

The London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network

The network for London's 500+ local Friends and User Groups and borough-wide Forums for all green open spaces

www.lfgn.net

General Meeting for all London's Friends Groups and the local borough Forums

Monday 12th September, 6pm - 8pm

Committee Room 3 at City Hall (downstairs by the cafe)

110 The Queens Walk, London, SE1 2AA (10mins walk from London Bridge tube station).

Map: <http://www.london.gov.uk/city-hall/visitor-information/location-map>

All welcome to attend! Please forward to all Friends and Users Groups in your borough.

LONDON GREEN SPACES FRIENDS GROUPS GATHERING

May 21st, 2011

Report of the day's events

35 people gathered for the second London-wide Friends meeting on May 21st at the Broadwater Community Centre, Lordship Recreation Ground in Haringey. We were welcomed by the Chair, Dave Morris, who said that the aim of the meeting was to allow more detailed discussion of some important issues facing all London Parks and Green spaces. The event was funded by a grant obtained by the London Parks & Green Spaces Forum. Representatives from Friends groups in Bexley, Bromley, Camden, Islington, Greenwich, Haringey, Hammersmith & Fulham, Havering, Hounslow, Lambeth, Lewisham, Richmond, Tower Hamlets and Wandsworth then dispersed to participate in different workshops. The topics discussed there were as follows:

1. Relationships with councils, management and park staff;
2. Organising successful projects and events;
3. Issues involved in volunteering and the 'Big Society';
4. Access to funds for projects and local events.
5. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity and nature conservation;
6. Lobbying for funds and resources for green spaces.

There was a break for a splendid home-cooked lunch provided by local residents involved in the Back2Earth projects at Lordship Rec. Then, in a 'Just A Minute' session, everyone was invited to talk for 60 seconds about their green space success stories. These included:

- While campaigning to save the Hervey Road Sports Field, Greenwich, from being built on, the Friends have organised a Parksfest and a Litter Pick for the third year

running on the Field.

- Plans for developing butterfly meadows in Camden;
- A £1000 grant for a new woodland walk in Bedford Park, Havering;
- A successful 10 year campaign for a new Community Café in Downhills Park and an annual 'Art in the Park' event;
- A new Kitchen Garden in Waterlow Park and a new 'Friends of Green Spaces' for Camden;
- A new childrens park, pagoda and skate park as part of the Heritage Lottery grant for Victoria Park;
- Creation of stone benches in Phoenix Gardens, to prevent vandal damage.

Workshops: summaries

Three main points from each workshop were reported to the whole group. These were:

1. Relationships with councils, management and park staff.

- Two way information sharing is important.
- The cuts are a threat but can also be a challenge.
- Access for all including those with disabilities is an important principle that needs to be stressed.

2. Organising successful projects and events ourselves.

- Planning and good organisation is vital.
- Good publicity; flyers, posters and press announcement.
- Ensure dates don't clash with other local events.

3. Issues involved in volunteering and the 'Big Society'

- Need to work in partnerships as equals.
- Volunteering should be fun: no coercion.
- Volunteers should enhance but not substitute for full time workers.

4. Access to funds for projects and local events

- Useful sources of grants, small and large were identified as:
- NCVO online register is free(Funding Central) and provides a useful search facility for specific projects and relevant sources.
- Awards for All; a good place for grant applications 60% of which are granted.
- Heritage Lottery, Sports England, Kings Fund (health related) named as other sources. Plus. CVS(local branch) offers training for Fundraising courses.

5. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity and nature conservation

- Get a group together for specific projects.
- Focus on single species (hedgehogs, bats) and involve schools and wildlife organizations.
- Look at LA action plans for their targets.

6. Lobbying for funds and resources for all green spaces.

- We need to publicise and raise the profile of parks and green spaces;
- Scrutinising local policies, and using them and campaigning.
- Petitions, protests and lobbying councillors.

Workshops: more detailed reports

2. How to organise successful projects and events ourselves

Participants: Andrew Deans, Canteloves Gardens, Camden; Linda Massey (Lead) Boston Manor Park, Hounslow; Frances Bennett, Kneller Gardens & River Crane, Richmond & Hounslow; Ron Lynn, Jubilee Gardens, Lambeth; Richard Desmond, Victoria Park, Tower Hamlets; Jackie Griffiths, Penge Parks, Bromley; Catharine Wells (note taker) Waterlow Park, Camden; Gillian Brightwell, Tooting Common;; Joan Griffiths, Mile End Park; Keith Shallcross, BTCV & Broadwater farm project.

Chair (Jacky Griffiths Bromley) noted that we had a good mix and that Linda would lead off and several others would offer their success stories.

WHY hold an event?

- To celebrate, have fun, raise profile & awareness of space and group, raise money from and for the community.

WHO will be involved?

- If you need outside help & involvement: try BTCV or other volunteer group, local businesses, for cash and support from staff and volunteers, estate agents etc for printing.

WHAT kind of event? :

- Think small and big; it could be major Festival or bulb planting or a dog show.

WHO to contact when planning?

- Each borough works differently so check with whoever deals with events.
- Consider other events by local schools and other organisations when choosing date
- Predict cost and stand your ground as it is a community event in order not to pay council for use of space.
- Council community plan should give clues to policy
- Make sure you stay in control of income from things like bars and stalls. You are volunteering for the community

Q: Where to hold meetings or events if not in the open space with charges for many indoor venues?

A: Keep asking and consider shaming by holding planning meeting in open space, get journalists and photo to show elderly & wheelchairs users.

Organisation:

- Share the load... people with different skills can do different jobs. Make jobs specific and manageable
- Linda offered tips from her experience of running the Brentford Festival which is now so successful that 12 thousand people take part. She has a pdf template to send to

participants who provide their email and which could be uploaded on to the main website

Publicity:

- Good quality flyers are a must.
- Promote locally by every means: Newsletter, local business, notice boards, local papers, website, council's site and news, local radio.
- Identify 1 person for each street for leaflet drop
- Involve councillors in these events as helpers and organise the local papers to do a photo shoot as councillors like the publicity.
- Be sure to put notices up at park gates and on boards

How Far in Advance?

- Plan one year ahead for major events

Keep a record:

- Make a template and keep working notes; do a debriefing afterwards to identify problems and mistakes
- Repeat successful events for continuity

Clear everything with your council who have to tick boxes:

- Does it need a license? eg fireworks or alcohol, raffle (unless on the day only)
- Under 2000 people (figure may differ in some boroughs) only requires a temporary event notice
- More people means a full application (allow 6 weeks)
- Some parks have their own licenses
- A Time Premise license can be obtained.
- Give a lower estimate of numbers as a fluid audience changes
- Victoria Park is licensed for 30 thousand
- Check insurance
- Calculate cost

Planning on the day of a major event:

- The organisation
- Who you are, where you are, safety policy, pat test, diesel generator etc
- Management
- Site safety
- Crowd management plan
- Code words eg lost child & ways of dealing with this
- Traffic management in & out of site
- Disabled parking
- Communications by radios
- Emergency plan
- Have police on radio standby
- Litter wardens
- Fire fighting with map
- First Aid plan recruit St John's ambulance offer food but no money
- Waste management who will pick up the bill for rubbish
- Stewards and rota system with time off so everybody can enjoy themselves
- Risk assessment such as ponds, path hazards.

- Have local councillors on board and on cttees
- Procedure for problems some to be dealt with afterwards
- Close off date for planning
- £10 charity and £30 for other stalls.

Small events:

- Participants spoke about smaller events which share many common features with the above.
- Friends groups of smaller spaces could consider a simpler event involving children and their families using trail and quiz sheets which can bring the adults on board. This is best done at half term and set up near a playground or cafe
- Bulb planting is usually a shorter half day event.
- Dog shows are popular and a way of bringing dog owners onto mailing lists and possible membership through entrance fees.
- Consider dog training advice sessions.
- Cycling events can co coordinated with free safety marking and training.
- For smaller events some councils will have a standard risk assessment form

The discussion became more general:

- Set up a website to get maximum exposure and to be linked to your council's website
- Some FGs charge membership of about £5 or £6 –more for families. You can offer a regular newsletter and access to a programme of events. One group offers free membership in return for some volunteering.
- The Charities Board may require returns for trading, but no need to register or declare if income is below £10,000.
- Importance of being properly constituted (crucial for fundraising and grants)
- Consider a Trustee Insurance Package so no individual is liable
- Friends of Kneller Gardens restored an old pavilion and asked council to agree a 'social value through community plan' whereby young people run it as a café under the umbrella of a charity youth partnership.
- Andrew from Canteloves has approached Camden to have a café stand but they want to choose from a tender themselves and presumably control any income.

[Notes by Catharine Wells 21/05/11]

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5. Protecting and enhancing nature conservation and biodiversity.

All green space natural features are important to protect. Friends groups should encourage more of these to be introduced to our parks and open green spaces.

Talks by friends groups should be arranged, on site, to explain what and why these various features are so important. Any one who reads up about the variety of wildlife to be found in any of these locations, can give a reasonable account of their importance. Failing that, there are people who have a special interest in a particular species.

One person in the group told us about a tractor driver who had, due to the cuts, been

laid off. The grass cutter he used to tow around now lays idle. As a result the grass has been allowed to grow. This has been a great advantage to wildlife.

Another told us that he was able to use the park's rotovator as it wasn't being used due to the cutbacks.

Conclusion

Friends Groups can take advantage of the cutbacks by doing many jobs in their parks that cannot now be done by employees.

Once they have obtained this position, hold on to it. Like our weather, the economic climate is also changeable.

*[Notes by James Leigh - Please look up my website:-
www.bringbackthebutterflies.org.uk It has some relevance to these discussions.]*

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2. How do we access specific funding sources for our own green space - projects and events?

Chair: Colin, South West London Environment Network ***Notes:*** Matt Allgood, Brockwell Park Management Advisory Committee

a. Summary of Friends/User Group funding needs

WEST

Hammersmith Park: Funding required for sports and healthy activities.

EAST

Mile End Park: Grassroots grant has funded a recent sports event. LB Tower Hamlets has funded Arts & Events with £1K and has also donated a Chair.

Active at 60 - £900 for taking older people for walks around Parks. M.E.P also fundraises for a free annual event and is looking to establish sustainable sources of funding

Victoria Park: £60K fundraising requirement for tennis courts which are looking shabby. VP has been in touch with the Lawn Tennis Association – ideally any funding needs to come on stream in time for Park reopening next year. Oral history podcast funded by Heritage Lottery Fund.

NORTH

Canterlowes Gardens, Camden: Park was redesigned 5 years ago. It has a large football pitch and new skatepark. The Friends would like to bring back greenery into the Park, however LB Camden is reluctant to fund. The Friends want to add a mound to prevent illegal driving onto the grass, insert a small herb garden and wildflowers.

Waterlow Park, Camden: £5 annual membership fee charged. They would like to build up an oral archive of Park memories and link with local schools. They would also like their Drinking Fountain restored.

SOUTH

Hervey Road Sports Field: no sub, relies on occasional donations, had one fund-raising recital. The Friends had no 'start-up' funds from Greenwich but are awarded £1,000 per annum to put on a Parksfest Evening Showcase. If the Field is bought by London Marathon Trust applications will be made for funds to restore the sports facilities. Ideas, please.

Jubilee Gardens: Resting on their laurels. Some occasional donations.

Tooting Common: Interested in funding to revamp damaged ponds (insert new clay basis), drinking water fountains and materials like high visibility jackets.

Sydenham Wells: Currently applying for tree grants from government. Their playground is in poor condition and tennis courts require funding.

Brockwell Park, SE24: £25K Lottery Funds over 3 years secured by MAC under service level agreement with LB Lambeth for 'MAD for Brockwell Park', an annual season of not for profit community music, arts and drama events. Interested in match funding opportunities for 2012 and 2013 e.g. from arts trusts.

b. Funding Resources and tips

- Funding Central is a free to register with database of trusts that may be of interest to parks groups. Website: <http://www.fundingcentral.org.uk>
- NCVO offers free membership to voluntary groups with annual income of below £5K.
- Use your local Council for Voluntary Service / Voluntary Action Council for advice on funding opportunities and applications.
- Directory of Social Change publishes a number of funding guides, including Environmental Funding Guide.
- Consider (raising) membership fees – this provides valuable unrestricted income. Consider obtaining member buy in for any rise and the logistical issue of getting them to adjust their standing order.
- Local Authority – consider partnering with them on large funding applications (e.g. capital / restoration works).
- Bovis – can lease portacabins
- Applying for funding is hard work. Keep a core set of governance documents together (e.g. signed annual accounts, signed governing document, safeguarding policy if applicable and contact list for all Committee members).

c. Funders

- Heritage Lottery Fund – offers capital and revenue – e.g. large capital project at Victoria Park supplemented by smaller revenue projects e.g. oral history.
- Awards for All. Offers grants of up to £10K for publicly accessible projects but not core costs. 6-8 week turnaround. They have supported herb gardens etc.

- Sport England, for tennis courts.
- The Lawn Tennis Association is worth approaching as well, although they only fund one set of courts per borough per annum.
- Bug Life, for ponds.
- Environment Trust
- Natural England.
- Drinking Fountains Trust
- City Bridge Trust. All large grant allocation meetings are conducted in public.
- City Parochial Foundation.
- Esmee Fairburn.
- Kings Fund, for health and well being projects.
- Wakefield and Tetley Fund.
- Arts Fund.

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3. Volunteering and the Big Society – key issues, controversies, opportunities

Are Friends Groups the ‘perfect example’ of the Big Society? Is volunteering meant to enhance or substitute for a properly staffed and resourced service? Will current pressures to volunteer lead to more involvement or to resentment? When does volunteering become conscription (eg work-for-dole schemes)? What’s the difference between formal volunteering (registered and supervised) and informal volunteering (collective and ad hoc)? How do we ensure it is fun, that it doesn’t become smothered by bureaucracy and that volunteers become actively involved in our groups?

Points Raised:

What IS appropriate for a Friends Group in terms of input? Have been adding value for years and improving quality of our parks. Lack of funds put them at risk of serious decline. Many Friends Groups now running Festivals, Growing Projects and a strong calendar of events promoting Art in the Park, Love Parks Week, The Big Draw, The Big Lunch etc.

Political Forums are looking at volunteering and green space strategy. Various training organisations for the environment/horticulture. Could they be helped to work better together? Issues currently around different ways of measuring data eg time inputs. Friends Groups do not automatically monitor vols hours. How is travel time to be dealt with?

London Living Wage is now £8.30. Friends time input now thought to equate to around £3million. Some disquiet expressed about assigning monetary value to volunteer hours.

What are individuals capable of doing and what are they prepared to do? What is an appropriate expectation on the part of the local authority? Potential concern about threat to council posts if volunteers are perceived as capable substitutes for a paid workforce? Awareness that ‘volunteer status’ itself is evolving – not always given sufficient recognition for valuable, some would say essential input. Concerns that local authorities may deliberately try to shift responsibility to Friends Groups as a cost

cutting strategy.

Important to note that volunteers are motivated by some feeling of personal gain – fun, social opportunities, skills development, being outdoors, making a contribution etc. Concepts such as ‘monetary value’ and ‘service level agreements’ are foreign to the world of volunteering up to now. But monetary value is routinely used as a means of securing match funding.

With the recession, almost everyone having to re-evaluate attitudes towards work, income generation, the ‘job for life’ concept and the different roles we all adopt throughout adulthood including stints as a volunteer. Volunteer status as a result of retirement, health recovery, employment gap, temporary skills development/enhancement opportunity etc.

Parks maintenance requires use of heavy machinery – has implications for training and health & safety issues. Well designed, interesting, adequately maintained parks need a high standard of horticultural expertise or at the very least, skilled supervision. Implications for volunteer expertise/training. Huge number of volunteer hours would be required to make up for local authority employees. What is the future for horticulture and its practice in our parks across Britain? Bedding plants being discontinued in many parks.

Disquiet expressed about mandatory work programmes staffed by volunteers in order to qualify for benefits. Concerns about the volunteer movement becoming a strategy for cheap labour and contributing to a de-skilling of the work force.

In Hownslow one Friends group have offered to take over the running of its park in a formal capacity, but the offer has been rejected. Genuine concern about loss of jobs safely under the council umbrella. Currently parks are tendered out to land managers who sub contract for specific services. But – the land contractors are there to make a profit for their share holders, not operating from a ‘service to the community’ ethic. Successful in leasing a café premises from the council, managing it skilfully, meeting community need and returning the profit to the Friends Group for re-investment in the park. Ditto The Brentford Festival run annually by the Friends group (12,000 attend). Effectively pioneering a social enterprise model harnessing volunteer good will to positive effect.

Friends of the River Crane Environment have been successful in their cross-Borough liaison and exploring the possibility of a regional ‘river park’ as part of the All London Green Grid. This has brought them to the attention of the Department of Communities who have been shadowing their personnel to see how a well established Friends Group can operate at first hand. In Richmond, Friends Groups were asked if they would be willing to take on the management of their own local parks. But – not all Friends Groups were willing or able to work alone.

In other localities, also starting to develop more linked up green spaces, in Southwark, for example, resulting in a ‘Five Parks Walk’.

Volunteer involvement shaped by personal skills and local need – example given of dog walker who also takes responsibility for mending a deer enclosure. Simply takes

all the necessary equipment with him!

Point raised about residential populations who do not actually visit their local parks. Bedford Park wanting to develop in such a way that cultural events could be facilitated (by having a walled garden space) bringing a new focus for the local village population. Growing project also in the pipeline. Re-invigorate the area after the loss of the local shop and its transport links.

Strong views expressed about the need for public services to be funded according to need and recognition that many parks had been underfunded for a long time and therefore need to be safeguarded from any cuts. The ideal: full staffing, refurbishment of all park buildings and Friends Groups operating as part of a partnership with the local authority with increased opportunities for volunteering. But Friends input to be viewed as an enhancement, not a substitute.

Summary:

Volunteering should be:

- * fun
- * an add on, an enhancement, not a substitute
- * voluntary, not mandatory
- * one aspect of a drive to formulate workable social enterprise models. Ultimately, aiming for a fairer society with wellbeing criteria at its core. Partnership models a possible way forwards – opportunity for local people to regain the power to be self determining.
- * a means of ‘working in partnership with’, not ‘picking up the pieces’

[Notes by CF 30.5.2011]