



Chair's report 2016

2016 has been a really busy year for the Friends group, and a challenging one for the park.

First, we had to say goodbye to Tony Benton our outgoing Chair. Tony's moved away to distant Shoreham but still keeps in touch with park activities. He contributed a great deal to the park and he'll be missed. Although he can't be here today, he deserves our thanks.

Events

Over the past 12 months all of our events have grown in popularity. Each of them is designed to celebrate the park in some way, to raise its profile, to have fun - but the focus is always on the park.

We held a **wreath-making** event last December using appropriately sourced greenery from the park. People were delighted to have a piece of Preston Park on their doors at Christmas-time.

With spring came our annual **Easter-egg hunt** event, designed to educate children on the value of precious flora, fauna, history and architecture of the park.

During the course of the year we organized some **guided walks**: a couple of history of the park walks, 2 trees of the park walks, Andy conducted walks of the Rock Garden, Alan guided a 'greater park' walk and there was a birds of Preston Park walk.

We took part in the Preston Open day where we presented a park quiz which was popular – and of course expanded people's knowledge about the park. This year we launched a new event: a **photographic competition**, inviting entries of pictures depicting the recreation, landscape, nature and sport to be seen in the park. More about that in a minute.

And our annual **Halloween Lantern Walk** for families was enormously popular, with hundreds of people creating a tear-jerkingly beautiful procession of lanterns through the dark park. With the exception of the wreath-making event when we charge £3 a wreath, all our events are free, although we ask for a donation. Like the park itself, we want them to be accessible to everyone. A big 'thank you' to all our sponsors without whom these events could not happen.

Communications

We try hard to keep people abreast with what's going on – like this meeting. We've produced several emailed newsletters or mini-newsletters for our members this year as well as posters in the park and locally.

Membership

Our membership – also free of course – has now reached 444.

Challenges

The events we run constitutes only a part of what the Friends group is about.

After our deputation to the council last year, we were pleased that the amount of spend on the new fencing to the cycle track was far less than predicted.

We have been active throughout the year in communicating to council staff, councilors and our MP that the regular incursion of Travellers is unacceptable. As well as the public consultation, we believe we have played a part in the decision by the council to adopt the new Public Spaces Protection Order which makes the prosecution or eviction of those displaying anti-social behaviours easier and faster.

We've also striven, with success, to keep valued Park Rangers in their jobs.

We have had various communications and meetings with the proposed new developers of Anston House. We at last got the information about overshadowing that we wanted and, based on the developer's plans, have concluded that the proposed new building will not significantly overshadow the southern end of the park. We have therefore decided not to object to the proposed new building.

We're grateful to the council for asking our opinion on the draft of the Conservation Management Plan for the park which we commented on earlier this year.

We liaised with archaeologists as they mapped the park and endeavoured to find something of interest – the results were disappointing.

We have sought and passed on views about how best to police the Pride event.

We've been concerned about recent vandalism in the park and have asked for help from our MP and the police which has received a really positive result.

We've also been concerned about the suspension of parking in the park's car parks. The revenue from which is the only source of money specifically ring-fenced for the park. The legal issue has now been resolved and paid parking should continue shortly.

Park finance

There is approximately £50k in the pot from parking monies – no deadline for a spend date. There is currently over £84k available from 'section 106' money as a result of the refurbishment of the old co-op building. That has a spend date of July 2018.

We were grateful to be asked our opinion on what would be the priorities of spend from 'section 106' money if the Anston House project were to go ahead, and we've duly replied.

CMP/Park Survey

The Conservation Management Plan is temporarily suspended pending the outcome of the 'Future of Our Parks' survey in the spring. We will be seeking clarification of how these two projects will work together. We will also be seeking clarification on whether the decision to save money for Heritage Lottery Fund match-funding for the park is still active.

Plans for 2017

More of the same! Including the Christmas wreath-making event which will be on Sunday 11 December from 11am to 3pm in this building.

There will also be an expanded photographic competition – this time people can enter a photo encapsulating a season in the park. It's open now and will close on 31 August.

Thanks

To all the hard-working park staff for all they do in straightened circumstances. To Park Rangers Emma Keane and Garry Meyer for their enthusiasm, encouragement and practical help. To our local councilors Leo Littman, Kevin Allen and Julie Cattell and Caroline Lucas MP for the help and support they've given to our group. And to all Preston-Parkers who, I know, love and care about the park, for their passion about this particular Green Space.

Sue Shepherd, Chair – November 2016