

Friends of Windmill Gardens Annual Report 2019

This report is the first AGM report of our charitable incorporated organisation (CIO), with voting members other than its Charity Trustees, number 1176991 and registered in 2018. It replaced the existing registered charity (no.1121790) registered in 2007, set up four years after the Friends of Windmill Gardens was established.

With the agreement of members, the CIO was set up to provide the best way for Friends of Windmill Gardens to meet future challenges and responsibilities as it moves from an active local group of volunteers to a fully-fledged social enterprise. Its new responsibilities include the taking-on of a lease for the newly built education and visitor centre in Windmill Gardens.

This report will consider what FoWG members have achieved since last year and up to 30th June 2019.

Our Business Plan for the years up to 2022/3 states that ‘in the medium to long term, FoWG will establish a purpose-built visitor and education centre, manage it and enhance the park for activities in furtherance of its aims and objectives. In pursuit of these goals it will co-operate with statutory authorities and community organisations’ and ‘FoWG undertakes to fit out the new building and grow a visitor/education centre that serves the community and brings increased prosperity and pride to the local area’.

Building delays have had the effect of delaying details and targets of the present business plan but there have been no significant changes. We are setting down the foundations to achieve these aims in good time.

FoWG: A NEW CIO

In February 2018 FoWG was registered with the Charity Commission as a fully incorporated charity able to employ staff, sign a lease with Lambeth Council, and manage the windmill education centre building. We began operating publicly as a CIO after the charity’s bank account was set up on 3rd July and funds transferred. FoWG members were transferred to the new CIO, taking account of data protection issues.

The Officers and most of the members of the Executive Committee/Trustee Board of the new organisation have remained the same as those for the old charity. The first General Meeting of the CIO was held on Wednesday 24th April 2019.

Thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund grant we have been supported in our transition by employing, a very able part time administrator and by the training we have been able to buy in. The trustees and other FoWG volunteers have benefitted from a range of training including, group training on setting and managing budgets, financial responsibilities, and on property management, as well as training in first aid and food hygiene. A total of 28 volunteers (including trustees) have undergone training improving the capability of the Friends. We are evaluating the impact of the HLF grant upon the organisation and have held two well-attended meetings about this. An organisational coach has been helping the trustees through this transition period attending Board meetings in March, May and June.

Much of the work of the trustees has been preparing to take on the management of the new education centre being funded by Lambeth Council. This new building designed by Squire and

Partners and constructed by Logan SE Ltd will be a wonderful new asset to our local community. On completion it will be leased to FoWG to manage. This is a great opportunity for our organisation and we must thank Lambeth Council for investing in FoWG's plan to secure the future of Brixton's historic Windmill.

Early in 2018 we launched a £29k appeal to furnish and equip the new centre. FoWG's Comms sub-group ran a highly successful Crowdfunder appeal raising over £17k (including Gift Aid). Our Fundraising subgroup secured grants from the People's Post Code Trust, Awards for All and WREF adding £26.5k more to the fund for furniture, equipment and replanting the area of the park around the new centre. We thank our very generous Friends and supporters as well as the grant-giving trusts that have responded to our appeal. Based on the research and planning by volunteers tasked to organise the fitout we are now ready to start buying the essential furniture.

Once the Lease on the new building is signed we can draw down another generous grant awarded to FoWG. This will provide further funds to help us complete equipping the centre, pay for the design a new website, and employ two part time staff.

Special mention must be made of the hard work on the part of our chair and secretary in negotiating the complex lease with LB Lambeth. We are near the end of this process and must thank our solicitors Russell Cooke for their professional support.

BRIXTON WINDMILL

Building: During the past year Lambeth Council, owners the Grade II* windmill, have refurbished the sails. These were taken to Owlswoth IJP millwright's yard for several months for some wood and shutter repairs and total re-painting. They were returned and re-attached in October. The council also spent £17k to resolve on-going damp issues within the 203-year-old windmill. Further repairs are planned later this year.

Windmill open days: The Friends organise free guided tours of the windmill at least one weekend a month April-October. 981 visitors signed our visitor book in 2018 and 239 have visited up to the end of June this year. Eleven new volunteers joined our team of guides and stewards. Those who train our guides, co-ordinate the open day team, and manage online bookings are all volunteers. They have done a great job ensuring that open days go smoothly despite the fact that the windmill has been surrounded by a building site since November 2018.

Monthly Heritage Walks around Brixton Hill, are led by a fully trained Blue Badge Guide, also a volunteer. They take place on each Sunday of windmill open weekends. All money raised from these walks is donated to Brixton Windmill.

Education at the Windmill

We re-started delivering workshops to local school groups after a re-write of our education programme in early 2018. From March to July 15 workshops attended by a total of 432 children and 88 adults visited the windmill. A team of freelance educators were supported by volunteers in our Education group. Because of the building works we suspended this programme but intend to re-start in October.

Community events at the windmill:

Since July 2018 we have organised a number of successful community events in Windmill Gardens. Art in the Park focussed on creative workshops for both children and adults and was enjoyed by all.

September is the annual Lambeth Heritage Festival month and included two extra openings of

the mill for London Open House weekend and the third annual Windmill Lecture on the subject of Green Energy.

In December Santa's Grotto at the Windmill was very well attended. 120 excited children met Santa, and his reindeers provided much interest all afternoon.

On May 6th our fourth annual Beer and Bread festival brought a great local crowd to the park. Thanks to our partners Brixton Brewery and the Old Post Office Bakery, who make this such a successful annual event. We are grateful to Connection Crew a local charity who provided us with a skilled events team to help set up and dismantle on the day.

Milling Brixton Flour

FoWG's team of volunteer millers has grown over the past year to 13. Two of the team have taken responsibility to be lead millers, training new volunteers and managing the milling sessions. These take place every fortnight and flour is delivered to nine local outlets that sell our 500g bags of stoneground wholemeal. They also supply two local bakeries. We have a team of two cyclists delivering our flour to help reduce our carbon footprint. The stones were silent for a month last summer after our millers discovered that one of the 1902 bearings was completely worn through. Fortunately, Lambeth Council were quick to get two new bespoke phosphor bronze bearings made and the French burr stones cleaned so that flour production could continue.

WINDMILL GARDENS:

Although a significant area of the gardens next to the windmill has been a building site since November 2018 our group of volunteer gardeners continue to work hard to keep the park looking good. This year the herb bed has been given a make-over. Logan Construction SE Ltd (who are building the new centre) donated a picket fence which they installed round the bed and this has reduced damage to the plants.

The area of soft fruit bushes in the north west of the park has been extended and the native species hedge along the north fence of the park is flourishing.

Early in 2019 a Lambeth Council surveyor decided that the boundary wall along the south side of the children's playground was unsafe and railed off the swings and a popular climbing frame. This made a lot of park users unhappy particularly as they saw little evidence of work being done to resolve the problem.

FoWG Trustees have raised the issue with Lambeth Landscapes who tell us that they are about to start a consultation on re-furbishing the Windmill Gardens play area as part of the master plan for the park.

The park has benefitted from GoodGym a local group of runners, who have visited the park three times during the past year to spend 30 minutes during their evening run carrying out tasks in the park. It is amazing what can be achieved by 30 active people in 30 minutes!

The Friends have also hosted two corporate groups who spent a day with our volunteer gardeners building raised beds and pruning trees and bushes. Another group organised by the charity BounceBack spent a day painting the play equipment in the playground.

Our weekly Tai Chi sessions continue every Saturday in the park from 11am-noon. These classes have been self-financing for the past year. Participants bring a small donation. There is consistent group that attend regularly.

Earlier this year we were inspected by judges for the Green Flag Community award. We hope that Windmill Gardens will retain the award that we have held for the past years when results are announced in July.

FoWG outreach and publicity

Our Comms team regularly update our website and publicise the windmill and FoWG activities via social media. As well as our monthly e-newsletters they upload regular blog posts and this year have added a successful Instagram account to our Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube social media outlets.

FoWG organised stalls at the Lambeth Country Show and at the Lambeth Heritage Fair to promote our work. During the Brixton Design Trail in September the windmill itself was the venue for an innovative sound and video installation Gestalt 'Variable 01'.

Our gardeners and millers have collaborated with Brockwell Bake and the Friends of Ruskin Park in their heritage wheat growing project. After harrowing the ground using traditional shire horses three strains of wheat were planted – Miller's Choice, Madeiran, and Purple Naked Spelt. The plan is to harvest in August. The wheat will then be threshed and winnowed before the heritage wheat grain is milled at Brixton Windmill.

Merchandise

FoWG has a growing and colourful range of merchandise that is sold to visitors on our open days to promote the windmill and the park. This year new items have been added including a new tote bag, a 'cut out and make' model of Brixton Windmill.

FoWG benefits not only from the creativity of our volunteer designer but also from volunteers who regularly bake cakes for our open days and local allotment holders who provide fresh produce and fruit to make jams and preserves that we sell.

Volunteers and Guides

Our volunteers are the life blood of everything we do and in preparation for the opening of the new centre our volunteer coordinator has been encouraging new volunteers to join us by featuring the stories of individual volunteers. These have been promoted on our website and in our monthly e-newsletter.

With the new building will come new and different volunteer opportunities. As well as the roles of tour guide, open day stewards, bakers, millers and gardeners. We will need more volunteers to support our education programme, to help develop our marketing strategy including an online sales, to help our part time staff with administrative tasks, to help run a pop-up café, to develop projects for young adults and older people. to manage our new website and social media platforms, to help with the day to day running of the building... the list is long and will expand. We need to attract younger volunteers and volunteers with a wider range of skills.

THE FUTURE

Although construction started on our new education and visitor centre in November 2018, the completion date has repeatedly been put back and now is expected in the autumn of 2019. This has led to revisions of the business plan and required liaison with funders who expected us to

access their grants by now.

We are currently in negotiations with Lambeth Council over the Lease, Community Service Agreement and other documents we need to sign to access another substantial grant for the fitout, set up a new website and systems that will be fit for purpose, and to enable us to employ a part-time Business Development Manager and Project Assistant.

Meanwhile costs for the fitout are rising so we have more funding applications in the pipeline. Once these are secured we will develop applications for an education worker to set up future adult and family education projects. A new specialist sub-group – in addition to the existing sub group of Communications, Education, Events, Milling, Park, and Fundraising - called the Fitout Group, is sourcing the equipment we need to make sure we have the best start to create a welcoming space for all people. Then we can deliver the next tranche of the Business Plan to:

- Increase FoWG's ability to make the new centre sustainable as a local resource by developing the visitor attraction/social enterprise side of the organisation
- Maximise potential of the new centre by increasing involvement of membership and volunteers
- Improve community and educational workshops for schools
- Enable productive partnerships with local organisations to the benefit of local residents