

Bromley Friends Forum

Minutes of the Members' Meeting held on 24th November 2021
Via Zoom Video, 7.00pm - 9.10pm

Attendance:

Forum Committee:

Please refer to secretary for details

Friends Group Representatives:

Please refer to secretary for details

Apologies:

Please refer to secretary for details

1. Chairman's Welcome

LH opened the meeting and welcomed everyone in attendance, in particular one or two new faces. LH apologised to members for the delay in organising this meeting, which was in part due to a lack of response from the Council to outstanding issues. Forum will endeavour to keep to a more regular routine of meetings, though the Covid pandemic may continue to influence matters.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 17th February 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: Following further requests for information there has been no response to date. Action dropped

§2 First Aid courses: Three first aid courses have been provided in recent months at various sites across the borough. It is hoped to return to the Council offices soon so that more centrally based Groups can participate. Members agreed that further courses were required, including one at a weekend. Action complete.

§2 Accounts Examiner: PR, the treasurer at Jubilee Country Park had offered to act as Forum's accounts examiner, and his appointment has been approved by the Council. Action complete.

§2 Survey options: Forum has looked into the use of Survey Monkey but concluded the cost is prohibitively expensive. Alternatives are to use Microsoft Forms or convert to Microsoft 365, which has several advantages. There is a cost implication and these are still being considered by the committee. Further action dropped at this stage, for consideration at some future date.

§5.1 Zip-tied Notices: This has been discussed with *idverde* and the un-professionalism of 'scruffy' notices in our parks explained. It is hoped they will improve matters as a matter of course. Action complete.

3. Forum News

3.1. Council/*idverde* Update

LH reported that the Council had been swamped with social care and pandemic issues in recent weeks and that parks matters had distinctly taken a back seat. In addition, James Hilsden had unfortunately had an accident and broken his leg which resulted in him being unable to attend to some of his duties as per normal.

A partnership meeting had been held on 23rd September with the Council and *idverde*. Council representation was limited to Sarah Foster, who is the Assistant Director for Performance Management and Business Support. Although not fully up-to-date with parks business, Sarah gave a good account of herself and the impression that she was there to help and get things done.

After two years of development we have finally agreed our Partnership Statement and this has now been formally signed-off. A copy is available for download from the Forum website (Forum page).

There have been staffing changes at *idverde*. Frank Kleinhans, the Contracts Director, has left and been replaced by Martyn Bradley. Caroll Long has left and Angela Wood has now taken over Caroll's Community Manager role. Angela's previous role on the countryside team is currently vacant. Allison John-Pandya has left the fundraising team and her position remains vacant. Andy Simpson has joined as Parks Development Manager.

JB reported that he believed Charlotte Eley has been appointed as Angela's replacement and has therefore moved from the BEECHE training team. The latest structure chart (with which Forum has been supplied) can be downloaded from the Forum website (Toolkit page).

Toby Smith, the Council's Enforcement Manager has retired and his replacement, Dean Laws, has now been recruited. As mentioned above, Sarah Foster appears to have become more involved with parks and it is hoped she will prove to be a more reliable asset

idverde reported lots of problems with their grass cutting regime this year citing a number of climate change issues over the year that made the process harder to manage. This year they brought the hay-cut process back in-house and it seems this has not been fulfilled in a very professional manner at various sites. Forum has received many complaints and we will be seeking some explanations.

LH reported that the Good Parks for London report of 2021 has been published in the past week and that Bromley has been ranked 15th out of thirty boroughs. Bromley has slightly increased its score since last year but has slipped down from 11th place. Seemingly other boroughs have improved their score to a greater extent than Bromley. One of the observations is that Bromley is not listed in the report as a supporter of the guide and hence has not provided any input. One wonders why this is and why Bromley appears to have no interest in this type of publication. Lewisham has been named as the top ranked borough.

3.2. Forum Update

Forum has now purchased a one year Zoom licence and details have been shared with the Forum Committee members. LH stated that Friends Groups were welcome to make use of the licence, to hold their own meetings, but would need to book their request via an email to Forum. This would help to ensure there were no clashes of meetings and that the process was controlled in an orderly manner.

LH reported that Forum had asked the Council for an increase in its annual grant and to date has received a very muddled email response. This suggested that the Council earmarked £7K to Forum made up of a £5K grant and £2K for new tools/PPE. Its not really Forum's business to provide Friends Groups with tools as this should be the gift of *idverde* and/or supporters of individual groups. Forum asked for £10K on the basis that Group numbers have increased from 20 odd to over 50. If we were to support each group with £100 that was £5K alone. Further discussion on this topic is scheduled for the next partnership meeting.

3.3. Open Space Strategy

The OSS was originally published as a 25-page document in late 2019. This attracted over 800 comments and it was Forum's understanding that stakeholders would get round a table to develop the process by which this would be redrafted. In actual fact this work was done by the Council and stakeholders had no say in the second draft which, including appendices, was 108 pages in length. This itself attracted a lot of comment but other than the correction of minor typo's has by and large remained unchanged.

This third version excluding appendices was placed before the executive on 17th November and it is Forum's understanding that this was voted through with no objection. The Council's view being that this is a high-level document and the more serious detail can come at a later stage.

RG commented that over a hundred written questions had been sent to the executive before the meeting, but most of these had been dismissed with a very blasé attitude. RG also reported that *idverde* had been given little opportunity to provide input into the redraft of the OSS. This seemed quite odd when they are targeted with its implementation and had been heavily involved in the production of the first draft. PW commented that from his experience if a 10-year strategy document has been passed by Council then it becomes their document and little will change. JI raised concern about the coverage the document gave to dedicated sports facilities and that Hoblingwell's efforts to develop a sports hub was making very slow progress. Their BMX track had received approval but as yet had not moved forward.

JB commented that he liked the redraft of the OSS and felt it was a lot more coherent than its predecessor. It talked a lot about action/management plans he wondered when these might be produced and by whom. BA was concerned that it concentrated a lot on parks and substantial green spaces and ignored small scraps of land, verges etc. PW remarked that they have a lot more control over land they own, as opposed to small areas of private land. BA agreed but emphasised they have control over planning and that this was a key element that needed to be taken into account and kept high on their agenda. RG commented that the OSS only covered areas that are maintained/supported by *idverde*.

It is understood the document will now be formatted for public issue and made available for download on its website. It is expected that this will be completed in the new year.

3.4. Tree Team

SC commented that she has a tree project in Coney Hall and was having trouble liaising with *idverde*. The meeting recommended that she approach the tree team direct, who are an in-house Council department. RG commented that the tree team are scheduled to plant 5000 trees over the next four years, as part of the Council's aim to be carbon neutral by 2029, and it was expected that they would establish a specific contractor to undertake this work. This would enable the tree team, via their contract with Glendale, to continue to provide their day-to-day maintenance and support service role unhindered.

3.5. Training Update

LH reported that Forum had run three first aid courses this year at various sites across the borough. These had been well attended and well received. Forum had incurred extra hall hiring costs and it was hoped we could return to the Council offices at some point in the new year. This would also help to support more centrally based Groups. Forum would also look to host a first aid course at a weekend, for those who work during the week.

idverde are contracted to provide Forum with five courses per annum and they have done so this year. Course subjects this year included invasive species, reptiles, butterflies, biodiversity and hedges. *idverde* would now like ideas for 2022 courses. Suggestions so far include maintenance of tools, flora/fauna identification and pruning.

3.6. Biodiversity Update

JJ reported to the meeting an overview of biodiversity matters that had been discussed by members of the Bromley Biodiversity Partnership (BBP). More detailed information accompanies these minutes.

Normally the Partnership meets every four months or so to discuss a variety of pertinent topics. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 31st January 2022. The Partnership can be contacted on bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com.

3.7. Forum AGM

LH canvassed the meeting for their views on holding the 2020/21 Forum AGM. There was a distinct preference for a face-to-face meeting versus an on-line zoom version. LH had initially considered hosting an AGM in January 2022, but in light of members views this may now be delayed pending further discussion, not least with the Council.

The 2019/20 AGM was held in May 2021 and though the Forum Constitution allows for a gap of 18 months between AGMs it would be preferable to hold the next AGM no later than May 2022.

JB stated that a recent crime summit had been held at the Council offices so it did seem possible that meetings could be held there once again. LH to pursue matters with the Council.

Action: LH

4. Friends Group Issues

- 4.1. Agenda item not covered in this meeting.

5. AOB

- 5.1. BA reported that she had received enquiries about DoE students working alongside volunteers and what safeguarding policies were in place. BA agreed to formulate a response to be added to Forum's toolkit and hence made available to all Groups.

Action: BA

- 5.2. MK reported that Cator and Alexandra had suffered a lot of graffiti and vandalism of late, and also an arson attack and issues with their paddling pool. Mk also expressed concern at the lack of a management plan and looking for some assurance that matters will improve.
- 5.3. SG reported the fact that Whitehall has constant flooding every winter and was considering implementing a swale (ditch) to alleviate the problem. The meeting was not convinced this works in all cases. JJ suggested SG contacts Angela Wood (*idverde*) who may have experience in this area.
- 5.4. KR reported that Forum has a Partnership meeting on 9th December and Groups should let Forum know if there are any further issues that they want Forum to raise with the Council and/or *idverde*.
- 5.5. JA reported that Crofton is having great difficult getting permission to complete some of their projects and would be grateful for advice on who she can move this forward. SG suggested that any fixed apparatus is a lot easier to get permission for than something with moving parts. The meeting suggested JA keep persevering with her Community Manager.
- 5.6. SC reported that Coney Hall had received an award from London in Bloom, as indeed have a number of other Friends Groups.
- 5.7. AC informed the meeting that Kelsey's committee had agreed to pursue charitable status for the Group. The meeting welcomed the news and wished them every success.

6. Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed.