



Forum Partnership Meeting No. 23

Thursday 23rd September 2021, 10am – Video Conferencing

LH	RG	SF
JC	AH (Minutes)	MB
KR	PR	
BA	JP	

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

Welcome & Introductions

LH welcomed all participants and introduced two new attendees MB (*idverde*, Contract Director) replacing FK and SF (LBB, Assistant Director, Performance Management & Business Support)

Apologies for Absence

PP, SG, KS, VS, AR, JH

Minutes of last meeting

The following issues and corrections were noted from the previous minutes.

Minor typos mentioned

P5 section about the Forum grant being increased. Action 33 has since been added to the action tracker to reflect this conversation.

P7 Volunteer hours – JP said that FF may be able to improve/capture better data. LH asked for clarity. This was clarified by JP he was asking the FF to encourage groups to submit self-led volunteering hours to their Community Manager.

P8 – Further detail on the sentence “LH has been updating the Forum website with KR” LH advised that there is more detail here, KR has done a substantial review of the three websites (LBB, idverde and The Forum) and has helped LH revise the Forum website and has sent comment to idverde and LBB to improve their websites. AH explained that the previous meeting recording was not clear due to internet issues.

Matters Arising (Action Tracker Update)

Action 16 - Partnership statement

LH advised that the revised partnership statement had been received on 23/7 and asked that if all agreed then the partnership statement will be adopted and issued. The only comment made is on section one which relates to LBB’s role in partnership meetings. LH would like this expanded upon to include a higher level of LBB officer at these meetings and potentially somebody from the tree team or a neighbourhood officer could attend on occasion. SF advised that this appears to be a reasonable request and LBB will consider it. All agreed on the adoption of the partnership statement. LH to update the statement from draft to formal and then the action will be closed.

Action 18 – Tool provision for Friends Groups.

LH received template on 23/6 and provided some comments to date he has not received a response to those comments. JP advised that a template was sent to LBB and was awaiting a response. JH is to advise if they are happy with what was being proposed. The action will have to be carried forwards in JH’s absence. SF advised that she believed that JH has sent an email on the subject and was awaiting a response from LH. LH advised he had received an email but it wasn’t necessarily clear what was being offered by LBB and that would pick this up when discussing Forum funding.

Action 24 - LBB to provide update on park sign upgrades.

SF advised that the Open Space Strategy is out in draft format, which has been shared with the Forum, with the intention to take it to committee in November. Projects such as this one will begin after the strategy has been agreed. SF will ask JH to provide a fuller update when he can. This is an ongoing action.

Action 25 - Additional water fountains installations and upgrades for existing fountains.

AH advised it is unlikely that this project will progress presently due to the insourcing of the Amey property contract. SF advised that LBB were taking the service back in house from the start of October and would expect to see an improvement on property issues. This is an ongoing action.

Action 27 – Updated NMO Organisation Chart

SF advised she will send an LBB org chart to LH as soon as possible to close this action.

Action 28 – Twenty Year Maintenance Costs for New Assets

LH advised that he had received an email from JH that requires discussion. JH's proposal was to remove the twenty-year rule and replace it with a timeframe to match the idverde contract. LH advised the Forum are not overly happy with this proposal, the issue with using the idverde contract length is that it is variable, what time does the maintenance liability start? Is it at the start of the process or once the asset has been installed? This action should be taken out of this meeting and discussed separately. BA added this is a big point for groups and that it is felt that maintenance should not be paid for upfront and certainly not for twenty-years. A direct face to face discussion is required with LBB as soon as possible. LH added that there is also an issue with the groups that have charitable status as they have to demonstrate to the charities commission all spend and cannot do this easily with the maintenance payments. SF agreed that a separate meeting should be arranged.

Action 29 – Revised Fundraising Process Map

AH advised that this hasn't moved forward since the last meeting as we have not been able to progress with this action due to some large projects that are now underway and the fact that we are still recruiting to replace AJP. Action carried forward.

Action 30 – Bromley Website Inconsistent Information

Review of the idverde website is underway as is the LBB review of their website. Feedback has been received by both idverde and LBB from KR. Further updates to follow at subsequent Forum meetings as the reviews proceed.

Action 31 – Increase in Dangerous Dogs in Parks

BA asked who has replaced TS since he had retired and what the pathway is for reporting dangerous dogs. SF advised that DL has just started at LBB and is the new enforcement Manager.

Action 32 – Customer Satisfaction Survey

LH advised that FK had shared the survey and the action can be closed.

Action 33 – Friends Forum Grant from LBB Increase

LH advised that at the last meeting with Cllr Huntington-Thresher in attendance that the Forum has asked for the grant received from LBB (5k) be increased. An email has been received from JH suggesting that 2k of LBB funds are to be used for tools and PPE which means LBB are funding 7k in total. It is not clear if the grant will be increased to 7k or if the grant will remain at 5k and the 2k is effectively earmarked for tools and PPE provision. SF suggested that the 2k may be for tools for new groups. LH advised that if this is the case then the request had not moved forward, the Forum expects a level of tools to be provided to groups from LBB free of charge as the group's activities are of benefit the parks. The Forum grant is to be used for things like training or project assistance, tool provision is separate. LH advised that he had sent budgetary figures to the Portfolio Holder detailing why the increase should be made to the grant, LH explained that the increase to over 50 groups from around 20 to support as well as the increasing costs of delivering projects is why they are asking for a reasonable increase to the grant. LH advised that they had asked for the grant to be increased to 10k but could accept an increase to 7k but would not expect to buy the groups tools from this. SF advised that clarity regarding the 7k would be sought and LH advised subsequently. KR asked who would approve or reject the requested increase. SF advised that PM is the budget holder.

LBB Update

In JH's absence SF advised that there was no specific update from LBB. If there are any questions for LBB SF would take the question away and provide a response later.

LH advised that there was a query about the watering of street trees, sadly a lot of trees had succumbed to the dry weather. SF advised that LBB had been given the go-ahead to plant thousands of new street trees and were looking to reinvigorate tree friends to assist with the watering of the new trees. A campaign to involve the public in this is launching, the project team are meeting next week and a couple of new colleagues have been appointed to the tree team to support this initiative.

LH asked that in the recent Council Executive meeting reference was made Hobblingwell BMX project. It was mentioned that 31k was being moved to the project from the Friends fund. LH asked what the Friends Fund was as it was not something he was aware of. SF advised that she will look in to this as it may have the wrong terminology, SF believes this may be the Community Initiative fund and had been recorded incorrectly.

RG asked where in the Open Space Strategy was park signage mentioned. SF advised that if it is not specifically referenced then it is possibly referenced under a separate heading. SF explained that the draft has been written and that wholesale changes were not possible but amendments could be made and this could be looked at on the stakeholder engagement sessions that were coming up soon.

RG said that park entrance signs, that are LBB's remit, there have been initiatives over the years, such as the Bromley College being involved with design, which have not progressed. In the meantime, the signs have continued to deteriorate to a shocking state. It is surprising that LBB are not taking more pride in their appearance. There has been no progress at all. I would have expected this to be covered more extensively in the Open Space strategy. SF advised she would take this feedback to the parks team to see if it can be referenced in the strategy.

LH asked when the Open Space Strategy engagements will take place. SF advised that they will be in early November and online. LH asked if LBB's expectation is that after the engagement meetings that the strategy would be tidied up and then put to Executive in November. SF confirmed this was correct. LH was concerned that this was extremely fast considering the uproar earlier in the year. It is clear that the document has been rewritten, has increased in size and is easy to read but it is a very quick turnaround. SF explained that the document design will be finalised in due course which may reduce the number of pages. The existing version is a draft and hasn't been finalised in to the glossy version, there were still edits to be made and typo's to be corrected. LH suggested perhaps there could be a summary version made available. Appendix five could be lost as it has nothing to do with the strategy, it is a good document in its own right. SF advised when it is published on the website the strategy will be a stand alone and you will be able to click on the appendices. There will be an executive summary and an easy-to-read version for anyone with disabilities.

RG asked if the list of open spaces was a list of all the borough's open spaces or only sites managed by idverde. AH said that he wasn't sure and would need to check.

KR said he found all this very disappointing as far as the Friends Groups were concerned, there was a big furore when the strategy was initially produced and the groups made a lot of comments. KR advised that it was his understanding that the group would be involved in the writing of the new draft strategy and this wasn't the case. KR feels that LBB had missed the feeling of the group and that the emphasis was completely wrong and that the groups were not engaged with. SF advised that the consultation was boroughwide for all residents and visitors. The engagement session is to show how views have been listened to. KR asked who was being invited to the engagement meetings. SF advised that there are a couple of sessions for different groups. The meetings will be hosted by Anthesis with PM leading for the Council.

BA expressed her disappointment and felt that the strategy was a waste of time. LBB planning has just given away a piece of Walden Wood without consultation. After reassurances that the Council would engage with groups regarding the strategy, this hasn't been the case and the strategy has become a whitewash. BA asked what other boroughs Anthesis had worked with and why LBB were paying for this when budgets are already stretched. SF advised they have worked with Greenwich Council on their carbon report, they are very good and experts in their field and that someone impartial presenting the information would be good.

Idverde Update

AH advised that we are approaching the end of the grass cutting season and the end of the season was a lot easier now than it had been all year due to the drier weather. Horticulture teams are moving on to the winter bedding programme. The hanging baskets are coming up for switchover as well with the winter baskets going up in early October. Infrastructure team have all settled in well with AS and YP having now moving projects forward quickly. AH said that he was looking forward to working with LBB Property as opposed to Amey property now that the service has been brought back in-house. Events have been very busy over summer with the Wireless festival being the largest event with over 100k people attending over three days. Fireworks are coming up next with the majority of events taking place. Lightopia is coming in to Crystal Palace Park which looks really interesting. The funfair will be there as well. AH advised that AW has been appointed as CL's replacement as Community Manager from the start of October covering the east of the borough and will be introduced to groups in due course. We are still actively recruiting to replace Allison John-Pandya but without much success so far. RG asked what was happening to the new naturalised grass areas in parks. AH advised that where the trials have been successful idverde will ask the Council to adopt the areas as naturalised via a contract variation. The areas will be cut in the near future as per the normal schedule.

PR advised she has been supervising some groups in the east whilst recruitment was taking place for CL's replacement. A good few weeks for groups recently with Winsford Gardens celebrating their ten year anniversary. Betts Park and Crystal Palace Park have held some community engagement events and the friends of groups of Palace Square and Churchfields Rec had received money from Clarion Housing which is good.

JP advised that the Countryside team are currently recruiting for a Ranger to replace AW. John explained that countryside habitat works are now in their peak season (Oct – Feb). Depending on how the weather is may mean we have to defer some of the works, particularly if it is mild, particularly with ponds but we don't usually start these until the end of November anyway.

JP advised from a volunteering perspective the latest figures for supervised volunteering were 3993 hours for 2021 which is from 31st March due to C-19 restrictions.

JP advised that Friends Forum courses has seen a total participation of fifty-four over three courses. The last of the courses for 2021 are up on the Bromley Parks website. Principles of hedgerow management, safely leading work parties and biodiversity on amenity spaces which was run due to feedback from the forum. JP asked the group to consider what training courses are going to be run next year.

JP advised that the capital works had now been completed for the brilliant butterfly's project across all the sites. There is only a couple of months left with the collaborative works with the London Wildlife Trust and then we will absorb the management of these sites going forwards.

JP advised that we have had a regime of independent assessments of our habitat management on some of our sites from third parties, Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group and the RSPB had a look at Hayes Common and Keston Common. It is beneficial to get outside opinions to our woodland and heathland management regimes. The feedback was very positive, the work on Hayes in particular. One of the regions top reptile ecologists came down and was blown away with the population that we are seeing. An online webinar is being set up to share this feedback.

JP advised we have great crested newt mitigation works taking place at Scadbury Manor as part of the restoration works taking place. The newt fencing is on and colleagues will be on site with the licenced ecologist to carry out newt bottle trapping prior to any works taking place.

JP advised that woodland infrastructure works were underway, particularly repair works to paths which were heavily used over throughout the pandemic and also suffered from the wet winter.

KR asked for an improvement on communication from idverde, when there are issues with things like grass cutting it would be useful to know. KR said he was confused with the latest idverde organisation chart and that it is not clear to him. BA added that the FoCRG had invited the local contract management team to site and this was beneficial.

AH responded by saying that he tries to introduce new colleagues when they join and is hoping to be able to include a "latest news" section to the website during the current review. In regards to grass cutting again getting the message out is difficult, it has been mentioned in updates during these meetings. Sometimes the team are focussed on the delivery of the service and the communications element could be improved.

LH advised that the organisation chart used to give more detail as to what Community Manager covered what area. AH advised that this can be looked at and a site responsibility chart could be circulated by PR.

LH asked what was happening with the Green Flag Awards? There has been no feedback yet. PR advised that the results are likely to be released later in the year.

BA had some concerns regarding figure included in the fundraising report (22k). AH advised he will need to look in to this with AR when she returns from leave as he is not aware of why this would be the case.

LH advised that he had received a email advising that Keston Common had received a Higher Level Stewardship fund (130k over 10 years), this information came originally from idverde Fundraising via the local Rector via the local Ward Councillor and not to the Friends Group directly. JP explained that it is no longer HLS as HLS no longer exists. This relates the Countryside Stewardship Grants which came live in 2021. The previous agreement expired and we have no issues sharing the details of the new grant if LBB agree. The grant is held in LBB's name as landowner so it is their decision to share the detail or not. There are a number of grants for sites across the borough and JP doesn't have the detail to hand. JP advised that the money is from Natural England effectively as an agricultural grant for habitat management, it may be viewed as commercially sensitive but the decision to share the detail is ultimately LBB's. LH feels that if it is possible the Friends Forum would like to see the detail.

LH asked a question of behalf of VS regarding radar gates at Scadbury Park, there was an issue with the change of contractor. AH advised he was not aware of this job and that if LH could forward the detail AH would look into it and report back directly to VS.

BA advised that she was concerned with the communication around fundraising, some of the detail is inaccurate and this shouldn't be the case. MB advised that the idverde team will look in to this and advise in due course but first we will need to check the details.

Forum Update

LH advised that the Forum have joined in with the training courses supplied by idverde and had also put on two first aid courses for the groups and are running a third course next month, with possibly more to follow before the end of the financial year. Normally these courses would be held at the Council offices but they have had to be held at different places. It is the aim to return to the Council offices as soon as that is possible so that the more centrally based Friends Groups can join the courses.

LH advised that the Forum would normally meet with the groups every couple of months or so but that hasn't happened, this is something LH would like to get back to. The Forum are considering having an AGM in November but this is undecided.

LH advised that JC is standing down as treasurer there is a replacement lined up so if the AGM is delayed then there is no issue.

SF said she would like to know more about the Forum's work and would like to visit the Friends Groups on site when possible.

LH explained that the Forum generally update the 52 Friends Groups on the outcomes of various meetings, such as this one to keep them updated. If the groups have issues or queries, they can advise the Forum and they will raise them on their behalf as they have today. Forum get 5k funding from LBB which they are hoping will be increased which enables them to support groups with small grant funding small projects such as benches or signage up to £300. In the past the Council gave all the groups a £100 gift for supplying their volunteering data, this doesn't happen anymore. LH advised that the Forum has various items of literature for groups and the Forum assists groups as and when required.

AOB

JP advised that as well as the Friends Forum course that there are other adult introductory courses currently being offered that are up on the website. Badger ecology is available and some other courses will be on the website over the next couple of days.

SF advised that the fund referenced to earlier was actually the members initiative fund which is available to Friends Groups and not the Friends Fund. This was an inaccuracy in the way the report was written.

Next Meeting Date

Next meeting date arranged for 10am Thursday 9th December 2021.

[Meeting ended]