



## OUTDOOR LEARNING ON BARNES COMMON AND VINE ROAD

April 2019

The aims of the Friends of Barnes Common are conservation, education and community engagement. We believe that the more we understand, the more we enjoy – and that the best way to learn is to do. 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. Within this, we strive to actively embed our SLOWER ethos (Sustainable, Local, Organic, Working together, Environmental awareness, and Resilience (reduce-reuse-recycle)). Every programme is designed to give time to explore and discover through art and science, as well as developing construction and technology skills.

Barnes Common, a designated nature reserve, and Vine Park, an amenity Recreation Ground, both sit within one of the most densely populated areas in the world. The challenges faced by urban and rural green spaces are vastly different and require sensitive and knowledgeable management to ensure habitats are enhanced and impact minimised. As custodians of Lowland Acid Grassland, a nationally scarce and fragile habitat, we are acutely aware of wear and tear, especially during the autumn and winter months when areas can vary from flood to frost and back again.

Our education and conservation management programmes adopt a strong policy of working with the seasons to minimise impact, awareness of nesting times, and aim to give the land time to heal. We provide ongoing training and information and encourage a sense of responsibility and respect for everyone – and everything – that shares these spaces.

Outdoor Learning Opportunities with Friends of Barnes Common:

- Duke of Edinburgh: dovetailing with nesting and exam times, volunteers are with us between October and December. They have opportunity to help in our conservation and education activities.
- Holiday Sessions: Early Years Art in Nature and Crafty science for older children takes place either out on the Common or at Vine Road. Holiday Sprouts is all about growing and happens at Vine Road.
- Little Sprouts: term-time early years strand to Community Food Growing project, based at Vine Road.
- Schools: Increasingly, we are delighted to receive requests for advice and guidance about linking outdoor and classroom learning. Links with a local Special Needs Senior School led to nature walks on both sites now firmly embedded within their own curriculum and the conservation development of 'Paddock Wood'.
- Teacher Training/CPD. Working with local teacher training universities, to offer hands-on possibilities for linking outdoor learning and the national curriculum. Working with educators at the start of their career and with experienced teachers, the aim is that these concepts can be adapted to any local space, wherever this may be, influencing many more students over time.
- Walks and Talks: throughout the year staff and external experts lead a varied range of social and informative walks. External talks to both local and national groups have included FiSH in Barnes, and the Geographical Association national conference.
- Work Parties: take the form of conservation work out on the Common, food growing activities at Vine Road and community involvement with the Goods Yard Orchard on the Common.
- Yaffles: monthly nature activities for family groups held between October and June. Activities take place out and about on the Common.

## External Groups

- Weekly term-time school and nursery visits:
  - FoBC has welcomed limited use of agreed areas of the Common and Vine Road. We have a good working relationship with the groups involved, and closely monitor impact and numbers. We identify ways in which these groups may encourage the children to enjoy nature responsibly by keeping them informed of opportunities and issues as they arise and agreeing appropriate activities with the school operators and staff.
  - Striking a balance is a wide-ranging issue. We are 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.
  - We believe we have a good balance between welcoming groups wanting to engage with this space and managing impact. In one area, 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.
- School, Home-school and Community Group Visits:
  - We work closely with school groups, monitoring the number of visits and numbers attending. We aim for the best possible learning experience, and to share the story of our space, its varied habitats, flora and fauna, bearing in mind our duty to ensure sensitive habitat is not adversely affected.

We welcome enquiries about any of our existing programmes and are happy to chat and try to create bespoke sessions wherever possible. Contact our [Outdoor Learning Manager](#) to find out more.