Open space’s history will become common knowledge

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Common Knowledge is being run by London-based non-profit organisation UP Projects who will be recruiting helpers of all ages from the local community to uncover the secrets of the 221-acre green space which is home to some 600 species of plants, trees and wildlife.

Working closely with Wandsworth Council’s parks department and local libraries the volunteers will trace the area’s history from the 1870s - when the land was changed from agricultural use to public recreation - up to more recent times.

Local people made use of the common in a number of ways including animal grazing, collecting wild fruit and wood, and digging gravel. The hollows on the Common, which accommodate one of the present day running tracks, are a result of gravel extraction. The habitat of today’s Tooting Common includes acid grassland, woodland, scrub and ponds. Records show that it supports a wide variety of woodland birds for an inner London site.

The 18-month project, led by creative facilitator and artist Jacques Nimki, will set up a volunteer group to be known as the Guardians of Common Knowledge or GOCK alongside a youth team or Y-GOCK. Having researched local historical and wildlife facts the volunteers will then help to run creative workshops with local schools and community groups. This project will also draw upon the existing expertise and knowledge of local heritage and historical groups to create an exciting new opportunity for involving local people with their local heritage.

The volunteers will also help design new signage and a range of information panels for installation on the Common and create an exhibition to share the information discovered. This will be displayed at local venues, including the Pump House Gallery, Battersea, and at local libraries.

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF London Sue Bowers, said: “This project gives local people of all ages an opportunity to develop conservation skills and knowledge about a much-loved green space. They will be able to spread this information to others and help protect the Common in future.”

For UP Projects, Director Emma Underhill, said: “Common Knowledge seeks to widen access to heritage skills and enhance people’s knowledge and understanding of the unique qualities and ecological value that Tooting Common provides. The project offers creative and informal learning opportunities to be enjoyed by the local community and visitors alike. Learning through participation and volunteering is at the heart of all of our work, and we are delighted to be partnering HLF and the Wandsworth Parks, Arts, and Heritage teams.”

Notes for Editors

• Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 30,000 projects, allocating £4.7billion across the UK, with £868 million of that in London.

Further information

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