

## Annual Report 2023

Welcome to the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Friends of Brunswick Square, the inaugural meeting of which I Chaired on Tuesday 1st July 2008 in the Guides Hall, Coram's Fields, in my role as Chair of the Marchmont Association. Some of you may remember this meeting, which was also attended by Gabi Howard, who was Camden's Parks Liaison Officer at the time. **Our partnership with Camden Parks** continues today and I am pleased to welcome **Alexandra West, Camden's Green Space Partnership Officer**.

During the year we have maintained contact with Camden Parks, including a positive site meeting with Parks Officers and Oliver Jones, who was briefly Parks Manager, before moving on to become Interim Head of Recreation. Although we established arrangements for on-going communications with specific Officers, I am aware that this has not always gone smoothly, particularly in relation to support for our volunteer gardening group. So there is room for improvement in 2024.

On the plus side, we negotiated a generous donation to FoBS via Camden's Events Officer in relation to an event which went very well.

Another positive has been the **Wellbeing Walks** programme initiated by ABSG with Camden Parks and Camden Guides, which saw several walks setting off from Brunswick Square in the course of the year. I believe Alex was a key player in making this such a success and we look forward to it continuing into 2024.

Another initiative Susan has been discussing is the **Make Space for Girls** initiative by Camden, intended to encourage girls and young women to make use of green spaces in Camden.

**Camden Friends Partnership Agreement** is currently out for consultation with Friends groups.

We have continued to be represented at **ABSG** quarterly meetings and the annual soiree, held in Bedford Square in the summer. We have noted that **Camden's rating in the Good Parks Guide** was poor, but that there were extenuating circumstances explaining this rating, which we don't have time to go into right now. FoBS has continued to benefit from its share of the proceeds of sales of the ABSG's book titled **Bloomsbury's Squares and Gardens**, by Susan Jellis, illustrated by Nick Andrew.

Once again, the **Bloomsbury Festival** hose Brunswick Square Gardens to display two impressive exhibitions on the railings along the east and south sides of the gardens.

Our **Volunteer Gardening Group** has continued meeting on the first Saturday of the month, adding value to the work of idverde, whilst providing residents with the opportunity to meet others in a collaborative, social environment. Our enormous gratitude is due to Stephen for all he has done to establish and maintain this group over the years and we warmly welcome Giselle, who has agreed to pick up the baton.

The main change to have taken place within the gardens this year has been the installation of the fencing, affectionately named the 'OK Corral', surrounding the **Brunswick Plane**, to protect it from harm. The glorious display of spring flowers within the 'corral' has more than compensated for the loss of access to this beloved tree.

**The revamped highways surrounding the gardens** have continued to disappoint, due to a combination of design flaws and intermittent maintenance, although the large paved area is now

being looked after by Veolia. I have submitted regular reports about pigeon infestation and the various forms of skating which have ruined the 'granite' seating, thus rendering the area virtually unusable as a quiet escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life for which it was designed. Incessant use of the paved area as a short-cut/race track by cyclists and scooter riders renders it unsafe for pedestrians, for whom the area was specifically designed. I have attempted in vain to get skate deterrents installed along the front of the seating, although PLEASE DO NOT FEED THE PIGEONS signs on two lamp posts overlooking this area have had a slight effect on reducing the frequency of pigeon feeding. On the plus side, my constant badgering of Camden Highways to get the desire line along the edge of the kerb opposite the bike stands paved has paid off, with a temporary surface being installed ahead of permanent granite setts to match the rest of this area.

**The triangle of land on the NW corner of the square** was eventually planted up entirely with Cornus shrubs, after several failed attempts to get external contractors to do the job. However, passing strangers took to pulling out many of these shrubs shortly after planting, but they were quickly replanted. Who would do something like that? Early signs are that the shrubs planted in proximity to the roots of the larger trees have not thrived, whilst those planted further away, where they also benefit from more sunlight, are doing better. I have recently made a second attempt to arrange a site meeting with King's Cross ward Councillors to raise these issues. This might also be an opportunity to recruit one of them as our 'champion' to promote the interests of Brunswick Square Gardens within Camden Council.

As things stand, the land surrounding the gardens gives a negative first impression of the gardens beyond, although I hear nothing but praise from Garden users and appreciation of the work carried out by our Volunteer Gardeners.

Ricci de Freitas

Chair