



## **Forum Partnership Meeting No. 20**

Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021, 10am – Video Conferencing

Attendance: [see secretary for details](#)

Apologies: [see secretary for details](#)

### **AGENDA**

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

LH welcome all participants and introduces agenda.

#### **Minutes of last meeting**

##### Action 16 - Partnership Statement

JH - Covid period has restricted volunteer activities. The statement is near finishing review by LBB and should have an update by end of Feb.

##### Action 17 - Survey & Questionnaire

FK - Survey undertaken by external consultants (WYG) and was a mix of postal and face to face surveys. The brief overview was that 89% were happy with Bromley's Parks & Open Spaces. FK explains breakdowns of responses.

### Action 18 - Basic tool provision

JH - this is something that has been discussed within LBB, what is needed is to ascertain the demand and need of basic provisions of tools needed for a Friends Group to operate. Numbers are needed for individual items. JH asks for LH to email over a list for him to discuss with council colleagues.

### **LBB Update**

JH explains the last year has been challenging for LBB. LBB has been involved with track and trace, shielding and neighbourhood officers have been continuing to undertake inspections with Idverde and other sub-contractors and service providers on a monthly basis in Parks & Open Spaces, as well as taking extra calls and delivering meals to the venerable. JH also explains the need to discuss Open Space Strategy. JH thanks all for the feedback received and received over 800 responses from survey monkey as well as individual emails. 650 responses were positive, 50 were constructive as well as some negative responses at the end of the consultation survey. LBB need time to assess & collate and review responses with a view to explore some of the ideas in more detail. LBB is delaying putting forward a finished product to committee formally.

LH enquired into negative comments received. JH explains it was mainly around formatting/poor wording and is easily answered.

LH enquires into the COVID situation as it is felt that LBB are slow in directing Idverde on how to look after their volunteers. JH explains that LBB do not receive any information ahead of government guidance & announcements and receive this as it is delivered to the rest of the nation, but try to be as quick off the mark as possible when this information is received. In the last Service Update Meeting between LBB & Idverde it was felt both parties were becoming more "seasoned" to this in terms of signage etc. and communications.

FK acknowledges this seems delayed after new guidance but not down to lack of effort and that the challenge is that between receiving government guidance and acting upon it, it then needs to go before parliament before anything is formalised between LBB & Idverde. Other variables are also considered such as local covid statistics before making a decision on such things as volunteering.

VS enquires as to the annual scheduled programmes of Idverde and if there was any back log on operations in light of government guidance/restrictions and the effects this had on Idverde resources.

FK explains it has and continues to be challenging. Success is having the right continuity and recovery plans in place and a part of how Idverde has operated throughout the pandemic is

to look at statutory services such as cemetery operations, and ensuring the service remain operational and support increased covid related burial numbers. Idverde trained the entire workforce in grave digging too, to assist with the increased demand if needed. Ultimately there was no major impact in overall service and the recovery plans were actually in place well before restrictions were implemented which meant regular reviews of plans only. Idverde had covid related impact on its workforce and activities such as parts of verge cutting had to be halted temporarily to direct and focus on parks due to increased numbers. Aspects such as verges were brought back into programme soon after lockdown though.

RG enquired into paths and bridleways because they have been used much more and if Idverde had been attending to issues?

JP - 1 or 2 small FMS enquiries which are being attending to on Adhoc basis. All that can be done is to inform public that they are using them at their own risk or potentially close them. Paths and Bridleways are marginally worse due to the extra footfall but no major issues reported.

LH enquired into dog notices in parks and needing a licence for having a certain number of dogs being walked and how there was not much of a consultation before this had materialised and asks JH for comments.

JH states this was an enforcement initiative so JH had not had much involvement. This was as a result of large amount of complaints from public regarding dogs and not being able to properly socially distance. JH also states it was meant for more consultation before the Covid 19 pandemic hit.

LH questions the communication process for people breaking this rule and would have appreciated more consultation on the process and lack of clarity on communications regarding reporting on this.

JH states again it was mainly an enforcement initiative but agrees he would also like clarity on this and will be seeking this with LBB colleagues but reporting procedures should go through the normal route for now.

LH asks why playgrounds are still open considering the current circumstances.

JH - explains the directive comes from the government but LBB was surprised when organised sports should cease but playgrounds could remain open which then opened the question of enhanced cleansing within playgrounds. LBB are liaising and monitoring with other boroughs to see what they are doing. Having said this open gyms have been closed. LBB have instructed Idverde to keep playgrounds open and LBB will be trying more firm signage to remind people of social distancing measures but does rely on the public's common sense and discretion.

## Idverde Update

CL - Been supporting our colleagues such as fundraising with funding applications being received thick and fast. We had an opportunity to meet up with some of the newer Friends Groups when restrictions eased to up to 6 people. Main purpose was to ensure momentum with the Groups. We have also been out to support the DSMs during COVID. But mainly trying to support groups and answer questions where we can. We also have been looking at management plans as well as the green flag awards that are coming up. Green flag is actually in the format of "mystery shop" so have been going over previous plans to ensure targets have been met and it seems that it looks like some targets have actually been exceeded.

AR - Business as usual with projects already in place. Examples include new playground at Kings Meadow which is a massive positive and is due to open in the next month or so. Cricket project at Farnborough Rec, the Playing surfaces have been levelled and new cricket square installed to ensure when the cricket club can resume playing the playing surfaces are much better and improved. Other projects coming up in 2021 include works for the Moat Manor brickwork repairs at Scadbury Park, also the Bandstand at Croydon Road Rec, BMX track at Hobblingwell Rec. This is just a few but many more projects upcoming. We have been lucky in that we secured some of the funding for our projects before Covid but there a few funders that have re-prioritised there focus on projects for those affected by Covid. Having said this the focus on sports, parks and recreational areas has been a large focus as a result of the pandemic and as a result some of the funders have expressed that going forward this is where their priorities may lie which is good all around.

PR - The co-chairs of the CPP Friends Group have stood down and need a little help from Idverde and the Forum. Two new Friends Groups have been formed, possibly a third. They are Friends of Betts Park & Friends of Palace Square Open Spaces with a big interest from the Friends of Churchfields Rec. Friends of Cator & Alex Rec happy with their new storage container and CPP Dinosaur Friends happy with the new Dino island bridge installation progress.

JP - Habitat grants had been successful. Following conversations, habitat management and creation of habitat for butterfly projects is looking very good across 4 sites and plans are continuing to proceed on the basis that we will receive the formal go ahead from LBB. Team is unchanged and operationally we had prioritise not having work parties due to Covid especially from October 2020 in order to continue to manage habitats and no major impacts as a result of this. Different approach to sheep this year at High Elms and their grazing, we had a sheep killed by a dog and another died of natural causes. Education has been extremely difficult given the inconsistent Covid guidelines but hoping trying to arrange online courses for certain groups.

AH - Teams have worked admirably to continue to provide the service as this has been hard professionally and personally as with everyone else. Parks have been heavily used as a result of Covid and unfortunately heavily abused – fly tipping a litter/rubbish has increased dramatically and has stretched our workforce/resource. Programmed works pretty much back on track and as an example are still fully gearing up to start grass and verge cutting. Winter pruning will take longer as due to Covid and adapting to prioritising tasks and as a result a lot of the summer programme was missed. Practices have had to be altered operationally to adhere to socially distancing guidelines. Thomas Annand has now left the business and his replacement will start 8/2. Projects and infrastructure team capability has increased and as such have now appointed a technical assistant to chase up on things such as memorial benches etc. No events – however, team was busy with event enquiries and people trying to put Covid safe events on as well as liaising with reoccurring events to try and prepare for when events are allowed to go ahead.

SG - a lot of naturalised grass areas have been agreed in parks and the info on locations of this within parks has not got through to Idverde maintenance teams. Is it possible to create updateable maps for each park that can reflect friend's activities to improve communication?

FK - The challenge with this is that it is difficult to create maps for 160 parks that we have with individual green assets but it could be driven by the mechanism of updating the site management plans which will highlight bespoke arrangements. Any change has to be formally agreed between LBB & idverde in order for any changes to be factored into idverde's work programme.

AH - Although our work programme and digital programming system will reflect changes or additions of assets such as additional Shrubs or additional areas of grass or an increase of the size area it will not show the specific location within a park or open space, which is something can be improved on to ensure the agreed places of new planting etc. The important part of any agreed additions/removals is that the message gets through to the teams on the ground, maintaining these areas. AH agreed he was to pick this up with SG at a later date.

FK - Final update is that our current Admin has been promoted to our support services at head office and her replacement will start in early February and organisation chart will be circulated in the near future. AH has been promoted to Senior Operations Manager.

## Forum Update

LH - Friends Groups have suffered badly in the last year due to Covid especially with friend's events as they have not been able to be held which has effected funding. As Forum's funds have not been spent as normal this year we have decided to help individual Groups by giving them a "covid" payment of £100 in return for completing our questionnaire.

Concerns over the Open Space Strategy discussed in member meetings via zoom. The concern with the document is that it appears very much as an Idverde planning document rather than an LBB strategy document.

Forum was not able to hold its AGM in November as normal due to Covid and is looking to hold it virtually in April/May time. LH requested assistance from LBB/idverde to act as co-ordinator as Forum does not have a business licence. JH/FK confirmed their assistance via Microsoft Team's licensing.

LH confirms committee has agreed to serve for another year until Nov 2021, however, the committee's treasurer will stand down after this period and will not look to serve after this point. As of Nov 2020, our account auditor has decided to stand down so we don't have an account auditor at present and wondered if LBB would provide assistance in this. There is some difference of opinion within the committee if the money held by the committee is public money or not. It is seen as a sum of money that is granted to the committee by LBB and they probably want to be satisfied on how it is being spent and that it is spent wisely. If the funds are deemed not to be public money than as an alternative there is the option to appoint an auditor from one of the Friends Groups to audit our accounts.

JH - totally understand this, we have already spoken about this between FK and myself and have such consulted LBB finance department for their opinion and when we receive an answer from them we will of course share this with you.

Committee and LBB/Idverde discuss the Open Space Strategy, including the formatting and wording and clarity on responsibilities of idverde and how poorly it was presented. JH politely disagrees and expresses his pleasure in the way it was presented but concedes the formatting could have been worked on but assures member that this is not for the purpose of selling parks and open spaces. It was also discussed whom is leading this strategy. FK, AH & JH clarified that the Open Space Strategy document was authored by idverde based on a brief and approved by LBB however is not an Idverde strategy but one created by LBB with idverde as a partner.

## AOB

VS - Can LBB or Idverde help provide Friends with survey assistance on an ad hoc basis, as survey providers such as Survey Monkey are rather expensive to obtain. Also enquires regarding an update of the parks asset exercise to replace and upgrade park signs.

JH expresses his support and will ask LBB communications department if they can help.

FK - on occasions we use Survey Monkey but we do not manage this locally and is provided for the company as a whole but also advises that Microsoft Forms is a good and cheaper way to obtain survey results and VS should look into this.

AH advises he sent correspondence & documents previously on the parks asset exercise but will resend.

FK advises that the initiative for park signs with Bromley College has been delayed due to Covid, however the college said they would make contact in March/April time with a view to take this forward so we will update you when we have picked this back up with them.

RG asks if new technical assistant within Idverde whom deals with memorial benches covers highways benches as well as parks.

JH explains that benches or memorial benches on highways is within the highways department of LBB and separate to memorial benches within parks.

LH enquires with JH as to water fountains and getting more fountains established.

JH states the last update before Covid was that we were looking at maintenance costs, building new fountains etc. with LBBs property contractor but is still being considered and updates will be given once completed.

LH asks FK about new groups potentially joining the Friends Forum and sought confirmation of support from Idverde to formally accept these groups to bring into the Forum.

JH & FK states once the new group has formally been added to the formal list of groups, they will be supported by Idverde in practice and with insurance and can join the Friends Forum membership.

LH enquires into more online courses/education for Friends Groups.

JP advises if the Forum can provide a list of topics that can be delivered online but will also send over a list of potential courses that could be available.

JH reiterates the value and council's thanks for the Groups and volunteer work that has taken place and thank every member including members of Friends Groups that are not present.

**Next Meeting Date**

Next meeting date arranged for Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

[Meeting ended]