



Forum Partnership Meeting No. 40

Tuesday 13th January 2026, 10am – Video Conferencing

Larry Herbert (LH)
Barbara Arora (BA)
Ralph Ambrose (RA)
Vivien Smith (VS)

Hannah Jackson (HJ)
David Braybrook (DB)
Hugh Chapman (HC)
Mollie Lyon (ML)

Mark Garthwaite (MG)
Angela Wood (AW)
Sue Holland (SH)
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 opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. LH was pleased to note that as this was meeting number 40, it represented the completion of ten years of the partnership.

2. Apologies for Absence

Friends Forum: Keith Rodwell (KR), Ian Thomas (IT), Richard Gibbons (RG)

LBB:

Idverde:

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

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

Matters arising are as follows:

Action 43 (Use of Microsoft Forms to capture unsupervised hours) was discussed. **Closed** – MG advised that idverde is content for the action to be closed but suggested it may be revisited in future.

The action tracker was updated in line with the above and checked to ensure all due dates were correctly represented. All new actions, as raised in the meeting and indicated below, were added to the list. The tracker accompanies these minutes as a separate excel file.

4. Council Update

HJ provided an update on LBB which included:

Council Budget

- The Council continues to face significant financial challenges from 2026 onwards.
- The budget gap for 2026/27 is projected at **£55.7m**, exceeding the current Environment portfolio budget of approximately **£44m**.
- Funding reductions following the Fair Funding Review are expected to be:
 - **£10m** (real-terms) in 2026/27
 - Rising to **£30m** by 2028/29
- Reserves have been used to balance the current year's budget and are expected to be required again next year, which is not sustainable long-term.

Partnership Working & 2025 Achievements

Despite mixed feedback at the November AGM, joint achievements included:

- Successful playground refurbishments funded jointly by Friends groups, idverde, and the Council.
- Environmental initiatives delivered through community advocacy.

Future Parks Management & idverde Contract

- The Executive agreed *in principle* to extend the idverde contract (October 2025).
- The Council intends to consult the Friends Forum on:
 - Future management approaches for parks
 - Opportunities to reduce costs
 - Priority areas for the next contract period
- Wider stakeholder engagement will continue before final decisions are made.

Governance, Scrutiny & Committee Activity

The Environment and Community Services PDS Committee (27 January) will include:

- Annual idverde contract performance review
- Year 4 progress report for the Open Space Strategy

Committee arrangements now prioritise policy-focused debate and reduce routine reporting.

A policy development paper on "Partnerships in Parks" has been drafted for discussion and will be shared with the Friends Forum.

ML continued to give an update on the projects including:

Kelsey Park Bridge

- Following commencement of enabling works in November last year, site mobilisation is due to start this Thursday 15th Jan.
- Access via Wickham Road and Stone Avenue entrances will be restricted for approximately six weeks during works.
- Signage is being installed at park entrances; Friends group and stakeholders notified via project mailing list.
- Off-site bridge fabrication is nearly complete and works remain scheduled to conclude in March.

Scadbury Moated Manor

- A drainage strategy has been proposed; if approved by Natural England, works will commence July following GCN breeding season.
- Soft market testing to inform the drainage tender will begin in coming weeks.
- Ecological mitigation plans underway, including a newt population survey in April.
- Subject to approval, drainage works expected to conclude in October; conservation tender to be published end of year.
- HE1 funding application planned for Feb 2027; repair works anticipated Summer 2027 subject to funding.

Croydon Road Splashpad Project

- Officers continue working with Friends Group on fundraising.
- Online consultation closed with over 700 responses: majority supportive.
- Funding applications to London Marathon Trust and National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund to submitted next month.
- Specification for contractor appointment due in February; appointment subject to funding.

Keston Ponds Project

- First round of surveys completed (ecology, aquatic, hydraulic, arboriculture). Survey priorities incorporated into funding strategy.
- Meetings ongoing with Natural England, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, Historic England.
- GLA Green Roots Fund bid unsuccessful, reapplying this month.
- Work continues with Legal and Estates on fishing management.
- First phase of development due to complete by May.

Crofton & Sparrow Woods Project

- £50k NFM funding application submitted to Thames RFCC; decision expected March.
- Water engineer appointed, topographic and bathymetric surveys underway.
- Friends Group updated earlier this week.
- First development phase due for completion April.

Church House Gardens Pond

- £75k application submitted to Veolia Environmental Trust.
- Proposed works include wetland replacement, island enhancement, inflow control reinstatement, pond desilting.
- Decision due April; further engagement with Friends Group to refine scope will follow.
- Forum thanked for acting as Contributing Third Party for match funding.

Platinum Jubilee & Playground Projects

- 59 projects completed.
- Two projects partially complete (Church House Gardens Skatepark, Poverest Recreation Ground).
- Remaining projects: Shaftesbury, Biggin Hill Recreation Ground, Well Wood.
- Further detail to be provided by Angela in update.

HC gave an update on arboricultural matters:

- Tree Planting Programme – A total of 132 trees are scheduled for planting this season, with 70 already completed. The programme remains on schedule for full completion by the end of January, in line with the current planting season.
- Micro Forests & Whip Planting – Restocking is required following last winter's LATF-funded micro-forest and whip-planting projects to meet the original grant-funded targets. Jane is coordinating with Friends groups and stakeholders to organise community planting sessions, which are planned for mid- to late-February. Site inspections undertaken before Christmas confirmed that most sites are in good condition. Elmers End Recreation Ground has experienced the greatest challenges and is receiving additional planting and targeted attention.

HJ gave a further update in the absence of DB:

- Infrastructure Repairs – The Council continues to work with idverde to agree and deliver priority infrastructure repairs across parks and open spaces. Owing to limited budgets, works are being prioritised in line with risk assessments to ensure that the highest-risk issues are addressed first. HJ advised that the parks and open spaces budget remains limited, necessitating careful prioritisation of expenditure. Investment decisions are therefore guided primarily by safety and risk considerations rather than aesthetic improvements or non-essential enhancements.
- Nature-Friendly Verge Trial / Sustainable Planting – The sustainable planting trial remains ongoing. A formal report outlining the trial's outcomes and recommendations will be presented early in the new municipal cycle (post-April). The report will consider:
 - The advantages and disadvantages of sustainable planting
 - Site-specific experiences and outcomes
 - Lessons learned during the trial

Future options to be assessed include:

- Expanding sustainable planting to additional locations
- Retaining the current trial scope
- Discontinuing the approach, with rationale provided

Early feedback indicates broad public support for sustainable planting where implemented in suitable locations. Discussion will therefore focus on *where* this approach should be extended rather than *whether* it should continue.

LH apologised for the AGM's conclusion and requested an update on follow-up discussions with Kerry, Andrew and others. ML confirmed that DB has been leading engagement with Kerry, who has been supportive, particularly regarding the Veolia bid for Church House Gardens Pond. HC noted ongoing conversations with Kerry about tree-related issues and is awaiting specific locations. HJ advised that funding concerns raised should be directed to the Portfolio Holder.

LH reported non-receipt of *Your Bromley* and queried whether a Forum feature could be included in future editions. HJ confirmed the *Environment Matters* insert is still published three times a year, will raise the delivery issue with Communications, and will explore the inclusion of a Forum feature, subject to cost and available space.

RA raised the long-outstanding drain-cover issue at Hoblingwell and broader delays in infrastructure repairs. ML confirmed the issue has now been resolved and will ensure it is followed up promptly. HJ acknowledged departmental complexities and delays linked to survey work; Officers will review the matter with MG and update RA on feasible actions within the current budget.

RA also reported an ash tree fall on Footpath 152 and requested follow-up inspections and Tree Officer contact details. HC confirmed Kevyn Whiteman is the Tree Officer and requested the Fix My Street reference to reopen the case. He will carry out a post-incident inspection and prioritise the area once seasonal conditions allow.

5. idverde Update

MG provided an update on Grounds Maintenance

- Engagement with Friends Groups – idverde will increase direct engagement ahead of spring. Site visits are planned for late February to agree cut/no-cut areas, priorities, and sensitivities, including follow-up visits at Chislehurst and Hoblingwell (year two). MG will coordinate arrangements; LH will identify any additional sites.
- Spring Preparation – Machinery servicing and operative refresher training are underway to ensure a consistent and efficient start to the grass-cutting season.
- Health & Safety – Bromley remains one of idverde's safest UK contracts, with continued improvement despite occasional incidents.
- Machinery Investment – idverde plans approximately £100,000 CapEx investment for 2026/27 to replace ageing equipment and reduce service disruption. All current machinery is being fully serviced.

MG will follow up with LH to confirm site visits and contacts. BA requested grounds maintenance maps be shared with Friends groups in advance of any visits; MG agreed. **MG**

AW provided an update on idverde's Community & Fundraising highlights which included:

- Green Flag – Management-plan meetings with Friends groups are underway ahead of the 31 January deadline. New applications are being prepared for Jubilee Country Park, Hoblingwell Recreation Ground, and a reapplication for Scadbury Park.
- Staffing – Following Winnie Motoko's departure in December 2025, recruitment is underway for two Parks Engagement Coordinators. Applications close 19 January, with Friends Forum involvement planned for selection. **AW**
- Hoblingwell Rec (£95k) – Completed with support from the Platinum Jubilee Fund, Veolia, National Lottery, and Friends contributions. Improvements include inclusive equipment, biodiversity planting, and a Mayoral opening.
- Churchfields Rec (£105k) – Completed in November with KCR funding and UK Power Networks support. Works include thermoplastic markings, a learn-to-ride circuit and running markers.
- Shaftesbury Playground & Pond Desilting (£100k+) – Contractor appointed. Playground works will begin before the breeding season; pond works follow. Completion expected late spring/early summer.

- Biggin Hill – Friends raised £45,000 with matched Jubilee Fund and community support. Works begin at month-end.
- Completed Jubilee Fund Projects – Husseywell, Widmore Recreation Ground, Mottingham, Pratts Bottom, and Kingsway (Biggin Hill) received new or upgraded playground and sensory features.
- Church House Gardens Skate Park – Lower half resurfaced and shelter modifications completed in 2025. Final repairs and installation of a manual pad are due for completion this month.

SH provided an update on idverde's Countryside & Education highlights which included:

- Memorial Tree Planting & Legacy Projects – Memorial oaks for Judy John were planted at Darrick Wood and High Elms. A memorial event and installation of interpretation boards will take place on 30 January.
- Volunteer & Education Activity – April–December totals: 6,854 volunteer-supervisor hours across 252 sessions; 442 attendees for education and engagement sessions; 3,294 visitor-centre users (continued growth).
- Countryside Stewardship – 2021–2025 agreements completed across multiple sites. New 2026 applications are underway with Natural England support. Additional sites are being considered. Transition to Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) in 2025–26 may cause minor delays; updates will follow.
- Events & Public Participation – Twelve wildlife walks and talks advertised, including bird walks, newt/toad surveys, bat and glow-worm events, and BioBlitz activities. Increased emphasis on public-led surveys.
- Training for Friends Groups – Training programme (March–November) to be planned with LH.
- Staffing – Calum O'Donnell appointed as the new Conservation Ranger.

VS asked about the duration of new ELMS agreements. SH confirmed that most new applications are for five-year terms, although some sites (e.g., Keston Common and Hayes Common) will continue on ten-year agreements, but the standard approach is now five years.

LH noted low attendance at last year's training sessions due to their timing and suggested offering evening, weekend, and child-friendly options. SH advised weekend sessions may now be feasible due to improved staffing at the visitor centre.

LH asked whether Friends groups could receive training or certification for invasive-species treatment (e.g., cherry laurel), as previously undertaken by Judy John. RA noted repeated cutting without treatment is ineffective at Hoblingwell. SH advised that pesticide use carries significant health and safety, insurance, and operational implications, and would require further discussion. **SH**

LH raised a query regarding a project involving the removal of a sundial and replacement with thermoplastic markings. AW confirmed the project is not yet approved and the proposed location raises concerns relating to vehicle access, child safety, and material wear. Adam (Infrastructure Supervisor) will meet Jane on-site to identify a safer alternative location near the pavilion. There is no objection in principle if safety concerns are resolved.

LH asked whether any new Friends groups are in development, citing Shaftesbury Park. AW confirmed no formal group exists yet, though engagement is hoped for. HJ added that officers are working with Burnt Ash Primary School on funding applications and are seeking to develop this into a formal group, with AW and Jane progressing discussions.

VS requested details of Friends-led projects planned for 2026; AW agreed to share this information.

AW

BA asked about raising the Forum's profile and the possibility of a feature in *Your Bromley/Environment Matters*. HJ noted that paid content guarantees inclusion but will explore securing free editorial coverage highlighting the Forum–Council partnership.

HJ

BA also requested improved online search functionality to help the public find accessible/sensory play equipment, woodland walks, and volunteering opportunities. HJ confirmed existing wellbeing and parks directory pages include some information and will explore further improvements through the Bromley Parks website or a dedicated accessibility webpage, discussing options with MG and the Web Team.

HJ/MG

6. Friends Forum Update

LH gave an update on Forum business which included:

- **Treasurer Role** – Forum's new treasurer, IT, is now in place and handover from Tony Allen more-or-less complete. On-line banking access and signatory arrangements now agreed with the Metro Bank. As IT has a background in insurance, he plans to review the Unity Insurance for Friends policies to ensure these continue to offer the best value for money, as well as meeting all indemnity requirements.
- **Grants & Funding** – Two small grants have been approved since the last meeting: bat box installation at Darrick Wood and elm tree planting at Keston. A support payment has been given to the Friends of Bromley Palace Park, as a newly formed group.
- **First Aid Courses** – two first aid courses have been run since our year end, one in October and one in November. Further courses will be arranged for the springtime.
- **Meetings** – Forum meeting dates for 2026 have been confirmed as the fourth Thursday of each month. All room bookings are secured, although the April meeting may move due to potential local elections. Updated staff contact and site responsibility information (provided by Luke) has been circulated and welcomed.
- **External Engagement & Networking** – Representatives attended a London-wide social and networking event with around 50 participants. An invitation has also been received for the Campaign for Rural England's launch event on green space threats; this is expected to be primarily a networking opportunity.
- **Monitoring & Reporting** – The quarterly statistics report has been published. Although figures remain low, AW confirmed they accurately reflect current activity levels. The request for Q3 stats has been sent to all Friends groups.
- **Events & Outreach** – Several Friends groups participated in the BEECHE Christmas Fair; attendance was reduced due to poor weather.
- **Volunteer Enquiries** – The Forum receives 2–3 volunteer enquiries per week, often via the website. Enquiries are sometimes unclear (e.g., tree-related vs. park volunteering). RA noted many relate to individuals already known locally, indicating some routing confusion. The Forum will continue to manage and direct enquiries appropriately.

7. AOB

HJ advised the Council has published its Enhanced Biodiversity Report under the Environment Act. The report outlines statutory biodiversity actions.

Link – [The London Borough of Bromley Enhanced Biodiversity Report](#)

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting date has been arranged for: Thursday 26th March 2026 starting at 10am (Online).

The subsequent meeting will be: Tuesday 2nd July 2026.

[Meeting ended]