

Friends of Windmill Gardens (FoWG) DRAFT Annual Report 2020

This is the 2nd annual report of our Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) with voting members other than its Charity Trustees, number 1176991. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic that hit us in March 2020 has meant that the past year has been an extraordinary one for all UK charities. For the Friends of Windmill Gardens, it has been a year of even more transformative change because, after many delays, we signed a lease with Lambeth Council to manage the new education and visitor centre they have built in Windmill Gardens. Because of the problems of the pandemic FoWG's trustees decided to postpone our AGM from July to October 2020 which means that this annual report covers 15 months mid-July 2019 to September 2020.

BRIXTON WINDMILL 1816-2020

Building: During the past year Lambeth Council, has been investigating problems of significant water ingress into the brick tower and wooden cap of the mill. As the owners the Grade II* windmill, they have the responsibility of looking after the structure. Council officers, working with historic building specialists, have to decide how to resolve this problem. It is likely that significant repairs to both tower and cap will take place in the next 12 months.

Visitors: From July to October 2019 FoWG's volunteer tour guides and stewards welcomed 352 visitors into Brixton Windmill. Due to the Covid-19 lockdown we were unable to open for our monthly free guided tours from March to August 2020. With the easing of pandemic regulations, careful preparation and some necessary restrictions on capacity, we were very happy to re-open the windmill over two weekends in September and welcomed a further 74 visitors including 44 on London Open House weekend.

Our first Brixton Hill Heritage Walk of the season, again with limited numbers due to Covid-19, led by a volunteer who is a trained Blue Badge Guide, took place in September. A fee is charged for these walks and all money raised is donated to Brixton Windmill.

BRIXTON WINDMILL CENTRE – FoWG'S NEW HOME

The new Brixton Windmill Centre (BWC), built by Lambeth Council next to the 204-year-old windmill, is a beautiful building and a wonderful community asset for Brixton Hill. The timber framed building sits in perfect harmony with the mill.

Signing the 20-year lease with the council means that the Friends have now achieved the third aim we had when we formed in 2003. Our trustees are very happy with this building, designed by award-winning local architects Squire & Partners, and built by Logan SE Ltd. We are confident it will be the key to the long-term security of Brixton Windmill.

Under the terms of the lease FoWG is responsible for the running costs and maintenance of the building but will not be charged rent by Lambeth if we deliver and expand our programme of guided tours, windmill

education workshops, and community events in Windmill Gardens as specified in the community service agreement (CSA) we have signed. With its large main room and well-appointed kitchen, that includes a baking oven, BWC is available for hire by local residents and community groups.

As an entirely volunteer-led group we have come a long way since 2003. Our progress has only been possible because of the ongoing support of our local community, the loyalty of our members, and many volunteers who have helped over the past 17 years, and the determination of our trustees.

FoWG is rooted in the local community and we have consistently delivered a lively programme of events as well as opening the windmill for free guided tours since its major restoration in 2010/11. This is something Lambeth Council recognised when they agreed in 2016 to fund the new building and lease it to the Friends to manage.

At our AGM in July 2019 we anticipated moving into the new centre in October. We had been awarded a substantial grant by Power to Change (PTC) to be drawn down as soon practical completion (PC) was reached on the building and the lease was signed. However, PC dates of October, and December were not met. Then March 31st was given but missed due to the pandemic. FoWG signed the lease on July 1st and we moved into the building a week later.

STAFF

A large portion of the two-year PTC grant award, agreed in July 2019, is to fund 75% of the salaries of two part-time members of staff to work in the new centre. FoWG's business plan had been agreed and checked and we were confident we could fund the other 25% of their salaries and deliver the CSA activities as outlined in the lease. In anticipation of the October PC date we advertised both posts.

Our project administrator (PA) joined us in November for 2.5 days per week and the business development manager (BDM), working 3 days per week, started in December. Both our staff members bring a wide range of skills to our project with previous experience in the heritage and media sectors.

Under the direction of FoWG's board of trustees our staff started to put our five-year business plan into action. Their brief is to move FoWG from a local group of volunteers to a successful social enterprise run on a firm financial footing and work with local residents and key stakeholders to establish the new windmill centre as a vibrant community hub.

Building delays then the impact of the pandemic lockdown meant our staff started their work under difficult conditions. With no established home they worked first from the neighbouring Blenheim Gardens housing office and later from a shared desk in the Council's parks department and when the pandemic hit from home. Since August they have been based at BWC supported by a rota of volunteers.

FOWG ACTIVITIES

Our five-year business plan outlines an expanded programme of activities to be delivered from the new centre, at the windmill, and in Windmill Gardens. However, the impact of the pandemic has profoundly challenged our ability to deliver this plan. We have had to change the way we work and our fundraising subgroup has spent a great deal of time writing grant applications to enable us to do this.

The event programme delivered in last half of 2019 was already reduced because of the construction site around the windmill, nevertheless, in addition to our regular open weekends, at the windmill from July to December we did hold four successful community events including Art in the Park, in August, a bat walk in September and a very successful windmill lecture held during Lambeth's Heritage Festival month. Speakers from the Real Bread Campaign, the Bad Boys Bakery at HMP Brixton, and our long-time supporters the Old Post Office Bakery all made a strong case for traditional bread making. The final event of the year – Santa at the Windmill in December – included a highly contested Windmill Christmas Bake Off where Brixton Flour was the essential ingredient! Over 400 families participated in these community events.

Our event programme in 2020 has been different. We were unable to open the windmill to visitors because of pandemic social distancing regulations. There was no Easter fun to start off the season. Our annual Beer & Bread festival in May, held in partnership with local craft breweries and artisan bakeries, that normally brings in significant income was cancelled and the storytelling event planned for June was abandoned. In July we did participate in the Virtual Lambeth Country Show with our Comms volunteers making a short promotional film and we then prepared online delivery for all other activities.

Volunteer graphic designers created a colourful Resource Pack with 10 activities for children to be downloaded from our website. Aware that many families had limited or no web connectivity we raised money to distribute hundreds of packs to children in these families. The packs have proved very popular and have been distributed across local council estates and to families using local food banks.

With the late summer easing of social distancing we were able to deliver some activities from the door of the new centre. In August our volunteers cooked hot dinners for 30 children each day in the final week of the summer play scheme organised in Windmill Gardens by CEFLyncx – a local education charity. This was the first use of the professional kitchen that is an important feature of the new building.

Inspired by this experience our volunteers piloted a pop-up café to sell hot and cold drinks, and cakes baked with Brixton Flour, to park users each weekday afternoon. This has proved popular.

Our 5th Annual Windmill Lecture: 'Pandemic, famine and war – how millers respond in times of crisis' was a successful Zoom talk that attracted 30 participants.

MILLING

Producing Brixton Flour has been the one regular activity of FoWG volunteers that has expanded in the first half of 2020. Milled under strict Covid-19 food production regulations, our wholemeal flour was in great demand during the early months of the pandemic, when supermarket shelves were bare of flour. Our team of volunteer millers increased production to supply demand from our established retail outlets. Milling English organic wheat, using the French burrstones installed by the Ashby family in 1902, they doubled, then trebled, milling days to produce our nutritious flour for local consumption.

When food banks reported a worrying increase in demand from Lambeth households suffering food poverty FoWG trustees decided to donate our flour. Since March we have supplied two local food banks.

We asked our supporters to give money to allow us to extend the donations and the response was rapid and generous and included a donation of 750 kilos of grain from Organic Arable our wheat supplier.

Brixton's flour production attracted media interest. We received requests for large quantities of flour, from across the UK that we were unable to meet.

Brixton's good news flour story featured on tv and radio including BBC London local news and was even picked up by Germany's ZDF tv channel. We continue to donate flour to foodbanks and from June have

added weekly donations of fresh vegetables grown by FoWG's gardening volunteers.

VOLUNTEERS

Our windmill volunteers are our life blood. One positive outcome of the pandemic lockdown has been the increase in the number of volunteer applying to join our team. Since July last year, 65 new volunteers have joined our team of guides, stewards, millers, gardeners, bakers and educators, 45 of them during the pandemic. 18 new volunteers completed our windmill guide training programme.

As we introduce new activities we will need even more volunteers to support the different areas of work. Currently volunteers willing to act as stewards in the Brixton Windmill Centre during the week and at weekends are needed to help run the pop-up café. In the next month we intend to launch our online shop so we are looking for volunteers who will take responsibility to make sure that orders are fulfilled in a timely manner. All offers of help are welcome.

WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

FoWG has various sub-groups and our Comms group is one of the most active. They have worked hard with local web designers Effra Digital to establish our new Brixton Windmill website. Launched in February, the new site has been a great success. The website has more interactive features and the online shop feature will enable us to sell the range of colourful windmill merchandise that has been developed over recent years by one of our talented team of designers.

Our Comms team keeps the website up to date and publicise all windmill and FoWG activities via social media. As well as monthly e-newsletters distributed to all our supporters they upload regular blog posts and keep the windmill in the public eye via our facebook, flickr, Instagram, twitter, and YouTube accounts.

Delivering the improved website was funded by the Power to Change grant.

FUNDRAISING

Our 2019-2020 accounts show a substantial sum reserved for purchasing furniture and fittings for the new building as well as re-landscaping areas of the park damaged during construction. Since July we have been spending this fit out fund accumulated over the past three years.

We now face another fundraising challenge to cover the income loss that that the pandemic lockdown and social distancing has created. We must manage this income loss without the ability to deliver the full

programme of trading that is outline in our business plan.

Our fundraising subgroup are to be congratulated on securing several Covid-19 emergency grants and we thank our main funder, Power to Change, who provided emergency funding of £6,440 to cover the shortfall in staff costs incurred up to September 2020 as well as some building running costs. In addition, our fundraisers have brought in £500 from the Lambeth Fund, and a total of £26,557 in two grant awards from the London Community Response grantee to fund new ways of working by delivering online services including talks, virtual windmill tours and school workshops. In April we received £1,166 from the Tesco Bags of Help fund for our fit-out fund. We thank all our grantees for their generous support.

EDUCATION

After suspending school workshops in the spring and summer terms of 2019 due to access problems at the windmill caused by construction work, we decided in the autumn to take workshop requests from schools again. In preparation we trained five new freelance teachers. That term we delivered seven workshops to a total of 149 children and 26 adults using the Windmill Stay and Play building as a classroom.

When schools were locked down in March we began to prepare to deliver workshops online and we will soon be able to offer this option. Our BDM is talking to local schools about their needs and whether they want to organise some school visits to the windmill now that we have the new building and education visits are possible under current Covid-19 rules..

WINDMILL GARDENS

FoWG's volunteer gardeners continue improve the park. Monthly Saturday workshops were suspended from March to May but resumed in June. Our gardeners are often joined by a team from GoodGym a group of local runners who also volunteer. They have helped us tidy the park for visitors to enjoy

Windmill Gardens has been improved by the newly turfed area immediately in front of the new centre and FoWG have commissioned Father Nature, a local social enterprise, to construct a terraced garden area at the west end of the new building. This new growing space is designed for gardening workshops and can accommodate wheelchair users. It will also produce fresh seasonal vegetables for local people as well as supplying the pop-up café and cookery classes to be delivered in the centre's well-equipped kitchen. This garden is funded by a generous grant from WREF.

The area of soft fruit bushes along the north west edge of the park has been extended and the native species hedge planted along the north boundary of the park is flourishing. This autumn the wildflower area behind the windmill will be re-seeded and the WREF grant will also fund planting more fruit trees.

Before lockdown the Friends hosted a corporate group who spent a day with our volunteer gardeners building raised beds and pruning trees and bushes.

Weekly Tai Chi sessions (first started in 2015) continue every Saturday in the park from 11am-noon. The classes went online from March to June but returned with participants working in clearly marked three metre squares in the park. Regular members of the group are grateful to resume their exercise led by our skilled tutor in the open air.

Windmill Gardens has retained its Green Flag Community award again this year.

MERCHANDISE

FoWG has a growing and colourful range of merchandise that we sell to visitors on our open days and at events to promote the windmill and the park. This year new items have been added including an apron and a new design of windmill mugs. This merchandise range is now displayed in a purpose-built shop unit inside the new Brixton Windmill Centre.

FoWG benefits not only from the creativity of our volunteer designers but also from volunteers who regularly bake cakes for our weekday pop up café that also operates on windmill open days. We also benefit from members who are local allotment holders and gardeners who provide fresh produce as well as the fruit to make the wide variety of jam and chutney that we sell.

TRUSTEES, THANKS

One of the best things in an annual report is to be able to thank all our supporters; our members, our growing number of volunteers and our trustees.

A strong and committed Board of Trustees are important to the future of Brixton Windmill. It is their responsibility between general meetings of the CIO to take forward our members' decisions and to guide the charity strategically. Their work is to ensure the success of the windmill project.

The last 15 months has been one where the trustees have worked hard to overcome the problems of building delays and then the impact of the pandemic. During the year the Board of Trustees was strengthened when our volunteer lead miller was co-opted on to the Board.

I want to thank all our trustees who bring their various skills and experience plus a great deal of time to the windmill project for all their hard work and commitment.

Under the terms of our constitution the three longest serving trustees must step down from the Board at each AGM. They can stand for re-election and this year two have decided to do this. However, Kim, who joined the Friends in 2010, and successfully led the Comms group over most of the period since then has decided not to seek re-election in order to devote more time to develop her own career.

Throughout her time first as an exec member of FoWG's former charity and since 2018 as a trustee of the CIO, Kim has been a much-valued member of our leadership team. Over the past 12 months she took responsibility for developing the brief for the new website for interviewing and appointing the web design company. She then worked closely with them to ensure the website was launched on time and to make it a success. We will miss Kim's carefully considered input to all our strategic discussions as well as her close scrutiny of the work undertaken by the Trustees. I want to thank her for all her hard work as and wish her success in her creative ambitions. Kim assures us she will still be an active member of the Friends and we will continue to benefit from her journalism and social media skills in the Comms group.

This year we also have to thank all our generous funders as mentioned above and in particular Lambeth Council who paid for the construction of the Brixton Windmill Centre. They have had the confidence to hand over the management of this building to us for the next 20 years and have provided us with a base where we can grow and develop.

Special thanks go to the Blenheim Gardens Resident Management Organisation (BGRMO) who provided financial support for our events programme in Windmill Gardens as well as a free meeting room, and, for many month, office space for our staff.

FAREWELLS

A more difficult task is to report to this AGM the death of two long-standing members of FOWG during this year.

Henry Ashby, a direct descendent of the first miller at Brixton Windmill, died in early February. After contacting us when he read about the restoration of Brixton Windmill in 2010 Henry became a very firm supporter contacting members of his family as far away as the USA to support Brixton Windmill. He provided the Friends with important information

about the history of his family and this was recorded in the oral history project that led to the publishing of our book 'Mill Memories: recollections of Ashby's Mill, Brixton'. He also organised family members to donate the Ashby memorial bench in Windmill Gardens. We send our condolences to all his family.

Eamon Maguire, who sadly died this September, had supported the Friends for many years. As chairman of the BGRMO Eamon attended executive meetings of our former charity and advised the Friends when we took the decision to transform into a CIO. He was an important link with the Blenheim Gardens estate that

borders Windmill Gardens and are our nearest neighbours.

As a very firm supporter of both Brixton Windmill and Windmill Gardens Eamon always invited the Friends to BGRMO general meetings to report on our projects and seek feedback from estate residents. We will miss his generosity, good humour, firm support of all that we have done and very wise counsel.

We know he will be missed by his colleagues and the management team on the estate. We send condolences to his family, his friends and all members of the BGRMO.

Jean Kerrigan
FoWG Chair
30/09/2020