

London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network

The London network of Friends and User Groups for all green open spaces

- * Protecting and promoting green spaces*
- * Improving and enhancing the quality of green spaces*
- * Expanding the amount of green space generally*
- * Seeking adequate resources for green spaces (capital and revenue)*
- * Improving staffing and management*
- * Ensuring the involvement of Friends/Users groups as partners in the management of their parks and green spaces*

Report of LFGN meeting, Monday 21st March 2010

Committee Room 2 City Hall

Attended: Colin Cooper [*took minutes*] (Richmond Environmental Network, Richmond); Alan Cornish (Friends of Wanstead Park, Redbridge, managed by City of London); Dorothy Bell (Friends of Loughborough Park, Lambeth); Lloyd Leon (Friends of Loughborough Park, Lambeth); Anthea Masey (Friends of Loughborough Park, Lambeth); Paul McLoughlin (Friends of Rapael and Lodge Farm Parks, Havering); Dave Morris [*chaired*] (Friends of Lordship Rec + Haringey Friends of Parks Forum, Haringey); Phil Butler (Friends of Dagnam Park, Havering + Campaign for the Protection of Rural England); Lois Amos (Friends of Bedford Park, Havering); Ann Sayer (Teddington Society + Friends of Bushy & Home Parks, Richmond); Annie Chipchase (Hackney Marshes User Group + Hackney Parks Forum, Hackney); David Lambing (Friends of South Park, Hammersmith & Fulham); Linda Massey (Friends of Boston Manor, Hounslow); John Godfrey (Kew Society, Richmond); Monica Mitchell (Sydenham Wells Park Improvement Group, Lewisham); Jenny Neal (Friends of Ravensbury Park, Merton); Hilary Jarrett (Friends of Mayow Park, Lewisham); Ron Lynn (Friends of Jubilee Gardens, Lambeth); Peter Eversden (Community network in Hounslow & Ealing, + London Forum of Amenity & Civic Societies); Annie Hart (Friends of Hervey Road Sports Field, Greenwich); Anna Woollen (London Parks and Green Spaces Forum); Tony Leach (London Parks and Green Spaces Forum) **Apologies:** Lucy Roots (Friends of Queen's Wood, Haringey); Janet Davies (Friends of Upminster Park, Havering); Simon Hemsley - (Tooting Commons MAC/Friends of Tooting Common, Wandsworth); Hugh Holden (Bristol Parks Forum, Bristol); Denise (Friends of Bury Lodge Park, Enfield); Val Bryant (Richmal Crompton Fields, Bromley); Joan Catterall (Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum, Ealing); Linda Trew (Friends of King George's Playing Field, Havering); Ian Woodward (Friends of Ainslie and Larks Woods, Waltham Forest); Christine Farrell (Friends of Waterlow Park, Camden); Robin Brown (Friends of Lake Farm and Minet Country Parks, Hillingdon)

1. Introductions and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting and ensured everyone had the appropriate documents.

2. Minutes of the last meeting (January 25th) + any matters arising which are not on the agenda

- a. Noted a number of those attending this meeting hadn't attended previous meetings, so active involvement and networking through the LFGN is still continuing to expand.
- b. Minutes of the last meeting agreed as an accurate record
- c. No matters arising (at this point)

3. Updates from each borough present

a. Richmond upon Thames

Richmond Environmental Network - The Council is consulting on developing a new Open Spaces Strategy for the next ten years. REN is providing an opportunity for the group to input into the strategy's development through our Environmental Groups' Forum (a former Friends Forum which has been expanded to include other environmental groups such as amenity groups, sustainability groups etc.). They wish to see that it is a real consultation rather than being tokenistic. REN have been busy supporting a new friends group, the Friends of Ham Lands, and aiding a another friends group reforming after experiencing some difficulties.

Teddington Society - Is an amenity society. Ann leads the riverside and open space group within the Society.

Kew Green - In the course of forming a friends group as a subgroup of the Kew Society. In general, thought Richmond Parks looked pretty good.

b. Redbridge

Friends of Wanstead Park, and City of London (conservators) of Wanstead Park. Managed by City of London. Not aware of other local friends groups. Park now placed on the 'site at risk' register after community intervention - this seemed to wake the owners up a little. Any consultation only seems to involve the free holders but not users and stakeholders - Friends aiming to change all that.

c. Lambeth

Friends of Loughborough Park - doing very well, developing a plan and report by the end of this month. Thinking of taking on adjacent green space. Discussing constitution. Some links with other local Friends

groups. Lots of other parks in the borough getting Heritage Lottery funding but others are being neglected. Hopes for the park to turn around.

Friend of Jubilee Gardens established since the abolition of the GLC. The group previously ran under the name Queens Walk Park. In continuous battle to incorporate a public car park near Waterloo Station. The British Film Institute has developed plans to build on the car park. Some of the area is now been designated as Metropolitan Open Land.

d. Havering

Havering Friends of Parks Forum Having a Parks Forum this Saturday. Council currently runs the Forum, and decides on whether local friends group gets official status. Council moves the goal posts, giving annual milestones, and monthly ones. 10 play sites being refurbished and another 12 this year. The rep present will report back about the LFGN to the Havering Forum.

e. Hackney

Parks Users Forum has been established a number of years. Had an officer that was paid to undertake admin, but funding has now been cut. New Parks Development Officer. Council setting up a protocol on working with groups. New groups setting up around food growing. Lots of Olympics works being undertaken, some involving users groups. However, there's an unhappiness with the consultation. Hackney now has a Biodiversity Officer (which previously it didn't), which is very useful. Hackney Marshes has Metropolitan status which is endangered on being developed on the fringe.

f. Hounslow

Hounslow Friends of Parks Forum Now have a new friends forum about 15 groups. LFGN chair attended the founding meeting. The forum meetings will move around the borough and be hosted by different Friends Groups so that they can all get to understand each others' issues/spaces. Will be an opportunity for groups to share information without land managers being present. Need to link with Ealing Friends groups (through sharing responsibility for Gunnersbury Park).

g. Ealing

Gunnersbury Park failed to get the Butterfly House as it was moved from Syon House. Issues with the Council not investing money and buildings at risk. Council proposing to sell off part of the park to pay for the rest - example Crystal Palace Park. Ealing have taken some lead in Gunnersbury, new proposal going to the Council's Cabinet on events in parks, brought on by the condition of the ground after visits by Zippos Circus, which has ultimately ended in them being banned. Ealing Council give money to the ward Forums; these include s106 'planning

gain' and capital funding and they distribute money to groups. A lead taken by Friends of Dukes Meadows, lots of groups go to them for support. Issues with rowers parking on green spaces and issues with grass.

h. Hammersmith & Fulham

Friends of South Park There is an existing Friends of Parks Forum. Consultation doesn't always take account of the input from the Friends Groups.

i. Lewisham

Friends of Mayow Park have been running since 1970 - park was quite run down. Things started to change on the arrival of the Green Flag scheme. The management of the park has been outsourced to Glendale who it is believed don't even pay minimum wage and they seem to know very little about horticulture. The Borough runs a Lewisham Parks Forum. Friends of Mayow Park have good relations with the local Sydenham Society. A charity has taken on a nursery on the edge of the park - the head of the charity is an avid cricket fan and through this has brought in external funding for the park. The charity is training unemployed people in horticulture.

Sydenham Wells Glendale have been chosen again to manage the park. The park has a Green Flag.

j. Merton

Friends of Ravensborough Park Started November 2004. Green Flags seem to suck all attention and funding. There are a few friends groups in the borough but no borough forum. The Council is reorganising and losing staff in the Leisure dept. This will affect advice on fund raising. Active warden group but very stretched. Bits of parks are being sold off to fund improvement works. Parts of the park are being developed into a medical centre and nursery. Loss of special trees in the park. The group has been applying for funding. Regular core of volunteers but they are taking part on the Wandle Festival to get wider engagement.

k. Greenwich

Friends of Hervey Road Sports Field, and Greenwich Friends of Parks Forum Friends Groups in 20 parks, with a strong Forum. Waiting for draft management plan to be published. Looking for 'Olympic legacies 2012' trees to be planted in the autumn and opportunities for outdoor gyms and refurbishment play spaces. There is a Greenwich Wildlife Advisory Group. Hervey Road Sports Field campaign to save an area in Blackheath.

l. Haringey

Haringey Friends of Parks Forum meets every two months. The Forum is an independent network and has excellent relations with the Council.

Forum is organising a minibus tour of parks and green spaces for the benefit of friends groups. In discussions with Council about park surveys regarding improving quality of parks and how people feel about them. BTCV work systematically across the borough with local Friends groups on conservation workdays, planting and ecology across the borough. The Forum is formalising their relationship with BTCV. Discussing Byelaws. A local group ensured that s106 funding initially earmarked for their park (but not apportioned to it by the Planning Dept) was recovered - Forum trying to make sure this happens in future for any developments.

4. Lobbying for adequate resources for parks and green spaces

It seems less and less resources are being apportioned to parks and green spaces, which in reality need greater funding and resources. The previous meeting's actions points were referred to.

a. General lobbying, especially around the local/national elections

As previously discussed, Tony introduced a draft joint letter from the LFGN and the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum. The letter will go to each Friends group to forward to candidates standing for election, or to the press. It stressed the importance of talking to all candidates about recognition and funding for parks and green spaces. The letter will also be sent to Parks Managers at each Council. Suggestion to perhaps target Leaders of Parties rather than all standing for election. Not all parks are managed by Councils so also need to target other parks owners. The meeting agreed for the draft letter to be finalised by Tony and Dave ready for distribution.

b. Existing expenditure (per green space, per borough). A

spreadsheet was presented to the Group on expenditure on parks and green spaces by each borough. The spreadsheet represents revenue funding only and doesn't take account of capital funding. There was a great deal of discussion about this important info, but it was stressed that it needs to be used carefully as it was not necessarily 'like for like' across all the boroughs.

c. Issue of statutory recognition

The group has agreed to campaign for statutory recognition for public green spaces so that those who own and manage them have a statutory duty to achieve acceptable standards of care. There are issues about this which need to be discussed, and it was agreed to 'park' the issue until another time. It was noted that, despite a previous campaign around this in the past, no MP had ever raised this as an Early Day Motion.

5. Other key strategic issues (briefly) as raised at the last meeting or

since

a. Good management/partnership-working with Friends groups

Due to time constraints this discussion was moved to the next meeting.

b. Privatisation

This has been an issue in some boroughs, and there have been concerns and issues. Where it happens it was stressed there is a need for proper financial management and effective Friends partnership working with the Council and their contractors.

c. Planning/development problems

- Issue raised about temporary buildings being put on green spaces - do they need planning permission?
- Issues with parts of green spaces being controversially sold off to release capital receipts, often with little or no consultation.
- Local planning policies are important. Every borough now has to have a formal 'Statement of Community Involvement' about whom they should consult and list the issues. Also a 'Sustainable Community Strategy' which must have genuine community input. These are important for the development of borough Local Development Framework planning policies and more local plans. Local LDF plans need to conform to the London Plan, which is currently undergoing revision - a public inquiry will run in City Hall from June to Sept of this year. We agreed to join with other significant London-wide community networks and organisations working together through the 'Just Space Network' to lobby for improvements to the London Plan. Dave Morris and Phil Butler may go to the Just Space Meeting on Friday.

d. Bye-laws

Current bye-laws can be very out of date and complex. Could they be improved? The Government is looking into it. The Home Office control Bye Laws. There are current moves to give greater control to local authorities with the aim of harmonising and to ensure they are enforced at a local level. Perhaps we should ask the Open Spaces Society for details. But there is also the point that bye laws should be different according to the different issues in each place/borough.

e. Green Flags and Green Flag standards

This year's assessments are coming soon. Councils look at 'key' parks, apply for Green Flag status, earmark funding for those and have to ensure they are well maintained. Friends Group are a key part of the process, as community involvement is a criteria in the assessment. But how involved do friends groups get in Green Flag applications? Councils should be working with Friends group in any application, inputting ideas. Each park has to have an application each year but also being imooted now is a new Green Flag Borough status if a set

percentage of parks within a borough have them. Green Flags used to be popular for all Councils but this is now not automatically the case and some boroughs may decide not to keep applying.

The issue was raised that Green Flags can detract attention from other green spaces that also need proper maintenance and standards. However, it was also recognised that they are a good way of raising the standard in parks if adopted as the yardstick to aspire to for all green spaces in a borough (as is the case for example in Haringey).

Green Pennants can be applied for by community groups (rather than the Council) if they manage a green space or community garden etc.

6. Strengthening communication and co-ordination in each borough and London-wide

a. Friends/User Forums for all boroughs

A real need for these in every borough. Perhaps we as the LFGN could develop a panel of experienced people willing to go to meet and encourage new or emerging Forums.

Southwark are having their Forum annual meeting this Saturday and it was hoped that the Friends groups there may develop it into an ongoing support network. Local groups were asked to please pass details on to Dave (LFGN Chair) or the secretary of any borough-wide Forum in each borough.

b. A website for London's Friends Groups

Discussed at the last meeting. Agreed to set up a page on the 'Project Dirt' networking site - action point Colin Cooper.

c. LGSFGN reps / speakers for various issues/roles

To be discussed at the next meeting. Need to look at future roles within our growing Network. This discussion was 'parked' till the next meeting.

d. Mailing lists: a general (all Friends groups) b. Internal co-ordination

We now have a mailing list of around 400 local Friends groups. It had been compiled by the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum, and, after an appropriate email to all the groups seeking their agreement, it has now been passed on to the LFGN. The list is a good start but needs developing, as we don't yet have details for groups in a number of boroughs. A separate list of those groups who've attended previous LFGN meetings is being developed to aid internal coordination within the LFGN.

e. 2010 London Friends Groups' Gathering (+reports of 2009 Gathering)

Provisional date 9th October 2010. A need for a good venue - please

all look. Is it available for October the 9th, midday to 5pm, to hold 300 maximum? Anna will pass on to Dave the summaries of the workshops at last year's LFGN Gathering/Conference - he will try to produce a report/summary of the event.

f. National Open Spaces Forum

Has been going two years, bringing area and regional Friends networks and Forums together (involving over 1,000 Friends and User groups). The London Friends Groups Network will represent London. Dave will circulate the minutes/notes of the NOSF meetings.

7. Any other Network business

The meeting formally thanked Anna Woollen for her admin support as she's now leaving the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum.

8. Next Network meeting

17th May 6pm at City Hall (if available).