

Friends of Windmill Gardens is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation whose objectives are to sustain the Grade II\* listed Brixton Windmill, improve the park in which it is set and to develop an education centre.

The organisation is managed by a board of trustees, currently ten in number, who meet every two months to monitor and review our operations and make decisions for future development. A distinctive feature of FoWG is that trustees often take an active part in working with the volunteers on our activities and events. FoWG is a membership organisation in which members have a say in our (typically) two General Meetings a year and are the basis of our volunteer force. We currently have 82 members. Volunteers take on very active and responsible roles in our public activities and behind the scenes work on planning them and managing many aspects of what we do. Trustees and volunteers also represent us on wider organisations, most notably the Lambeth Local History Forum, Brixton Neighbourhood Forum and the Lambeth Parks and Green Spaces Forum. We could not provide a fraction of what we have offered the people of Brixton and beyond without the strong and diverse group of people who chose to offer their time and attention for keeping the Windmill a unique and thriving attraction and the park a place that people love to be. We are also indebted to our visitors. We stage events and open days in good faith that people will respond, and this year saw our offer being taken up in buoyant numbers by a diverse public with great enthusiasm and appreciation.



The year 2023-2024 was the second full year of operations since the Covid-19 pandemic, making full use of the Brixton Windmill Centre that was constructed in 2019. We are pleased to report that its use has increased, with several regular community activities and educational offer, including school groups and cooking and baking for adults and younger people and two Tai Chi sessions per week. We also continued to develop our range of public events within the park and showing the windmill to visitors. A key achievement has been the establishment of British Sign Language tours, a subtitled screen-based windmill tour for people who cannot reach the upper stories, and the development of a sensory tour of Windmill Gardens. The Over-55's Thursday Club has continued to prosper, providing a place of creativity and activity for people to enjoy. A recent grant from the Field Family Trust has helped to fund it into 2025.

### Key activities and operations:

**The Windmill** – We offered a full programme of openings on nine weekends between April and October with our trained guides show people to the top of the mill and bring its unique story to life. On average, 160-200 people

take tours of the windmill per open weekend. The building faces an accumulation of challenges, being 15 years on from the major restoration. Some sail shutters fell to the ground due to the deterioration of the timber, leading all of them to be taken down to ensure public safety around the building. There is continued damp and leaking that needs addressing. The building is the responsibility of Lambeth Council, which at the time of writing this report is facing a difficult financial situation with spending being minimised as much as possible. There is currently no costed/timed plan in place for stemming the deterioration. The Friends continue to carry out cleaning and light maintenance inside to ensure the safety of visitors and a suitable setting for the milling.

**Milling** – 2024 sees the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of returning the 1902 modular mill back into regular use for supplying the public with stoneground wholemeal flour after a break of 80 years. The flour is currently ground from a heritage variety of wheat grown near Rochester. This year saw the installation of beautiful solid polished timber worktables on the Meal Floor marking a big improvement for our volunteers who package and distribute the flour. The flour is a key aspect of the windmill being a unique place of living heritage in action and the life of the overall project. It is currently at a subsistence/breakeven level and we would like to develop the operation for more sustained supplies to our stockists and contributing more to our financial income. Special thanks to trustee Lizzie Taczalski, lead miller Eric Harvison and the team.

**Windmill Shop** – Some new products were added to our offer and the shop always provides a strong and vibrant presence to our open days, events, and wherever we set up shop on external events. Special thanks to Chris Patton who continued to provide our strong branding.

**Pop-Up Cafe** – This opens on our events and open days and we look forward to a further diversification of offer since gaining a licence to sell alcohol alongside the food on these and other occasions. Special thanks to Eric Harvison for overseeing the cafe operation and training new volunteers.

**The Park** – Use of the Brixton Windmill Centre was very difficult during winter evenings due to the lack of light and unevenness of the path. Funding was secured in partnership with Lambeth's Changing Lives Social Value Fund for the path to be resurfaced and solar bollard lights to be installed. This is the first such installation in Lambeth parks, which is a much more cost effective solution than lamp posts fed by cables in trenches. Our Park volunteers have continued to look after the space with great dedication and we once again received Green Flag Community status. City Bridge Trust funding was recently secured for additional help through the Share Gardening / Urban Canopy Fund. There are plans to develop a wilder section of the park at the far end by the water works site, complete with hedging and a willow arch to improve ground drainages and provide an attractive place for people to exercise dogs more away from the main field. We also welcome the return of Stephen Lawlor who is involved with that project. Special thanks to Jean Kerrigan for organising the gardening sessions.

**Food Growing** – This period saw increased use of the kitchen garden at the back of the Brixton Windmill Centre with produce being used during open days and the Thursday Club lunches. Plans are in hand to refresh the herb garden in the playground, where a variety of herbs are available for people to pick for their own cooking. Both of these areas are now the responsibility of FoWG following a Lambeth-wide initiative to formalise the responsibilities between the Council and Friends groups in many parks in specific areas where the Friends carry out intensive gardening and growing projects. This has added a new commitment for FoWG to fulfill.

**Education** – We have continued to provide educational workshops for school parties on an ad hoc basis resourced by a mix of paid sessional staff and volunteers with a background of working in educational settings. We will be prioritising funding applications for establishing a part time education officer to enable this to develop. We also staged several successful milling and baking days for mixed age groups, and would like to develop more education around food and nutrition.

**Archive & History** – A group of volunteers is active in developing windmill interpretation, outreach, knowledge sharing, technical innovations, archiving and accessibility. A current priority is to review the tour guiding scripts and include more information on interests expressed by visitors such as the history of wind power and bread making. We are also in the early stages of gaining eligibility for Arts Council Museum Accreditation which will open up new opportunities for promoting the windmill and gaining other sources of funding. We are working on incorporating the museum status as an object in our constitution, but it will not need to involve a change to the charity's name. Special thanks to volunteer Penny Steel for continued research on this.

**Volunteering** – This year saw the wider adoption of managing our volunteer operations on the Assemble Software as part of the National Lottery Heritage Reaching Communities funded activities. The site manages the

booking of volunteers on specific events and tasks alongside providing a document hub for our policies and other information for volunteers to access. This remains an ongoing transition that is taking longer than expected, but 51 people are registered so far and we will see it through in 2025. The overall membership of 82 people is down on previous years, so expanding it again will be a priority in the coming year. We will also be benchmarking our operation through an NCVO health check tool to identify and implement improvements. Special thanks to trustee Ann Lee and staff member Abel Holsborough.

**Special Events** – The year saw a full community event programme (a special event roughly once every two months involving around 100 – 700 attendees) including an Easter event, Art in the Park, Family Sports, Harvest Festival and Winter Market. Sadly, May 2023 saw the last edition of our very popular Beer & Bread festival. In 2024, we found that it had outgrown Windmill Gardens as a viable venue due to the scale of the attendance in excess of 1,000 people set against some requested additional safety management measures that would be too costly to implement. We plan to offer a new Spring family event that will be more in line with the scale and ambience of the harvest festival in 2025. Special thanks to staff member Catherine Hamilton.

**Marketing and Communications** - A group of volunteers meet every six weeks to plan out information campaigns across several social media outlets (Instagram, X and Facebook) and hard-copy posters and leaflets. Recent activity has been around making use of free advertising on Google and Meta which recently generated a five-fold increase of views through Instagram. We have also gained three local celebrity influencers with high-profile media presence who know and love Windmill Gardens and have posted about or from the park in the course of their activities. One example is an interview with Emma Barnett who presents on BBC Radio which appeared in the Observer promoting her colouring books which includes the windmill. Special thanks to trustee John Licence volunteer Chris Patton and staff member Catherine Hamilton.

**Windmill Centre and Hire** - Hires for parties provides the largest source of unrestricted income to help pay for the upkeep of the Brixton Windmill Centre and the Centre Manager. We continue to receive positive feedback about the quality of the space, amenity of the building and the setting opening onto the park. Our business plan reserves a minimum number of days a year that the Centre should be available for educational and open-community lettings and within this is latent capacity for which the Marketing and Comms group intends to attract commercial and business hires to solidify the trading income across a variety of user groups. The building faces a big challenge in the form of the cladding being too brittle to withstand the impact of footballs and children running into it. We are making efforts to resolve this with Lambeth who are our 'landlord'.

Although not being used to capacity yet, there are times when it would make a big difference to enable two things to happen at once, so we are talking to Lambeth about the idea of installing a retractable partition to enable the main room to be divided into two. This would be a significant project for which we would need to raise capital funds for its sensitive design and installation. Approaching its 5th year in use, we will be looking at some targeted repairs and redecoration to keep it fresh next year.

**Fundraising** - The fundraising group has continued to be successful in raising grant funds for our community work. Grants were received from The Ironmongers Company for “Cook Eat and Learn” workshops for children, Lambeth for operating the winter Warm Space afternoons, National Lottery Awards for All contributing to various workshops, events and the Thursday club and the Field Family Trust for the Thursday club. There are more statistics in the financial report. Applications are in progress to support these projects further into the future. Special thanks to Donna Lister and Viv Wittingham.

**Governance** - Last year we welcomed Yasemin Sezgin to advise on Human Resources matters and Claudette Minott to help with Events matters. We said farewell to the outgoing Chair, Toussainte Reeba, who stood down in June 2024 with Vice Chair Nicholas Weedon stepping in as Acting Chair until this AGM and to stand for election as Chair. I would like to thank Toussainte for her work, especially on our strategic priorities. External recruitment for a new chair and treasurer was unsuccessful. To compensate for this, the accountant, Sarah Hooper, is taking on a slightly expanded role including handling bank transactions until a new treasurer is in place, which is now the top priority. We are also saying farewell to the trustee Secretary, Emma Smith-Bodie and extend particular thanks for her ever thorough and proactive work on keeping us moving in the right direction.

Nicholas Weedon  
Acting Chair  
October 2024