Orchard. We also have three new members of staff in the Rookery thanks to SCCoop, which took over services in February 2015, making huge improvements.

Back in 2013 not one penny was earmarked for capital investment on Streatham Common, but now we have achieved funding of £1 million to restore the playground area. We have excellent draft designs for a new playground, café, changing rooms and a community room ready for consultation.

However, the looming budget cuts are bigger than we could have feared. From 2016, it is proposed that the parks budget is halved, topped up controversially by income from events like Garage Nation and rent from cafes. This will have a drastic impact on services, despite efficiencies from organisations such as SCCoop. We are opposing the cuts, supporting local management, and asking for a more co-operative event planning process, with a greater share of income put back into the parks. You can read more about all this on page 6. I urge you to fill in the council's consultation questionnaire on the proposals by April 24th.

There is a very real risk that, with the headline-grabbing library closures being opposed so strongly borough wide, no-one speaks up for parks, and we see an even greater cut.

*Richard Payne*

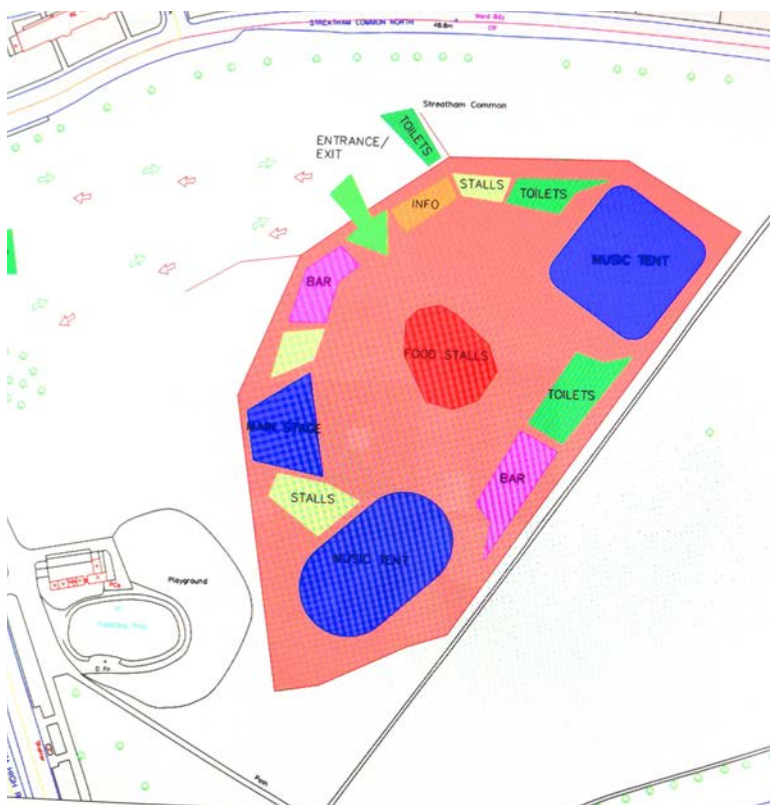
## Music Festivals

Earplugs at the ready, a noisy, controversial, two-day music festival is coming to the Common this summer. It could be a sign of things to come as Lambeth council struggles to balance its books.

The festival will bring at least 12,000 people to the Common over two days of garage music (see box). It will be held over the weekend of 11/12th July. Saturday will be a Garage Nation Festival, with music from 12.00-9.30pm; the next day will be a One Dance Festival from 12.00-8.30pm. Entry will be by ticket only into the large fenced-off area of the lower Common shown below. The organisers have promised tight security, crowd control and strict adherence to agreed noise levels, which are likely, however, to be uncomfortably high for local residents.

The Garage Nation festival is coming to the Common as part of Lambeth's plans to increase revenue from commercial events

**Site Map.** *Playground and High Road, bottom left. Streatham Common North, top. Stages, blue. Food stalls, red. Other stalls, yellow. Toilets, green. Bars, pink.*



in its parks and green spaces in order to offset the severe cuts in budgets that it intends to impose. The current proposals (see page 6 for more details), which are open for consultation until April 24th, are for a cut of 50% in the budget for Streatham Common (and all green spaces in Lambeth) by 2016. They propose that Streatham Common (and all large sites in Lambeth) are used for at least eight days a year for large commercial events and that only one third of the hire fees from these events is returned directly to the site. Garage Nation's two-day festival will return between £7,000 and £14,000 directly to the Common, depending on ticket sales.

Controversy has sprung up about the event for a number of reasons. The first is that local residents were not adequately consulted about the event before permission was granted. Regrettably, Lambeth did no more than fulfill its minimum obligations by putting up a few notices on the Common announcing the application for the event and inviting comment. Even then the notices were very few in number and went largely unnoticed, or at least uncommented on.

There were just three objections, one of them from the chair of Friends of Streatham Common, who also spread the word locally about the proposed event. As a result of the objections, a meeting was held with the organisers, the council and the police, after which various changes were made to the plans for the event, such as earlier finishing times and more portable loos. The organisers also agreed both to address a meeting of the Friends executive committee and then a public meeting organised by the Friends (which was held on March 25th). As a result, the Friends decided to withdraw their objections to the event.

Other concerns have centred on the expected noise levels, the fact that a large section of the lower Common will be out of action not just for the weekend but for a few days either side of it, while the facilities (three stages, loos, fencing, etc) are put up and then taken down, the potential damage to the Common, parking/traffic problems, and possible anti-social behaviour. All of these were raised on March 25th when two members of the company that is arranging the event took a limited number of questions at a meeting arranged by the Friends. In effect, the company said they were very experienced, were already working out details on all the matters of concern with the council, police, Transport for London, etc and that everything would be fine. However, they agreed to consider a number of new points that were raised.

There is no escaping the fact that noise levels will be high, although the maximum levels have been set to be safe and will be monitored on the day. A hotline for complaints has been promised. There is also no escaping the fact that a sizeable area of the Common will be out of action for a week (as it is when the fun fair is here).

Any damage to the Common, primarily from the high footfall, will be repaired after the event. As for any event on the Common, even a Friends event, the organisers have to put down a deposit from which any repairs are paid. In the case of Garage Nation, it is of the order of £7,000. There remain two causes of concern. Would the deposit be sufficient were the site to become a Glastonbury-like sea of mud? The organisers said were this likely, the festival could be cancelled. The second is the speed with which the repairs would be carried out – Lambeth have a lamentably slow record in this respect.

Parking and traffic problems seem very likely to occur. Even if, as predicted on the basis of experience, the great majority of

**What is Garage Music?** Garage is a genre of electronic music dating back to the 1990s. To quote Wikipedia “it usually features a distinctive syncopated 4/4 percussive rhythm with 'shuffling' hi-hats and beat-skipping kick drums. Garage tracks also commonly feature 'chopped up' and time-shifted or pitch-shifted vocal samples complementing the underlying rhythmic structure at a tempo usually around 130 BPM”. At least nine Garage Nation events are taking place in the UK this year, but only the one on Streatham Common is to be outdoors.

the ticket holders use public transport, there will be plenty of extra cars vying for parking spaces and causing flow problems, especially on Streatham Common South. Little consideration has been given to this but more was promised. Anti-social behaviour is always possible but there will be control of the crowds leaving at the end of the day and security personnel patrolling “around the wider Common”. Also there will be portaloos at three locations outside the fenced-off area.

Many of the concerns about the Garage Nation festival were voiced in 2009 when, at short notice, it was announced that Day of Portugal was to be held on the Common. This is a large music festival, with dance, food and drink, that is held for London's Portuguese community to celebrate their national day. As it happens, the day passed without any real problems. The event has since been held in Kennington Park but is set to return to Streatham Common this year, from 11.00am to 7.00pm on June 14th. At present there are notices around the Common (far more than there were for Garage Nation) announcing the application for this event and inviting comments by April 13th. The Friends executive currently has no objections to Day of Portugal. Over to you.

*Peter Newmark*

**MEMBERSHIP.** If you pay your membership annually but have not yet renewed it, you will find a form enclosed for you to fill out.

For any queries about renewal or membership, please contact the Membership Secretary by emailing [membership@streathamcommon.org](mailto:membership@streathamcommon.org) or by writing to 9 Strathbrook Rd, SW16 3AT.

## SCCoop Takes Off

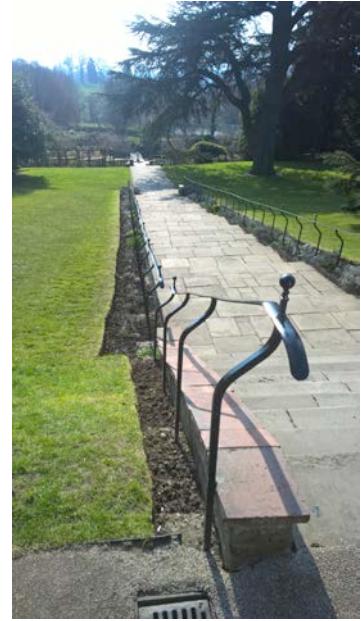
*No regular visitor to the Rookery can have failed to notice the improvements over the past couple of months. Here, Dominic Leary, the Head Gardener & Manager of SCCoop, provides an update. SCCoop is not-for-profit cooperative with over 300 local members. You can join it by purchasing a share for £1 at [www.sccoop.org.uk](http://www.sccoop.org.uk)*

The Streatham Common Co-operative (SCCoop) took over the management of the Rookery at the beginning of February this year. We started with two staff, myself and Assistant Head Gardener, Nick Mawbey.

The Rookery is a fabulous garden but it was clear to us that due to increasing cuts over the years to the Lambeth Parks budget, it was not looking its best. We intend to change that and have started by working on features that we feel that the public notice the most. We have worked hard at the main entrances, clearing the encroaching ivy, thereby giving room for some of the old under-planting to grow



again. We edged the lawns back to their original line, removing old turf. This revealed soak away drains which had been covered by turf for years. Nick has spent days clearing the clogged-up silt in these



drains, in some cases up to a metre deep. This should go some way to improving drainage in the Rookery. Of course we've also had to start managing the seasonal tasks, such as pruning summer flowering shrubs, pruning and tying in roses and weeding around the lavender plants that line the steps. All of this work is being carefully recorded so that by next year we will have a detailed horticultural maintenance plan.

SCCoop also values its relationships with the other voluntary groups who use the garden. We regularly attend Friends meetings and provide updates to the executive committee. We work closely with Streatham Common Community Garden. Sharing our resources, we have just cleared all of the old compost bays in the yard giving the Community Garden space to store compost and manure.

We want to build partnerships with other local groups, too. You will notice the raised bed on the top terrace which contained the centenary floral display. This display was beginning to look past its best. We have removed the old planting and it will be replanted with bee-friendly perennials. This will be done working with groups from Crown Point School, encouraging groups that might not normally use the Rookery.

A key principle of SCCoop is to provide opportunities of employment for young people in the horticulture industry. As such, we are about to hire an apprentice who will spend one day a week at Capel Manor college studying towards a recognised gardening qualification. The rest of the apprentice's time will be spent working within the garden, gaining practical experience with the team. We have also employed a part time groundsperson who will start in April. With our expanded team, we're really looking forward to making the Rookery the best it can be.

Not only are we taking on the horticultural management of the Rookery, we are also aiming to increase opportunities for volunteers and continue to grow the much loved community events and activities that take place in the Rookery. We've achieved much so far, but there is still plenty to do.

*Dominic Leary*

## Owls on the Common

Anyone out on the Common at dawn or dusk this winter may have been lucky enough to hear and perhaps see either a tawny owl or a little owl. The former are quite often around in the winter but little owls are an unusual visitor.

The tawny owls – at least two were seen and heard – favoured the woodland area. It is the tawny owl's hoot that is the one we all try and imitate – hoo-hoo-hoo-hooooo – and is inevitably heard on the soundtrack of any film that features a scene shot in the countryside at night. It is heard only during the winter months. Tawny owls hunt after dusk, usually in or near woods, catching small mammals, worms and insects on the ground. Whether they nest in the Common's woodland is uncertain. Let us know if you have ever seen owlets in the woods – now would be a good time to spot them, probably perched on a high branch of a tree, with their parents not far away. The parent birds are about the size of a pigeon and have mottled brown plumage. The owlets start off with fluffy



white down but that is gradually replaced by brownish feathers as they age. They can fly when they are about a month old and look like adults at three months.

Only one little owl was seen on the Common. It frequented the upper part of the Common, north of the path that runs from Copley Park to Valley Road. It was sometimes perched on a tree, sometimes on a rooftop on Streatham Common South and sometimes on a rubbish bin on the footpath. It was also seen on the ground, no doubt looking for insects or worms. And it was also sometimes heard calling its repetitive single screech.

Little owls (above, right) are about the size of a starling and rather plump in appearance with greyish-brown plumage that is spotted white on the wings. Unlike the tawny owl, the little owl is not a native to the UK. It was introduced to these shores in the late part of the 19th century and rapidly spread, although has been on the decline for the past 40 years. It is the little owl that is probably responsible for the association of owls with wisdom. Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, was symbolised by a little owl, the Latin name for which is *Athene noctua*. Many ancient Greek coins carried a depiction of the little owl and the tradition is continued on the back of the country's current one euro coin ♦

**Thanks.** The Friends Streatham Common would like to thank **Sainsbury's** and **Anthony Gold Solicitors** for sponsoring their Christmas Carol Singing and Party.

## Photography Competition

Readers were confused by an error in the last issue in which we offered a prize for the best photograph of Streatham Common or The Rookery taken "by the middle of March 2014" This should, of course, have been March 2015. As a result of the confusion, we have extended the date to July 2015.

Email your entries - no more than two per person - by 1st July 2015 to [friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com)

The winning photograph will be chosen by a panel that includes a local professional photographer and the editor of *Common Knowledge* and will be published in the next issue.

## Muddy Times

Winter is always muddy on the Common but this year it has been made worse by a number of events. The first of these was in December, when the London Gospel Choir performed near the bottom of the Common. Predictably the ground was soft and vehicles delivering the stage etc caused some rutting. The site chosen was right next to one of the areas where new sapling trees were planted last year and some of these suffered as a result.

The next problem was caused when a vehicle used by tree surgeons, who were removing some dead or diseased trees from the Orchard, encountered difficulties in leaving the site because its wheels were sinking in the ground. Deep ruts were formed before the vehicle managed to leave (above, left).

Then in early January the Surrey Cross-country running teams had a competition on the Common. As the ground was so soft it became very badly churned up in a couple of places where the runners were funnelled through a bottleneck (above, right). Most recently, an ice cream van drove along a path too narrow for its



wheelbase and caused ruts on either side when its wheels sank into the soft ground.

One might well ask why, given the predictably sodden state of parts of the Common in winter, this kind of damage was not foreseen. Why were the events allowed and why were the tree surgeons allowed to take such a heavy vehicle on the Common? Precisely because the ground is so wet, the damage often cannot rapidly be repaired as this would require vehicles to be able to access the sites. Moreover, grass seed cannot be sown until the spring. So parts of the Common are left in a poor state for months. Let's hope lessons have been learned for next winter♦

## Budgets Halved for Lambeth Parks?

Lambeth Council last month launched a public consultation ([www.lambeth.gov.uk/culture2020consultation](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/culture2020consultation)) about its plans to cut back the Cultural Services budget, which includes parks.

The Friends of Streatham Common has serious concerns about these cuts and the proposals for events and income and you can read our key issues below. We urge you to respond to the consultation as soon as possible and copy your responses to your Ward Councillors and ourselves ([friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com)). The public consultation ends on April 24th. We want Lambeth to know how deeply

people care about their local park or open space.

The Parks' budget will be cut by half – from £4.4m a year to £2.2m by 2016. Lambeth plan to off-set this in part by earning more revenue from parks via a big increase in the number of events in parks, by raising the rent of park cafés and other buildings and by charging more to sports players and for licences.

We believe that maintaining parks and open spaces is vital to the health and well-being of all who live and work in Lambeth. More people use parks and open spaces than any other service Lambeth provides.

**The Friends of Streatham Common does not support the proposed cuts**, and believes they will have a detrimental impact on the delivery of services, even with the efficiency savings that can be made by organisations such as the Streatham Common Co-operative.

**We support Lambeth's plan to hand over responsibility for managing some 'pioneer parks' to community led groups** (such as the Streatham Common Co-operative for the Rookery and Streatham Common), but note that this will not in itself bring in more money, although it could lead to better value for the money that is spent. The plans to create other 'partnership' parks would simply spread the responsibility for deciding how to use the much smaller budget to new groups, in most cases yet to be formed.

**We also do not support the proposal to take 1/3 of all income from events on Streatham Common and other parks and put it back into the administration of the events service itself.** The events service should be a fixed cost per year, with extra revenue going back into the parks. You can read more about the events strategy at [www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/new-events-strategy-2015-to-2020.pdf](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/new-events-strategy-2015-to-2020.pdf).

**We are concerned that there is no formal process to discuss or oppose** the nature of the current proposed eight days of major commercial events in Streatham - most or all of which would be on the Common, or of the possibility that this number will be increased. The choice of events is to be at the discretion of only the cabinet and area lead councillors.

You can read the background and fill in the questionnaire at [www.lambeth.gov.uk/culture2020consultation](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/culture2020consultation); or you can get a hard copy of a summary "Cultural Services by 2020" from your local Lambeth library. Whatever your views, please comment by April 24th rather than remain silent ♦

## Orchard Planting

Plum, cherry and quince trees were planted in the Orchard in mid February, complementing the apple and pear trees planted last year. A total of ten new trees includes Majorie's Seedling plum, Fairleigh Damson, Old Greengage, Meeches Prolific quince and Sweetheart cherry. The trees were paid for by Network Rail via the London Wildlife Trust as part of the biodiversity project that has seen many new trees planted on the Common. Planting was carried out by volunteers and managed by the Streatham Common Community Garden working with the Friends, Streatham Action and Lambeth Council.



Preparation of the Orchard for the planting involved removal of four dead or diseased trees, one of which was meant to be given stay of execution as it bore one of the very few clumps of mistletoe in Lambeth. Unfortunately the tree surgeons had not been informed about this. Just as unfortunately their large vehicle became stuck in the mud (see page 6) ♦

### Alexander Technique

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\*Prices dependent on species / weight

Please contact us on 0208 679 6969 or visit [www.valevets.com](http://www.valevets.com) for more information.

## Dates For Your Diary

More details will be on our website or posters

April 11th - [Bird Walk](#), meet at 9.30am by the café.

April 17th - [Rookery Volunteer Morning](#), 10am to 12.00pm.

April 25th - [Community Planting Day](#), White Garden, 10am to 4pm.

May 9th - [Community Planting Day](#), Old English Garden, 10am to 4pm.

May 10th - [Bird Box and Song Survey](#), meet at 9.30am by the café.

May 14th - [Comedy Night Fundraiser](#), The Hideaway.

May 23rd - [Community Planting Day](#), Old English Garden, 10am to 4pm.

June 7th - [Streatham Food Festival Quiz Trail](#) to the Rookery, 5-8pm.

June 10th - [White Garden Official Opening](#), 2pm.

June 14th - [Band in the Rookery](#) on Open Garden Squares day, 3-6pm.

June 19th - [Bat Walk](#), meet at 9.20pm by the café.

June 21st - [Kite Day](#), 11am-5pm.

June 27th - [Cake Bake-off](#).

July 5th - [History & Natural History of Streatham Common walk](#), meet at 11am by the café.

July 14th - [Shakespeare in the Rookery: As You Like It](#), 7.30pm.