

## Gardening Group Report for ASPRA AGM 2021

The global pandemic, lockdowns and social distancing has had an impact on the ability of the gardening group to meet for organised gardening sessions in Bingham Park and the planned working party schedule was suspended.

When the group took over the management of the beds, the original planting scheme was to include perennials and bulbs to reduce the need for constant maintenance. Little did we know that the benefits of this strategy were invaluable during a pandemic!

Since the last AGM, there has been only one organised gardening session. A 'getting the beds ready for winter' was able to go ahead in October. However, individual members of the group and other park users have done sterling work throughout the year carrying out a number of tasks including weeding, pruning, watering and adding bird food to the feeders. Donations of plants, and a small tree were received, as well as a donation to purchase bulbs. It was always intended that maintaining the flower beds was a community effort and this was certainly the case in 2020.

Just prior to the 2020 AGM 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. An acknowledgment was received but to date there has been no further update.

In January 2021, Croydon's Trees and Woodlands Officer advised that there was no funding available for the planting of the 30 sakura cherry trees planned for the park. Feedback was awaited from the Japanese Society as to whether the nursery could keep our quota of trees on their site until November 2021, so that funding could later be found. However, two weeks later the good news was received that funding had been secured and the Japanese Society had agreed to a delayed tree planting in November. A site meeting will take place in the summer to finalise the location of the trees and to start planning a tree planting ceremony.

Other information:

- The group co-ordinator has completed surveys on 'The Importance of Green Open Spaces during Covid 19' initiated by the University of Westminster and a survey conducted by Croydon Council focusing on the use of parks during lockdowns. 60% of respondents to the latter survey had discovered a new park during lockdown and 86% valued their parks even more since lockdown – which showed the important role parks play in people's wellbeing.
- Details of the gardening group have been sent to the John Whitgift Foundation who are compiling a list of community gardeners. To mark the Foundation's 425th anniversary, they are on a mission 'to get Croydon growing – for a healthier, happier Croydon, for all'.
- Croydon Council has advised of a 15% staff reduction and the group's contact regarding park maintenance has taken early retirement. The group were advised that there be a change in how parks and green spaces will be managed, with more emphasis on parks cleansing and grass cutting.

### Gardening sessions for 2021

The following Saturday gardening sessions are planned, and it is hoped that these will be able to go ahead successfully during the year. New volunteers are always welcomed and no previous experience necessary.

17 April	28 August
29 May	18 September
19 June	23 October
31 July	

Lyn Simmons, Gardening Group Co-ordinator