



PCEG AGM 2016 Annual Report

This has been one of PCEG's most productive years, with the undertaking of Workhouse Wood – our third major project and much else besides.

Our membership numbers have remained more or less stable. The number of people doing the hands-on work seems about the same, and it just isn't enough to cope even with the ever-increasing tide of litter that despoils our green spaces and our streets. I would very much like to see a wider demographic and more young people. There has been much interest in what we have been doing this year, but that hasn't translated into new memberships. I have put a proposal before this meeting to re-brand ourselves as a more friendly offering, and I hope that will make a difference.

I hope members agree that The Star is a good venue for our meetings. There is no charge for the use of this room, and we can have a friendly drink afterwards. The meetings are also well-timed for a Sunday lunch beforehand. The more we make use of the pub, I feel, the more we will continue to be welcome here. In the survey I conducted it would appear that Sunday afternoons is by far the best option for our meetings.

Management Committee

I should start by thanking our committee for their loyal diligence. Bob Carlisle is tirelessly efficient in his management of our accounts. He and Patience will be transferring their centre of gravity to the Kent coast very soon and we will have to find another way to manage our accounts. I think we can lighten the Treasurer's load considerably by transferring the management of membership, members and their subscriptions to the Membership Secretary. That will be in the Membership Secretary brief for the coming year, and must note we will need to recruit a new Treasurer in the near future.

Jess Currie has come to the reluctant decision that her commitments elsewhere mean she cannot give the time to the group that being a Vice Chair demands. I thank her for her support in the past. We now have a vacancy for that management committee post. It basically involves general support for me as Chair, and for the group as a whole. I would expect a Vice Chair to come up with ideas and projects that help to pursue our aims and objectives. Assistance with fundraising and administration tasks would be most welcome.

Maria Kaustrater has had a very pressured time at work this year and has, nevertheless, efficiently handled the task of Secretary to our group. I thank her for that.

Sandy and Eileen Paterson have continued to manage our membership database, and I thank them, too.

Membership and communications

In the new year I will be starting a membership drive. I would like to thank the 35 members who completed the members' survey I sent out earlier this year. I sent it to 94 members, so the response was, in itself, somewhat disappointing and may be a reflection of the true degree of commitment in the membership.

There were some interesting remarks that I will be responding to. Some less useful things like: "can you tell me if any members live near me?" – without any indication of where that member lived!

Time is clearly the big factor when it comes to volunteering. The most people that *regularly* volunteer in any one activity is 5. I did a survey of parks friends groups in Greenwich and our hands-on numbers are comparatively low with so much competition for people's time. Interestingly, time for the family was a big factor – so we need to make it clearer that what we do could easily be a fun family activity. I hope a re-branding will help with that. In fact 9 people said they wanted to do more volunteering – that could double the hands-on numbers we have. I'll be looking at that.

Interestingly, 13 respondents said they have either never visited, or *very rarely* visit, the nature reserve. Clearly, in the summer we should be organising community events in the reserve.

With regard to communication with members, the survey showed that the best way is clearly through the Yahoo group and emailed news updates. People seem to like the news updates. They go to 33 “interested parties” as well.

Only 12 of my survey respondents are on Facebook and even fewer, 7, use Twitter. But I continue to use both these social mediums because they appeal to the demographic I am trying to attract.

One of my corporate clients this year has been a charity fund-raising consultant. She told me our web site was impossibly dull, so I have been trying to make it a bit friendlier and folksy.

I was very sorry to hear about Marcia Whittard's illness. I took, on behalf of the group, a large bunch of flowers to the hospice together with a note from us all wishing her well in what is clearly an extremely difficult time.

Awards

We were awarded no less than *three* Green Flag awards this year, adding Workhouse Wood to The Slade Ponds and Plumstead Common Nature Reserve. The judging was tough this year and we have been given quite a list of tasks to accomplish, not least of which is an updating of the management plans for each site. I have on my endless To-Do list a meeting with Parks Management to get advice and help with a considerable number of tasks. One of these, for instance, is reduction in the canopy at the western end of the pond that may give the reeds a better chance.

You may know that I received a Royal Greenwich Civic Award for contribution to the community. I was a runner-up in the GLA Community Volunteer of the Year Award this year. I think the reason I didn't actually win is that the number of members of the community we actually *directly engage* with was less than the winner. That is something I should fix in the coming year with some activities. I hope that Workhouse Wood will be a spur to this.

Events

Our presence at the **Plumstead Make Merry** is much diminished now, as you can see from our receipts. In 2017 we will need someone to take on the role of organising our stand. We did a splendid job on the litter-picking, and I am very grateful to the members who helped with that,

I attended the **Great Get Together** at Woolwich Barracks field. It was a waste of time!

Plumstead Live! was a great success. It was a shorter programme this year because costs are rising and the grant remains the same. Perhaps next year we can extend the event into the evening by having local bands that will play as a showcase. I am grateful to the members who helped steward it. Many people said that publicity was poor. Numbers attending were slightly disappointing, but it was a beautiful day, and the music was great. We did lose continuity by not having an event last year. I posted several times on Plumstead

People Facebook, and we sent out thousands of leaflets with Greenwich Time — but I think that fewer of them than planned was delivered. Next year I think we may return to leafletting ourselves.

We had a Boxing Day Mulled Wine gathering at Workhouse Wood which was attended by about ten people, I think. We may think it a good idea to make this a regular event. We also had our usual Christmas gathering in The Star pub, which was well attended by the usual stalwarts.

I did two guided tours of Workhouse Wood and Plumstead Common Nature Reserve for **Plumstravaganza**. Both were well attended.

We had eight **Capital Clean-Up** sessions in which a massive amount of litter was cleared from places we don't normally care for. One of our sessions was all around the Pettman Crescent bus garage, which I have been trying to get the council to deal with for a very long time. (The site meeting I had with councillors and officers had produced no noticeable results.) Macdonalds joined us in the venture, the area was vastly improved and it will be much easier now for the regular Macdonalds litter-picks to keep on top of it. We had another major clean-up in the Plumstead Road/Pettman Crescent area with Macdonalds and completely cleared the verge near the bus driver change-over stop, collecting over thirty sacks of litter. The sessions were generally not well attended by members. Perhaps a member will take on co-ordination of a few major clean-up events in the coming year, and help to spread the load.

We participated in an **Environment Champion** clean-up day earlier in the year on Woolwich Common with a bunch of our CWP volunteers. We found some excellent wooden posts which the council people declined to transport to Workhouse Wood for us, so I resigned my Environment Championship is a hissy fit. The result was a personal contact with a Street Cleaning manager and an ongoing very cooperative problem-solving relationship.

Funding

We received a **Team London** grant of £484 for our Capital Clean-Up efforts. We also got a whole load of equipment such as pickers, hoops and gloves from them. We spent most of the money on building a shed for storing our ever increasing amount of equipment that we were falling over in our house. Unfortunately the shed suffered continual vandalism and was eventually completely destroyed in an arson attack.

We received a **Royal Greenwich Ward Grant** of £616.90 which was used to buy essential equipment and tools for the Workhouse Wood project.

ASDA gave us a £200 community environment award of £200

The loss of our shed brought community contributions of £271 from the **Plumstead Pantry customers** and **Greenwich Green Party**.

I gave a talk to a local church group which raised £40 and to a local Rotarian group which didn't even raise a bottle of wine!

I applied for a **Royal Greenwich Pride** grant of £1500 which we were within inches of getting when I was told that the council "had some issue with a previous project which has impacted upon the budget for Greenwich Pride" – whatever that means! They will be putting my application forward for review when the issue is sorted – whatever that means!

I have had several meetings and much correspondence with **Crossrail** representatives that have, frustratingly, come to nothing. *Very* frustratingly!

The big funding deal this year has been the **Tesco Bags of Help** scheme. I applied for a second time and we were successful in getting through to the final voting in local stores. It's extremely laborious applying for funding so this is a great result. I hope you all know the details and have been busy shopping and voting over the last two weeks. Basically, we are guaranteed £8,000 in third place but may get £10,000 or £12,000 for second or first places. That money will enable us to do all the tree work for accessibility and safety in Workhouse Wood, create a Forest Schools classroom, install benches and interpretive signs, and also create a tree trail. Great news!

We have recently received a grant of £1000 from the Greenwich Parks Friends Forum to enable us to start the considerable work needed on Workhouse Wood.

I would like someone to step forward now take on the application for the similar **Coop** scheme so that I can get some of my own life back!

I've put my Curry Night at **Plumstead Pantry** under this heading because we will get 10% of the take. I guest-chef for two services at 6.30pm and 8.30pm on Saturday 19th November. Places are booking fast, I'm told.

Projects

The Slade Ponds

The twice-monthly sessions have been quite well-attended with some new people coming along. I think that underlines the importance of regular, predictable and dated sessions at the site. There have been two fallen trees that we have been able to deal with ourselves. Particular thanks to John and Ray who have done a lot of work clearing a lot of the branches. We restored the original duck platform, but it capsized in heavy winds and is waiting to go back in. I am very grateful to Chrissie for her steadfast involvement in coordinating the sessions. She hardly ever misses (even insisting we catch a dawn plane back from holiday to make sure we're there!) and ensures cover for the days we absolutely can't make it.

Unfortunately someone has put another terrapin in the pond which is a threat to our native wildlife. I will be seeking advice on how to catch it.

Workhouse Wood

I expect you all know the story by now. The removal of seven and a half tons of robust fencing, and clearance of truckloads of fly-tipping from the site would not have been possible without the Community Work Placement partnership, and that in itself would not have been possible unless I guaranteed them six months of my time to supervise them five-days-a-week. But it was worth it. The achievement is fantastic. We benefitted from over 2,800 hours of free labour up to June, alone – and then much beyond, up to the end of September. A few valued members were able to cover for me over 29 days when I was hospitalised or when I had to earn a bit of money. Chrissie alone did 17 of those days.

In fact the workers wanted to carry on beyond the projected June finish date. I could no longer guarantee full days to oversee them, so the productivity went down a bit, but the work – especially the litter-picking all over the common continued. See below.

We have created a clear path around the wood, now, and plan to continue the work when we get funding. The path is almost completely lined with bricks that we have found all over the Plumstead Common area. David Drostle has kindly offered us a full day's labour, so he and I hope to do some more on that next week. I have found two new sources of bricks!

We have also levelled and paved, with concrete blocks, the area of the old piggery. I'm thinking of getting local primary schools to submit children's designs for painting the back wall.

We have a splendid sign at the entrance, made by one of the CWP workers from a bed-head I found dumped at the Shelter Shop. The first two signs we made were destroyed in acts of vandalism. This one is reinforced so we live in hope.

This weekend we have a contractor creating safer access to the south west entrance to the wood from Winn's Common.

General care for the common

The CWP programme enabled us to deploy a number of people every single weekday all over the common from January to September. We were able to deep clean areas by St Margarets Grove, Great Bartletts, Bleak Hill and Rockmount. The condition of the green space around the Rockmount Estate was disgusting. The area around the tower blocks had been in the care of the Housing Department, and they had clearly neglected their duty for decades. After the council re-structuring those *estates* areas are now in the care of what is now the Parks, Estates and Open Spaces Department. We have given them a clean start, and will be encouraging a more diligent programme of management in future.

I have been quite involved in responses to the Traveller problem. It's interesting that we celebrated 140 years since the events of 1876 at the Old Mill last week (I spotted all of three members!) which ensured people cannot use parts of the common for their own personal living space. We have had three incursions of Travellers on the common this year who have been doing exactly that. We helped the council clean up after all of them, and also sent a bunch of people to clear up after the Hervey Road incursion left truckloads of rubbish behind. There isn't time to dwell on the official responses now, but I should point out that the council are acting as fast and as effectively as the law will allow. The incursions all over the borough have cost us all well over £50,000 and the time lost by Parks officers in dealing with them is beyond unacceptable. It would appear the Travellers regard Greenwich as a soft touch on account of lack of police action. (Police have powers under section 62 of Criminal Justice & Public Order Act to direct travellers to leave land and remove any vehicle and property from the land where there is a suitable pitch available on a caravan site elsewhere in the local authority area.)

Plumstead Common Nature Reserve

Work in the regular volunteer days continues and I am grateful to Roger and Elizabeth who, together with Krystina, do the lion's share. We badly need more member involvement here. Now the CWP workers are no longer with us it is difficult to keep up with the litter and regular abuse of the site. There are regular gatherings of dope-smoking drinkers who regularly light fires in the Forest Schools circles. We installed some robust signs to encourage careful treatment, but they seem to have made no difference. The SNT are making regular patrols but unfortunately we do not have a police force in the hours we most need it. (called 101 recently to complain about ASB from the Travellers and gave up after 12 minutes. A second call wait of 25 minutes brought the response that it was a "council matter")

I conducted a South Rise school visit to the reserve this year which was a great success. We badly need a member to take on schools liaison and take this kind of initiative forward, especially now that Workhouse Wood is coming on stream.

There was significant vandal damage to the post and rail on the eastern steps. We repaired it once but after a second attack we asked for the council's help. They effected and excellent repair. We had a serious offensive (to the police) graffiti attack to the southern forest schools circle. The SNT reported it to me and the council and owing to its offensive nature, the Parks Dept. quickly cleaned it off.

There was a second instance of fence damage after a tree fell on it. The council quickly dealt with the tree, but the fence remains, as yet, unrepaired. The truck damage from last year is also awaiting repair

Coronation Garden

Kay Bartlett and Chris Cooke, with the help of Deborah Jones, have continued their devoted care of this once neglected site. There has been some vandal damage to the wall and coping stones. The council have responded to both our calls for remedial help this year. Repair to the latest attack is in progress.

This year saw the installation of a fine bench in the garden.

Plumstead Manor Nursery

The CWP workers responded to a call from Plumstead Manor Nursery to clear and restore their garden. They did a magnificent job, and I was invited to open it in July. We also spent some time cleaning up and painting the façade of Plumstead Pantry, taking the graffiti off their shutters, and working on the garden at the Old Mill. I hope you will agree that these contributions to the Plumstead community in general were a good way of using the free labour available to us from the CWP scheme.

Headstart

I began a partnership with Headstart, a programme for young people. Which involved, as you can imagine, rigorous governance and compliance. Of the 15 volunteers promised, only 6 confirmed and, of those, only 4 turned up on the first day. On the second day only one turned up on time and two more shuffled in late – one of them by an hour and a half, because she over-slept! I decided to integrate the one young man, who was keen to continue, with the CWP team, but abandoned the programme as a whole because it had been an annoying waste of time.

Duke of Edinburgh Award

We have enjoyed working with two young men who were volunteering with us as part of their award programmes. It has been very satisfying to see young people working in such a committed way – one of them in Workhouse Wood and the other at The Slade Ponds.

Bat Monitoring

Our own “Batwoman”, Jo Lawbuary, has submitted the following excellent report:

Bat Survey 2016

We completed the annual survey this summer and realise that 2016 marks 5 years of Plumstead bats being surveyed!

The survey takes the same format each year: We travel along a circular route with 12 stops that takes in Plumstead Common and Shrewsbury Park, and the roads in between. We survey for large bats such as noctules and serotines as we walk along, then small pipistrelle bats when we stop. (This involves retuning the bat detector, like going between different radio stations.) The survey is conducted on 2 nights in July.

The first survey was on 7 July. Weather was dry and warm (18 degrees) but very cloudy – good bat weather you’d think, but we were disappointed not to detect any large bats at all: no noctules, serotines or indeed the elusive Leisler’s.

At least the common pipistrelles were more obliging. We found them at 4 of the 12 points – in Shrewsbury Park + around Plumstead Common.

Survey 2 was undertaken on 20 July. Conditions were clear and dry, and it was a balmy 24 degrees. This time we detected noctules in 3 locations around Plumstead Common (but no serotines or Leisler’s) and the common pips didn’t disappoint either: we found them at 5 out of 12 points – again in Shrewsbury Park + around Plumstead Common.

So it seems a good year for common pipistrelles (this was also the case in our other survey in Belvedere where they featured in 7 out of 12 points – in both survey nights).

But – we didn’t find the other slightly more elusive soprano pipistrelle this year – which we have detected previously in Shrewsbury Park (and also in the Slade ravine – though not part of the official

survey). Since we only started surveying 5 years ago, and as far as we know Shrewsbury Park has not been surveyed for bats historically, we have no idea whether the appearance /disappearance of sopranos is normal or anything to be worried about - in fact they were only identified as a separate species in the 1990s – so there's probably little if anything on the record about them locally.

The other disappointment was not to have witnessed the 'spooky film' mass noctule event seen in previous years on Plumstead Common, often, just as we start the survey, at dusk.

This really is a marvellous sight (and sound! It makes the bat detector go wild!) but we did see them on another summer's night, so we know the noctules of Plumstead are still around - roosting somewhere quite local possibly, near the common. They just will not be included in this year's survey data.

We have submitted our data to the Bat Conservation Trust, along with hundreds of other volunteers from all over the country, and will wait to see the report next year. BCT collates this information to help find out what is happening with bats all over the UK. To be able to survey the same sites year on year is very valuable, as this helps to detect trends and tells us what is happening to bat populations over time.

According to BCT, the bigger picture suggests numbers of bats may be stabilising across the UK, though this must be seen in the context of a historical decline in bat populations all over the country, sadly.

We're happy to say that what our local battiness shows is that Plumstead Common and Shrewsbury Park particularly, with their trees and meadows and glades, are important habitats for bat populations, as well as being lovely places for humans. We must continue to work together as PCEG to make sure of it!

Jo Lawbuary + Purnendu Roy

Partnerships and Cooperative working

We have enjoyed very good support from the Glyndon and Plumstead Met Police SNT teams under the leadership of Sgt. Dean Cuomo and Sgt. Alan Cooney, respectively. Unfortunately Sgt. Cooney has been re-deployed in the borough and both teams fall under the remit of Dean Cuomo. We have seen a gradual diminution of the SNT service over the years, which is thoroughly regrettable. The existing teams have limited time and resources now to deal with a raft of problems. They give us good support where they can and I am happy to maintain a mutual respect.

We get great support from Paul Martin, Chief Ranger at Parks, Estates and Open Spaces. He is in constant touch and ensures that requests I put in for help are actioned speedily.

I also have a valued relationship with James Cooper of the Street Cleaning service, and he is also quick to respond to any calls for action.

I have attended most of the Greenwich Parks Friends Forum meetings this year. The support and information sharing that results from our membership is highly valued. I thank the management committee, Terry Powley, Dave Stevenson and Bee Twidale, for their time-consuming diligence and care.

Nick Day

Chair