



Forum Partnership Meeting No. 35

Thursday 26th September 2024, 10am – Video Conferencing

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

Hugh Chapman (HC)
Hannah Jackson (HJ)
Mollie Lyon (ML)

Martyn Bradley (MB)
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: Vivien Smith (VS)

LBB: Cllr Will Rowlands (WR), David Braybrook (DB)

Idverde: N/A

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, this can be found attached to the minutes. A summary of changes to the action tracker is as follows:

Action 24: Park signage updates – **Continued to be reviewed.** AW advised there hasn't been any further submissions. HJ advised good to clarify how the Forum would like to be involved in this project going forward, mixed messages previously about this. LH commented that when it first started, it was all about a design for the new style of sign. Tried persuading Friends Groups to do the audit but

for some reason that they haven't been able to fulfil that. Still think at some point to consider some sort of rudimentary design for a new sign and that when budgets allow, then maybe, introduce one or two new signs.

BA added there was not very much appetite for doing surveys because everybody felt that the long run there was no actual plan for having a budget for actually taking anything further forward. Concept was to originally get the tech college or somebody to come up with a natty new design. There's no clear plan and no clear commitment from LBB, that it should perhaps be shelved for now and resurrected, at a later date. KR agrees with BA's comments and added if nothing is being promoted or pushed forward by the Council or agreed, then you know there doesn't really seem much purpose in us trying to push Friends Groups into providing information.

RG agrees with BA, KR and added the information that's there, if it is legible, is out of date. With today's digital printing technology that stickers for some of the signs could be produced relatively cheaply. That would at least mean that the information that's being presented is correct and up to date. It just reflects badly on the Council who is constantly telling us what a wonderful borough we live in.

HJ commented views have been made very clear. When we started on this journey, when we started thinking about signage, I did try to make it clear at that point that the Council didn't have lots of money to put into this. If we needed to replace signs as we go along, then we would need to do that. And that's sort of what I think sparked this project, i.e we wanted first of all building on what RG was saying to work out what we had and what we might need to change more quickly. Or remove even if it is completely out of date and then to work on potentially this design guide so that as and when funding may become available or as and when, Idverde do have an element under their contract in terms of keeping park infrastructure safe and maintained.

HJ shared a bit about the Council's financial position, I'll be showing a bit about that with you again today. These are really, really tough times. I appreciate what you're saying and the feedback that you're giving me about it reflecting badly on the borough. I'm not necessarily disagreeing with you. But budgets are really, really stretched. We look at what's important from a health & safety perspective. We look at what's important for our residents, for the feedback that's given to us, and we tend to prioritise in that way. So I can't give you a commitment today that we're going to somehow find some money to refurbish and replace all of the signage in our parks across our boroughs, but we are happy to take these initial steps work out what we've got and what we need to change more immediately and put in place some sort of guide.

LH asked MG is there some form of time span in which idverde can fulfil the audit. MG advised doesn't have a timescale, will touch base with AW. LH commented try to fulfil the audit and then perhaps publish the audit and see where we stand. We should try and achieve that, then put it to one side for a time being and then come back to it at a future time.

HC suggested with the action as its ongoing and has been for a while and everyone's articulated very well that there is value to it and that there are things in the offering for it. Maybe rather than specifically reviewing it at the start of each of these meetings, if we just kind of discuss as and when there's an update. In the next instance, once they've done their audit. RA agrees with HC and try and focus attention on particular things. LH confirmed action to be updated as and when there are updates to give on. AW to publish what info there currently is and share with LH.

Action 25: Water fountains – Continued to be reviewed. LH advised we're trying to get to the bottom of how you can actually install a water fountain in one of our parks and what processes are required, what is needed to achieve that and where the Friends could help out with purchase or some of the funding. But equally at some point there will be requirements from the Council to support the water used as well. ML advised in regards to the update on the processes from the Council's behalf, DB and I met with Facilities Management last week in which we raised this question again. They've advised that they'll be able to give us next steps and time scales within the next three weeks, so unfortunately they are also very understaffed. So things are moving a lot slower than we'd had liked, but I've been given a three week deadline for next steps so I can update once I hear back from them.

LH commented we don't understand if there is a commitment to putting in some water fountains in our parks, or whether again, this is something that's never going to happen. I'm prepared to purchase a water fountain but I can't provide the cost of ongoing maintenance and the cost of the water used. ML added LBB do not have the budget, cannot commit to spending any additional money on maintenance that isn't considered statutory or for health & safety reasons, which unfortunately this wouldn't be. HJ added this is obviously quite a tense meeting, and it would be good to be able to try and move constructively forward, but the Council's first responsibility to its residents has to be to return a balanced budget and the financial situation of the Council's really serious. I can't commit to creating new costs or pressures within the service because of the Council's overall financial position.

RA suggested a model whereby there's a QR code on a water fountain that leads people to make a donation that can help to support it and other developments in that local park. ML acknowledges suggestion and will take away to look at in more detail. LH confirmed action to be updated as and when there are updates to give on.

Action 38: Friends Group donations from events – MG advised idverde stance would remain the same as it was last time, continuing to have discussions on contract extension with LBB for a possibility as of 2027. LH and KR raised concerns on not being able to answer them. MB added our current commercial arrangements with the LBB is that we've assumed a certain level of income from parks events. That income stream goes to contribute to running the service, so we've discounted, if you like the running of the grounds maintenance contract as a result of idverde. Receiving that events income until there's a commercial change in the contract arrangements which we currently enjoy, there is no opportunity to present anything different as part of our discussions with the authority regarding a possible extension proposal, we have tabled some initiatives, but unfortunately at this stage we haven't concluded those commercial discussions, so we're not in a position at this stage to answer the question what you're answering. We're not being evasive. We're not being awkward, but these things do take time. Our current contract doesn't expire till 2027. Hopefully if we're successful and what we've proposed to the Council is agreed, then we will be in a position to articulate a response at that time.

KR commented 3 years to wait Larry. LH added I would have thought you could decide about the fees that are charged for. I mean, I presume these fees are increased for inflation for instance. So I don't understand why the fees that are charged for somebody holding an event could not be revised before we have to have a complete contract renewal. RA added we're looking for an additional levy that is paid by event organisers of commercial events that will help to fund some of the essential restoration that we do that wouldn't otherwise be done. MB thanks comments, MG and MB will have a discussion with Anna and get something presented back for the next meeting.

Action 39: idverde to provide course on events **Action Closed.** – MG advised presentation guide now complete, to be distributed within the next two weeks.

Action 41: Inconsistency between idverde statement of volunteer working and what insurance policy allows requires clarification. – RG advised this was in respect to the use of ladders, which our group has been told consistently over recent years that we're not allowed to use ladders. The insurance that has been issued by Unity says that the use of ladders or platforms up to three metres is covered. Asked for clarification of what can and can't do.

MB commented we need to take that one away as from a H&S point of view, working at that height would determine a working at height regulation. So Angela, if that's what Unity have said in our insurance policy that I would deem that incorrect because that brings a lot of H&S complications in terms of working on platforms, so can we come back to you on that one and get that clarified. KR added you've had since the 2nd of July to come back to us on that one. It's obviously not been considered, has it, three months or so. I mean there's no one looked at it, up to now. MB added we need to go back to our insurance company and clarify your query that you raised.

Action 42: Basic tool kit provisions to existing Groups to be agreed and finalised in line with what Veolia provides to its Street Friends – LH and AW to discuss further in separate meeting

Action 43: Use of Microsoft Forms to capture unsupervised hours. Clarification on how risk assessments/H&S policies are observed/policed. – LH stated this had a very mixed message because the form involved H&S aspects, location aspects and things like that, which wasn't just literally capturing the hours. Equally, when we discussed this at the Friends Members' meeting, there was quite a lot of disquiet about what the aim here was. AW advised think it's quite clear on the top of the form, the purpose of the actual reason why we're trying to progress this. Obviously there's a H&S aspect, there's obviously capturing the volunteer hours and actually capturing what those hours are doing towards commitments within the actual parks themselves, because the current forms that we send out just capture the overall hours, which also include things that administration tasks. This is to actually capture the physical activities that are going on within the parks themselves. LH added I need to understand why you need to capture this and what you're trying to achieve here. AW advised well, that's why I feel like it'd be very important to have David on the meeting as well. So if we can have that discussion also at the same time and we'll go through the basic tools kits and the kits for new starters have that discussion with him as well, then we can obviously come to some kind of agreement on how we can take this forward.

4. Council Update

HJ provided an update on LBB which included:

- Budget – continues to be very serious with quite significant discussions and statutory service areas being already main areas of concern. Only spending on essential things.
- Some changes have been made to the idverde contracts and started to implement them:
 - Reviewed the key performance indicators and key service objectives within the Performance Management framework and made some changes to just clarify how we measure and monitor some of those KPI's.
 - Changed the way we targeted and conducted the inspections
 - Have been doing some work with our Facilities Management colleagues to do some essential work to grounds maintenance depots

- Jubilee Parks Fund has £125k unallocated funds – Jane Askew has been working really closely with Groups in Wards where funding remains to try and get applications. Expecting a few to come through for the 1st of October deadline. Probably going to introduce another deadline at the end of December.

ML gave an update on projects which included:

- Kelsey Park Bridge - awarded the contract to B&M McHugh in August 2024. The contracted works are split into two phases, with the first phase focusing on the initial design of the bridge and the Arbour Cultural Works. These design works are due to be undertaken between October this year and January next year. The second phase then focuses on the construction of the bridge, which is anticipated to start on site in March 2025.
- Kelsey Park desilting - The contract was subsequently awarded to Land and Water, their works are due to commence in mid November. They will start on the desilting of the silt trap first, then the main lake with the lower lake desilting programme for Feb to April next year. Subject to that work being completed, we're hopeful that we can start demobilising in May 2025 with the project soon to be complete afterwards.
- ML sent an e-mail out to the Friends of Scadbury and ODAS late last week, just advising that we're slightly behind on the application process. So we're hopefully now aiming to reissue the draught at the end of October. The plan is to eventually submit by the end of this year, but unfortunately we are quite low in resource at the moment, so that's taken slightly longer than expected, but we are still working towards that.

HJ continued to give an update on consultations:

- Thank you to those of you that completed this year's Park User Satisfaction Survey. In the process of analysing the results which will be presented to the November meeting of the Environment and Community Services PDF as part of the annual Contract Performance Report.
- Sustainable planting and nature friend verges consultations and surveys remain open, but they are due to close later this year with a report due to go into the January committee, we will consider what we do next following the feedback from those two trials.

HC gave an update on arboriculture & tremendous project:

- Pleased to report that we've concluded procurement, back to work and everything. We're in the process of mobilising these new supplementary contracts just now. They started at the beginning of September, so we're a few weeks in at this point and things are going really positively. So the way that we've set it up is there are four additional suppliers that have each been assigned a geographical area, it roughly works out kind of South West, Central, North and East.
- They will be operating in parks, we've issued them with keys to the parks along with guidance on how to operate the gates and how to conduct themselves within the parks, especially this time of year, they've been well informed not to take heavy plant onto soft ground.
- Going into final year of tremendous tree planting around the borough, with 5000 additional trees planted over a four year period.
- Trees are reserved and we're expecting to start taking delivery in late October with the 1st of November commencement date for tree planting.
- Expecting to hear within the next week or two the outcome of our grant funding application for tree scape fund which is focused primarily on parks tree planting.

- Progressing link creation project and the application is with the England woodland creation Grant.
- At the last committee, looked at the Glendale performance report, which was broadly well received.
 - HJ added we know that there are issues with their performance that was set out very clearly in the report, but there were things we were doing to try and mitigate the impact of their performance.

HJ continued updates on:

- The Environment Agency have accepted the funding to do some tree planting in the riparian zones around the River Beck, which was part of their wider remit that they're doing around the River Restoration project.
- Mayor interested in litter picks with Friends Groups and getting perhaps more people involved in them. Working on that at the moment and will be in touch about it in future.
- Change to staff at LBB as Colin Brand, the current Director of Environment and Public Protection, has decided to retire next year.

RG raised query for HC on tremendous - in Green Street Green, had a number of trees planted over recent years, some part of tremendous and some preceding that. A number of those have failed or have been vandalised. Those that have died, the trees have been removed. In most cases, a single stake is remaining in the ground. Can we assume that where that has happened that new trees will be planted and therefore we don't need to highlight those through FMS or direct to you. HC advised when a tree stake left in situ in the tree pit that the intention is to replace that tree. Can't guarantee that in every instance purely because there are sometimes complications that have arisen with the site and it may be that the tree stake has just been left there. The reason that we leave tree stakes in pits is just to provide a kind of visual that something's there so that people know not to go and walk over that area as it may be a H&S risk. Have been replacing them in the following year, often will either just leave the tree there or remove it and pop a stake in the pit until we can get round to it.

LH asked HJ if there are figures on how many people responded to the satisfaction survey. HJ confirmed 372 responses this year.

5. Idverde Update

Idverde's presentation was distributed to the Forum previous to the meeting.

AW and SH gave updates from presentation.

LH asked if MG is giving update on Grounds Maintenance as received a slight complaint from Downe Orchard that some of their trees were damaged during some mowing sessions. MG advised not aware off top of head, and gave an update on Grounds Maintenance:

- I think in comparison to 2023, we've seen huge improvements across the whole borough on the grounds maintenance aspect, we've had much better staff retention this year.
- We had a huge programme of maintenance and servicing over once we decided to ensure that we were fully machined and ready to go.
- Scoring improved.

BA asked SH - how far in advance one needs to book if you're going to get some help with surveying a wildflower area for next year. SH advised if you're able to volunteer, do it yourself, that's fine. Then just give us some results or we're happy to support you and be there when you do the surveys. So we can always talk about that.

RA raised queries:

- Green flag - may miss January 2025 deadline, would like to see progress on this
- Hoblingwell grass cutting – received invitation to potentially discuss grass cutting at Hoblingwell. Few weeks went by, didn't hear anything more, and then the tractors came in and started doing things without our knowledge. Would like to try and resolve the issues around cutting ahead of next year.

MG advised will send diary invite for site meeting to discuss plans and have them in place for next grass cutting season. RG commented to have similar discussion as similar issues at Green St Green. MG understands concerns and will have catch up

RG asked AW what will the new Community Managers bring to the borough. AW advised they're shortly going to send an e-mail out, introducing themselves to the group, so I can ask them to include the forum on that so they can provide a proper introduction, but both do not have experience directly in parks, but they have experience in other sectors of community management experience. Nikki formerly worked in project management and stakeholder relations. She has worked with non-profits, funders, local authorities and social impact consultancies for 5+ years delivering high-impact social good projects. Winnie has previously worked at university dealing in a community side of management. She has worked with students and hopefully has some ideas of bringing a younger generation into the parks, which is something we've all discussed previously trying to engage and capture that audience. I think they're going to bring in some really good skills and hopefully be able to try to get a different demographic in terms of ethnicity as well. I think it would be really, a great thing for the borough.

RG commented seems the role of the Community Managers is changing, so whereas, the Friends Groups would look to the CM's for some horticultural support, by the sound of it, it may well be the other way round now.

BA added if someone can chase up their Green Flag as have last year's one up. Met both Winnie and Nikki with Penny, and they both confessed that they had no experience of parks, but they're willing to learn. But I think again, it's going to fall on Friends Groups to actually be teaching them rather than them doing much hands on leading of us in the areas that we need the leadership, so I don't know, I especially feel that we need more people from BEECHE to come out and help us with stuff. So it's going to be an interesting journey, for the next while. AW commented it's nice to hear you have little faith obviously in their abilities, but no, if we obviously have training courses ourselves in horticulture, we have our in-house courses which I have guided them to already and they're sitting there taking them. RG added just want to clarify, it's not a matter of lack of faith. It's just an understanding of what we can expect. From the volunteer's perspective, idverde are the grounds maintenance contractor. They're not providing all the extra skills that we've been talking about, so it's just that getting an understanding of what we can expect from Community Managers in this new way of working.

LH raised query on people applying to be in Friends Groups as they go directly to idverde, wondered how many of these actually did ultimately become volunteers or what exactly happened with this. AW advised they are directed to Forum web page.

RA raised query on situation of management plans. AW advised will pick up with DB on return but have been working on management plans at the moment to make sure that they're all in place and there's not been any discussion so far about what sites are going to be going forward for Green Flag, if any.

6. Friends Forum Update

HJ asked LH what grant has been spent on. LH advised supporting a number of Friends Groups with a payment of £150. We've done that nine times this year, so £1350 for that. £2000 worth of small grants that we've offered to various different groups. Have been running first aid courses which run at £360.00 each. Looking into PPE (Hi-vis jackets) have pretty much spent the £7,000 this year.

LH gave an update on the Friends Group which included:

- We had a Members' Meeting earlier this week where a number of different Groups provided their feedback on their successes and failures, that's perhaps prompted some of the questions this morning.
- Two emergency first aid courses have been planned for this autumn, one on 17th October and the other 18th November. These will be held at the Civic Centre, Stockwell close and are fully subscribed.
- Have been in discussion with Jackie Baxter (LBB) about a draft script/video to promote Park Friends. Not clear on exact intentions as it seems to be addressed to new registrants rather than existing volunteers. It is very H&S orientated and does not give a welcoming view of what being a Friend involves. Nor does it indicate any of the health benefits. In some respect it is a bit of a turn off. The equivalent Street Friend version is much more concise.
- Looking at supporting a new Group for Foxes Field in Mottingham. Full contact details awaited.
- Raised the issue of Forum's AGM and after some discussion (and post meeting clarification) it was agreed it would be held on Thursday 28th November.

7. AOB

None

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting date has been arranged for: Tuesday 7th January 2025 starting at 10am (Online). The subsequent meeting will be Thursday 20th March 2025.

[Meeting ended]