



FRIENDS OF
MOUNTSFIELD
PARK

ANNUAL REPORT

2016/2017

FORWARD

In November 2016 we were devastated by the dreadful news that Alex Malcolm aged 5 died in Kings College Hospital from injuries sustained early evening while at Mountsfield Park on Sunday 20th November. Our thoughts are with the family and the friends of Alex Malcolm who have suffered such a devastating loss.



The last year has been full of challenges and triumphs at Mountsfield Park, The park continues to be transformed, with the new trim trail and increasing numbers of visitors enjoying the space. On the other hand, we have yet to see years of campaigning to deliver a new café for the park bear fruit (although more on that later in this report), and the backdrop of financial austerity has meant further cuts to the Council's park service.

What has remained consistent - as you will quickly see in the pages of this report - is the tireless commitment of the local community, especially all of you as Friends of Mountsfield Park. Through our collective efforts we have held the Council to account for the decisions they have made; pushed for (and secured) further funding for the park; organised events; and have been committed campaigning for our wonderful park can be enjoyed by people of all ages and from all parts of the community.

Mountsfield Park continues to have Green Flag status, recognising it as a park reaching high standards across a range of categories. Glendale - the company the Council contracts to run parks in Lewisham - deserves significant credit for the efforts they have made to help bring Mountsfield Park up to this high standard. We are grateful for this input and remain committed to working with them to ensure that the park sustains these high standards, holding them to account where necessary.

But credit is also due to you. To achieve Green Flag status, a park needs to be a welcoming place, it needs to be healthy, safe, and secure, and it needs to involve the local community. In other words, without your efforts, without the respect you show to the space, without your commitment to enjoying and improving the park, the Green Flag would not be flying above Mountsfield Park now.

We are looking forward to exciting times for Mountsfield Park in the year ahead. We will continue to push for further funding and improvements, and will continue to organise events and campaigns. We can do this safe in the knowledge that you, as Friends of Mountsfield Park, will give your support and, most importantly, continue to enjoy the Park we all love.

We would be very grateful if you would support our newest campaign which is with the support of Glendale to replace our old litter bins with fox proof bins to make Mountsfield Park look cleaner and more welcoming. [Please support our Spacehive campaign to raise £10,000 to provide replacement litter bins](https://www.spacehive.com/mountsfieldpark) - <https://www.spacehive.com/mountsfieldpark>

Rory, Carrie, Max, Gareth, Ros, Rivke, and Maria
(Friends of Mountsfield Park Executive) April 2017

Working locally

Friends of Mounstfield Park is a local park users group. We are made up of volunteers, donating our time on top of busy jobs and busy lives. We do it because we love our Park and we want to make it even better. But we don't own the park, and we don't run it. Instead, we rely on influencing those who do, on making sure that we get information out to local users, and on galvanising the local community behind calls for action. Every penny we raise is put back into activities to support the Friends and the Park more widely.

We have campaigned in three main ways:

Working with the Council, and holding them to account

We have regular correspondence with Lewisham Council, pressing them on issues that need resolving and raising issues of concern amongst the local community (access to clean toilets being a very common one). During the last 5 years we have also invited the Council to a number of public meetings and held private conversations, working with officials and at a political level with local councillors and our local MPs. This approach has been key in keeping the pressure on to make progress with a new café in the Park.

Working with Glendale

Glendale are responsible for the management of Lewisham parks on behalf of the Council, and we engage with them regularly, highlighting everyday but nonetheless important issues that affect park users. This includes pushing for more park keeper time, reporting any acts of vandalism or anti-social behaviour (thankfully few), raising issues around litter collection.

Working with other local park user groups

Through the Chair, the Friends of Mountsfield Park meet regularly with other local groups at the [Lewisham Green Spaces Forum](#). This enables the Friends to put our weight behind issues that impact on all parks in Lewisham - especially around funding and cuts to services.

We are always looking for more volunteers - please do get in touch if you want to become more involved!



The Community Garden

Before 2014 the Community Garden was an inaccessible building site, full of mud and ugly machinery. Now it is a haven for gardeners and park users alike.



Our direct involvement kicked off in earnest in November 2014 with 'The Big Dig' - a day organised in conjunction with the Council to open the community garden and get some of the early hard graft done in shifting soil, digging over ground, building equipment, and planting trees. We were hopeful that the new community garden would attract local gardeners, but were blown away when over one hundred of you came along, rolled up your sleeves, and mucked in. We were particularly pleased to see local councillors (James Walsh, Helen Klier, and Stella Jeffrey) help out, as well as local MP Heidi Alexander.

Since that wonderful beginning, the Community Garden has gradually taken shape, including through the addition of a poly-tunnel, so that we were able to enjoy our first harvest last autumn, with successful crops of potatoes, chard, beetroot, squashes, and courgettes.

The Community Garden is maintained and improved by a core of regular volunteers who help to ensure that the flowers, fruit trees, and vegetables thrive, and also that the Community Garden remains an oasis of tranquillity in the middle of one of London's busiest boroughs. The contribution of Nature's Gym volunteers is particularly noteworthy.



A grant of £2500 from the Community Development Foundation supported the development of the garden and the input of local volunteers. We have also been awarded £450 from the Metropolitan Gardens Association for compost and soil for the raised vegetable beds, and received 80kg of bulbs from the same organisation (in conjunction with Taylor's Bulbs), which have been planted in the Community Garden and around the flagpole.

More widely across the Park, we were delighted that the Woodland trust gave us hundreds more young trees to plant around the park - you can spot them by the clear, plastic tubes that are protecting them. [Thanks to the Thomas Tallis School Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteers for helping us to plant the trees.](#) We are particularly pleased that Glendale have agreed to replant the Rose Garden 2016/2017. Many of our members have passed on memories of this area in its previous glory.

The playground



Other improvements

The Friends of Mountsfield Park were delighted to secure funding of: £1500 from the Rushey Green Assembly to make the community garden more accessible with better seating/picnic benches and easier to use gate latches (2017).

£2000 from Rushey Green Assembly to pay towards the new trim trail (2016/2017).

Café

The lack of a good café in Mountsfield Park has long been an issue. The failure of the previous Council plans to deliver a café (using the same funding opportunity that paid for the Community Garden and the playground improvements) led to considerable tension with the local community, and some strong exchanges of opinion at open meetings with the Council. In the summer of 2014, the Friends of Mountsfield Park persuaded the Council to set aside £50k to be used to support the development of a café in the future. In the meantime, the Council continued to lease the existing container units to an external provider.

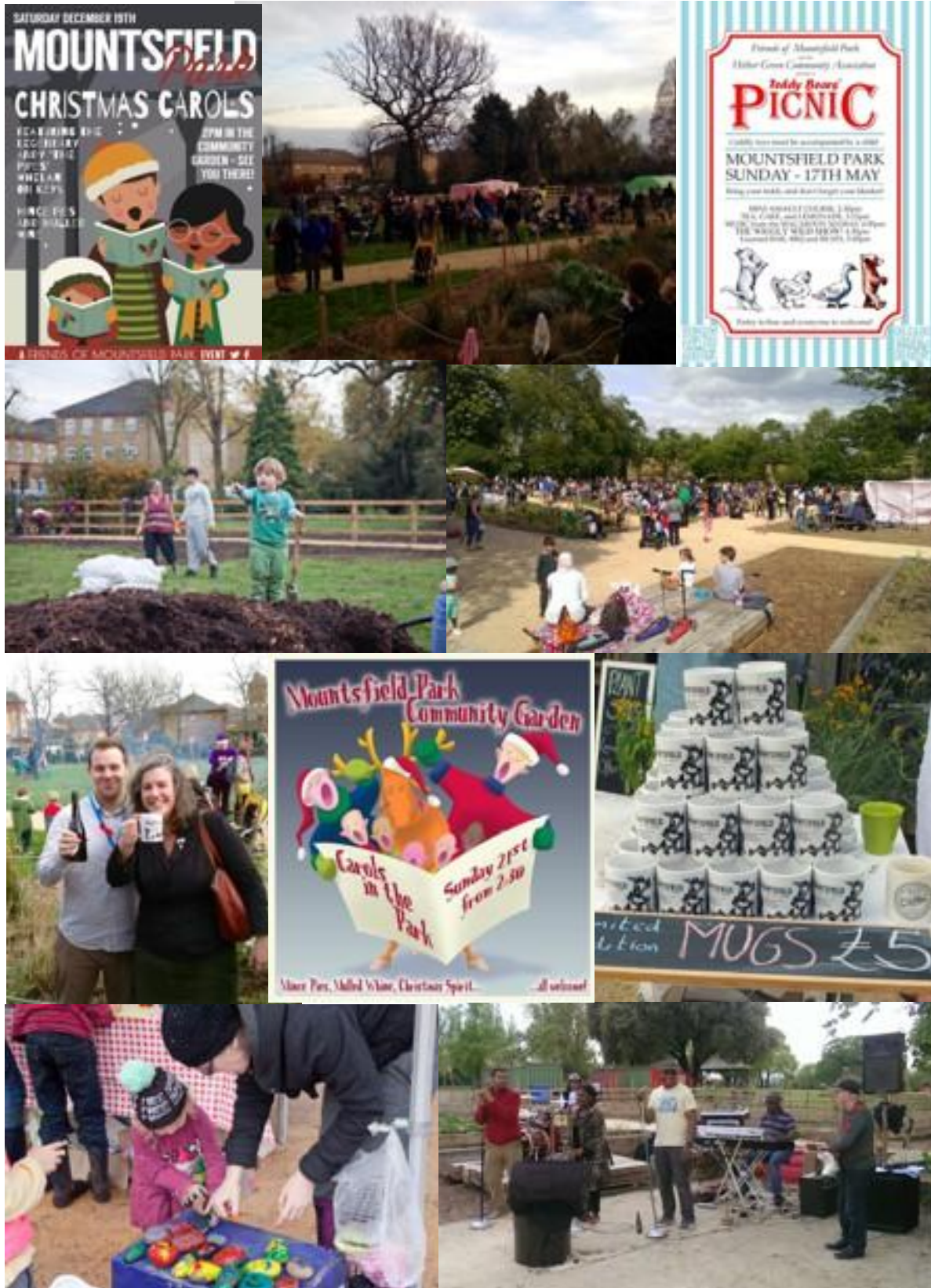


We had hoped that the increased footfall brought about by the playground improvements would mean that the existing container units would be open more often. But, sadly, the more common experience has been of families having to leave the park for refreshment and toilet facilities, even as the sun has been shining down and the playground full.

The Friends of Mountsfield Park have worked closely with the Council to press for the £50k to be made available to a potential café operator sooner rather than later. In particular, those Friends who were able to make an open meeting with the Council in July 2015 (attended by Councillor Onikosi amongst others) did an excellent job in pushing things forward with Council officials. This has led directly to the Council running a tender exercise over the last few months (supported by materials provided by the Friends of Mountsfield Park). This process is still ongoing, a cafe operator currently has planning permission to build a cafe in the park and has recently invited tenders to build it.

Friends of Mountsfield Park events 2014 - 2017

We are particularly grateful to all of those who have volunteered their time and efforts to help make sure that our events run smoothly, are popular, and that visitors are well fed!



Highlights include:

Carols in the Park 2014 - 2016

Christmas 2014 saw the first Friends of Mountsfield Park community carols event. Over a hundred hardy souls braved the weather (helped by mince pies, mulled wine, and the musical accompaniment by Andy Whelan), belting out old favourites in the Community Garden to celebrate the festive season. The winning formula was replicated in Christmas 2015, but with added hot chocolate, beer, and cider! In 2015 we also supported Lewisham Food Bank by using the carols event as a drop off point for food donations from incredibly generous park users.

Hither Green Festival - Teddy Bears' Picnic - May 2015 and 2016

The Friends of Mountsfield Park were delighted to take part in the annual Hither Green Festival in May, working with the Hither Green Community Association to hold the 'Teddy Bears' Picnic in the Community Garden. Our biggest event yet, the Picnic provided a truly wonderful day out for families.



Lewisham People's Day - July 2015 and 2016

Attracting over 25,000 people, Lewisham People's Day is a massive event delivered by the Council on an annual basis. We are proud that our Park remains the flagship outdoor venue in Lewisham (although there are drawbacks!). Although we only played a small role at People's Day in 2015, it will go down in folklore as the day we unveiled the limited edition Friends of Mountsfield Park mug!



Friends of Mountsfield Park summer picnic - September 2015

In only its second year, the annual Friends picnic was a massive success, helped in no small part by the bird of prey display provided by Eagle Heights. Few who were there will forget the sight of the bald eagle soaring across the grass, surprising quite a few park users wandering by! We were delighted by the support provided by Sammy T's, who offered a range of food, and Carrie's Bar for keeping everybody refreshed.



What was most impressive about the picnic, however, was the generosity of those who came. The Friends decided at the last minute, to use the event to raise money for Syrian refugees via Save The Children. Through the sale of cakes, drinks, and limited edition mugs, £434.04 was made in profit to donate to this worthy cause. Sammy T's

added a further £100, so that a total of £534.04 made its way to Save the Children. As if that wasn't enough, the Friends also used the summer picnic as a means of collecting donations of clothes, food, tents, and supplies from park users for the

'Help Calais' campaign. In the end, four carloads of donations were received and delivered to families in the most desperate of circumstances.



What's to come in 2017?

We hope that 2017 will be just as busy as the last year, that the Park continues to evolve and improve, and that the Friends of Mountsfield Park will continue to play its full part!

We are delighted to be supporting the 2017 Hither Green Festival in May once again, and will of course be preparing our now traditional Teddy Bears' summer picnic.

We would also like to invite you to come and join us for an informal Big Lunch picnic on Sunday 18th June at Mountsfield Park community garden.

We will continue to bid for funds to improve the Park, including plans to [introduce fox-proof bins](#).

The Community Garden will continue to develop, and we are always grateful for new volunteers who want to join in, on a regular or an ad hoc basis.

We hope that 2018 is the year that finally sees the opening of a proper café in Mountsfield Park, with indoor seating, toilet facilities, good coffee, excellent food at reasonable prices, and refreshments for those long, sunny days in the Park!

There are many practical ways in which you can support the Friends of Mountsfield Park: volunteering in the community garden; contributing time or cake (!) to community events; attending open meetings; or letting us know your ideas about how the park is used. If you would like to be more involved, or you have any questions, please contact us at mountsfieldpark@gmail.com

