

What will we be doing in 2023/24?

We are planning for 2023/24. Biodiversity will continue to be a big theme. Getting more Friends active and involved is also a top priority. In November, we hope to re-chalk the outline of the Oaks Mansion near the Artists' studios. We have obtained a grant from the Council's Local Community Fund to buy

the chalk, we just need volunteers to come and do the work. Sutton Landscape Artist 2024 will be taking place so get your brushes ready. June 2024 marks 250th Anniversary of a Fete Champêtre held in Oaks Park in 1774 and we aim to mark that too.

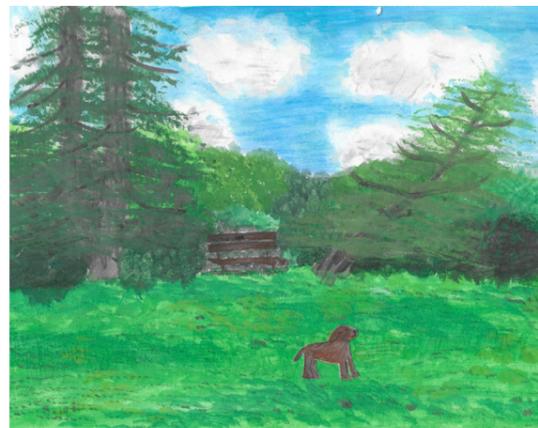
Sutton Landscape Artist

Inspired by an original suggestion from a Friend of Oaks Park, Sutton Parks ran the second year of our Landscape Artist Competition between May and August 2023. Six parks participated this year, up from four in 2022. There were three categories: Children,

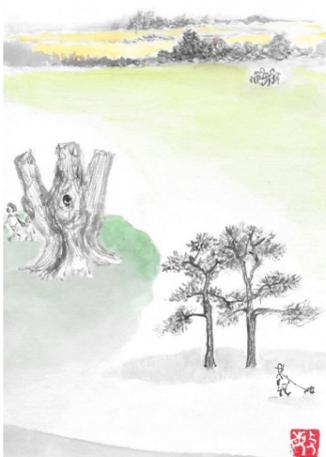
11–16-year-olds and Adults. In Oaks Park, we had fifteen participants and some amazing work was created as you can see. The winning entries from across the Borough will be exhibited in Sutton Library in November. Watch out for next year's competition!



Winner, 3-10
Emily McBride



Winner, 11-16
Sasha Ibberson



Winner, Adult
Man Ye Wendy Wo

We need you

We rely on you to help us with everything from litter picking to running art competitions and beyond. Even if you can only offer one hour's help in a year we appreciate it, so please volunteer! Current committee members joined for many reasons such as wanting to give something back to the beautiful park, supporting someone they knew, doing more for wildlife and discovering that paperwork was the least important part of the role. Visiting the park when they

were children themselves, bringing their own children and dogs also were very important. Their favourite places in the park include the wildflower meadow, the café and the rose gardens. It's about using varied skills to help everyone enjoy the park. Most gave 2-4 hours a month to the Friends and all said how much they enjoyed it. We need three more committee members. If you would like to know more (with no obligation) please email us.

The Friends Committee

Chairman: Anne Pearcey
Secretary: Ray Shepherd
Treasurer: Tina Bates
Publicity: Anne Jameson
Roger Thistle, Judith Witts and Derek Yeo

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Friends of Oaks Park

Newsletter 2023-24

What a Year!

It seems almost impossible to believe what has been achieved this year. The Friends have been really busy, working closely with others, particularly the Council, the Café, Contractors and local suppliers. The Jubilee Copse has been planted, we've gained the Green Flag again and just been awarded our third

Gold by London in Bloom. Sutton Landscape Artist competition has grown, we've had cows grazing in the meadow, introduced guided tree trails, new handouts to help children explore the park and strengthened our work and commitment to improving biodiversity. Tai Chi has gone from strength to strength and our informal

gardening group has blossomed. Added to all that, the Café has had an amazing makeover and is a really lovely place. Finally, we have made real progress in tackling our lack of disabled parking spaces and we hope to have four more very shortly. Thank you to everyone who has been working so hard.

The Jubilee Copse

Tall oaks from little acorns grow and the Jubilee Copse grew from a very small idea back in 2021. Now we have 39 beautiful trees settling in really well to the main body of the park and plans to plant a final 10 trees to finish the main work. They celebrate H.M. the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee, support her Green Canopy Legacy Project and create our own legacy for Oaks Park. The trees will be thriving years after us. They will also help tackle climate change, removing carbon emissions from the atmosphere.

Planting day for the first group of trees back on a very cold morning in December 2022 was a wonderful experience. Ben Morris and the Council Trees team and Duncan and his team from Beeches Tree Care had done a great deal of preparation in the two days beforehand, including digging down through the chalk to create the holes for the trees and putting them in place. Nearly 200 people arrived

to plant their trees, add bulbs to the surrounding soil and celebrate the Copse's arrival. There were smiles everywhere and a lot of emotion. The lovely bacon and egg baps provided afterwards by the café just made a perfect finish after a lot of hard work. The Jubilee Copse was praised by the London in Bloom judges and is a source of great interest and joy to many park visitors. If you would like to know more or sponsor a tree, please check the website.



Meadow Day & Mayor's Community Weekend



On 24th June we held our first Meadow Day, celebrating chalk grasslands, wildlife and biodiversity, led by David Warburton, the Council's Biodiversity Officer. We welcomed 3

Dexter cows from The Downlands Partnership farm who enjoyed a day grazing in our meadow and were a great attraction for visitors. Grazing means the faster growing grasses are selectively eaten and smaller wildflowers can flourish. The hoofprints make bare patches of earth where new seeds can flourish and the dung produced feeds the soil. It can't all happen in one day of course, but it was lovely to see the cattle in the park and understand their value.

The Downlands team also brought 2 orphaned lambs, who were great favourites with children. They sold a selection of their chalk grassland wild flowers. David gave a scything demonstration and explained the benefits of scything rather than mowing. Several of us tried it ourselves. It wasn't as easy as it looked but, with practice, a patch of meadow grass was scythed by enthusiastic people and it looked very professional. Everyone enjoyed being involved and learning about grassland management.



This was all part of the Mayor of London's Community Weekend.



We had generous financial support from the Mayor's Office plus lots of pink bunting, tablecloths and selfie photograph frames to make our event even more fun and welcoming. We were able to explain the role of the Friends and some of the history of the Park. We gave out activity sheets for children to enjoy spotting colours, leaves, insects and birds. Our many visitors enjoyed the park's open spaces, wildflower meadows and trees as well as the café.



As you walk in the Park look around and see things you may not have noticed or thought about before. The park is man-made, and is full of history too, but is full of nature as well: birds and animals, trees and flowers.

1. **Make friends with a tree**
Find a tree you like. Look at how the branches are formed, look at the different shaped and colours of the leaves. Look at how the bark is formed, give the tree a hug and a name, and see how it looks throughout the year.

2. **Clouds**
Look at the different shapes in the sky:
• Stratus – flat/layered and smooth
• Cumulus – puffy like cauliflower
• Nimbus – rain bearing
• Cirrus – high up/wispy
Can you see any pictures in the cloud?



Guided Tree Trail

Having produced a tree trail leaflet, featuring around twenty interesting trees in Oaks Park, the Friends Committee then thought it would be a good idea to offer occasional guided walks featuring these trees. The walks are free, take about an hour, and have been run in spring, summer and autumn, to catch a variety of foliage. The trees include an unusual strawberry tree, and a notable Cedar of Lebanon. It also features oaks planted by the Mayor for

Millennium Year and the Earl of Derby. The latter is connected to the park because his forebear, the 12th Earl had his home here and conceived and promoted the two famous Epsom horse races, the Oaks and the Derby, first run in 1779 and 1780 respectively and named after the house and the Earl. Watch out for future guided tree walks on our website. The Tree Trail leaflet is available from our display board in the café.



Our website: <https://friendsofoakspark.co.uk>

Third Gold Award from London in Bloom

We were very pleased to welcome the judges for London In Bloom on a sunny afternoon in June. Our gardener, Tony, had worked really hard to prepare the park. Then the Friends' informal gardening group had done an excellent job of dead heading the roses. We also planted 3,000 Spring bulbs and 30 new roses. We were particularly grateful to Wallington Nursery for sponsoring the supply of some excellent plants for the circular bed and formal gardens. Next year, we are looking to put in more drought-resistant plants. The judges looked at nine different aspects within the park, including its management and community involvement. They were very interested in learning how the Friends were involved in all aspects of park life and were especially complimentary about our Jubilee Copse initiative this year. They were also impressed by the professionally managed meadows, natural chalk

grassland and the butterfly bank. Ilhan and the café staff were on hand to give their usual welcome and our noticeboard was remarked upon as an excellent way of communicating what we do to park visitors. We were delighted to hear in September that we had won our third gold in a row, all thanks to teamwork.



We won another Green Flag



It was the first time in over 10 years of being on the committee that I have helped the judges for the Green Flag and I surprised myself on how I could chatter about the park and everything that goes on for such a long time. We had two judges and I walked around with one of them with members of Sutton Council. The other judge was joined

by our Biodiversity Officer. I am very glad to report that again we won the Green Flag. It shows that we are a safe and well-run park. One of the Council members pointed out that we do not do things within the park that best complement the park, which I thought really resonated with what we are all striving to achieve.

The Butterfly Bank is flourishing

It's now just about a year since Sutton's Biodiversity Team, supported by the Rewild London Fund from the Mayor of London, dumped the best part of 200 tonnes of chalk dust at Oaks Park! Far from being an act of vandalism, this was the latest stage in improving Oaks Park for nature, by providing more priority habitat for chalk grassland plants and animals, as part of the Link the SINC's project. We started this process of chalk grassland connectivity in January 2021, with the creation of two small scrapes for the small blue butterfly. We scraped off the thin topsoil to expose the chalk beneath and then seeded with kidney vetch, the only food plant for the small blue caterpillar.

The bank was planted by volunteers from the Friends of Oaks Park in October 2022. In total, over 350 plants



mounding of chalk, to create north and south facing slopes, placing various stress factors on the plants. The bank has now been seeded with further chalk grassland wildflowers and typical grass species, which will come through next year, to replicate natural conditions more fully. Now that the bank is maturing, we will need

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