

## Gardening Group Report for ASPRA AGM

Since the last AGM, the gardening group have been very active in maintaining the two flower beds in Bingham Park. Gardening sessions were held on Saturday mornings each month with a break in the winter. Planned sessions from March 2020 onwards have been suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is hoped that once the current lockdown is lifted, that the gardening group will be able to resume its work.

There is a core of regular gardeners. They are supported each month by those who are not able to commit on a regular basis but contribute when they are available. It has been great to welcome some new volunteers to the group who have moved into the area and to give guidance to other volunteers who are new to gardening.

The two flower beds are becoming established with perennial plants and bulbs. Monthly maintenance has involved weeding and pruning as well as filling in some bare areas with new plants. Local residents have continued to generously donate seed, cuttings and plants throughout the year. Some work has also taken place on the beds along the entrance from Bingham Road and it is planned to do more work as time permits.

An important factor in maintaining the flower beds, is regular watering during dry periods. There has been a fantastic effort by a number of park users who watered plants using the hose linked to the water supply located in the old toilet block, as well as the water collected in the butt.

In order to encourage more bird life, a bird feeder station has been purchased and placed in the bed parallel to Carlyle Road. It has attracted birds and squirrels. A member of the gardening group has regularly topped up the feeders.

The gardening group has contacted some local uniformed groups offering to set aside an area for their young people to work towards gardening badges. Replies from the groups are awaited.

Members of the gardening group have been liaising with Croydon's Parks Department following a donation of thirty cherry trees as part of the Sakura Cherry Tree Project. This is an initiative to celebrate UK and Japan friendship in what should have been Olympic year. The park is only one of two selected in the borough and chosen due to its 'blossom impact'. Helen Lomasney, Trees and Woodlands Officer at Croydon Council stated that the park was selected as 'it is a wonderful small park located in the heart of Addiscombe which lends itself to the Sakura Cherry trees'. ASPRA members have drawn up a planting plan and will organise a celebratory tree planting event for the local community, hopefully later in 2020. A meeting due to take place in March with Helen Lomasney, was postponed due to lockdown measures. It will be rescheduled at an appropriate time.

A major piece of work for the gardening group was to respond to a request for more evidence about Bingham Park in respect of an application for 'Local Green Space' status.

The Government had introduced a planning classification of open space called 'Local Green Spaces'. The criteria to achieve this extra level of protection is very tough. Croydon Council and the local community were asked to prove to a Government Inspector that the park was demonstrably special and of particular significance to the community it serves.

ASPRA and individual residents had responded to the initial consultation in the Summer of 2019 but the evidence submitted was deemed insufficient to gain the additional protection. ASPRA responded to each of the points requiring additional information, and submitted its evidence document in March 2020. A significant number of residents also responded to the council. The outcome is awaited.

The gardening group has continued to receive praise from many park user groups for the work it has done to improve and maintain the flower beds.

The group now has its own dedicated email address [gardening@aspra.uk](mailto:gardening@aspra.uk) and welcomes enquires from anyone wishing to volunteer or to donate plants.

Lyn Simmons, ASPRA Gardening Group Coordinator