

## Bromley Friends Forum

Minutes of the Members' Meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2022  
Civic Centre & via Zoom Video, 7.00pm - 9.10pm

### **Attendance:**

#### **Forum Committee:**

*Refer to secretary for details*

#### **Friends Group Representatives:**

*Refer to secretary for details*

### **Apologies:**

*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 explained that tonight's meeting was both in person and via zoom and hoped that the technicalities involved would suffice. It appeared that there were sound problems and the meeting was briefly paused whilst those in person moved to sit closer to the microphone.

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

The minutes of the meeting held on the 12<sup>th</sup> May were accepted with no alterations.

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

### Matters Arising:

**§3.1 Signage Working Party:** RG reported no progress in this area. Action continues.

**Action: RG.**

**§5.1 Process Maps & Forms:** These were expected to be delivered in late summer/early autumn and would be reviewed again at that time. Action complete.

## **3. Forum News**

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

LH reported that the new portfolio holder for green matters was Cllr Aisha Cuthbert and that he had had a one-to-one meeting with her on 16<sup>th</sup> June. She had also attended the whole of the partnership meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June and the signs were most encouraging.

LH continued the discussion by referring to the recently announced Platinum Jubilee Grant scheme from the council. This offers grants up to a maximum of £20k for community based projects in our parks and green spaces. It is opened to various community groups to bid for not just Friends Groups. There is a limit of £40k per ward, so those wards with a large number of Friends Groups may feel slightly disadvantaged.

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The application process is all on the council website along with guidance notes and acceptance criteria, which needs to be followed. Applications under £3k can be submitted at any time whilst those above £3k will be accepted at two points in the year, 1<sup>st</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> October. The scheme will run throughout the lifespan of the current administration so approximately three and a half years. With all applications some level of additional funding from other sources will be expected. RG commented that applications might be looked at more favourably if there was ward councillor involvement and urged members to ensure they were aware of any bids they make. RG also commented that idverde had no involvement in establishing this grant and know little more than Friends in how it will operate. It was also noted that some wards have considerably more parks and Friends Groups than others and it was not clear what would happen if there was an under spend in some of the wards with fewer parks and Friends.

Forum requests that any Friends Group making an application to the scheme informs Forum, so that requests of a similar nature can be monitored and hence advice shared with Groups.

**Action: Groups/Forum**

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. As mentioned at the last meeting the environment department is being split into two and the Council have appointed Hannah Jackson as the new assistant director for all matters green related. Hannah will take up her position on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> August. PW commented that this was a good opportunity to start a fresh approach with both the new portfolio holder and the new assistant director.

BA reported that it would be nice if within the partnership (LBB, idverde, Forum) Forum was treated as an equal, but clearly at the moment we are not. LH reported that agreed action deadlines are not being met and as a consequence progress is very slow. JJ commented that at the recent Countryside Consultative Panel meeting there was no Council representation.

LH reported that idverde are having a number of staffing issues, with a number of key people leaving recently and recruiting new staff is proving time-consuming and slow. John Pemberton has been promoted within idverde and now has a more national role and will be stepping away from Bromley. His post has been taken up by Sue Holland which in turn leaves her role vacant. Donna Cook (community manager) has left as too has Chris Williams (projects supervisor). It is also understood that Helen Cassidy (Beeche manager) will shortly be leaving.

LH moved the discussion to water fountains and that the Council were still deliberating the provision of these in our parks. It would seem that they were of the opinion that Friends wanted to restore/renovate existing fixtures and therefore the cost and issues surrounding this approach were relatively high. Forum explained to the Council that Friends were interested in new installations where previously there were none. The Council agreed to look in to this option and would report back at the September partnership meeting. MK asked if there was an actual project underway, LH replied that no there wasn't, it was just a feasibility study at this stage and ascertaining all the permissions, licensing and costs involved in undertaking an installation.

RG mentioned that the posts associated with the tree planting programme were marked with QR codes which are supposed to be used for recording the watering regime amongst other pertinent information. It was felt useful if this information could be made available so that trees under stress could be easily identified.

MK reported that she has on-going communication issues with the Council and as a consequence has written to her MP. MK also reported issues with the tree team where communication between their various contractors the Council uses keeps breaking down.

JR reported that there were events taking place in Bromley Town parks which they, as the Friends Group, knew nothing about. It wasn't necessarily a problem but it would be nice to have a heads up just in case there was some specific element that all parties needed to know about. LH agreed that it made sense if the events team, as a matter of course, informed a Friends Group when an application is made that concerns their park. LH to ask idverde to implement this as a matter of routine within the events handling process.

**Action: LH**

### **3.2. Training Update**

LH reported that Forum has just run two first aid courses, which were both well attended and received. Forum is currently finalising details with idverde over the four courses they need to provide by calendar year end. A work party leader course has been identified for 14<sup>th</sup> September and once the application process has been put in place notification will be sent out to all Groups. It is expected that the other three courses will follow one per month in October, November and December.

Forum will plan to offer a further couple of first aid courses in the autumn/winter period.

### **3.3. Biodiversity Update**

JJ reported that on-going surveys of hedgehog, toad and white admiral butterfly were now underway and urged Friends to send in their results to the biodiversity partnership. These results will be collated for their January meeting and published thereafter.

JJ also informed Friends that now was the time to think about planting hedgerows for wildlife and that they should apply now to the woodland trust for free whips, which would be delivered in November. Also consider where these could be planted, in schools and other places beyond the bounds of their individual park.

JJ also reported that they were undergoing a survey of woodland plants and identifying areas of woodland big and small. Ancient maps up to 400 years old were a great asset in achieving this project and any help Friends could offer was much appreciated.

Normally the Partnership meets every four months or so to discuss a variety of pertinent topics. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The Partnership can be contacted on [bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com](mailto:bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com).

## **4. Friends Group Issues**

- 4.1.** LH introduced this item by asking Groups to report on what they would like Forum to concentrate on in the coming months i.e. what can Forum do for you.
- 4.2.** JB felt Forum should be doing more of the same and building a closer relationship with the Council and idverde. Especially with the new regime starting at the Council. JB felt communication with idverde had improved of late from its early beginnings and when it was TLG.

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- 4.3.** At this point the wi-fi at the civic centre closed down and communication with those online was lost. Subsequent to the meeting MK sent in the following:

From Cator's perspective as a Friend's Group, we would like The Friends Forum to continue to be our collective voice:

- a. To gather intelligence from Friends' Groups and identify common themes – e.g. communication problems with the tree team
- b. Agree with and then hold to account contractors and the Council representatives on actions such as the fountain scoping project
- c. The website resources continue to be valuable – it was felt the sample constitution was particularly very helpful
- d. Consider buddying up new Friends Groups so that they can support each other
- e. Offer advice/assistance with projects and completing project proposal forms
- f. Create an opportunity for Friends Forums to meet and share and network
- g. Create a library for lending. Or at least a list of who's got things that potentially 'off the fringe' Groups could borrow. For example, PA systems. pigtail stakes, bat detectors, outside bunting.

### **5. AOB**

- 5.1.** JR reported problems with low water levels following the hot dry weather and asked if other Groups were experiencing the same. JJ suggested that members leave some water out in their gardens for the wildlife.
- 5.2.** KR reported that Winsford Gardens had been nominated for best park in the UK via the Fields in Trust scheme. Members were asked to give their vote of support.
- 5.3.** PW reported that they had a large influx of volunteers and their keepers and trustees, who normally lead their work parties were finding it difficult to oversee large numbers of people. They would like to split their work parties into separate groups but needed some leader training to be able to accommodate this working in practice. As mentioned above a course has been identified and once joining instructions have been prepared will be advertised to members.
- 5.4.** MK asked where can Friends get tools such as spades, hoes and shears sharpened. LH reported that a course on tool maintenance was planned for the autumn and that hopefully this subject would be covered. It's possible that idverde could offer this service.

**Action: LH**

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

Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> September, starting at 7pm. Civic Centre & via Zoom.