



Forum Partnership Meeting No. 39

Thursday 2nd October, 10am – Video Conferencing

Larry Herbert (LH)
Ralph Ambrose (RA)
Keith Rodwell (KR)
Richard Gibbons (RG)

David Braybrook (DB)
Hannah Jackson (HJ)
Mollie Lyon (ML)

Mark Garthwaite (MG)
Sue Holland (SH)
Angela Wood (AW)
Jess Dalton (JD) (Minutes)

AGENDA

1. Welcome & introductions
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of last meeting / Action tracker
4. Council update
5. *idverde* update
6. Forum update
7. Any other business
8. Date of next meeting

1. Welcome & Introductions

LH welcomed all participants and began introductions.

2. Apologies for Absence

Friends Forum: Barbara Arora (BA) Vivien Smith (VS)

LBB: Hugh Chapman (HC)

Idverde:

3. Previous Minutes & Matters Arising (Action Tracker Update)

The minutes were accepted as a true reflection of the previous meeting.

The action tracker was reviewed, amended, and updated including new due dates for actions outstanding (attached). A summary of changes to the action tracker is as follows:

Action 43: Use of Microsoft Forms to capture unsupervised hours. Clarification on how risk assessments/H&S policies are observed/policed. AW has provided Forum with a set of template Risk Assessments and these have been posted on the Forum website for Friends Groups to use. AW will send LH the additional ones he has requested. – **Action Closed.**

4. Council Update

HJ provided an update on LBB which included:

- Council Budget - £58.9m budget gap for next year (around 1/5 of total budget). Statutory services (children's & adult social care, housing) are driving high costs. The Parks and open spaces budgets have not faced cuts so far.
- Future of Parks Management & Grounds Maintenance - Options appraisal completed (6 options explored over 12–18 months). The options included: contract extension, insourcing, LATCo (local authority trading company), re-tendering, hybrid models, and shared services. Confident to extending the contract with Idverde, will bring that back to LBB committee to sign off that detail, aiming for June 2026. Reasons for recommendation are that insourcing would add 28% to costs, LATCo would add 23% to costs and carries high risk, hybrid models would add 14–24% to costs, shared services unlikely to deliver benefits, Market testing suggests re-tendering would also increase costs. The extension seen as most financially viable within current pressures.
- Performance & Satisfaction - Acknowledgement of past performance issues in contract, but improvements seen recently. The latest Parks Satisfaction Survey shows improved satisfaction compared to recent declines. There is a positive working relationship with idverde.
- Grant Funding Success - Nearly £75k grant from Veolia Environmental Trust secured. Match funding from Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund. The projects funded are;
 - Full playground refurbishment at Shaftesbury Park.
 - Pond restoration at Shaftesbury Park.
 - Previous success at Hoblingwell helped secure new funding.
 - Community partnership with Burnt Ash Primary School recognised.There are ongoing efforts to secure more external funding.

ML continued to give an update on the projects including:

- Kelsey Park Bridge – the concept design phase is completed; existing abutments to be reused. The new design replicates original structure; accessibility maintained but no vehicle access. There has been positive feedback received at recent engagement event. A detailed design phase is underway; FRAP submission expected next week. Temporary enabling works (incl. tree works) start autumn 2025. An off-site bridge fabrication to follow; site mobilisation in January 2026 with completion in March 2026. Thames21 volunteer events held for marginal plant species planting and fencing removal.
- Keston Pond – Project approved and added to capital programme in June. Initial great crested newt survey undertaken but found no presence. Consultants appointed for aquatic & hydraulic surveys and engineering. Aquatic raw data issued, the full report is due November. Feasibility studies with Council for review. Stakeholder meetings with Natural England & Forestry Commission happened in August. Debra is presenting a further update to the friends in October to discuss progress and next steps. A contractor has been appointed for delivery/cost planning, will be doing a site visit next week. Have applied for GLA Green Roots Fund, outcome expected in November.
- Crofton & Sparrows Woods – Secured £27,000 from Environment Agency. Funding supports initial design/survey for river restoration project. The focus is on natural flood management, habitat enhancement, SSSI protection, and water quality improvements. Further grant funding to be applied for delivery phase.

- Scadbury Moated Manor – Richard Griffiths Architects appointed in June. Kick-off meeting held in September with consultants, LBB, ODAS and Historic England. Phase 1 consists of site/condition analysis, conservation planning, water strategy, statutory approvals. Phase 2 consists of contractor procurement and construction works (subject to HE1 grant next year). Ecological assessment underway, focusing on moat drainage. Necessary consents to follow.
- Croydon Road Recreation Ground, Splash Pad Project – Fundraising initiative launched to convert paddling pool to splash pad. GoFundMe campaign has raised over £3,000 so far. 4 contractors expressed interest in initial design/construction phases. The estimated project cost: £300k–£350k. Public consultation on design underway with 600+ responses received.

DB continued to give an update on LBB which included:

- Nature Friendly Verge Trial – Permanent sites increased from 8 to 13 (5 new trial areas added). Biodiversity improved: flora species rose from 80 (2023) to 147 (2025). Notable sites are Broad Oak Swain (70 species in 1st year), Downs Hill Rd, Warren Rd (high invertebrate counts). The evidence suggests verges are achieving biodiversity goals (wildlife corridors, floral diversity)
- Sustainable Planting – Now in year 2, with no additions/removals. Survey results show 94 invertebrate species across sustainable beds (vs. 48 last year). Non-sustainable beds showed only 10 species, proving strong positive biodiversity impact. Friends Groups encouraged to promote schemes and surveys locally.
- Green Flag Awards – High Elms and Kelsey Park added; Hoblingwell received a Community Green Flag. There are 10 Green Flags in total. Scadbury Park did not receive flag this year, discussions are ongoing with judges.
- Park User Satisfaction Survey – Ran from July–September 2025, the results are being analysed. An early indication is that overall satisfaction has increased. Full results to be included in Idverde’s annual contract report and presented to committee in January 2026.
- Vacant Pavilions – Marketing exercise undertaken at Biggin Hill and Stanhope Recreation Ground. Good level of interest from bidders, heads of terms being drawn up
- Infrastructure repairs – Ongoing works across borough such as the major repair in Keston Common. Awaiting final infrastructure survey to plan next tranche of works (end of 2025).
- Allotments – Continuing to work on leases and management. Engagement with allotment associations to support site running.

HJ gave an update on Arb matters:

- Supply Chain Stabilisation – Glendale contract terminated earlier in year, new supply chain bedded in. Backlog of issues addressed; FMS performance improved significantly. It’s the first time performance indicators are positive since role began. The current arrangements are short-term up to 2027, which was Glendale contract end date.
- Future Planning – Options appraisal for supply chain underway. Committee decision expected in 2026/27 financial year.
- Woodland establishments – Ongoing efforts to secure sustainable funding. Engagement with funders to cover delivery and long-term commitments.

RA asked if there has been a new tree officer appointed. HJ confirmed Simon Hobbs and Kevyn Wightman have swapped areas.

RG raised query about the number of responses to the recent Park User Survey and how it compared with previous years. DB confirmed 602 responses, up from 370 last year. RG raised query on replacement of trees from the Tremendous tree planting programme and whether Friends Groups could be provided with a list of trees already marked for replacement to avoid duplication of reporting. HJ confirmed the tremendous programme is complete. Policy commitment remains that lost trees will be replaced normally within two planting seasons, subject to location suitability. Approximately 500 new trees planned this year. Request for reporting list to be taken back to HC for consideration. RG raised query whether cuttings from nature-friendly verges and naturalised grass areas are being collected, as leaving them may increase nutrients and reduce biodiversity. DB confirmed the policy is cut and collect. MG added the practice is to cut, leave temporarily approximately 1 week or a few days to allow seeds to drop and invertebrates to disperse, then collect. Acknowledged that this may not always happen in practice; Friends Groups were encouraged to report locations where cuttings are not collected.

LH raised query on tree survival and replacement, how officers determine whether a tree has not survived, given leaf loss during hot summers. HJ commented tree officers assess reports via FMS. Suspect trees are reassessed the following spring before removal, as apparent dieback can be seasonal stress. Decisions are made by trained officers to determine whether to remove or allow further recovery.

RG asked whether Friends Groups will be formally consulted in the contract renewal process and raised concerns about communication issues with Idverde. HJ advised that current paper sets direction of travel (financial and qualitative analysis informed by inspections, enquiries, and forums). Stakeholders, including Friends Groups, will be engaged on opportunities for efficiencies and improvements. MG acknowledged challenges in communications. Confirmed Idverde is working with LBB to improve, with openness to Friends' feedback as part of shaping the long-term extension (8 years). Highlighted that leadership and priorities have changed since the 2019 contract, with new management now in place and an evolving approach to contract delivery.

LH added from the Forum's perspective, an extension of the existing Idverde contract is the only viable option. A new arrangement would create unnecessary disruption for Friends Groups in terms of relationships and learning processes. Expressed support for continuing with the extension route, while recognising areas where improvement is still needed. LH also noted that the 2019 contract period was significantly impacted by COVID-19, which affected operations, and highlighted that similar future challenges could occur. A meeting is scheduled next week to discuss the new Community Manager role and how to improve its functioning.

5. idverde Update

MG provided an update on Grounds Maintenance:

- Grounds maintenance remains one of the most challenging aspects of the contract, employing approximately 70 staff.
- Grass cutting season – Significant improvement since the poor performance of 2023. 2024 was better, and further progress noted in 2025. Inspection scores show low complaints and

standards above required levels, but there is still room for improvement. Peaks in grass growth remain difficult to manage especially June this year.

- Ongoing issues include – Litter shredding during cuts, inconsistent strimming around trees and weather-related challenges affecting growth cycles.
- Positive collaboration with Friends Groups – major improvements this year through at Hoblingwell through better site coordination. Has been similar engagement at Chislehurst Rec and Priory Gardens.
- Investment & resources – Approximately £80,000 of new machinery purchased as part of CapEx replacement in March & April 2025.
- Memorial safety testing – 11,000 memorials tested in 2024/25; further 5,000 to be tested by March 2026 to ensure safety in churchyards.
- Health & safety – No RIDDOR-reportable accidents despite a large workforce; only minor cuts and bruises reported. Regular near-miss reporting, toolbox talks, and safety stand-downs implemented.

RA asked what induction training is given to new employees, noting concerns that staff sometimes trim grass, weeds, flowers, and litter indiscriminately. MG explained that induction lasts 1–2 days depending on machinery used. Includes training on trimmers, blowers, hedge cutters, ride-on mowers, and tractors. Apprentices can enter an internal NVQ training programme. Regular refresher training and toolbox talks are held throughout the year, though challenges remain as staff are not gardeners but grounds maintenance workers. ML confirmed this is monitored monthly at SOB meetings.

LH asked whether Idverde plan to extend the positive communication model used at Hoblingwell to more Friends Groups, including Priory Gardens & Whitehall Rec. MG agreed and confirmed plans to roll this out to more sites from February, to align work plans with Friends' priorities and reduce issues. HJ added that a similar meeting with Friends of Kelsey had been constructive. RA added that advance communication helps Friends prepare to litter picking before grass cutting, making collaboration smoother.

RG raised concerns that repeated issues at Green Street Green Common were not reaching the right people, despite raising them with successive Community Managers. He suggested direct contact with grounds maintenance. MG agreed, proposing that Friends should be able to communicate directly with grounds maintenance managers/supervisors, while Community Managers remain in the loop. AW supported this approach, recalling similar successful arrangements in the past and suggesting a renewed meeting with Richard, Nigel Russell, and Paul Meek. RA added that staff morale and job satisfaction improve when communication channels are open, leading to better retention and outcomes for all.

AW provided an update on Idverde's community and fundraising highlights which included:

Community:

- Staffing – Community Manager Jade Veronie has left the role; Winnie on long-term sick leave. AW is currently the only Community Manager; recruitment underway for 2 posts. Meeting with LH scheduled to discuss future structure and improvements

- Community Action Days (Big Bromley Brush Up – 9 total)
 - Petts Wood Rec Ground – painted playground benches with Friends Groups.
 - Church House Gardens – painted sandpit walls (with LBB staff, students, Foresters Financial).
 - St Paul’s Cray Hill Country Park – event to support formation of new Friends group; bench replacement and clearance.
 - St Paul’s Rec Ground – painted playground equipment.
 - Croydon Rd Rec Ground – bench action day with families and Friends group.
 - Cator Park – 27 volunteers painted 40m of fencing.
 - Biggin Hill Rec Ground – fence painting with corporate volunteers (Jade’s last project).

Fundraising & infrastructure projects:

- Hoblingwell Rec Ground (£95k) – New inclusive roundabout, swings, climbing frame, sensory area, climbing boulder, sensory garden. Launch event in October.
- Churchfields Rec Ground (£105k) – New play equipment, sensory corner, trampoline, exercise area (£18k). Launch event in November.
- Shaftesbury Playground & Pond Desilting (£100k+) – Supported by Platinum Jubilee, Section 106, and school. Works include pond restoration and new play equipment.
- Betts Park – Supporting Friends with outdoor gym and “Steel Warriors” calisthenics project. Awaiting William Sutton funding.
- Croydon Rd Paddling Pool Refurbishment – Over 600 consultation responses (many from families without gardens). Friends raised £3.5k. Design and funding application in development.

RG raised concern about the high turnover of community managers in the past 2–3 years, questioned whether Idverde is employing the wrong people, or if internal problems are prompting departures RG observed that frequent churn suggests "something wrong somewhere". AW acknowledged the high turnover issue and difficulty recruiting, confirmed discussions are scheduled with LH and LBB to review the role collaboratively and reshape it. RG commented that if most Friends’ issues relate to grounds maintenance, and MG is recommending bypassing the Community team for those issues, it raises the question of the value of community managers. MG agreed the role needs reviewing and will be in discussions with LBB. MG stressed that Community Managers play an important part in events, working parties, and volunteer engagement, even if day-to-day grounds maintenance can bypass them. Noted challenges in recruitment due to low salary levels, making retention difficult.

MG accepted that Idverde must take some responsibility for how the role is defined and managed. HJ added the upcoming discussions aim to co-design a solution with Friends Groups and make best use of limited funding and resources. RG added that issues are more prevalent in urban parks, while countryside sites seem to run more smoothly. KR commented that the last couple of community managers have been of little use to urban Friends Groups. Asked for a reassessment of the role, its purpose, and how appointments are made. KR welcomed the idea of a meeting between Friends Groups and Idverde to discuss the future of the role or possible alternatives. MG acknowledged the issues and thanked RG for raising these points.

SH Praised AW and her team for the extensive work achieved despite challenges. SH continued to provide an update on Idverde's countryside and education highlights which included:

- Volunteer & Friends Sessions:
 - July: 34 sessions (856 hours) – tasks included bracken clearance, infrastructure works, surveys (dormice sightings with babies, moth trapping with rare species).
 - August: 29 sessions (672 hours) – included exchange visits with Down House and RSPB Rainham Marshes; 37 holiday events reaching 167 children and 635 visitors.
 - September: 24 sessions (598 hours).
 - Total (Jul–Sep): 87 supervised workdays (2,126 hours).

- Education & Outreach:
 - Delivered 54 school sessions over the last academic year (125 sessions for 2,333 children).
 - 7 outreach sessions to schools/local parks.
 - Renewed Service Level Agreements with 3 special needs schools (Brook Lane, High Elms, Scadbury) for Forest School training and work experience.
 - Renewed licence for Midfield Bromley Academy to use Scadbury for Forest School.
 - Delivered school talks about nature-friendly verges (positive feedback).

- Partnerships & Exchanges – Built partnership with Down House (exchange visits and training). RSPB hosted Idverde team at Rainham Marshes for skills development.

- Countryside Stewardship – Current agreements end December 2025, new scheme starts in 2026. All mapping work complete, peer review done, and now invited to apply. Natural England advisor positive about acceptance. Working with Forestry Commission on woodland agreements.

- Training:
 - Ladder training in February had 15 attendees
 - Biodiversity in community spaces in June had 7 attendees
 - Meadow survey in July had 7 attendees
 - Bioblitz in Chislehurst in July had 7 attendees
 - Woodland trail in September had 4 attendees
 - Hedge laying course planned for November.

- Friends of BEECHE (new group) – First meeting held 9th July. Chair elected; still in early stages. Group will support fundraising for BEECHE, garden, and education sessions.

RA asked about revamping butterfly beds and scrapes that are underperforming, and whether lack of funding is the issue. SH advised that initial funding came from Butterfly Conservation but has ceased. Surveys are ongoing, with plans to reseed failing beds and create new scrapes depending on results. RG asked about timing and availability of survey results. SH confirmed surveys have been completed and are being analysed; results will be included in the Biodiversity Report in November which can be shared publicly.

LH queried the value of quarterly statistics, noting he hadn't received April–June data and questioning low response rates. AW apologised if she had missed sending them and promised to resend. DB added response rates were low (around 12–15 Groups) but said the exercise remains worthwhile for promoting Friends Groups' work. LH commented he needs to know which Groups respond to follow up and questioned usefulness unless engagement improves. AW confirmed the next data collection round will go out shortly.

LH raised concerns about low attendance at training sessions calling it a poor use of resources. SH agreed numbers were disappointing, sometimes affected by weather, and said improvements will be considered for next year's programme.

LH asked SH about advertising for the Christmas Market to ensure attendance. SH confirmed the date of 7th December with 10–12 indoor stalls available, and said advertising will begin immediately.

LH raised query on new Friends Groups, asked about recognition of Bromley Palace Park Friends as a separate group (currently under Bromley Town Parks) and progress at Crease Park. AW advised she and ML plan to meet them on-site to clarify arrangements, noting the group seems keen to be independent. AW confirmed discussions were ongoing regarding Crease Park, would check JV's handover notes, and could issue a new group toolkit once formalised.

RA raised that signage refers to chalk grassland, which is incorrect for his site, SH agreed and said alternative signage can be provided.

RG asked if there's a process for expanding sustainable beds/verges, highlighting PR value and resident involvement (similar to Friends of Trees). He noted Idverde struggles to manage weeds in some areas. HJ advised survey results show strong public support for conversion (90%+), though slightly less when tied to specific sites. A report is expected next year to consider expansion, depending on budget. RG highlighted the maintenance challenge, as sustainable beds require gardening skills rather than standard grounds maintenance, and suggested more resident adoption. RA added that as beds mature, they should require less maintenance if properly planted to suppress weeds.

6. Friends Forum Update

LH gave an update on the Friends Group which included:

- Meetings:
 - Two member meetings since June – July had 25 attendees, 15–16 Friends Groups represented. September had 13 attendees, 8 Groups represented (lower turnout, concern about promotion)
 - Attended Countryside Panel meeting at Crofton & Sparrow Woods
 - Attended Stakeholder Panel meeting in July
 - Upcoming – another Countryside Consultative Panel meeting.
 - Ongoing meetings with AW, DB & HJ about the contract extension.
 - Attended London-wide Friends Groups meeting relating to finance concerns across boroughs, Bromley seen as advanced with Forum structure
 - Attended Bromley Environmental Network Group – useful for contacts with churches, schools, potential new/younger volunteers.

- General Feedback from Members – Countryside parks largely positive, Urban parks there are some disappointments but overall favourable feedback. Good progress with fundraising and projects.
- Grants & Funding – 8 small grants awarded this year £3,500 total which some was spent on boards, benches, and occasional tools.
- Training & Support – 4 first aid courses delivered at cost of £1,500. 2 more first aid courses planned for October & November. Purchase and distribution of new PPE gloves for Friends Groups.
- Governance & AGM – Financial year ended September. AGM scheduled for 27th November, awaiting confirmation of room and portfolio holder attendance.
- Treasurer resigning at AGM – replacement needed, Role not onerous 2–3 transactions per month, 20 annually. LH can provide interim cover if needed.

7. AOB

LH raised concern about Bromley Palace Park’s proposal to use an aerator and weed control, questioning if it was appropriate. DB confirmed it had not been formally discussed with them yet. He is liaising internally and expects the matter to be addressed in upcoming meetings with Andrew and Molly. Updates will be provided once more information is available.

LH raised query whether Friends Groups could be better informed about available grants, noting that Amy Rogers previously circulated updates. HJ suggested using the Parks for London website, which already provides a comprehensive list of grants for councils and community groups. Recommended sharing this resource. AW added she had put together a list earlier in the year (mainly gardening-related grants). She will review and update it before sharing again, as some opportunities may now be expired.

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting date has been arranged for: Thursday 8TH January 2026 starting at 10am (Online). The subsequent meeting will be Thursday 26th March 2026.

[Meeting ended]