



streathamcommon.org

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Members Christmas Party

**Outside at The Bull pub,
December 7th, 8.00pm**

Preceded by mulled wine and mince pies at 7.00pm and carol singing at 7.30pm, both by the Christmas tree at the bottom of Streatham Common

Common Knowledge

From the Chair

So, here we are again heading towards the end of one year and starting a new one; they come around faster every year!

We had a successful public meeting in October to discuss and review options for the Rookery car park. In advance of the meeting, we ran a small survey in an effort to gauge our members' opinion. You can read an analysis of the results inside this edition.

Over the summer, the Rookery was judged as part of the London in Bloom capital campaign and received a gold award, as well as being voted best small park. This is fantastic news for the team at SCCoop and all the volunteers that helped to get it looking so good.

The SCCoop Christmas Fair will be held this year on Sunday December 18th. I hope many of you will come along and enjoy the festive atmosphere and continue your support of SCCoop and the Rookery.

I attended the Remembrance Sunday Service last weekend on behalf of the Friends for the first time and was very impressed with the turnout. Many community groups were in attendance, including local schools, Cubs, Scouts and Police Cadets, to name but a few. I was really impressed with the children's commitment to their duties on the day. The traffic was stopped on the A23, and many wreaths were laid, including our own.

On December 7th we will be holding our Christmas party at The Bull, which has just been refurbished. There will be carols by the Christmas tree beforehand with mulled wine and mince pies. I do so hope you can all attend and join us in singing carols and then enjoying some warming soup and nibbles in the pub and perhaps a glass afterwards.

Finally, as always at this time of the year, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the FoSC executive committee and our fabulous volunteers for all their hard work over the past twelve months. I would also like to wish all our members and their families a very Merry Christmas and prosperous new year.

Tracey Williamson

There was a good response to the survey with 337 responses in total, of which 40% were members of the Friends. The headline results were 71% preferred to consider other options for the car park rather than re-open it. FoSC members who responded were broadly of the same view as everyone else with 66% preferring to close the car park compared with 74% for non-members.

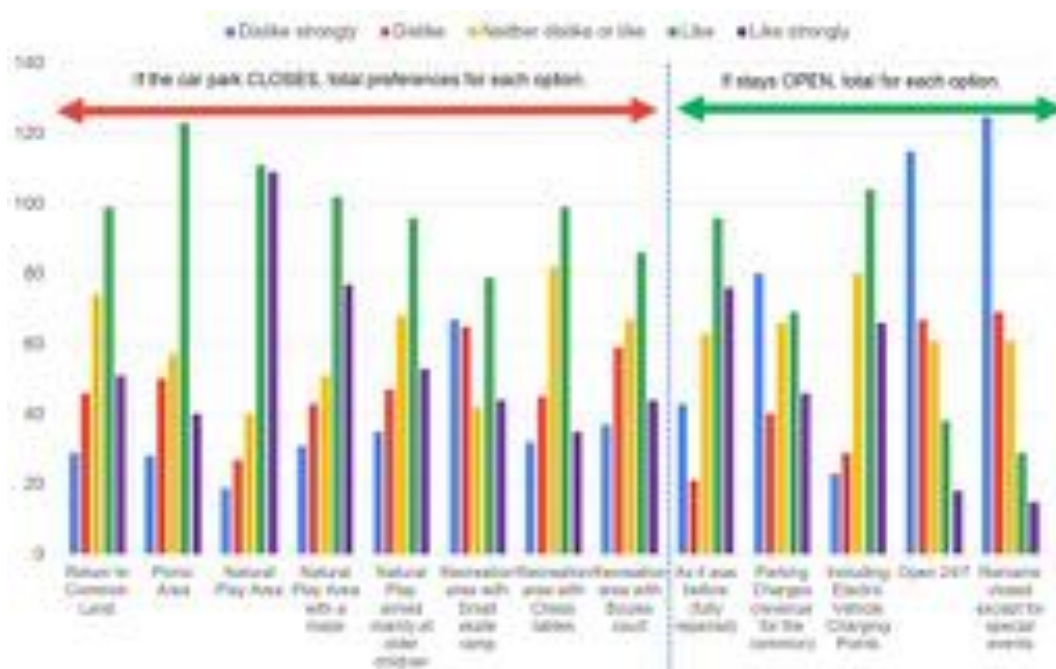
Regardless of the preferred choice to open or close the car park, everyone was asked what options they preferred and also given the opportunity to comment further. If in favour of closing the car park, most people liked natural options, with a natural play area being the most strongly liked. The two

In the case that the car park remains open, it was interesting that either keeping it open all the time or open only for special events were very unpopular. Adding electric car charging was a popular response. Perhaps unsurprisingly, introducing parking charges had the most divisive response!

In other comments, introducing disabled parking, increasing cycle parking and making exercise equipment available were most often mentioned.

Views expressed at the public meeting, with Council Officers and local Councillors in attendance, generally reflected the survey results. There are currently no council funds available for any change, so a more detailed proposal needs to be drawn up and consulted on, and then funding sought, which may take some time. Whatever option is chosen, the timing could be phased.

One thing the Friends executive is keen to avoid is nothing happening and the area



falling into further disrepair. Perhaps the clearest conclusion to draw is the most unpopular decision by far was keeping the car park closed as it is now!

*Richard
Payne*

Childhood Memories of Streatham Common

It was wartime when I arrived in Streatham as a one-year-old child. My parents had moved up from the South Coast when my father was transferred to the Air Defence of Great Britain command at Kensington during 1943. Living just a few roads away from Streatham Common, it became a habit for the family to make for this open space and the charms of the Rookery for an afternoon out. However, strolling about the Common was for not for me and as a young boy the lure and attraction for adventures in the woods of the upper Common and games on the lower slope, presented an environment that contrasted vividly with my other play areas – the dangerous but exciting bomb sites. My thoughts still wander into memory when I pass by the Common today, seeing in my mind's eye the fenced area that contained a patchwork of allotments that covered much of the upper slopes, and the rows of prefabs - little houses with their titchy gardens that sat along the edge of the Common by the High Road and on the Southside. When playing cricket on the lower slope we used one of the old trees



My first visit to Streatham Common as a young child in 1944

alongside the north side of the Common as a makeshift cricket stump. Here there were many old trees between the bushes and during rainy periods a little watercourse sprung to life, trickling downhill to form a marshy area opposite the War Memorial Gardens.

From Valley Road we would make our way uphill alongside the allotments, passing the bandstand at the top before entering the woods. Here we indulged ourselves by running wild, climbing the trees, playing hide and seek, shouting about and dodging the Common Keepers, who were not inclined to appreciate the fun we were having. These guardians of the Common were best avoided, particularly when we were charging around the Rookery Gardens with our sticks, hiding in the bushes and scrumping in what is still the orchard.

The pitted and gravelled path that led down to the gate into Norwood Grove was a journey to another place. We recklessly sped down this path on our little bikes – it was a challenge. However, we stopped at the gate as the formality of the gardens deterred our adventurous leanings and where, of course, there were the ever watchful eyes of the Park Keepers.

The Common was more than just a play area. The Boy Scouts in the 2nd Streatham Common Group, of which I was a member, were often on the Common for scouting activities practising, for example, our semaphore skills or learning the art of tracking. When looking back to those childhood days of the 1950s, the Common was purely an adventure playground for kids: it was wild and unkempt in parts and presented an exciting place for juvenile escapism.

Graham Gower

We are very grateful to Anthony Gold Solicitors for their sponsorship of our Christmas party (see front page) and their donation of a hamper as a raffle prizes. See you there!

Acid Grassland Restoration

As foreseen in the last issue, an area near the top of Streatham Common South has now been fenced off in order to restore the 'acid grassland' therein. Most of the fencing used came from a newly 'de-fenced' area in the main woodland.

Acid grassland is so-called because of the acidic nature of its soil, which is nutrient-poor and free draining. As a result, it favours particular grasses and flowers that do poorly elsewhere. A combination of factors, including pollution from cars, excretion from dogs and too much trampling of the fragile habitat, has meant that Streatham Common's acid grassland has become reduced and degraded.

The first stage of restoring the acid grassland is now complete. It started with deep scraping of the top layer of nutrient-rich topsoil in the most degraded parts of the fenced-off area. The clods of soil were then removed and a special seed mix, containing species typical of acid grassland, was sown on the exposed nutrient-poor subsoil. Further seeding is likely to take place and appropriate grass cutting will be instigated.

By fencing off the area, the new plants within it will be able to take hold quickly as they will be protected against trampling and erosion. The amount of land fenced off is the minimum required for the project and the fencing will be removed once the restored grassland has become fully established.

The project has been funded largely by the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund but also by Lambeth Council. London Wildlife Trust and Lambeth Parks are delivering the project, with the involvement of both the Friends of Streatham Common and the Streatham Common Cooperative.

19th Century Head Gardener

Of Graveyards and Things may seem a strange publication in which to read about The Rookery's head gardener from 1855

until 1904, but that is where his great, great grandson's wife has reproduced a 125-year old article based on an interview with him.

The head gardener in question was William George Turner and the article appeared in *The Gardeners's Chronicle* of 20th November 1897*. Turner, born in 1833, moved to The Rookery from the Earl of Spencer's Althorp estate when he was 18 or 19 and became head gardener at the age of 22. He remained in post until after the death in 1901 of the last occupant of The Rookery house, the widowed Lady Jane Key. While head gardener, Turner lived in the gardener's cottage on the estate, raising a family there. Heart problems led him to retire and move to Deal in 1904, where his daughter lived and where he died.

During his time as head gardener, Turner won prizes at exhibitions for, among other things, black grapes, melons and apples grown in the Rookery gardens. The writer of the article was evidently shown around the gardens by Turner and describes many features including the kitchen garden - with peach and apricot walls - the fruit garden and a small house full of camellias. It also describes an old sun dial, in front of a covered well, that was "ruined" by "a policeman who was 'on patrol' for it is said he had no person to arrest and consequently arrested the brass fittings."

*the full article can be read at <https://ofgraveyardsandthings.com/2022/10/14/1897-interview-with-william-george-turner-head-gardener-at-the-rookery-streatham-common/>

At the London in Bloom Awards 2022, the Rookery again achieved Gold in the Small Park of the Year category and also became the 'Overall Category Winner' for the first time ever.

Streatham Common secured Gold in the Common of the Year category and Silver Gilt for its Local Nature Reserve in the Large Conservation Area category.