

Friends of Tooting Common AGM 2 November 2025: Chair's Report on 2024-25

This has been another busy and eventful year for Tooting Common, and for us as the Friends. We have again organised a range of activities and events. We have also continued to make a very considerable input to discussions with Enable and Wandsworth Council about the Common.

FOTC's aims: We aim to promote the public use and enjoyment of the Common, to help protect it as an excellent area of open space with distinctive character, available to everyone. We want to help make it a better place for people, plants and wildlife. Our events and activities, and the input we make to consultations and discussions, are all directed to these aims.

1. Activities and events

Litter picks: We have run regular litter picking sessions fortnightly on Sunday mornings, and fortnightly on Tuesday mornings. We continue to collect substantial amounts of litter, particularly in the wooded areas. Many thanks to Matthew Hamlyn and Mike Langdon for running the picks, and for the report they have provided.

Bat walks: We have run six bat walks, finding large numbers of bats, particularly by the lake at dusk. These have been very enjoyable events and it has been good to be out on the Common at dusk. Many thanks to Geraldine Kelly for leading the walks, and for providing the report on them.

Fun Dog Show: Our Fun Dog Show on 8 June was again a very enjoyable and well-attended event. Over 300 people came, and 120 dogs were entered for the classes, with most competing in more than one class. There was a great array of dogs of all shapes and sizes including male and female, puppies, veterans, and rescue dogs. There were also classes for junior handlers to demonstrate their skills. We were very glad to be joined by the Parks Police, Wandsworth Council Animal Welfare Team, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, Strays of Greece, and by Streatham Hill Vets and a number of other businesses supplying provisions and other support for dogs. We are grateful for their support and for their involvement in judging some of the classes. We were very pleased to welcome the Mayor of Wandsworth, Jeremy Ambache, and are grateful for his support and involvement in judging. We are also grateful to Winkworths estate agents for supporting the event by providing dog treat bags and dog waste holders.

Pumpkin Parade: Our Pumpkin Parade last Sunday (26 October) was also a very enjoyable and well-attended event. Around 200 people came, many of them families with children. There were competitions for carved pumpkins in three categories - funniest; most artistic; and scariest - and 48 carved pumpkins were entered for these competitions. There were also competitions for home-made fancy dress for children. There were some excellent carved pumpkins, and very creative and imaginative fancy dress.

Botanical and other walks: We have also held several well-attended walks on the Common during the year:

31 December 2024: Roy led a Wild Flower Hunt. We (mainly Roy!) found 27 different species of plant flowering on the Common.

22 March 2025: Roy also led a 'spring plant' walk for FOTC

24 April: Mick of Enable led a walk on biodiversity

21 June: Ann of the Swan Sanctuary led a walk and talk on wildfowl on the Lake

30 July: Roy also led a 'summer plant' walk

11 October: Roy also led a tree walk

15 October: Liam of the Council led a walk

We are very grateful to Roy, Mick, Ann and Liam for sharing their knowledge and expertise with us in these walks.

We think it would be good to establish more hedgerows in appropriate places on the Common, and have established a working group, also including Enable, to take this forward.

We are also planning to plant five black poplar trees on the Common, and have been discussing arrangements with Enable and the Council. Progress has been slow but we hope to be able to do the planting this winter, probably in the area close to the Woodfield Pavilion.

We have also worked with the Woodfield Orchard group in their project to plant fruit trees on the Woodfield field, and congratulate them on the excellent progress made during the year.

A number of FOTC members participated in the City Nature Challenge event on 27 April organised by David, one of our members, to record wildlife on the Common, as part of the City Nature Challenge 2025, in partnership also with the Natural History Museum. This was a great success - thanks to all those involved.

We are keen to increase the number and range of our events and activities, though these do of course need volunteers to make them happen! If you have any suggestions for other events and activities, please do let us know, to fotcinformation@gmail.com.

Volunteering sessions organised by Enable

Another very welcome feature of the year was the continued monthly volunteer sessions organised by Enable during the winter and spring, in which a number of FOTC members participated. Over the year, sessions included:

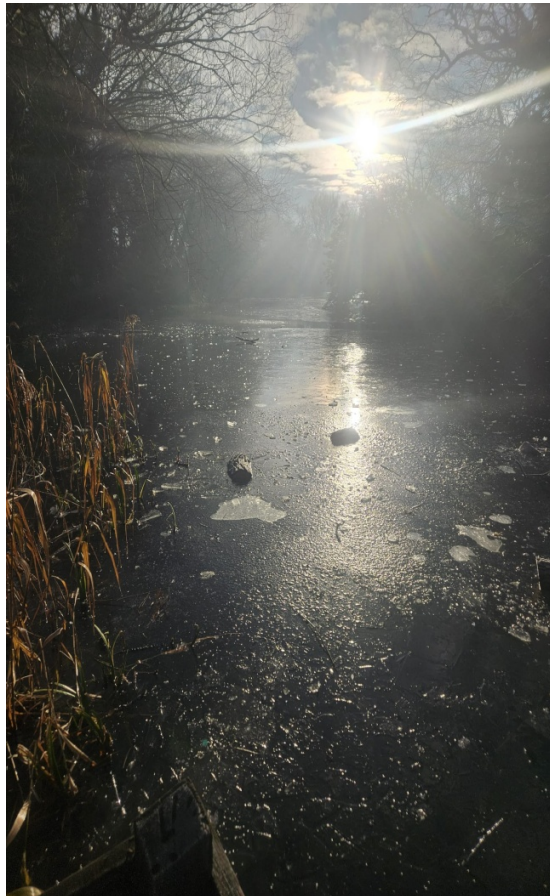
- Eco pond maintenance and willow cutting - clearing some of the self-set willow saplings which would dry out the ephemeral ponds.
- re-filling with woodchip the woodland path in the "sanctuary" by the lake that the volunteers built in 2023, and also stag beetle loggery creation.
- further work in the eco pond area, to thin out vegetation, removing some non-native species, and improving sightlines into the raised island area, among other things to reduce disturbance from antisocial behaviour
- planting whips of native thorn and shrub species on the Woodfield field.

- helping with mowing and baling at end-September, alongside the heavy horses brought to the Common by Enable. This was a great success, with the horses attracting a high amount of interest, including on national media.

We are very grateful to Enable for organising these sessions, and in particular to Mick, who was Enable's Parks Biodiversity Officer for most of these sessions. Mick has now left Enable, and we wish him all the best for the future. Enable are arranging a further series of volunteering sessions for the winter, and we look forward to participating in these.

2. Photos and other information about the Common

During the year we continued to run photo competitions for the Common for each season, with a good response. Congratulations to Katy, Graham, Alison and Elaine for these excellent winning photos!





We are also very grateful to Roy for his excellent photos and posts on our Facebook page about plants on the Common.

More generally, and as noted last year, we continue to be keen to develop the information that is available systematically about the Common and its plants, wildlife and natural history. One possible development that we have discussed is to develop nature and history walks on the Common - in leaflet form and on-line - for visitors to use.

FoTC members have worked with Enable on their project for biodiversity development and recording in the ecopond area.

3. Issues on the Common

During the year we have again been involved very considerably, along with the Tooting Common MAC, in discussions with Enable and Wandsworth Council of issues on the Common.

We have informed and consulted FOTC members on these various matters during the year: the following list below pulls the information together. **Necessarily this list focuses mainly on matters which we think have needed attention and improvement. We do though acknowledge and welcome the many positive developments in the management of the Common in recent years.**

Arrangements for liaison have been affected by the Council's decision, in the context of their new contract with Enable, to withdraw from direct communication and discussions about greenspaces, and that all communication should be routed via Enable. We have to say that we have considerable reservations, which we have registered with the Council, about this and some other aspects of the new management arrangements. It will be important to see how these new arrangements work out in practice, in terms of the effect on the Common, which of course is our main concern.

Waterlogging We have been raising for several years the poor condition of a number of paths, including those which get heavily waterlogged in winter, particularly the area on the "Capital Ring" path (between the Bedford Hill crossing and the Lido car park) to the NE of the lake, which is often completely impassable; and also areas on and by the Triangle field. We have been concerned at the lack of progress. We therefore now welcome the Council's plans - certainly from the general description on the Council's engagement hub - to deal with flooding in both these areas, and the allocations of £300,000 to each of these. We think the development of these plans does at least partly reflect our raising of the issues. We would encourage the Council to take forward work on these two areas as soon as is possible. The very dry summer has masked problems of waterlogging but these will appear again with wetter weather.

We did earlier raise considerable concern, for some time, about what was the worn and muddy section of path onto the Triangle field from the Culverden path, between the Triangle playground and the railway line. There was a safeguarding issue that when the path was waterlogged some people took a shortcut through the children's playground, which was clearly inappropriate. We therefore welcome the work which Enable carried out during the year, financed by the Council, to deal with this problem and resurface the path.

Condition of paths As well as waterlogging,, a number of other paths are in poor condition, some very worn. We welcome the work now on hand to improve and widen the path parallel to Rastell Avenue, but a number of other paths require attention (with wide worn verges), including that by Streatham and Clapham High School and the Spinney, and we will continue to raise these.

We have also raised with the Council that the main pedestrian cycle shared path has a number of cracks and variable surface which could be dangerous to cyclists and others. The Council have previously said that these cracks do not meet the threshold for repairs by Highways Dept, but we think the cracks are serious and do warrant action.

We also raised with the Council the very patchy and unsightly repairs to several tarmac paths. We also raised concern at the use of tarmac on a non-tarmac path: it is welcome that the Council agreed and removed this tarmac; and said that in future there will be liaison between Highways and the "parks" side of the Council as to what are appropriate materials for resurfacing.

Cycling We have continued to raise with the Council the issue of some e-bikes travelling far too fast, and dangerously, with the strong likelihood of an accident to them or pedestrians.

While we recognise that solutions to this are not straightforward, this is an important issue. We have also continued to raise that, although cycling is only currently permitted on the pedestrian cycle shared path, a considerable amount of cycling takes place elsewhere.

Further to earlier discussions, we held useful discussions with Council staff on the intended 'quiet cycle' route from Drewstead Road to Sternhold Avenue route, and are happy with the plans for this. Construction work on the route as such will be starting soon. Consultation about making it a 'quiet cycle' route will be held next year. We have also continued to say that there is a strong case for allowing cycling on the path between Tooting Bec Road and the Lido (not in the Council's consultation plans, but they may reinstate it for the future).

Signage We have expressed continuing concern at the very long delay in taking forward the earlier review of signage. Further proposals have now been received. We have commented on these and also suggested new and better signage about the pedestrian cycle shared path, and additional signage on the speed limit.

New Strategic Management Plan We are continuing to work with the MAC, Enable and the Council on a new 10-year Strategic Management Plan to replace the current Plan produced in 2015. The start to the process was delayed and there remains a considerable amount still to be done. It will be important to get the new Plan right.

Triangle site development We engaged with the Council's "Our Triangle Time" engagement in December 2024. On the plans now set out by the Council we welcome the plans for reducing flooding (as above), and the other "Transforming Tooting Triangle" projects, certainly from the general descriptions given. We have suggested that it would be helpful to give some priority in the plans to providing publicly available toilet(s) - a point we have been raising for some years. We have also said it will be important that the plans for the Triangle are seen as part of the plans for the Common as a whole, with the Triangle seen as part of the Common and not separate from it.

Eco-pond area We have continued to discuss with Enable the "eco-pond" area in the south-west corner of the Common. We welcome the work which has been carried out, including by the volunteer sessions which among other things has restored the ephemeral ponds. This has greatly improved the area, and it now looks well cared for. We welcome Enable's further plans, including for interpretation boards.

Council's new events policy We commented during the year on the Council's proposed new events policy. Whilst we welcomed some aspects of the new policy (including expressing the number of large events in terms of "event days" rather than "events") we considered that the policy still allowed for more large events (over 2,500) than reasonable. At a deputation on 14 July we also sought an assurance that the Council's decision that there would be no large events on Wandsworth Common would not lead to increased pressure for more large events (and certainly not for more than reasonable) on Tooting Common. The Council did not provide this assurance, although they suggested that this would be unlikely since there had not previously been large events on Wandsworth Common. We are disappointed that the Council did not provide the assurance, nor adopt the other comments we made.

"Country on the Common" event We consulted FOTC members on Enable's proposal for this large (c 6,000) event. There were a range of views, including strongly-held views both for and against. Based on the balance of views, we supported the application, but emphasised strongly the need for mitigating action to counter the potential adverse effects of the event on the Common and other users (including noise). We also emphasised that this event (if approved) should not set a precedent for similar or larger events in future. In the event the event (5-6 July) went off with no major problems - in part because the ground was very dry so little danger of damage - and was generally well received, though there were some expressions of concern about noise. We and the MAC requested certain information from Enable about the event and are awaiting some, including on complaints about noise. It is likely that Enable will apply to stage a similar (or possibly larger) event in 2026.

Water fountains We raised with the Council earlier in the year the need for better cleaning of the fountains, though this appears to have improved. We have raised concerns that the drinking water spouts on both fountains appear to have been out of action for nearly 6 months, including during the very hot weather. We have also queried the move of the fountain by the café to a new location at the back of the café. While a move was appropriate (the previous location was very waterlogged), the new location is out of the way, and not visible to people on the main footpath by the cafe. This new, rather remote, location could pose safety issues for women (including joggers and dog walkers) when the cafe is closed (and the area hence deserted) and with the darker evenings and nights.

Trees We have raised with Enable that a number of newly planted trees, including 10 between the café and the ecopond area, have died, probably due to a lack of watering. This is of concern, though we understand that the watering regime for new trees should be improved in the new Council contract to be issued next year.

Enable and the tree team have kept us informed on plans to fell trees where this is considered necessary, usually for public safety reasons, and we have in turn informed members and others. In most cases, the felling appears warranted since the tree was diseased and in danger of falling. We have however raised concern about the felling of a (dead) tree where kestrels had nested earlier in the year.

Removal of planted whips on Woodfield field We raised strong concern with the Council at the destruction by the ground maintenance (Krinkels) staff, during mowing work on the Woodfield field, of the whips of native shrubs which had been planted earlier during one of the volunteering sessions (as above). The Council apologised on behalf of Krinkels for what was apparently an inadvertent error by an operative in reading a map. Krinkels will pay for the purchase of replacement whips. We have stressed to the Council the need for operatives to be clear about the work they are supposed they are to do, and to follow instructions accurately.

Furzedown Lodge We have continued to request updates from the Council on plans for Furzedown Lodge, a Grade II listed building. It is of great concern that this building, on the Common, has been boarded up and in urgent - and increasing - need of repair for a very long time. While the Council have reached an agreement with a prospective tenant to carry out repairs and to use it as a cafe and restaurant, the process of submitting a revised planning

application (following an earlier refusal) is taking an excessively long time. We are considering whether the issue can be raised through other routes.

Streatham and Clapham High School: floodlighting application We commented on the planning application by the School for the installation of floodlights on their sports pitches, indicating some serious concerns, particularly on the effect of the lighting on neighbouring parts of the Common..

Swan Sanctuary We are grateful to the Swan Sanctuary for looking after wildfowl on the lake, including their care of the swan family in 2024. To reflect this we have made a donation of £200 to the Sanctuary.

Green telecommunications cabinet by Lido car park We have been seeking for a considerable time to get clarification from the Council on the legal basis for this installation...The Council have now just accepted that they should have sought consent from the Planning Inspectorate, and say they will now do so retrospectively.

Other issues which we have continued to raise, or keep a watch on during the year include:

- **wet area under railway bridge** We have continued to raised with Enable the very wet area, and apparent water leakage, under the railway bridge near Drewstead Cottages, with the walls looking in very poor condition. Enable have raised with Network Rail, who have the responsibility for the bridge.

- **renovation of Lakeside children's playground** We have kept in touch with Enable's plans for the renovation of this playground.

- **cutting of Culverden path hedge by flail** We discussed with Enable their plans for a major cut of the Culverden path hedge by flail machine

- **painting over of tiles to remove graffiti** we have been raising concerns with the Council about the inappropriate use of grey paint to cover over graffiti for a long time, with (as yet) no substantive response.

4. Recognition of Tooting Common We are very pleased that Tooting Common has had its "Green Flag" status renewed again for this year, and has also again received Gold in "London in Bloom - Common of the Year". This is further welcome recognition of what an excellent greenspace the Common is.

5. Links with partner organisations We continue to work closely with the MAC, including through the joint quarterly meetings with Enable. We also work closely with the Woodfield Project, and also seek to maintain our links with the Friends groups and MACs for other greenspaces in Wandsworth.

6. FOTC Committee: I am very grateful to the FOTC Committee for all their work throughout the year, which is vital to maintaining and developing our work.

At the Balham and Tooting Community Association 'Community Heroes' award event in April, Mike received a "Highly Commended" award for his role on the FOTC litter picks and keeping the Common litter-free. Many congratulations to Mike on this! The "Friends of Tooting Common team" also received a "Highly Commended" award, for our role in looking after the Common.

7. Communications We are seeking to reimplement our website to provide a clearer and improved facility. We are also planning to replace our noticeboard on the Common (by the café) which looks dowdy.

8. A request! As before, there is a lot happening on the Common, and we hope that next year we will be able to develop our work and activities further. However, in order to do this we do continue to need involvement by members, in different ways - joining the committee, helping to lead a walk or other event, or helping with FOTC's administrative or publicity work, particularly on website and IT issues. We would particularly welcome a Minutes Secretary. If you would be interested in being involved, in any way, **we would be very glad to hear from you!** (Email address is fotcinformation@gmail.com)

Many thanks for your interest in and concern for Tooting Common.

Peter Ramell
Chair, Friends of Tooting Common
November 2025