



Chair's report 2017

2017 has been a quieter year for the Friends group but the park still faces some challenges.

Events

The number of events we've been able to host this year has been affected by the leasing of our usual venue, the **men's bowls pavilion**. The latest we've heard about this is that the council have identified the probable new lessees of this building, together with the Tile House, and negotiations are taking place at the moment. During the past few months we have not had access to the building. We're hoping that the new lessees will allow us to use the building from time to time. However we will not be holding our usual Halloween Lantern Walk this year.

But we did manage to hold our annual **Wreath-making** event in December in the building. A huge number came and, as usual, it was a really lovely, happy event and a great way to use unneeded park vegetation – thank you to the Park Rangers.

And we had our **Easter-egg hunt** earlier in the year, designed to educate children on the value of our precious flora, fauna, history and architecture of the park. The weather was kind and it was very successful.

We instigated and facilitated the **Preston Village Open Day** in the summer, and were delighted that the High Sheriff of East Sussex Maureen Chowen and her consort accepted our invitation to come along. The Friends of St Peter's combined the day with their Midsummer Tea Party and arranged for history walks around the village; the Walled Garden volunteers, churchyard gardeners, croquet

club all contributed and Preston Manor was open for the day at a reduced rate. If it wasn't for the pouring rain it would have been a huge success! But those under cover – like St Peter's – did benefit.

We've had a good response from our request for entries to our **photographic competition**; we'll be announcing the winners and distributing prizes in a few minutes.

I conducted an illustrated **History of Preston Park walk** again, as part of Heritage Open Days. It was well-attended which was gratifying.

And, as always, the park was used for all sorts of other events throughout the year including Pride, the Brighton Marathon, the circus, the Thai weekend, the RSPB wildlife children's events and the weekly park runs.

We would not be able to host our own events however without the support of our sponsors, so a big 'thank you' to them.

Challenges

The park has been troubled by **vandalism** during the year. This menace seems to come in spates. We have been involved with the tennis club, the Rock Garden and Preston Manor to think of ways we can mitigate the problem. Our local police have been excellent in the way they've dealt with incidents, so thank you to them.

We've had a problem with what to do with our stuff – that's the modest amount of **equipment** we use for events and meetings – now the bowls pavilion is out of bounds. We're hoping that we'll be able to use the upstairs of the Chalet café. In the meantime, thank you to Sue Shanks for temporarily storing it.

The issue of people bringing their **cars into the park** is still a concern during the weekends; we have informed the council's Sports Booking team.

There have been **tree problems** as well, but I'll leave that to Alister Peters to explain.

Successes

The council's Parks' Projects team have completed their **Conservation Management Plan**. And they conducted a survey earlier in the year to determine which of 2 projects park users would

like to see undertaken. The voting was close but the **Rose Garden** won! So park monies will be spent on re-designing and planting the borders - work has already started – and enough money should be available to work on the Coronation Garden as well.

The **wildflower area** was planted later than usual this year but that has proved to be a real benefit as we're still enjoying a lovely display.

The **Rock Garden** has looked more splendid than ever during this year. Thank you to Andy Jeavons for his work, and congratulations to him for the award of a gold medal by Britain in Bloom as well as a horticultural achievement award. Well deserved!

The park has been awarded a **Green Flag** again this year. The judges take the dwindling number of park staff into consideration as this is a country-wide issue. We think the park looks stunning and our thanks go to Alan Griffiths, Mick Ransome and all the park staff.

We have not been troubled as much by **Traveller encampments** this year. This is due to the success of the Public Spaces Protection Order and the availability of places at the newly-enlarged Traveller's site at Horsdean.

Membership

As of today our membership stands at 479.

Plans for 2018

More of the same! We'll continue to keep members in touch with what's happening in the park and to work closely with the Parks' Projects team, other council departments as well as other groups connected to the park for the betterment of Preston Park.

We will announce a schedule of events for next year after our committee next meets. In the meantime we will be holding our **wreath-making event on Saturday 16 December** from 11am to 3pm - but this time it will be in Knoyle Hall. We'll be delighted to see you there.

Thanks

To park staff as mentioned as well as indomitable Park Ranger Garry Meyer and to Emma Keane who'll be helping at our wreath-making

event. Thanks too for the continuing support of Councillors Leo Litman, Julie Cattell and Kevin Allen, and to Caroline Lucas MP. And thanks to the committee for all their work during the year. I'm sure that all Preston-Parkers will continue to value and enjoy our beautiful park in the coming year.