



FRIENDS OF BARNES COMMON

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OUTDOOR LEARNING ON BARNES COMMON AND VINE ROAD

FORWARD

The main aims of the Friends of Barnes Common are Conservation, Education and Community. We believe that the more we understand, the more we enjoy – and that the best way to learn is to do. All of our activities have a strong practical aspect and as much time as possible is spent out of doors, either on the Common or at Vine Road.

We also know that these two green spaces - each with very different needs - sit within one of the most densely populated areas in the world. They both require sensitive and knowledgeable management to ensure habitats are enhanced and impact minimised. The challenges faced by urban and rural green spaces are vastly different and require different management. For us, wear and tear are of particular concern, especially during the autumn and winter months when areas often vary from flood to frost and back again. We are also custodians of Lowland Acid Grassland, a nationally scarce and fragile habitat.

Our education and conservation management programmes adopt a strong policy of working with the seasons to minimise impact, to give consideration to nesting times, and also to give the land time to heal. Throughout, we provide training and information, and aim to instil a strong sense of responsibility for the space we use, along with respect for everyone – and everything – that uses it. Within our education and community activities, we try to do this in several ways:

Friends of Barnes Common-led Activities

- Arts and Science Club: weekly after-school group for key stage 2+ meets term time Spring through Autumn. These sessions take place both on the Common and at Vine Road. This not only gives varied opportunity for learning, it also minimises impact on our more fragile habitats.
- Duke of Edinburgh volunteering: In consideration of our conservation management work and exam dates, our DoE volunteers are with us from October – December and become involved in hands-on conservation work, as well as having the opportunity to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with our younger members.
- Engaging with individual schools: we are always delighted to build links with local schools. Our close collaboration with a local Special Needs Senior School has led to the use of Barnes Common as an identified part of their own curriculum, school staff leading regular weekly walks and activities out on the Common, and bespoke science sessions led by FoBC staff. In addition, their regular visits identified a need and directly influenced the conservation development of 'Paddock Wood'.
- Little Sprouts: Early Years section of our Community Food Growing project meets term time Spring to Autumn and is largely based at Vine Road.
- Outside Term Time (OTT) Sessions: regular environmental sessions for children and adults during school holidays give a bit more time to explore through art, science, and performance, and take place at a variety of sites throughout the Common and at Vine Road.
- Walks and Talks: throughout the year staff and external experts lead a varied range of walks, suitable for all abilities and interests, and also give external talks to groups that have included FiSH in Barnes, and the Geographical Association national conference 2017, held in Guildford, Surrey.
- Yaffles: organised nature session for family groups that meets on the first Sunday of the month between October and June. Activities take place out and about on the Common.
- Teacher Training (in collaboration with local universities): We give staff and student teachers hands-on opportunities and ideas about how outdoor learning - particularly off-site visits – can be used to help deliver the national curriculum and instil resilience and enquiry-based thinking. In this way, as the students move through their teaching careers, we hope some of these ideas will find

their way to thousands of children and young people, to be adapted and used within their own local open spaces.

Independent Organised Activities

- Forest Schools:
 - FoBC welcomes limited use of agreed areas of the Common for forest schools. We have a good working relationship with the groups involved, and closely monitor impact and numbers. We identify ways they may encourage the children to enjoy nature responsibly by keeping them informed of opportunities and issues, and agree appropriate activities with the school operators and staff. For example, the Forest School explains to their groups why fires are not permitted in Summer.
 - We believe we have a balance between welcoming groups wanting to engage with this space, and impact – current numbers of little feet are helping us to keep down bramble and bracken! To keep this balance, for the foreseeable future, we are not accepting any further regular groups onto the Common or increasing numbers in any way.
 - Striking a balance is a wide-ranging issue. We are acutely aware that excessive wear and tear at other sites has led to the closure of some forest schools and that it is the current policy of Richmond Council not to permit any new forest schools on its open spaces.
- School, Home-school and Community Group Visits:
 - We work closely with school groups, and carefully monitor both the number of visits and the numbers attending each visit. We aim for the best possible learning experience, and to share the story of our space, its varied habitats and associated flora and fauna, with a care to ensure sensitive habitat is not adversely affected.

We welcome enquiries about any of our existing programmes and are also happy to chat and try to create bespoke sessions wherever possible. Please contact Sharon to find out more.

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