

## CREOS Chair's report 2016

Overall I think I can say that the last year has been a time of improvement for the Crouch End Playing Fields as a whole and for CREOS as well.

There have been no threatening planning applications to fight and the playing fields area is looking altogether more cared for this season. The newly installed vehicle access gate on the road to the Hanley car park has made a huge difference, deterring night-time shenanigans and reducing the amount of litter; similarly the bollards at the start of the Hanley path from the Greenway have been effective in preventing mopeds from entering. Volunteers have put in a dead-hedge to protect the flowers and the path now looks very pretty. The Hanley tennis club has also tidied up the car park and hedgerow, making the whole area more attractive and less prone to vandalism.

It did cause some concern when the Georgians club ordered a very harsh pollarding of its surrounding trees and then left all the wood chippings piled up next to them where previously bluebells had bloomed. However the resurfacing of the courts, new netting, refurbished club houses and surrounds heralded a welcome renewal of the club. Now, after years of under-use, it is clearly flourishing again.

The North Middlesex club is replacing the broken and unsightly wooden fence along the Greenway with sturdy green mesh fencing. This opens up the view of the cricket club and should be a huge improvement to the Greenway path, making it more pleasant and also safer. However it remains to be seen what the new owners, Play-on Sports, are planning to do with the overgrown site of the old bowling-green and its dilapidated clubhouse.

The CREOS-managed area was challenged by a long dry summer followed by a very wet winter. The fine weather attracted many new visitors, most of whom appeared to have never heard of litter bins. Every day bottles, cigarette papers, food containers, etc. were dropped around the benches or thrown into the bushes, providing plenty of work to do on CREOS workdays. There also seemed to be a plague of disposable BBQ's leaving their ugly marks on the grass. CREOS had had plans to install two benches that had been donated by London Wildlife Trust, but as soon as the first of these was repainted and set in place it was uprooted by partying youths, used as a BBQ stand and then thrown into the bushes. As a result it has been decided that the area would be better without further benches.

Concern about crime in the playing fields as a whole, much of it linked to drug-dealing, has led to the setting up of the Crouch End Open Space Neighbourhood Watch group. Now members of the Shepherds Cot Trust, parents and teachers from Highgate Wood School and CREOS have regular meetings with local police. There is now one person to whom all incidents can be reported. The idea is that if all drug-dealing, vandalism, fly-tipping, graffiti, etc. are logged and reported, this should result in a greater police presence to keep us safe.

I would like to thank those CREOS members who have turned out reliably all year on our workdays even in cold and rain. They have bagged up endless amounts of litter, removed Japanese Knotweed, cut back brambles, weeded out surplus saplings and spread barrow-loads of wood chips onto the paths. In addition a useful extension of the CREOS pathways

has been created, leading into the school playing field, through an area which has always been exceptionally muddy and dangerously slippery. This provided a much-needed improvement for which passers-by have already shown much appreciation. The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) have also come to help on several occasions this year and were responsible for the digging of the two ponds. These are essentially seasonal ponds but nonetheless will help with drainage, prevent flooding and encourage amphibians and more varied wildlife. On the forthcoming corporate workdays there are also plans to put in some hidden drainage on the meadow, which has also been exceptionally boggy this winter.

The aim to provide a mud-free route all the way through from Crouch End to Highgate, enabling commuters to walk cleanly through the 'countryside' to and from work was successful throughout most of the winter. By March however things had changed and the lower path became badly flooded. Remedial drainage work did not help, so a grant has been obtained from London Borough of Haringey to create a raised boardwalk on this section of the path, ready for next winter. We have been greatly helped by the assistance of Matt Pendergast from TCV who has arranged four corporate workdays in the next month to assist in the building of this walkway.

Apart from two grants for path building we have also been fortunate to secure funding of £4,200 from Haringey to improve the look of the entrances to the woodland area. Eventually this will involve de-spiking and painting the railings along the Greenway and at the allotments access road entrance. We also hope to have signs at these entrances, to inform the public that it is a Site of Interest for Nature Conservation, cared for by CREOS.

CREOS's profile has also been recently enhanced by its very professional newsletter production. Our colourful and attractive newsletter is now produced on a voluntary basis by Alice Shaell of Grogan Shaell Design, for which the committee is very grateful.

It would not be right to end this report without a mention of the social side of things. For many members, working to protect this site has been a wonderful way to get to know neighbours and make new friends. Not only have workdays continued to be followed by picnics, but CREOS had its traditional Christmas party and also a delightful summer BBQ on the meadow. We were fortunate, at the summer event, to be entertained by Gregor Grant's group, "All shook up", who have kindly agreed to come and play for us again this year. The date is Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July, so mark it in your diaries and do join us if you can.

Glenys Law, May 2016