

It is difficult to believe that only 12 months have passed since the last CREOS AGM, in which I was invited to step up to the helm and take over from Mel, who had calmly steered the CREOS ship on such a long journey. The prospect was rendered all the more challenging, in the closing lines of Mel's last annual report that spoke of "unprecedented and horrible weather, significant planning threats and ... much work to do in the coming year". We have indeed had to face all of these during the winter of 2013 -2014, but with a hard-working crew and fantastic support, CREOS has sailed successfully through some very stormy seas.

We started out in high spirits and decided to celebrate the joys of the CREOS meadow with a "Big Lunch picnic" on Sunday 2nd June. With less than three weeks to organise it, the committee did a remarkable job in getting prizes pledged by local businesses, selling raffle tickets and organising decorations and food. It was well worth the effort as the sun shined on the day, a fun time was had by all and we raised £75 towards our footpath fund.

Our biggest task of the year was the continued monitoring of the controversial planning application from Holly Park for a huge inflatable Dome over three of their tennis courts. Haringey's Planning Department failed to make a decision on the planning application within the required time and the Club therefore appealed to the Government's Planning Inspectorate in Bristol, which was the beginning of another lengthy process. David Abram and Mel Cairns made sure the Inspector was given all the relevant documents and information and many of us sent in our letters of opposition all over again. We owe a huge debt of thanks to David who spent literally hours on the telephone to the Planning Inspectorate. A group of representatives from CREOS and from the Shepherd's Cot Trust eventually met the Inspector on her site visit and made sure she saw the real beauty and ecological value of the site, including the trees in which bats may be roosting. The best news of the year was when Inspector Higenbottam eventually gave her verdict: the appeal was rejected on the grounds that this would be inappropriate development for Metropolitan Open Land and that it was contrary to London Planning Policy. She even added that this dome, lit up at night, would be an "alien intrusion".

CREOS of course exists not just to monitor planning matters but also to ensure the conservation of the area. With light pollution being a constant threat, the CREOS Bat survey was commissioned and completed in May and has proved useful on a number of occasions during the year. It helped us persuade LBH to fix shields to the very bright lighting that had been installed in the alleyway from Wood Vale to Park Road. The bat survey was also submitted to LBH in the Planning consultation over the tennis dome and quoted by the inspector in her verdict. Later in the year another planning application for lighting was submitted, this time by Hanley tennis club. The effect of lighting on the environment was at the forefront of the Hanley plans, and the lights proposed are significantly less bright than those on nearby courts, so on this occasion CREOS made no objection to the application, in fact hoping that it would serve as a model of good practice. In addition we are pleased to hear that Hanley Tennis Club is to provide a dozen bat boxes as a condition of the application.

In terms of conservation our greatest achievement this year had been in the renovation of the CREOS footpaths. In early summer a large mountain of wood chips were donated by the firm who work for the council, unfortunately taking up much of Hanley car park, so we had to work as fast as we could to put these wood chips on the paths. This also involved trimming back undergrowth and cutting logs to make the edges. However an excellent job was done through the combined effort of volunteers and paid workers. A considerable amount of CREOS funds were spent on this project but the number of passers-by thanking us and offering support has shown that the work was much appreciated and well worth the money spent.

The year's most significant achievement is the improvement made to the Woodland Walk area, between the allotments access road and Queen's Wood. This had become impassable during the winter months due to extensive mud and walkers trying to get round the mud were causing a lot of damage to the woodland floor. CREOS officers put in many days of hard work to raise the funds to construct a new path with a more durable surface. Our efforts were rewarded with a substantial grant from the Mayor of London's Re:Leaf fund, from the Lottery Awards for All scheme and from LBH Parks Small Grants scheme. However these grants also came with a requirement for match funding. We were overwhelmed by the amazing response of CREOS members who rallied round to help raise the amount needed. A postal request to members led to many generous

donations, large and small. One member set up a guided walk of London's street art, which alone raised £220. Local businesses offered prizes for the Christmas raffle and as a result we had one of the best attended Christmas parties ever, at the home of Paul and Sue Secher, where the raffle prizes were drawn and we learnt that the raffle had raised £573.

From the tenders submitted we chose Steve Hooper Design and Landscapes, as the company most experienced in environmental work. The main grant required the project to be completed in February, which was one of the wettest months since records began. Fortunately Steve Hooper's men were up to the task and despite appalling conditions the path was finished on time, with the help of a number of valiant volunteers. Not only was it finished on time but also we managed to liaise with Friends of Queen's Wood, who were able to extend the walk into Queen's Wood, so that it joins the Capital Ring Path and leads to the tube station.

As always there has been a lot to do on our monthly workdays: path work, planting of spring bulbs, cutting back undergrowth and the usual litter picking. Volunteers and sunshine never quite managed to coincide, however, with the result that the meadow was not mown at all in 2013. We have made several approaches to LBH and to the various sports clubs for help with this task, but so far to no avail. In order to make our workdays more efficient, we have now put better organisation into place, including preparation and monitoring forms, and our volunteers are now all issued with Hi-Vis jackets sporting the CREOS logo. These jackets give us a more visible presence in the fields and help to engage passers-by in conversations about the conservation work we are doing.

This is also the first full year in which our website has been up and running and it has proved very useful. We have added a news page and we have had a number of people contacting us who found our contact details from the site. This includes a representative of the Community Service Volunteers, who has arranged to send a group of around 30 corporate volunteers for an intensive work day in July. With this many volunteers and some funds to buy tools we are hoping to get a lot of tough physical work done in just one day.

Looking to the year ahead we have had a slight setback in not obtaining a grant from the Mayor of London's Pocket Park fund, with which we had envisaged tidying up the Hanley Car Park area. We had hoped to make an easier and safer cut through the railings from the alleyway into the woodland around the car park, create a properly defined footpath, replant shrubs destroyed by trampling, install a bench and a litter bin and make it clearer where grass and tree clippings should be composted. Above all we have been working closely with LBH, Hanley and the Shepherd's Cot Trust to find a practical way of closing off the car park to traffic at nights. This would prevent the occasional fly tipping, but more importantly the continual disturbance to local residents from loud music and partying 'til the early hours of the morning. The constant offensive littering of the car park from this night time revelry causes a lot of work for both Hanley and CREOS and is particularly inappropriate on land managed by the school. We will still try to get this work done, but will have to seek funding from other sources.

Another development of 2013 is that we now have a Management Plan to guide us in the work for the next five years. Haringey and Highgate Wood School arranged for an ecology survey and proposed management plan, commissioned from Complete Ecology Ltd, of which Alan Scott is the founder. CREOS was sent an early draft of the plan and subsequently submitted a 9 page document of comments and requests. We welcome the Management Plan for its expert guidance on how best to preserve the ecology of our treasured open space, but hope too that it will herald an era of closer partnership between HWS, LBH and CREOS. The management plan is not backed by any budget, but we hope that either the council or the school will provide support for the future mowing of the meadow. Discussions are still under way on this, but one thing that has been agreed is that in this financial year LBH will erect signs at the three main entrances to the area, similar to those at the entrances to Queen's Wood, which we hope will help to make it clear that this is not, as some local vandals once stated: "a bit of waste land that nobody cares about", but a "Borough Grade Site of Importance for Nature Conservation"

I would like to finish by saying a big thank you to those colleagues who have given me such wonderful support in this very challenging first year as Chair and in particular to Andrew Kirk and John Bartlett, who are retiring from the committee after many long years of valiant service.

Glenys Law, May 2014