

## HILLINGDON FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

### Secretary's Report for the year ended 31 August 2014

As our last year came to an end we were waiting to learn what Friends of the Earth's next major campaign was to be. In mid October FoE announced that this was to be "Sunny Schools" (later called "Run on Sun"). We were pleased, as this had been the choice of Geoff, and we registered our interest in the campaign.

Long standing members of the Group will be familiar with the regular pattern of our activities depending on whether the Ickenham Festival has been held in the year.



Our visit to the Glebe Allotments in June

2014 was one of those years and the month of June saw Festival events prominent in our activities.

We put together another Festival Treasure Hunt and this time were able to include clues around parts of the new Ickenham Park development and Ickenham Marshes. Some members paid another visit to the Glebe Allotments for their open evening, when we met up with members who are allotment holders, bought plants, enjoyed refreshments and inspected the bee hive that had recently been placed on the site.

For the first time Rosemary and Doug's garden featured as one of the open gardens during Festival Week and they provided a delicious spread of food. Generously, they donated half of the money raised to Hillingdon FoE. During the afternoon Doug and Rosemary were presented with the Swakeleys Shield in recognition of their work for the Ickenham Festival and other local organisations, including Hillingdon FoE.

The climax of the Festival is the Gala Day and we set up a stall on the sports field at Vyners School, which was hosting the event following the refusal of the new Swakeleys House management to allow the Gala Day festivities, concert and firework display to take place in its traditional setting. The Gala Day was, we felt, a good opportunity to launch our campaign on "Run on Sun". A national Day of Action was set for the following Saturday but the materials for that day arrived in time to be used at Vyners. Our stall was alongside that for Rukiga and we were able to link the campaign for solar panels to be set up in British schools with the work that is being done to support the Rukiga project in Uganda, including the supply of D lights. Life was made difficult because of the limited number of members there were to staff the stall. For the same reason HFoE could not take part in the Gala Procession this year. We were able to set up a display of solar powered equipment, including a water pump and fan, and Gavin loaned us a D-light. He also spent some time on the stall, as did Gus, one of our newer recruits, and it was evident that they were very successful in engaging with people to explain the potential for solar power, particularly the money that schools could save by fitting solar panels on the roof. Generally, however, we did not find "Run on Sun" attracted much attention from visitors to the Gala, and the torrential rain in the morning did not help!

Although we had signed up for this new campaign, we continued to work on bees. The Bee Cause Campaign had moved on to the next and possibly final phase, entitled “Bee & Bee” and aimed at encouraging people to help bees by making bee hotels, planting nectar and pollen-rich plants and ensuring a source of safe water is available for them. Hillingdon FoE had been demonstrating these three elements on our stalls from the early stages of the campaign but FoE has now brought them all together in an attractive information pack that includes clear instructions for creating a simple bee hotel. We decided that this booklet told people most of what they needed to know in order to create a bee habitat in their gardens and we handed them out to interested visitors to our stalls, while suggesting useful plants they could grow in their garden, in patio containers, even in window boxes or hanging baskets. At the same time we asked people to sign up to create a “Bee and Bee”. The pledges were to help FoE build up an online map of the safe havens for bees being created across the country and also to show the Government the strength of feeling for saving our bees through a strong and effective Bee Action Plan.



Promoting the FOE Bee Campaign

A draft National Pollinator Strategy was put out to public consultation but Friends of the Earth considered it could be much better and they produced a petition highlighting its weaknesses. By the time the consultation came to an end on 2 May more than 25,000 signatures had been collected by local groups and other bee supporters. However, the launch date for the final Strategy has slipped several times and we now risk missing the opportunity to create bee-friendly habitats in time for the new year’s growing season.



Ruislip Wood Festival in May

The Bee Cause campaign featured on our stalls at the Ruislip Farmers Market in October, Transition Heathrow’s birthday party in March, the Ruislip Woods Festival in May, Ickenham Festival Gala Day and Hayes Carnival. We have been able to bring on more bee-friendly plants for sale at these events and it was particularly pleasing when people at both the Ruislip Woods Festival and Hayes Carnival said they were coming back to buy more plants from us as those they had bought the previous year had grown well and had been smothered by bees. At the Group Meeting in March we showed “More than Honey”, an award- winning and beautiful film highlighting the plight of bees worldwide that I had seen at its special London FoE screening in London in September. We have our own copy of the DVD if anyone would like to borrow it.

We included bees as well as the Run on Sun campaign when we joined Transition Heathrow at the Hayes Carnival in July. In fact we saw our friends at Transition several times during the year. Some of us joined them for their 4<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party celebrations on 1<sup>st</sup> March, taking our bee information and seeds to help visitors sow their own seeds. They were very keen for HFoE to be part of their eco-village at the

Carnival and although there were only two of us able to go along, the fact that one of these was Andy, with his large van, meant we were able to go along and set up gazebos and tables, plants, displays and lucky dip as well as supporting Transition Heathrow and providing materials and frames for their picture frame decoration workshop. Once again, we were unable to use the event as a major fundraiser and I am sure the lack of helpers on our stall here, and at the other events where we hope to raise money, has a real impact on our ability to encourage people to support us.

We visited Grow Heathrow twice more, in May when he held our monthly meeting there and on 15<sup>th</sup> August, when a number of us made an early start to get to Sipson in time to support our friends on the morning set for their eviction. In the event, the bailiffs did not turn up and the day was one of celebration, music, speeches of support and defiance and tasty food. A bonus for Hillingdon FoE was that our members and banner appeared in both BBC and ITV News broadcasts on that day. As I write Transition Heathrow are still at the Vineries, continuing their work of maintaining the land's productivity and supporting the Heathrow villages, but their future there is uncertain, especially as the owner of the site, who did put in an appearance on eviction day, remains resistant to the offers to purchase or lease the land.



Supporting Transition Heathrow

As well as Transition Heathrow, and of course national Friends of the Earth, the Group is involved with other local environmental groups. We have not had the manpower to contribute practical help to the Ickenham Marshes Partnership but we donated a quantity of books to them as prizes for the Treasure Hunt held at the end of July. Rosemary and I have attended the Church Environmental Committee meetings held during the year and we can report that steady progress is being made in improving the green footprint of St. Giles and its Church Hall following energy audits carried out by Gavin and Rosemary's initiative to improve recycling. We are now in touch with the Holy Mowers who take care of the graveyard and the United Reformed Church to get them on board as well. In April I attended FoE's Regional Gathering in London but I have yet to visit their new offices in Stockwell after the move from Underwood Street at the beginning of March. However, Rosemary and I got glimpses of the office in the background when we took part in a tele conference that had been set up between local groups and Andy Atkins, FoE's Executive Director.



Fund Raising Lucky Dip

Hillingdon FoE took part as usual in the annual Ickenham Festival events. Our team enjoyed the Quiz in November and our stall at the Christmas Festive Evening featured a lucky dip and "smelly boxes" game that made it our most successful fundraiser of the year.

In all other respects the year's activities are as could be predicted. We met every month, at Christ Church on all but three occasions this year. The number of people attending meetings has not increased

and on a few occasions has been as few as four, which does not make for a productive evening of learning, discussion and environmental planning. Evenings involving special activities or outings are more popular. We enjoyed the hospitality of Transition Heathrow for our May meeting, selected Metro Piazza in Ruislip for our Christmas meal and in February we were among the first people to be given a tour of the very recently finished transformation of Graham and Jess's home to a splendid eco-house. Another visit during the summer when the lighter evenings would give enough time to observe the features on the outside of the property had to be postponed but will be re-arranged.

Sadly further illness among our members has been a feature this year that has had a serious impact on the number of activities Hillingdon FoE has been able to take part in and the extent to which we have been able to become involved. I wish everyone good health next year!

On a final point, some of you may remember Vaughan Rees, Co-ordinator of Hillingdon FoE in the early 1980s and one of the first people locally to erect solar panels on the roof of his home. Vaughan moved away but was in touch in June this year having been surprised to see on FoE's website that Hillingdon FoE still exists! His own news was that following a road accident some years ago he lost his sight and is now getting around with his second guide dog. Happily, he is still active on the environmental front, and at the moment is campaigning against fracking. Recently he came down to London to deliver a petition to 10 Downing Street.

Susan Sweeting  
17 November 2014