



Friends of Windmill Gardens

Annual Report 2026

Introduction

Friends of Windmill Gardens, formed in 2003, 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 nine 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 and staff 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 form the basis of our volunteer force. We currently have 71 members. Volunteers take on very active and responsible roles in our public activities and behind the scenes work, planning 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 choose to offer their time and attention for keeping the Windmill a unique and thriving attraction and the park a place where 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 again being taken up in buoyant numbers by a diverse public with great enthusiasm and appreciation.

Our values

FOWG is inclusive and encourages diversity. We provide an enriching and inspiring experience for visitors and volunteers. We are committed to environmental sustainability and the wellbeing of our local area.

We do this by being:

- Rooted in the community*
- Friendly, open, cooperative and accountable*
- Resilient, reflecting Brixton Windmill's history since 1816*
- Creative, pragmatic and supportive*
- Ambitious for excellence in everything we do.*

Business Plan: 2026-2029

During 2026, the board has introduced a new 3-year business plan with strategic priorities based on:

Heritage – Learning – Community – Environment – Inclusion

Heritage: Secure repair funding with Lambeth, promote the milling as "living heritage", develop themed social media posts, and establish a Heritage Day. Finish the feasibility study concerning possible museum accreditation.

Learning: Hire a Volunteer Coordinator (now in place) to develop management and training training, add paid support to expand school visits and use structured visitor feedback to improve experiences and workshop diversity.

Community: Boost volunteer retention and hours, achieve 100 members in 2027, grow revenue through venue hire and fundraising, and pilot expanded open days .

Environment: Develop garden biodiversity, solar feasibility study, sustainable procurement policies.

Inclusion: Actively widen access through improved park entrance, engagement with the neighbouring Blenheim Gardens community and continued commitment to EDI.

This is set out in more detail in the associated action plan which is available on the website.

Report on activities within the last year

Membership

As noted in the introduction, our being a membership organisation is very important to ensure that we have as wide a base of supporters as possible and to influence decision-making. The number of members has declined in recent years and a current priority is to encourage renewals and new members, including looking at more tangible benefits that members would enjoy. Being a member is a concrete demonstration of support, whether attending our events or volunteering regularly, or not at all.

Volunteers

During the reporting period, we have appointed Alice Ashton as paid staff to manage the Assemble system and develop the volunteer base. Alice held a recent evening workshop with volunteers on the use of Assemble which was well attended with useful feedback and ideas gained for future work. The total number of volunteers registered is 152. Year-on-year to September, the system has recorded 2,073 hours by 84 volunteers across the cafe, milling, community club, tour guiding, trustee activity, education, fundraising, education, fundraising, baking and maintenance. These statistics cover the set-piece events managed over the system, but there will have been a significant amount of unrecorded hours too.

The age range of volunteers who have provided demographic information is widely spread with 1.6% under 16, 40% age 16-34, 44.5% age 35-64 and 13.9% 65+.

60% of registered volunteers have now supplied non-tracked demographic information, showing 40% not disclosed, 39% White and 21% Non-White; and 15% identifying as LGBTQ indicating a healthy diversity. We ask for more volunteers to enter their demographic information as this will give a more accurate picture for presenting to funders and the public in general.

Current areas of work include better recording of visitor experience, clearer guidelines and policies, improving volunteer recognition, recognition / connection with other certification bodies, such as Duke of

Edinburgh Award, and finding ways in which volunteering can enhance wider prospects such as certification of learning skills.

With a month to go in the current open day season, volunteers have given tours to 440 visitors at our 14 open days this year, including 140 during the recent Open House weekend. While most of our ticketed full tour slots have been filled, the number of free 'turn up and go' short tours attended have been significantly down on previous years, and need a wider audience.

Comments in our visitor book have shown that the heritage tours are very popular and much appreciated, with visitors on one recent day coming from as far away as Ukraine and Ohio. Visitors especially appreciated the knowledge and friendliness of our team of 11 tour guides, and the volunteer time and effort that have been devoted over the years to restoring and maintaining the windmill, opening it up to the public, and introducing a wide variety of special events and activities, including our recent successful storytelling sessions and Harvest Festival, our cafe, community club and baking classes, tai chi and much more. Our range of colourful merchandise, and flour produced by our own team of volunteer millers (on a heritage mill once used by our founders) receive a special mention in our feedback. None of this could have been achieved without our loyal and energetic team of volunteers, and especially those experienced long-term volunteers who train and support new recruits.

As a thank you to our volunteers, we held a successful volunteer social last December and a new summer evening gathering, and will have a winter/Christmas social on 9th December.

Governance

The board of trustees have seen some departures and arrivals during the last year.

Chair: Nicholas Weedon

Vice: Vacant

Treasurer: Edgar D'Mello

Secretary: Olivia Christophersen

Trustee members, with special role or interest noted:

Sonam Sikka

Ann Lee – Volunteering, archive and history

Lizzie Taczalski – Milling

Flora Faith-Kelly - Membership and community

John Licence (Standing down) - Comms

Deborah Crocken (Standing down)

Yaniv Fransev (Stood down) – Governance and risk

Following recruitment during the last few months we propose to appoint:

Liz Mackenzie-Barrett - Comms

Lucy Dorman - Heritage

Mike Appleton – Governance and risk

Archive and Heritage

We enjoyed another full set of open days in which our volunteer guides show the building to visitors drawn locally and from around the world. The comments book acknowledges the role of the volunteers bringing the story to life and the visitors having an engaging and fascinating time. We are due to host the Worshipful Company of Bakers, who awarded funding for new Family Baking Workshops in 2027, for a private Windmill tour in October.

Our archive and heritage volunteers have had a busy year researching aspects of the site and people who worked at the Windmill. Our information informed the new storytelling event held as part of the Heritage Open Days described in the events below, bringing more life to the history.

Research on the 1921 and 1931 censuses are revealing more about the people and roles involved with running the windmill during the period, with stable hands and book keeper active alongside the millers. The family history is complex but interesting, and we are keen to present new material soon.

Marketing and Communications

A volunteer group, along with the Centre Manager, covers this aspect with constant work on social media, keeping the website up to date, and our branding and the shop. Recent work includes:

- Enhancement of the website navigation
- Maintenance of a planned social media campaign with updates and photos; we have 5,244 followers on Instagram, 1,500 on Facebook, and 45 on the Flickr photo sharing site that hosts 4,500 photos documenting our activities since around 2009. (We have less used Youtube and TikTok accounts and would welcome anyone with enthusiasm for making clips to use them).
- Two local celebrities make occasional posts, supporting some of our events.
- Making use of free advertising for charities on Meta to a value of £1,000 to promote events, trustee vacancies and volunteering opportunities delivering 454,000 impressions in the last 18 months.
- The Meta adverts resulted in three new trustees being appointed.
- Free advertising for charities on Google for volunteers, education, event space and promoting the special events.
- Year on year, we have had a 30% increase in page views, the most popular being Events, Visits, Venue Hire, Volunteering and Shop.
- We have had some great features in local press (Brixton Buzz and the sadly closed Brixton Bugle and free London promotional channels such as Londonist and Ian Visits. We even appeared as a destination in the Financial Times Weekend.
- We featured prominently in a YouTube video on the London Windmill Past and Present on The History of London – Peter Stone channel.
- We were shortlisted for Heritage Open Days “Everyday History Heroes Award” - we were one of the 3 shortlisted heritage sites in the South East of England. The award was a national award scheme celebrating organisations working to tell the stories of working people.

Looking forward, we will be selling ticketed events through Eventbrite, which from experience with other organisations, will bring more people to our notice through their algorithm which should offset the booking fees, and it will save a lot of staff administration time. We also want to enhance local marketing and find a TikTokker or two

We give special thanks to John Licence for heading the Comms team for the last three years and is passing this role on to Liz Mackenzie-Barrrett. John will still be an active volunteer, including guiding and joining the fundraising group, and Liz has some new ideas to pursue.

Community Centre

The Windmill Centre hosts regular weekday activities and attracts strong bookings for party hires and an increasing number of special events, with many weeks now seeing 7-day operation. Most of the remaining capacity is now in the evenings, which to date have had relatively little uptake, likely to be due to the location within the park on dark evenings requiring more management of keyholders and the park gate.

Regular hires include Yoga, Pilates and Joy of Sound. Regular direct-grant funded activities comprise Tai Chi, the Thursday 65+ Community Club and since this year, the Wednesday community choir Windmill Singers, supported by Thinc Fund Brixton. The choir has proven to be a very popular addition to our offer.

The 65+ club has a waiting list and welcomes around 30 people each week for chair exercises, craft activities, a healthy two-course lunch and occasional outings to places such as Kew Gardens and a recent trip to Brighton. Lindsay Lynn was appointed our new Community Club Facilitator in March 2026. The club is supported by FoWG volunteers including Jean, Susannah, Angela, Maurice and Shane.

Taken alongside the Share Gardening project described later, these grant funded projects (see Fundraising section) demonstrate a strong and valuable support of the local community regarding health, wellbeing, social connection and mental health. It's our continued antidote to an increasingly estranging effect of aspects of the online world in which we live.

Other notable hires have included South London Jazz Orchestra, Multi Story Orchestra, Supper Clubs, Self Defence classes, a wedding reception, Incredible Edible Lambeth workshops, Adult cooking classes and the National Trust.



The Windmill Singers giving their first public performance at the 2026 Harvest Festival

Education

2026 has been a strong year for our learning programme.

- Schools: For the school year 2025/2026 we welcomed in 30 classes from schools and nurseries from Lambeth and beyond. Our Little Red Hen workshop for Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1 classes continues to be our most regularly booked. Schools visiting this year have included Dunraven, Corpus Christi, Kingswood and Ashmole. Nurseries have included Abacus and Mini Stars.

Sessions continue to be led by our freelance Education Facilitator Chloe Peel with help from FoWG volunteers Penny, Carolyn, Susannah and Wilson.

Community education has included:

- **Family Bake Club** (2 summer and 2 autumn sessions) Freelance teacher Fabio Bettini delivered 2 sets of 2 sessions for 16 local families with children aged 7 to 12. Classes focus on healthy, seasonal bakes.

Feedback: "Love the classes and the venue is lovely" – "Fabio and the assistants were amazing" - "The classes have been excellent" – "It's given me inspiration to bake at home" – "Phenomenally well organised, so friendly and helpful, an absolute joy"

- **February Bread Making Class** delivered by Fabio Bettini with help from 2 FoWG volunteers

Blenheim Gardens Resident Management Organisation has received funding for pilot cooking classes for residents which will be held at the Centre on five Saturday mornings in early 2027.

Events

Thanks to an ever-enthusiastic community, grant funding and door donations, we have staged a full programme of very well attended public events during the last year, most of which are free on entry.

- **Easter** saw 100 treasure hunts attracting local families

- **Mayfest** attracted around 1,800 people across the afternoon, complete with new maypole and traders reporting positively. *Feedback: "I love it every year. MORE please" – "Brilliant day, so much fun!"*

- **Open Air Theatre** in July by Dott Collective attracting 180 audience members and very good cafe sales.

Feedback: "Really nice show in a beautiful environment" - "I enjoyed being outdoors and watching a play" – "Fantastic experience"

- **Art in the Park** in August was well attended with seven workshops

- **Annual Heritage Festival Talk** in September on the Ashbys on the Wandle and wider industries by Mick Taylor from the Wandle Industrial Museum

- **Open House and Heritage Open Days** in September windmill opening, which included additional activities exploring the untold stories of the workers of the windmill: Feeding the City Collage Workshop plus Working Life Stories - storytelling with professional storyteller Olivia Armstrong. The story has been developed using windmill and Ashby family history supplied to Olivia by volunteers Penny, Liz and Jean. We will plan to have Olivia back to deliver the stories during a couple of events in 2027.

- **Harvest Festival** in September – 1,000 visitors across the afternoon enjoyed live music, crafts, and food. One comment from a visitor at the close noted that this made her feel a sense of real community and connection.

The remainder of this year will see the Halloween event on 25th October, Winter Fair and Santa's Grotto on 6th December and a new Christmas theatre production of Scrooge on 18th December



The Mayor Cllr. Paul Vellentine with the Community Club and talking to visitors at the 2026 Harvest Festival

Fundraising

The fundraising group continues to meet every 6 to 8 weeks and concentrates on applications for grants to cover our activities taking place in the Windmill Centre, annual events programme and improvements in the park. During the last financial year, we benefitted from £52,000 worth of grant income generated from applications over the last few years, representing 48% of our income. New grants received include National Lottery Awards for All (Events and Community Club), Lambeth Council (Age Friendly Wellbeing Day), Thinc Fund (Tai Chi and Choir sessions) and Worshipful Company of Bakers (forthcoming family baking workshops).

This is constantly demanding work, as grants cover overlapping activities with varied durations, so nothing that we deliver through them is 'safe' for very long. Acknowledgement is due to Jean, Viv, Edgar, Catherine and Flora who maintain an ever-evolving list of funders, identify opportunities and make the applications. We have noticed a tendency of some key funders to shift the emphasis to targeting specific types of beneficiaries, such as the most vulnerable, or organisations led by 'lived experience' representatives.

Special acknowledgement is extended to Donna Lister, who, having moved to Spain, left the group during the year, having been successful in raising grant awards since 2005.

Maintenance

Windmill - Although the shutter sails were substantially repaired during the last year, they remain inoperable due to the incompleteness of the repair of the control mechanism. The condition of the mill has been deteriorating due to the weathering of the tar, opening up of cracks on the external window cills and loss of render coat to part of the base. Lambeth received advice on increasing the ventilation to the interior to reduce the dampness and installed some powerful fans, however their operation has been triggering the fire alarm. They are looking at different sensors that would be more compatible. A small area of tar has been removed to inform a study of whether its removal would help to keep the brick dryer by way of faster evaporation during dry periods.

Last year, Lambeth started working on a strategy for the upkeep of listed structures within the parks, the outcome of which has not yet appeared. We are working on the basis that the scale of repairs now requires a substantial budget that will require a joint fundraising bid between Lambeth and FoWG to grant givers such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Current technical studies commissioned by Lambeth will inform the

nature and scale of work required, but we are concerned that Lambeth will need to provide some more capacity in the way that the last major repairs, 16 years ago, was led by a dedicated project officer.

Windmill Centre – Having established a technical path for the repair and reinforcement of the brittle cladding with Squire & Partners and our responsible Lambeth officers a year ago, progress on implementation has stalled and we are working on resolving this.

Milling

Milling has continued, using organic grain from Hertfordshire, currently supplying our shop and Brixton Wholefoods, Maya's Bakehouse in Tulse Hill, MacFarlane's Delicatessen in Abbeville Road and The Thoughtful Fruiter in Balham. We are supporters of the Real Bread Campaign which promotes additive-free products and is part of Sustain, which advocates for widespread access to healthy foods, and local and sustainable food economies.

This year saw our milling volunteers take part in two special industry events

- Harvest Home Event in August. Brixton Windmill hosted the gathering of the Southeast Grain Alliance, attended by farmers, bakers and millers celebrating the first bread made with this year's harvest.
- The Chefs in Schools Annual Conference was held on 1st September at the National Baking School. We were asked to provide 120 bags of flour for each of the conference delegates to take home, and have also engaged in some reciprocal social media and newsletter mentions with Chefs in Schools.

The milling activities are at the core of our heritage mission and depend on the active support of our milling group, particularly our lead millers - Eric, Sheila and Sarah; Ann B who organised the successful SEGA event; and Michael, Mark and Sia who regularly assist with milling and also flour deliveries.



Hosting the Southeast Grain Alliance in September

Park

The gardening group has had a very good year with new volunteers and working with Lambeth Landscape's tree officer, Poppy who engaged local people in a massive tree planting programme across the Borough. The most visible result in the park is some 35 metres of new hedging, planted by volunteers. Of six new trees planted in the park, four are fruit trees, which along with the terraced garden by the windmill, and the herb

garden and vegetable beds by the playground is a long term project to provide fruit, vegetable, herb and nut foraging for park visitors.

A 3-year scheme by Share Community Project engaged 41 young adults with learning difficulties in gardening and other skills designed to help independent living.

Two large willow trees and hedges now define the narrow end of the park which has always been dark and waterlogged. The willows are already soaking in excess water and we are developing the space by cutting back the undergrowth to let in more light to complement woodland bulb planting and a proposed second wildflower area to add to the one behind the windmill. This has also made it easier to clear the litter there and make it more welcoming.

Having had Green Flag Community status since 2015, we were awarded the full Green Flag award for the first time this year. This is a recognised standard of a place that is welcoming; healthy, safe and secure; well maintained and clean; standards of environmental management; biodiversity, landscape and heritage; community involvement; marketing and communication and overall management.

Feedback from the assessors was very positive, highlighting the welcoming feel, quality of the marketing and heritage information, the positive impact of community involvement and Friends group, edible produce and the community club. Their main recommendation was to explore manipulation of the tree crowns to make the windmill more visible from the approach.

This reflects many improvements to the park alongside our community events that take place here. It also reflects on the great work by the volunteers, Lambeth's Parks team, Good Gym volunteers and Centre Manager. We also extend special thanks to volunteers who kept the newly planted hedges, trees and fruit and vegetable beds watered throughout the record-breaking hot and dry period in which we had no rain for nearly two months.



Hedge planting attracted new volunteers - Produce from the vegetable garden

During the period, we carried out a park user survey in which 64% of the respondents said they visit once a week or more. The top-rated things they like about the park are being in a green space with a heritage building, seeing trees and flowers change with the seasons and being in nature. Other likes were visiting the playground, space for children to play, walking the dog and using the Centre and cafe. Top requests for improvements were more native plants and shrubs, more bat and bird boxes and more benches to sit on.

Other requests included workshops for planting, bench building, more paths and better drainage at the far end of the park, a fenced and safe area for dogs, more food growing and more information about the plants and wildlife – all of which we are keen to respond to.

You will be aware of how worn the grass is in front of the Windmill Centre. We are in discussion with Lambeth about having this re-seeded, meaning that it would be fenced off from December to next March. We are also considering making this lawn dog-free to reduce the wear and improve the experience for school visits and visitors.

At the previous AGM we discussed the entrance to Windmill Gardens and the unwelcoming nature of the area at the end of Blenheim Gardens. We are finding that it is so far more productive to approach it incrementally. BGRMO recently mitigated some of the trip hazards in the area outside of the gate, and the problematic clothes bank that had become a magnet for fly-tipping has been removed. We have also been discussing with Lambeth ideas for embellishing the railings near the entrance with Windmill and nature-themed motifs.

Nicholas Weedon - Chair

29/09/2026