

In the 18th of a series of articles profiling Wanstead's local community heroes, photojournalist **Carole Edrich** introduces us to Ann Williams

Friends of the Earth



Angels in Wanstead

Ann Williams

I met Ann Williams with Diana Korchein, who you read about in this column last month. A co-coordinator of Wanstead and Woodford Friends of the Earth she is also standing down this year. I asked her why, and she agrees with Diana: "We just got tired. Last year, we said we'd give it one more year. We thought a lot of people would join because of the Seeds for Snaresbrook project, but not one of the people who asked for seeds has done so". Just writing that makes me feel rather sad.

Ann is an academic specialising in medical history who, after 20 years, took early retirement from West London Polytechnic when she moved to Wanstead in 1987. She is a tireless campaigner and told me as a joke that she was a member of rentamob in her youth. She joined Friends of the Earth in the 1970s, joined Greepeace when the first Rainbow Warrior was sunk and was so annoyed by what had happened she apparently gave quite a bit of money to a campaigner on the street.

Then in 1992, she became an active canvasser and later rejoined the Green Party because, as she says: "Diana kept raving on about it." She was one of the founder members of the local Friends of the Earth group in 2007 and then campaigned for the Greens before starting to collaborate with Diana, becoming joint coordinator with her and, as they both say, progressively acting as one before she went to Winchester with Diana for the most recent election, where they achieved above average votes for their party.

It's impossible to list all the activities and achievements Ann has initiated and participated in. She and her sister (who she moved to Wanstead to be closer to) participated in the M11 Chestnut Tree protest and protested in the mud in Leytonstone. A medical setback some time ago has not stopped her at all. With Diana she set up the Redbridge Sustainability Forum; a group that enabled those interested in sustainability, recycling and other charities to meet council officials regularly, understand what was going on and feed into the processes where appropriate. Unfortunately the money ran out after 18 months, which is what prompted Ann and Diana to set up Transition Redbridge. Ann has been on the steering committee for this body for the last eight months.

Ann is also on the board of the embryonic vegetable box scheme Organic Ilford. It was started by a woman who, on returning to live in Ilford, had become horrified by what had happened in her absence. The name was chosen because of the abbreviation OI! Diana says that Oi is also a Korean cucumber. Ann is the Chairman of the Bush Wood Allotment Society, which deals with Browning Road and Kings Passage and has had allotments there since 2000. She has also worked for Malston Street and the Community Gardeners for Transition Leytonstone.

In 2013, Ann and Diana (who I think of as the 'tireless two') successfully applied for an Olympic Legacy grant for the Seeds for Snaresbrook project. It took four months for the decision to be made, at which point it was almost too late to be able to get the seeds out for when they had planned! The idea was that residents and shopkeepers of the local community would get involved in seeding the tree pits with wildflowers. This would increase the bee population, give them more forage and also be attractive. Considering the area has about 1,200 trees, this was no small idea. The project has been successful all over the neighbourhood, particularly in Gordon Road, parts of Campridge Road and Halstead Road. Although the project is unofficially over, there are still seeds left. A number of people are still applying for seeds for community spaces and the Tireless Two have decided to throw applications open further. So if you want wildflower seeds for your gardens or for patches of public land that is lying fallow, contact them as they're happy to help. Right now is a good time to sew, as is September.

So apply for the seeds, consider joining the local Greens or Friends of the Earth or just turn up at the meeting to see what they're up to. Ann says, once you get into campaigning you'll feel much more alive. Try it and see for yourself.

For more information on Wanstead and Woodford Friends of the Earth and the Seeds for Snaresbrook project, visit **foe.co.uk/wanstead** or call **07747 014 235**

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