

## Bromley Friends Forum

Minutes of the Members' Meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022

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.

## **2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 17<sup>th</sup> February were accepted with no alterations.

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

### Matters Arising:

**§3.7 Council Room Availability:** Forum will continue to monitor room availability as and when required. In addition it will consider use of The Hub (see 3.5 below). Action complete.

**§5.1 Safeguarding Policies:** Details from the Friends of Chislehurst Rec have been received and will be incorporated into the Forum Toolkit in the near future. Action complete.

## **3. Forum News**

### **3.1. Council/Idverde Update**

At the last meeting LH reported that the Council were in the process of splitting the environment department into two, with one assistant director looking after waste management and enforcement and one assistant director looking after parks, trees and carbon neutrality. Sarah Foster had been appointed to look after the parks side of things and this was all going well until March, when Sarah announced she is leaving to take up an appointment at another borough. Since then a recruitment process has been undertaken but as yet no decisions taken. As such the environment department has reverted to a single assistant director under Peter McCready.

Partnership meetings have been held with the Council and idverde in both December 2021 and March 2022. Idverde's progress has been good to date and they continue to achieve their required key indicators. It was reported that they intend to recruit more permanent staff for the summer season rather than seasonals and in this way it is hoped further improvements to the schedules can be achieved.

Communication from the Council continues to be very poor and there seems to be a distinct lack of providing Forum with up-to-date timely information. Following the local election results it is hoped the new regime of portfolio holder will provide a more reactive commitment to the green agenda. There is so far no news on the delivery of the revised Open Space Strategy document or any follow-up from previous statements on the subject.

Some discussion about the Council announcement of an increase of £1M in the grant to parks followed. It was evident that no decision as to where this money was going had yet been made and the Council were unable to provide any detail. It seemed likely that a lot will be spent on infrastructure and not necessarily on green biodiverse matters. It was equally not clear what time period this spanned and following the local election whether this will in fact proceed.

LH referred to recent emails about water fountains in parks and a working group to look into park signage. Both had received a terrific response and these have been passed to the Council, who are co-ordinating any response. Just to confirm these are Council led initiatives and not being managed by Forum. Forum will, of course, pursue matters and try to initiate progress. RG agreed to follow-up park signage status. **Action: RG**

Idverde reported that there had been an uptake in events for this summer, in part because of the Platinum Jubilee, and that any Group wanting to organise an event should make their request as early as possible.

Idverde are currently in the process of revamping their website.

### **3.2. Project Approval / Funding Proposals**

Forum has held long discussions with idverde's funding team to streamline both the approval and funding process of Friends community projects. Forum is happy to report that major progress has now been made and we are able to present a set of process maps which detail how this will work in practice.

VS presented the process maps which in essence have three separate structures:

Structure one is for a simple community based project that makes no material change to the open space portfolio and can be removed at a later date. These projects will generally be low value, have no funder involvement and do not require external permissions or have any on-going maintenance implications. They will be fully managed/overseen by the Group's Community Manager.

Structure two is for strategic projects that make a major change to the open space portfolio with large on-going maintenance costs. These projects will generally be high value, have funder involvement and will require a variety of permissions to be secured. These projects will be co-ordinated through the Group's Community Manager, will involve a complex proposal form and sign-off from Council, as landowner.

Structure three is for a fast track project that makes a minor or moderate change to the open space portfolio. These projects will generally be low to moderate value, may have funder involvement and will require other permissions or have on-going maintenance costs. These projects will be co-ordinated through the Group's Community Manager, will involve a simplified proposal form and sign-off from Council, as landowner.

VS explained that the process maps were currently in draft form and will be published to members at the earliest opportunity.

BS asked if the various proposals had a structural value. VS responded that they didn't and LH confirmed that there are no monetary limits being imposed on any of the three structures e.g. you could have a very simple project but it costs a lot of money to implement or purchase the necessary items.

JR remarked that the process needed to have some markers/checkpoints so that all parties were aware of where the project was in its lifecycle and that these parties were in agreement as such. LH commented that there was a reliance on the Council to sign-off full approval and it was important that these was not unduly delayed.

VS agreed to write up members views and feed these back to the funding team so the process maps can be finalised and issued to all concerned. VS agreed to obtain the latest versions of the forms so these can be made available on the Forum website. **Action: VS**

As a final point PW expressed concern that Community Managers may be overwhelmed with the work load of new Friends projects. VS view was that they were prepared for taking on the responsibility and believed it would be manageable. The earlier Friends involved their Community Manager the better the process would perform.

### **3.3. Training Update**

LH reported that idverde is required to provide Forum with five courses per annum and so far we have received a couple including a webinar from Froglife on how to make ones garden more green. Suggestions for the remaining courses include maintenance of tools, flora/fauna identification and pruning. No dates, as yet, have been proposed.

Forum will plan to offer a further couple of first aid courses in the coming months including, if possible, a course on a Saturday, for volunteers who work weekdays.

### **3.4. 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 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022. The Partnership can be contacted on [bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com](mailto:bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com).

### **3.5. Greener & Cleaner Update**

PWr presented an account of the Greener & Cleaner Bromley (and Beyond) group, which she is founder and CEO. In particular she gave an account of the newly opened facility in the Glades called The Hub. This provided an opportunity for people to meet and greet and get to learn more about our local environment and how this can make a positive difference to our way of life. The Hub also hosts Bromley's Library of Things where visitors can hire industrial quality items for personal use. The Hub is open Thursday to Monday 10am to 6pm (Sunday 11am to 5pm).

PWr also informed the meeting about the Bromley Environment Network (BEN), which is their vision to support community groups to inspire and support residents in working together to make the borough a greener and healthier place to live now and into the future. BEN is open to all types of community organisations, who can sign-up and join the network and help disseminate pertinent information. For further comprehensive details about the group visit their website at [greenerandcleaner.co.uk](http://greenerandcleaner.co.uk)

### **3.6. Forum AGM**

LH reported that the Forum Committee had agreed to hold their next AGM in November 2022. Venue and details to be confirmed nearer the time.

## **4. Friends Group Issues**

- 4.1. KR raised the issue of a Friends Group ceasing to function and how the funds built up by the Group are protected. With the advent of more on-line banking it seems the need for cheque writing and two signatories is becoming less common. KR suggested Groups look at how their finances are dealt with and what protections are in place. LH commented that the Forum had recently moved to the Metro Bank and that Forum could only have an on-line account and no cheque book was provided. JR said they had a Metro Bank account opened some years ago and as well as on-line were provided with cheques, which was their preferred method of payment. JB reported that they had an arrangement with their bank (Barclays) that was on-line but required two on-line signatories, this involved one signatory emailing the other to finalise sign-off and approval.
- 4.2. South Hill Wood reported that the collapse of two large oak tree branches had injured three people and the Air Ambulance service had to be called. They are also seeking a small improvement scheme but are finding the response from the Council tree team as inadequate.

## **5. AOB**

- 5.1. The Friends of the Earth have an oak sapling grown on by one of their members and donated to the group. They are planning for it to be planted in memory of Graham Hemington, whom many of you will have known, who sadly died last year. They are looking for a suitable public place for it to be planted. If any group, with idverde's approval, would be willing to plant it out this year, they would be so grateful. FoE can supply more detailed information on the sapling on request. Graham's nearest park was Goddington, but he had ties with many people and places, so if anyone can help, please do get in touch at [bromleyfoe@gmail.com](mailto:bromleyfoe@gmail.com). JJ mentioned that Graham Hemington was a member of the Orpington Field Club and a very active member and contributed greatly to Bromley's biodiversity.
- 5.2. RG reported that Orpington Priory had suffered from box blight and idverde had stripped out all their box hedging. RG was asking for advice from members as to what could be used as a replacement. JJ suggested that perhaps a lavender or yew hedge might be suitable.
- 5.3. Some discussion followed about the prospect of the next Environment Portfolio Holder following the local elections. RG commented that a decision was expected on 18<sup>th</sup> May when the Council Executive meet. It was believed roles must be allocated on a percentage basis so in effect less for the Tory party.

## **6. Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July, starting at 7pm. Venue to be confirmed.