

Bromley Friends Forum

Minutes of the Members' Meeting held on 19th December 2020
Via Zoom Video, 6.30pm - 8.30pm

Attendance:

Forum Committee:

[See secretary for details](#)

Friends Group Representatives:

[See secretary for details](#)

Apologies:

[See secretary for details](#)

1. Chairman's Welcome

LH opened the meeting and welcomed everyone in attendance, in particular JA from the new Crofton and Sparrow Woods Group. Members introduced themselves and their Friends Group association.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd January were accepted with no alterations.

The minutes would be revised with full names removed prior to publication on the Forum website.

Matters Arising:

2 Street Cleaning Grant: Response awaited from LBB, to be raised at next stakeholder panel meeting. No progress due to lack of meetings. **Action: LBB**

3. Forum News

3.1. Council/*idverde* Feedback

LH reported that the Covid-19 pandemic had made working conditions very difficult this year and that a lot of the blame lay with the Council, who had been exceptionally slow to give guidance to *idverde*. Indeed it was not until late June that *idverde* advised that self-led activities could commence and the beginning of September before they started supervised activities. This continued for a couple of months until the second lockdown and now we are again only allowed self-led activities under strict social distancing rules. It is unlikely that the situation will change before late January.

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Forum has had no meetings with either the Council or *idverde* since 12th March and all actions arising since then have been put on hold. It is hoped to have a stakeholder panel meeting early in the new year. Members agreed that matters needed better communication and did not understand why more effort in having zoom meetings had not been taken. After further discussion the meeting requested that Forum seeks a partnership meeting via zoom/teams with the Council/*idverde* at the earliest opportunity. **Action: LH**

The meeting proceeded with discussion about poor service over recent months. PM reported problems at Hollydale – in particular problems with trees and bins. It was stated that the tree team are short staffed and are only undertaking emergency work at this time. MK reported problems at Cator regarding their paddling pool, discussions have just been going round in circles and not achieving anything. AS interjected that when Chislehurst Rec has unresolved issues they contact the Council leader, Colin Smith, and action soon seems to get resolved.

Jl reported that they at Hoblingwell had been well served but this may be in part due to their close contact with *idverde* through Darren Russell. PM raised another issue regarding flooding caused by one of their lakes which had to be attended by the fire brigade. The problem was traced to various blockages, which to date have not been fully resolved. PM said he had chased his Community Manager to resolve the issue with little success. The meeting advised that this needed to be escalated to a much higher level both within *idverde* and the Council. LH responded by saying that these types of issues should be logged on FixMyStreet (FMS) and repeatedly so until the correct action is taken.

The meeting then moved to the subject of tree planting in the borough and asking what plans there were to accommodate this. VS reported that Hugh Chapman was in charge of trees and up until recently he had no staff. Circumstances had now changed following recruitment and he was now formulating a plan to address the matter. This plan would form part of the strategy and carbon footprint proposals for Bromley. Members were urged to forward their comments to the Open Space Strategy consultation (see below). RG commented that in order to meet the carbon neutral target of 2029 there would need to be a huge amount of tree planting required and that these trees would need to grow!

It was agreed that all the issues and comments arising from this meeting should be co-ordinated into an action plan to discuss with the Council/*idverde*. This action plan should include the feedback received from the recent update questionnaire survey and have the aim of improving communications across all parties. **Action: Forum**

3.2. Open Space Strategy Consultation

LH introduced the topic of the Open Space Strategy consultation which closes on 7th January. It was felt that the document was very glossy but rather weak on precise detail. It was difficult to read due to its chosen font size and looked at the borough as a set of individual parks rather than one entity. It glossed over items such as trees and bridleways and gave very little credence to the subject of biodiversity. The targets it set for itself seemed quite low and the criteria for measuring success poorly defined.

JR remarked that it was an *idverde* document and as such only covered the areas where they had direct control. Hence nothing about trees, which remain under the management of the Council.

AS said that the key sections of the document (the successes and the strategic objectives) was impossible to read. AS also referred to the consultation survey which was appallingly structured. Most questions were gathering data on the respondents and the prioritising of the Key Strategic Strands was pointless. The document also includes case studies which have

no relevance to Bromley and are therefore completely irrelevant. The talk of repurposing land is very worrying and one wonders what plans they have in this respect. WL added that the document looked as if it was plugging some contractual need rather than providing a true strategy for the borough.

RG commented that its promotion via a simple press release is a concern especially as the strategy affects all residents and as can be seen, especially this year, they value their open spaces very highly. It should have been open to a much broader group of collaborators and more widely distributed.

JR pointed out that this strategy had a stated aim to support economic growth, and that there was a target to increase income from our parks. The concern here is that this would mean inappropriate use and exploitation of our parks. SC voiced concern that her ward councillors had taken no interest in their parks and until the councillors in general are on board with this strategy it would not be taken seriously.

The meeting agreed the Forum should summarise members viewpoints into a combined response to the consultation prior to the closing date in January. **Action: LH**

3.3. Questionnaire Feedback

LH reported that Forum had received 32 responses out of a possible 50 to their questionnaire and thanked those who responded. A summarised version of the issues raised had been circulated to members and it is hoped this gave a clear flavour of the problems that Groups had encountered due to the Covid-19 pandemic. LH agreed to send these findings to the Council/*idverde*. **Action: LH**

3.4. Training Update

LH reported that a couple of virtual training courses had taken place in the last couple of weeks. Both of these were well attended and well received with over 20 attendees. Both had a few hitches and because they lacked the practical element were much shorter than they would have normally been. Forum will look to agree further similar courses with *idverde* over the coming three to four months. If members have particular topics of interest then they should let Forum know.

LH continued to report that they have been unable to run the Emergency First Aid course this year as usual and this has led to a build-up of expired certificates. The meeting agreed Forum should look at a virtual solution to this problem and find ways of simplifying the renewal process. **Action: Forum**

MK asked about the position on insurance if a Group had no current first aiders. LH was unable to offer an answer at the time but would investigate and feedback to the members as soon as possible. **Action: LH**

3.5. Fund Raising & Small Forum Grants

LH referred to the fact that all Group events had been cancelled this year and that this had had an impact on income. Forum had in a small way offered Groups £100 and LH added that there were small community schemes like Tesco bags, Waitrose green tokens etc. that provided an opportunity to raise some needed income.

LH informed the meeting of the Forum's small grant policy that offered up to £300 for an approved community project. In the last six months five such grants had been made.

3.6. London Scene Report

Continues to be quite active in the virtual world. LH had distributed the recent Good Parks for London guide where Bromley is ranked 11th of the London boroughs. Bromley doesn't fair particularly well in this survey, but this is to a greater extent down to the fact that the criteria chosen doesn't match our priorities. Lambeth were recorded as the top borough, which is quite puzzling, when a quoted statistic states that they have received 500 volunteer hours in the year!

LH attended an LFGN zoom meeting this past Monday and it was noted that a lot of good work and collaboration with CPRE is carrying on behind the scenes. Together they are working on a vision statement which has a seven-point plan covering the next five years. Basically, they want to heighten the profile of Friends across London, see more collaborative working and ensure all boroughs have an active Forum.

LH re-iterated the GoParks.London website, which offered Groups the opportunity to add their details and in effect free advertising to a London-wide audience. LH also referred to the parkscommunity.org.uk website, which provided a useful set of 'How To' guides. It also has a relatively simple Friends Group Health Check questionnaire which, if you complete, will indicate the strength and viability of your Group. It's well worth a look.

VS mentioned an app that Hugh Chapman had recommended called TMA fungi. This provided useful information on trees and fungi. *Post meeting note: this app involves a subscription account so you may wish to find an alternative approach.*

4. Forum AGM

LH referred to our constitution which allowed us a gap of 18 months between AGMs. As a consequence, we had until April/May time to hold our 2020 AGM. LH confirmed that the current committee members had agreed to serve for a further year to November 2021. However, John Cutting, our treasurer, stated this would most definitely be his last year in office and so applications for a new treasurer were sought.

LH canvassed the meeting on their views of including Council/*dverde* in a zoom version of the Forum AGM. There was unanimous support for this and indeed it was felt they may be more likely to attend a zoom meeting rather than one in person. LH also asked members for their opinion on the position of Accounts Examiner, as the current incumbent had decided to stand down as of 30th September (the end of our 2019/2020 financial year). It was agreed that a decision in this aspect should be sought from the Council, as it was they that contributed most to the finances of the Forum. **Action: LH**

5. AOB

- 5.1. BA asked about the position of swings in parks, as only half of Chislehurst Rec's had been replaced following the lockdown. Although it was understood the reasons behind this decision, it was actually causing queuing problems which itself was certainly not ideal. JR remarked that their swings had not been affected, as appeared to be the case for a number of other parks. It was agreed that each could come to its own conclusion over its swings and if need be place a query with FMS.

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- 5.2. JR has been involved with Thames 21 and is in discussion about renovating their pond in Church House Gardens. Thames 21 are currently in discussion with idverde regarding the funding and it is hoped this will come to fruition during 2021. The project itself has the full backing of the local ward councillors.
- 5.3. SC reported that they have received the go ahead to work with the London Wildlife Trust to develop two butterfly corridors. This is in collaboration with the Brilliant Butterfly scheme. The scheme is looking for other sites, so if you have interest please get in touch.
- 5.4. BS expressed a note of thanks and re-iterated that this meeting had shown how much members had missed the meetings and how important it was to discuss matters.
- 5.5. MK asked if Forum could invest in a survey monkey account for access by all Groups. It was felt this was needed when bidding for projects. **Action: VS**

6. Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed.