

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

Minutes of LFGN general meeting, 2nd December 2010

Committee Room 2, City Hall

Attendance: [Note - numbers were down because of transport disruption due to heavy snow].

Camden: Christine Farrell [took minutes] (Friends of Waterlow Park);

Hackney: Annie Chipchase (Hackney Marshes User Group + Hackney Parks Forum);

Haringey: Dave Morris [chaired] (F of Lordship Rec + Haringey Friends of Parks Forum);

Hounslow: Cathy Meisels (F of Chiswick Common);

Newham: Cliff Segree (F of Memorial Park, and Grassroots CRC), Dina Jung (F of Memorial Park, and Grassroots CRC);

Richmond: Erica Griffiths (F of N. Sheen Rec);

Tower Hamlets: Richard Desmond (Victoria Pk FG); also dropped by briefly: Kenneth Greenway (F of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)

Wandsworth: Gillian Brightwell (Friends of Tooting Common);

London Parks and Green Spaces Forum: Alexandra Rook;

Project Dirt: Nick Gardner

Apologies:

Bexley: Ken Hobday (F of Danson Pk and F of Bostall Heath and Woods in Greenwich);

Bromley: Jackie Griffiths (Friends of Penge Parks);

Greenwich: Annie Hart (F of Hervey Rd Sports Field + Greenwich Friends of Parks Forum);

Hammersmith & Fulham: Anthony Williams (F of South Park); Haringey: Mei Wang (F of Russell Park);

Havering: Lois Amos (F of Bedford Park), Julia Herold (F of Raphael and Lodge Farm Parks);

Hounslow: Linda Massey (F of Boston Manor + Hounslow Friends Forum); Islington: Chris Ashby (F of Gillespie Pk + Islington Friends Forum);

Lambeth: Helen O'Malley (Clapham Common MAC), Ronald Lynn (F of Jubilee Gardens);

Lewisham: Alona Sheridan (F of Mayow Park);

Richmond: Colin Cooper (Richmond Environmental Network), Pam Ibrahima (F of N. Sheen Rec & Pensford Field);

Southwark: Stephanie Lodge and Jim Lodge (Southwark Friends of the Earth);

Waltham Forest: Virginia Cucchi (F of Lloyds Park);

Wandsworth: Simon Hemsley (Friends of Tooting Common); London In Bloom: Geoff Hyde;

Lambeth: Fred Uhde and Marius Hope (F of Clapham Common), Rose de Falbe (F of Unigate Wood);

1. Minutes of the last meeting (September 13th, 2010)

Correction: Victoria Park is in Tower Hamlets (not Hackney). Otherwise the minutes were accepted as a true record.

Matters Arising:

- (Re Pt 3) We had agreed to encourage lobbying for adequate funding for London's green spaces, and to support any appropriate London-wide events and protests against budget cuts. Dave reported that as LFGN chair he had addressed a mass anti-cuts rally before a central London demonstration called by Trades Unions on Oct 22nd 'budget day'. He spoke about the value of green spaces, the work of Friends groups, and the need for proper resources. He is available for such London-wide events.

- (Re Pt 6) We had agreed that LFGN reps would be willing to be contacted for advice/expertise.

We decide it was also useful to include their emails as contacts, where they agree [see pt 5 below]. Please bear in mind they are volunteers, as we all are, so please only make relevant approaches when needed!

- At the last meeting there had been a discussion about alternatives to cuts, and to the current financial system. Jackie Griffiths had agreed to provide a list of recommended reading on this subject to interested people. Such a sheet was left on the table at this meeting for reps to pick up if they wished.

2. Brief Updates from Boroughs.

Hounslow. (Chiswick Common only). Improvements had been made to the surfaces across the common.

Friends will be asking the Borough to re-site the playground. Advice will be sought about fund-raising. Hounslow has an active borough wide Friends Forum.

www.hounslow.info/parks/friendsgroups/index.htm

Richmond (North Sheen Rec only). A request has been made for shrubs and trees to be planted to make the area less bare and to help prevent football taking over the whole area. The Borough will pay for plants but not planting. Volunteers sought and offers of small trees and bulbs were made by other Friends groups present.

Richmond (Report in writing). Borough is doing a review of capital investment which has raised the profile of parks with local politicians. An open spaces strategy is being developed with the Friends Forum / Richmond Environmental Network.

www.richenvironmentnet.org.uk

Camden Special meeting held recently with reps from Camden Friends Groups. LFGN chair attended to contribute views and advice, and to help lead a workshop on partnership working with parks officers. Meeting discussed a range of other issues, including plans the borough has for implementing cuts of around 20%. Chief Exec and Head of Parks keen to work with Friends Groups to find alternative sources of help and money. Have regular Friends Groups Chairs meetings. Work progressing on setting up a full Camden wide Forum of Friends Groups.

Wandsworth (Wandsworth Common only). Several events held including a Dog Show and a Pumpkin Parade at Halloween. A map of the Common had been produced by an artist and sold for £2 a copy. A good source of income for the Friends.

Newham (Mosley Park only). Newham is the host borough for the Olympics so much activity affecting green spaces recently. Local people were invited to 'have a say' in planning nature trails, growing things and using plants to make crafts. These activities not so prominent as sporting activities and developments.

Tower Hamlets Planning for a pre-meeting to establish a Friends Forum. Tower Hamlets funds a development worker for Parks. Is this sustainable? Work has begun on re-building the lake in Victoria Park. VP will be a 'Live Site' (i.e. large TV screenings) during the Olympics.

This is free but tickets are required. Mile End park is progressing well.

Hackney Money has been secured for a range of Clissold Park developments but this has unfortunately led to loss of a large number of old trees. There is no biodiversity plan in place. A management plan is being developed for all parks. Heritage Lottery money has been granted for Springfield Park to allow the old conservatories to be removed/replaced. Fruit trees have been planted in several parks and food-growing schemes are developing. Lots of Olympics developments, some with serious negative effects on green spaces eg two large sports hubs and two huge car parks with excessive lighting.

Protests gathering due to threats to bat populations. Well Street Common planted trees and provided dog bowls. Half a million pounds provided to plant trees for Hackney Marshes. The Friends Forum has been established for many years and currently meets on a semi-regular basis.

www.hackney.gov.uk/parks-user-group.htm

Haringey A grant of £4 million awarded by Heritage Lottery for Lordship Rec. The Friends Forum is now eight years old and the agenda is increasingly becoming dominated by cuts discussions and lobbying e.g. The national Playbuilder Fund money was frozen by Government but led to a public outcry and 70% has been restored. Friends Forum are part of local Haringey Alliance for Public Services, uniting community groups and trades unions.

www.haringeyfriendsofparks.org.uk

Greenwich Greenwich Friends of Parks Forum had held its annual meeting on the same night as this one!. www.greenwichparksfriends.org

Havering (Report in writing) - is making some progress in setting up a borough wide Forum.

Islington Friends Groups in the borough met up to launch a Friends Forum. It was a very well attended and empowering event, and the LFGN chair had been invited to give encouragement and answer any questions. A wide range of relevant issues were discussed. The event was called by the Council parks dept who are fully backing the new Forum as an independent and active ongoing body meeting regularly.

Enfield (Report in writing) Friends Groups met up successfully in November. Had invited a speaker from Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (the chair of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces) to get advice on strengthening and developing their occasional Forum meetings, and about meeting more regularly and more independently from the Council.

Sutton The LFGN chair attended a recent Sutton Friends Forum meeting attended by around a dozen local groups. Very good discussions, including about the LFGN.

London Parks & Green Spaces Forum Hold regular London-wide meetings with local borough officials, and various theme groups (eg biodiversity). They have invited LFGN to send a rep or two to their meetings. A list of future meetings/events they are promoting was circulated to reps present at this meeting. Immediately before this meeting they co-ordinated a seminar about volunteering in green spaces, which 5 or 6 Friends Groups reps attended. Produce bi-monthly update bulletins for the LFGN to send out to FGs.

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

Discussion It is essential to find a strategy to protect parks and green spaces from cuts. Councils are making all kinds of decisions under pressure of Government cuts. Redbridge is setting up a Trust to create an independent unit for parks. Newham rep felt it to be important to create some kind of self-sufficiency for parks.

Ensure that parks are functional, with active user groups - monitoring is important.

Important also to work together with users of other local public services to oppose all cuts

and prevent 'divide and rule'. Can use FoI Requests to find out local budgets for green spaces. LPGSF has produced budgets information from London Boroughs in the past and will be doing so again next year.

It was proposed that a special item be put on the agenda for the next meeting to discuss these issues further or, for a special meeting to be held devoted to protecting our parks.

'Love Parks' week Last July had seen over 800 local events in UK green spaces to celebrate their importance and keep the pressure on for adequate resources. We agreed to back and promote Love Parks Week 2011 (July 24-31st). Groups are encouraged to organise local events and do press releases etc. www.loveparksweek.org.uk

Lottery Funding LFGN chair had recently made a presentation - on the importance of green spaces, Friends Groups and community involvement - to Lottery board members when they visited a Haringey lottery-funded scheme. Their visit was a special one as part of their evaluation of their national funding programmes for parks.

Horticulture Week The magazine for professionals in the industry was due to carry an article based on an interview with the LFGN chair about Friends Groups getting organised nationally and speaking out against cuts. [See below, at end].

4. Communications

- The list of all London's Friends Groups is gradually becoming comprehensive, being managed jointly by Dave for the LFGN and Alex for the LPGSF. It will be used sparingly.
- We now have also an internal LFGN email 'core' list of all those who have attended LFGN meetings or expressed support. It will be used to keep people up to date between meetings, and could eventually be developed into an 'all-to-all' internal communications list.
- We agreed that the LFGN would circulate leaflets about the value of green spaces and need to oppose cuts, using the one originally prepared by Haringey Friends of Parks Forum. A national version is also available [see point 7 below]
- **Website.** Discussion about our various options for a web presence - our very basic 'e-voice' page, our 'Project DIRT' page, the Greenspace website, and maybe setting up our very own full site. We need an online space as well as possibly an area for interactive discussions and events listings. Richard to liaise with Nick about further details. See: <http://e-voice.org.uk/london-friends-network> and www.projectdirt.com/group/londonfriendsnetwork?commentId=2004501%3AComment%3A50119

5. LFGN co-ordination / reps Colin Cooper (Richmond) has let us know he would prefer to stand down as LFGN Secretary due to other commitments. Christine Farrell agreed to take our minutes on a regular basis. Richard Desmond agreed to help with IT issues. Gillian Brightwell agreed to help with dog issues. Therefore our current LFGN reps are:

Chair - Dave Morris (Haringey) 0208 211 0916 - <dmorris@onetel.com>

Vice Chairs - Jackie Griffiths (Bromley) 07938 206866 - <jackie.pengeparks@hotmail.com> ; + Mike Franks (Islington)

Minutes Secretary - Christine Farrell (Camden) 020 8892 0590 - <cfarrell123@btinternet.com>

Treasurer - Cathy Meisels (Hounslow) 0208 995

1867 - <cathymeisels@hotmail.com>

Biodiversity - Ken Hobday (Greenwich) 0208 311 1357

Planning Policies - Roger Chapman (Barnet) 07855 304488; + Dave Morris (Haringey) 0208 211 0916 - <dmorris@onetel.com>

Youth issues - Pam Ibrahima (Richmond)

Dog issues - Gillian Brightwell (Wandsworth) - <gillian@gillianrb.plus.com> Rivers/wetlands
- Jackie Griffiths

(Bromley) 07938 206866 - <jackie.pengeparks@hotmail.com>

Website - Richard Desmond (Tower Hamlets) - <mail@richarddesmond.org.uk>

Events - vacant

Sports - vacant

N/S/E/W/C London contacts - to be discussed

6. London Friends Gathering 2011. We agreed to set up a small sub-group to plan a second London conference, starting with an open meeting at the end of January. LPGSF has money to fund a second conference.

7. National Federation of Parks & Green Spaces: update. Next national meeting of area forums is to be held on January 15, 2011 in Birmingham, 11-3pm. Any borough wide forum is welcome to attend. Contact LFGN chair if your local Forum would like to attend. You can download 2 excellent topical leaflets for distribution: www.green-space.org.uk/community/nfpgs/resources.php

8. Next Meeting(s)

- **24th January: LFGN Organising Meeting** (for officers and open to all FGs). To discuss and plan our next London Friends Gathering, our website issues + AOB.

- **7th March: LFGN General Meeting**

VOCAL LOCAL

Interview with the vice-chairman of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces

By Jez Abbott, **Horticulture Week - 03 December 2010**

<http://www.hortweek.com/news/1044143/Interview---Dave-Morris-vice-chairman-National-Federation-Parks-Green-Spaces/?DCMP=ILC-SEARCH>

Dave Morris does not, cannot and will not accept that the cuts to parks and green space budgets following the comprehensive spending review are a done deal. The vice-chairman of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces warns naysayers he is one from a movement of potentially millions of people. "These cuts are not an act of god but an act of Government, and something that's Government-driven can be changed by public opinion on a mass scale," he explains.

"This is a wealthy country, but the Government has chosen to bail out the banks that caused the financial crisis by stealing resources off the public sector."

What was a loose gathering of friends groups has been melded into a formidable force whose time has come, he believes. Not since the 1980s have public services seen such an attack. Back then there were hardly any friends groups to protect green spaces, he says.

"This time we have a fast-growing, increasingly confident movement of friends groups to protect different green spaces and the needs of their communities," says Morris of the 2,000 or so groups from around the country.

Morris has spent 35 years campaigning on the environment but plays down his role as one of the "McLibel Two", who triggered the longest court action in English history. It saw off McDonald's, one of the world's biggest corporations, with a pamphlet critical of the fast-food chain. This time, Morris insists, it is not a one-man show, but a "nascent, organic, growing local movement".

And there lies the challenge: "It's one thing to be hands-on in your own local patch, but we have to try to translate that local concern to a countrywide force, and that takes time. This is an organic, grass-roots movement that's finding its potential and the mechanisms for bringing out all that potential.

"Yes, volunteer groups want to help manage parks. But the Government strategy of claiming it wants to put aspects of public services into community hands is very cynical propaganda. They know full well you can't systematically and continuously manage vital public services on a voluntary basis. It's absolute nonsense. So they do it under the cover of community empowerment.

"We don't want to be manipulated to that end. Although friends groups do want to be more involved in aspects of management, it is very much down to individual groups and parks and the local issues they have. If there's a derelict building that could become a community space, who will make it happen if councils are starved of cash?"

If this strikes a beleaguered note, forget it. "Friends groups are, by their nature, optimists and realists - optimistic because they want to make a real difference, realistic because they know they can make a real difference. The challenge, when you're faced with a Government-driven massive cuts programme, is to respond on a national scale."

Until, that is, something happens on an international scale such as the implosion of Ireland's finances. "We can see two things happening internationally. Ireland is facing horrendous cuts to public services to bail out the banks, which is a failure. In Greece, France and Spain we have seen a huge mobilisation of people demonstrating and protesting.

"Are we going to go down the Ireland route, which has been a disaster, or should we do as they do in mainland Europe and say: 'This is not acceptable'? I think doing nothing is not an option."

Morris does not necessarily suggest that friends groups should take to the streets. A first step is to grasp this "key phase" of linking up, developing networks and creating a national movement that speaks out. "But if the Government won't listen we would have to consider what kind of activities and tactics are likely to be successful. It's more effective for millions of people to take action than thousands."

This talk of mass national movements is tempered with an emphasis on the grassroots level of community, though. "I'm not a chief executive shuffling bureaucracy in an office. I'm out there in Lordship Rec, Tottenham, updating the noticeboard. It's up to us as friends groups to mobilise, speak out, lobby and insist on adequate resources and oppose these dreadful cuts."

CV

2001: Helps start Friends' of Lordship Rec, Tottenham

2002: Haringey Friends' of Parks Forum starts

2007: Decision to launch National Open Spaces Forum

2010: Changes name to National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, with Morris as vice-chairman

[Note: Dave Morris is also Chair of the London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network]