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BUZZ ARTICLE –THE FUTURE OF WATERLOW PARK

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Things are changing at Waterlow Park. Parks have no statutory protection and are the first to suffer when budgets are cut. Camden Council is facing major budget reductions as a result of central government cuts and over the last year has been in detailed discussion with park stakeholders about new ways of managing the park to generate income and cut costs.

The Waterlow Park Committee draws from local groups such as Friends of Waterlow Park, Lauderdale House Society, Highgate and Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Forums, Transition Dartmouth Park, and the Highgate Society. This is a transitional group charged with identifying the best organisational and management structure for the future management of the Park. Camden will still be a key player as it is the only trustee of the Waterlow Park Charity - set up when Sir Sydney gifted the park as a "garden for the gardenless" - but the committee hopes to have the influence both to steer Camden as the Park's Trustee and most importantly to capitalise on the Park's charitable status to help raise funds and maximise Park income.

So far the committee has been reviewing park assets. Two of the four park properties will be refurbished to a high standard and let on the private rental market for the highest possible rents, with all monies going back into the park. Work has started on the necessary renovation of Swain's Lane Lodge, and Dartmouth Park Lodge will follow. Lauderdale House, by far the most valuable asset in the park, having won funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Camden, is now fund-raising to complete its transformation. This has been a long and arduous process.

The biggest problem is the Park Centre as the planning restrictions on the building are tightly defined as "environmental education". While worthwhile, this does not easily generate income. As the Park Centre costs about £50,000 p.a. to run, this is a big slice of the Park's £350,000 p.a. budget. The Friends would like the Centre to be used more effectively for broader educational activities and will be putting proposals to Camden this Autumn.

The Committee is seeking savings in the maintenance regime as well as beginning to explore ways of increasing revenue, but it recognises that trusts and foundations will not want to replace public funding for the Park. So it seems inevitable that, like it or not, the Committee will be forced to come to local residents to ask for help in protecting our precious local asset.

We will need your support, your help in kind on our committee and (most of all) your money and fundraising skills! This year's "Lark In The Park" represents our first step on this path but with a budget cut of 20-30% anticipated for 2015-16, we are going to have to move quickly to safeguard our beautiful Park.