

## **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 general meeting, Monday 24th May 2010**

Committee Room 2 City Hall

**Attended:** Jackie Griffiths (Friends of Penge Parks, Bromley); Celine La Freniere and Peter Cuming (Friends of Talacre Gardens/Green, Camden); Nick Riacon (Friends of Russell Square, Camden); Dave Morris [*chaired*] (Friends of Lordship Rec + Haringey Friends of Parks Forum); Denis Cook (Friend of Dagnam Park, Havering); Phil Butler (Friends of Dagnam Park, Havering + Campaign for the Protection of Rural England); Hilary Temple (Kensington, Knightsbridge & Earl's Court Societies, Kensington and Chelsea); Anthea Masey (Friends of Loughborough Park, Lambeth); Ron Lynn (Friends of Jubilee Gardens, Lambeth); Bob Robinson and Fred Uhde (Friends of Clapham Common, Lambeth); Maude Estwick and Jackie Plumridge (Friends of Milkwood Community Park, Lambeth); Anthony Scully (Friends of Home Park, Lewisham); Alona Sheridan (Friends of Mayow Park, Lewisham); Colin Cooper [*took minutes*] (Richmond Environmental Network); David Boote (Friends of Abbots Park, convener of Waltham Forest Open Spaces Forum); Gillian Brightwell (Friends of Tooting Common, Wandsworth)

**Apologies:** Walter Hand (FLIF, Camden); Christine Farrell (Friends of Waterlow Park, Camden); Denise Vallance (Friends of Bury Lodge Park, Enfield); Nick Day (PCEG, Greenwich); Kate Powling (East Greenwich Pleasaunce, Greenwich); Annie Hart (Friends of Hervey Road Sports Field, Greenwich); Russell Higgs (Hackney Downs User Group, Hackney); Anthony Williams and David Lampings (Friends of South Park, Hammersmith & Fulham); Linda Hawthorn (Havering); Lois Amos (Friends of Bedford Park, Havering); Paul McLoughlin and Julia Herold (Friends of Raphael and Lodge Farm Parks, Havering); Robin Brown (Friends of Lake Farm and Minet Country Parks, Hillingdon); Linda Massey (Friends of Boston Manor, Hounslow Friends Forum); Jackie Hyer (Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gdns, Kensington and Chelsea); Angela Miller (Lambeth); Mark Sweeting (Clapham Park Tenants and Residents Association, Lambeth); Monica Mitchell (Sydenham Wells Park Improvement Group, Lewisham); Alan Cornish (Friends of Wanstead Park, Redbridge, managed by City of London); Ann Sayer

(Teddington Society + Friends of Bushy & Home Parks, Richmond);  
Stephanie Lodge (Southwark Friends of the Earth); Simon Hemsley  
(Tooting Commons MAC/Friends of Tooting Common, Wandsworth);  
Alex Rook and Tony Leach (London Parks and Green Spaces Forum);

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

### **1. Minutes of last meeting (March 22nd)**

A couple of small points were clarified in the reports below. Otherwise agreed as a true record.

### **2. Brief updates from each borough present**

#### ***Richmond***

Richmond Environmental Network continue to support existing and emerging Friends groups, and are involved with consultation over the Council's new Open Spaces Strategy.

#### ***Camden***

Well attended forum of Friends groups, new director of parks formidable in promoting friends groups. Parks have to be maintained with an ever-shrinking pots. Reluctance in the town hall to engage with volunteers. How to get people engaged? Successfully lobbied for 'town green' status for a green space of about an acre. 24 Friends Groups meet frequently. Issues with keeping vehicles out of parks. Connaught are the new contractor. 20% budget cuts... Some green flag awards. *Friends of Russell Gardens* organise outings, monitor work going on (have a permanent gardener) and respond to community issues.

#### ***Lambeth***

*Jubilee Gardens*: South Bank employers stated that money is available to redo jubilee gardens. Is it being sorted ready for the Olympics?  
*Clapham Common*: Council found money to be spent on doing the tennis courts in Clapham Common and cricket practice area. They tore down a park rangers house and then were forced by a local resident to clean it up. Rehabilitated a pond which had been infected by algae. Environment Agency gave money for research and pond has been redone. Main issues of officer good will and releasing information. Reinstating the circus site on Clapham Common and Millwood Community Park. The park is well kept. Planting trees on the common - Trees for Cities used to raise £32K blocks. Skills audit in the community. Trying to raise a £85k to build a wildlife meadow. Utilised MP to seek funding. Obviously more pressure on resources thesedays. Long term funding hard to guarantee. Clapham Common is a source of income for the Council and this should stay in the parks pot, ring

fenced for parks. Veloia contractor, Council unhappy with them so only rolling contract for 6 months. Green Flag attracts funding but this is spread across all parks. *Loughborough park*: Emergent group with cllrs, police and community safety reps helping people to sort the problems of some anti-social dog owners. This is an issue holding back the groups. Groundwork have undertaken a feasibility study for improvements, but issues in getting resources out of the Council.

### **Lewisham**

*Mayow Park*: Friends started in 1993 (not 1970 - correction to previous mins). Now have a new park keeper. Building a 8-13 play area with Playbuilder funding secured after the group did consultation with schools. Park Keeper is funded by Glendale in a new contract. *Sydenham Home and Wells Park*: Alliance of chairs to liaise with Glendale for things they want in the parks. *Lewisham Parks Forum*: Council run a Forum each year.

### **Havering**

*Havering Park Forum*: Third annual Forum recently. Council wanted feedback on this forum. Also chairs of Friends Groups meet Council. Groups lobbying for adequate resources to be allocated. 2 more groups now registered and this gives them a £1,000 pound kitty to run activities in their park. Parks managers want to know how to keep friends groups motivated and supported. Friends Groups need to liaise and develop independent co-ordination. Have 6 green flags - takes up a lot of staff time and non-green flag spaces can get neglected. Issues include: good news about additional play areas, but some not considered to be in the right place, including in a conservation area. Digging up around trees or nature sites to install equipment. Roving parks security. Horse riders, conflicting with dog walkers and children. Anti-social behaviour and vandalism. *Friends of Dagnam Park*: Been operating as a park since 50's. Campaign vs central area being sold for housing - petition handed to the Mayor before the election. Advised to secure 'town green' status – can get support from the Open Spaces Society. LCC has a standard of 6 acres of open spaces for every 1000 people.

### **Wandsworth**

*Friends of Tooting Common*: The group is getting going. Tooting Management Advisory Group cannot hold funds. Friends organising nature walks. Fundraising to revamp a water fountain. Provide a bench on the common, but unfortunately told had to be plastic instead of the plan to use a fallen tree. Newsletter now out. Using Waitrose to fundraise. Parks Police don't respond quick enough. Toilets replaced but not opened. Issues with Council eg. not replying to emails, and dog bylaws not being enforced / sensible siting of dog bins.

### **Waltham Forest**

Groundwork have funding to encourage friends groups and given money to set up a website. Council have an officer responsible for community development. Forum renamed Green Space, and Nature Conservation Group changed to Forum. In contact with only a few groups.

### **Kensington and Chelsea**

Natural History Museum want to pave over their lawn but community fighting this - but without Council backing to date. May go for 'Town Green' status.

### **Haringey**

*Friends of Parks Forum:* Active Forum of about 35 groups. Meet every two months. Independent but Council attend part of meeting. 6-10 groups attend on average. Challenging budgetary cuts. Produced public leaflets and press releases during the elections. Haringey Federation of Residents Associations issued questionnaire to all Council election candidates and secured promises from all of partnership-working with Friends Groups and the Forum, and defence of public services.. HFRA and the Forum will hold them to it! In the last year, as a result of the Forum's lobbying and partnership working with Council, BTCV and Met Police, the Parks Constabulary were scrapped and resources redirected into on-site staffing in major spaces in late afternoon and weekends. Organised a Friends minibus tour of 10 - 12 parks. Excellent relations with BTCV and their 'hands on' community activities. Groundwork help in some parks with fund raising and designs. Friends groups and their Forum have had a huge impact in the last 7-8 yrs, but know they will have to work together to fight for enough resources in the future.

### **Hounslow**

*Hounslow Friends Forum:* New Forum now going very well. Dave, the LFN chair, attended the founding meeting which was very lively and productive. 10 groups represented at second meeting. Have set up their own yahoo internal email communications group. Many groups have an ongoing concern to improve communications with Parks Management.

### **Bromley**

*Penge Parks:* Group covers 5 green spaces, plus Crystal Palace Park. Only in contact with 1 other established friends group.

## **3. Lobbying for adequate resources for parks and green spaces**

### **Generally**

The London Friends Network had agreed to encourage Friends Groups

and Forums to speak up for green spaces during the recent local and national elections - as part of an ongoing campaign for adequate resources and minimum standards for parks, and a long term aim that authorities should have a statutory duty to maintain green spaces properly. A joint public statement to this effect was issued during the elections by the London Friends Groups Network (us!) and the London Parks & Green Space Forum. Local networks of Friends groups are developing all over the country, linked up through the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces. The National Federation issued a similar call for action for more resources for parks, and for local Friends Groups to support Love Parks Week as a way of raising these issues (see below).

There was a discussion about these matters. Points raised included:

- The need to work together with other groups campaigning to defend public services, rather than compete over dwindling resources. This is starting to happen in a number of boroughs, including Haringey where the Forum has joined with residents associations and trade unions to set up a local Alliance for Public Services.
- Parks need proper management, including on-site Park Keepers
- Could green spaces be used intelligently / sensitively for fundraising, eg could people be buried there?!
- We can use Freedom of Information requests to find out how much money is spent on contractors and consultants, compared to in-house working etc.
- Parks have a central role in neighbourhoods. Lots of research available on the benefits of parks.
- Funding could come from several sources.

#### ***Love Parks Week, 24th July - 1st August***

GreenSpace charity promotes this each year to highlight and raise the profile of green spaces. Full info available on their website:

[www.loveparksweek.org.uk](http://www.loveparksweek.org.uk) and [www.green-space.org.uk](http://www.green-space.org.uk) We agreed to promote it - it's a good opportunity for local groups to get press coverage etc. The meeting also agreed to support 'The Big Lunch' (national day of food sharing in local public spaces) on July 18th.

#### **4. Other key strategic issues (briefly)**

##### ***Developing good partnership-working between Friends/User groups and management***

We can all encourage better networking among Friends groups, sharing our experiences and examples of best practice. Visit each other's events. Parks managers can be encouraged to attend Friends meetings. Different boroughs have different liason systems (or lack of

them) and experiences. Lewisham have good relations. Having users forums in addition to friends groups makes a big difference, the relationships with Council seem to get stronger. Other in-borough partnership working is valuable – eg with biodiversity groups, schools, other residents groups.

### ***Planning and development problems and policies***

There needs to be the strongest possible protection for green spaces in local planning policies and also the London Plan. An example is that Lambeth Council entered in a contract to redevelop an ice rink, a new Tesco and bus station and 300 units of housing. They want to do this all in one go and they need a depot for storage during construction - want to use Streatham Common (south bit)! There are other examples of threats to open space. Many local FGs have responded to Council consultations over planning policies, seeking improvements to 'Local Development Framework' policies. We as the LFGN have now linked up with other significant London-wide community organisations through the Just Space Network to lobby together for better policies in the 'London Plan' which dominates urban planning throughout the capital. The London Plan is currently due to be reviewed in public hearings at City Hall. Dave, the LFN chair has made some representations on these issues on our behalf, and is due to appear at the hearings.

### ***Water fountains***

Sustain have launched a national campaign for water fountains in local parks, as part of their healthy living drive. Its also a green/sustainability issue. Are there any good examples around London? Bromley wants to reinstate some fountains. Metropolitan Drinking and Cattle Trough Association have lots of funds for this kind of thing. One park is planning to drill a well 150m deep to water the lawns and beds – a license may not needed if not used for drinking. Wandsworth have asked their Friends Groups to help raise funding.

### ***Other issues***

Some other issues were flagged up, but due to lack of time these could not be discussed. eg: events and volunteering, vehicles in parks, outsourcing of staffing, sources of funding for improvements, public toilets, updating/enforcing relevant bye laws, dog walking issues....

## **5. Strengthening communication and co-ordination in each borough and London-wide**

### ***Progress on Friends/User Forums for all boroughs***

These are slowly spreading throughout London boroughs. Hopefully we'll get a clearer picture at the next meeting. LFGN chair is available to attend borough-wide meetings of FGs which have been arranged to set up a new Forum or to strengthen an existing Forum.

### **LFGN reps and speakers**

To become a really effective and influential network we are looking for people to volunteer to take on various roles or be available as speakers as LFGN reps. e.g. Chair (DM), Joint or Vice Chair, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Minutes Secretary, Youth, Biodiversity, Events, Sports etc. Colin Cooper of Richmond Environmental Network was elected as LFGN Secretary. We aim to develop some of these roles over the coming year.

### **LFGN communications (website, leaflets, e-lists etc)**

Colin is involved in 'Project Dirt', a website providing social networking possibilities, including publicising events like our meetings. He agreed to set up a trial LFGN page on it:

[www.projectdirt.com/group/londonfriendsnetwork?commentId=2004501%3AComment%3A50119](http://www.projectdirt.com/group/londonfriendsnetwork?commentId=2004501%3AComment%3A50119) 'E-voice' has free websites for community groups – Colin has set up a trial page there too: <http://e-voice.org.uk/london-friends-network> 'London 21' has produced a London Green Map.

### **6. London Friends Groups Gathering**

We were planning to hold another London Friends Gathering this year to bring people together, discuss issues in more depth etc. One possibility investigated was Charlton House in Greenwich. However, we agreed the Gathering should be postponed till spring/summer 2011. This is partly due to the fact that: we've taken excellent strides over the last 6 months, another Gathering would be quite a major organisational effort, and our main current focus has been on developing the network and on encouraging lobbying for greater resources for green spaces.

### **7. National Open Spaces Forum / National Federation - update**

Dave reported back from the last national meeting. Local networks of Friends groups are developing all over the country, linked up through the now-constituted National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces. [www.green-space.org.uk/community/nfpgs](http://www.green-space.org.uk/community/nfpgs) The LFGN is the London section, and all borough forums are entitled to send a rep to the national meetings. The focus has been on raising the profile of Friends Groups and forums, linking such forums together, encouraging lobbying for greater resources, and identifying other key issues for all green spaces. Next meeting is September 25th in Birmingham.

### **8. Any other Network business**

Next London Friends Groups Network meeting, 13th Sept.