



for Parks & Green Spaces

# **BROMLEY FRIENDS FORUM FOR PARKS AND GREEN SPACES**

## **SUMMARISED COMMITTEE REPORT AND REVIEW**

### **FOR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2015**

#### **1. Introduction**

The current Committee, as elected at the AGM in November 2014, is Larry Herbert (acting chair), Peter Woodward, Alan Filby, John Cutting, John Ince and Darren Russell.

When we reported to you at our Conference in June this year, we acknowledged the contribution of the Council and how the transition to TLG was expected to take place. We continue to enjoy a good relationship with all parties and we would like to thank everyone who has attended our meetings and inputted to the discussions.

This paper summarises our work of 2014/15 which will be presented in full at our AGM on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015. Topics covered are:

- Consultation process
- Partnership working
- Member Group support
- Conference and other meetings
- Insurance review
- Financial update
- Forum Committee / Succession
- Challenges ahead

#### **2. Consultation Process**

A fair proportion of the start of this financial year was taken up with responding/supporting the consultation process for the outsourcing of the Parks and Countryside service. A number of meetings were attended and letters and papers written both supporting and questioning the proposed service. In particular Forum attended the Executive Council meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March where the decision to vary the maintenance contract to a wholly managed service was taken. Forum raised the question of contract evaluation and where given assurances on the on-going relationship and support that will be provided.

The Council handed the service over to TLG on 8<sup>th</sup> June and since that time TLG have concentrated on getting their structure and processes into an operational position. At the time of writing this report the final pieces are not yet in place but it is expected these will be completed by the time of our AGM.

Subsequent to the above TLG have now issued their strategy document which has been sent out for consultation to all interested parties. Forum has again provided feedback and it is expected that the decision to adopt this strategy will be taken at the Environmental PDS meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> November.

### **3. Partnership Working**

Up until June 2015 the Forum had a working partnership with the Council. Since then this partnership has come under review and a new additional working partnership is being prepared between the Forum and TLG. It is hoped that a draft version of this will be in place by the time of our AGM. We (Forum and TLG management) will continue to meet quarterly to discuss matters of concern and issues raised by the membership. We will also work together to reach the goal of having operational management plans for all Friends Groups.

### **4. Member Group Support**

As the umbrella organisation to Bromley Friends Groups, Forum continues to support and assist members where they can. This year two groups in particular were given additional and closer support than the norm. Forum helped Havelock Rec form a new group and assist with their concern over plans to build a school on their site. Forum in collaboration with the Chislehurst Society also helped Scadbury Park reform and become more active than it had been in recent months.

### **5. Conference and Other Meetings**

Once again this year Forum held a very successful conference in June, which was well attended by all parties. The keynote speaker was Dave Morris, the vice chair of the National Federation of Parks & Green Spaces. He gave an upbeat presentation on the state of parks nationally and described the plans to try and make maintenance of parks a statutory requirement. In the afternoon Nick Temple-Heald, CEO of TLG, presented his view for the future of parks and how his company's aims and plans would be effected in Bromley. The conference also included a workshop session covering three separate topics: Biodiversity; Accessing Help & Support From Partners/Third Sector Providers; Ways To Protect Your Green Spaces.

In addition this year, Forum has hosted nine Open Committee Meetings. It has generally been felt that these have been a resounding success and greatly improved the transfer of ideas, problems, solutions etc. to the wider membership. Going forward it is proposed to hold these in the evenings on a bi-monthly basis. It is also expected that now and again the meeting will be themed and have invited guest speakers, as appropriate.

### **6. Insurance Review**

Following the transition from the Council to TLG it became apparent that the insurance cover provided to volunteers was no longer fit for purpose and needed review. Forum assisted in this review and the outcome is that when volunteers are supervised by TLG staff they are covered by TLG's employee insurance, when they are working unsupervised they will be covered by their own insurance purchased on their behalf by TLG. 42 Groups were identified by TLG as requiring this specialised insurance (each policy costing £131) and it is understood that every one has now signed up. This specialised insurance policy included cover for the hosting of low key events, with no limit to the number of events, and as such supersedes that cover provided by Forum. Going forward Forum will no longer purchase events insurance.

## **7. Financial Update**

In discussion with the Council/TLG, a budget of £5k for the tax year 2015/2016 was prepared and submitted for approval. This was granted in March/April 2015 and though its receipt was slightly delayed the monies have now been banked. Forum's financial year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> Oct to 30<sup>th</sup> Sept and as such this income spreads across both this year's expenditure and next.

The financial position as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015 is as follows: starting balance £6,026.82, income £5,000, expenditure £3,345.47, closing balance £7,681.35. Whilst the Committee do not want to tie up funds unnecessarily, given the uncertain future funding of the Forum and the increased financial pressures on the Council/TLG, we feel it would be sensible for the Forum to hold these funds as a reserve account. These monies will therefore be held as reserves to be reviewed on an annual basis.

As reported last year we are applying for a HLF grant of £10k for promotional material and the provision of specialist training opportunities. Unfortunately due to other commitments this has been delayed but the intent remains and it is hoped to finalise the bid in the coming months.

## **8. Forum Committee / Succession**

In line with the Forum Constitution all current Committee members will be resigning at the AGM and a new Committee elected/re-elected.

Larry Herbert, currently serving as acting-chair, is willing to serve as chair for the coming year. He will also continue with his responsibility for the website.

John Ince, currently serving as a general committee member, is willing to serve as vice-chair for the coming year.

John Cutting, currently serving as a general committee member, is willing to serve as treasurer for the coming year.

Darren Russell, currently serving as a general committee member, is willing to continue in this role. It should be noted that Darren, a member of Hoblingwell Friends, now has a position with TLG and will ensure that there will be no conflict of interest and will excuse himself from meetings should this arise.

Peter Woodward, currently serving as a general committee member, has decided to stand down from Forum Committee duties.

Alan Filby, currently serving as a minuting secretary, has also decided to stand down from Forum Committee duties.

This leaves vacant the position of General Secretary/Minuting Secretary and, if you are interested in taking up either vacancy or in joining the committee generally, please do get in touch. We hope we are accessible to all Friends Groups and would invite you to speak to us if you feel you or any of your Group can make a contribution to the Forum, however large or small.

In conclusion, we anticipate a lesser workload for a new committee than has been required over the last 12 months as the key structures and timetables are now in place. Although, obviously, there will always be new challenges for any committee – see section below.

## **9. Challenges Ahead**

At the time of preparing this report, we are aware that TLG are finalising their structures and plans for the parks service and there remains some unknowns as to how this will all work through. Friends Group relationships with TLG and their related management plans are yet to be addressed as too various health & safety and training matters.

In addition the Council's stakeholder engagement panel is yet to be formalised and inaugural meetings held. It is not known how this will operate and to what extent Forum will be involved.

The Forum is set up to support Friends Groups operating in the Bromley area. Our objective is to ensure that, whatever outcome is decided for the management of parks and green spaces, the Friends Groups continue to have access to the support from their partners who are responsible for the land and the management service.