

Bromley Friends Forum

Minutes of the Members' Meeting held on 7th March 2023
Civic Centre & Via Zoom Video, 7.00pm - 9.00pm

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 one or two new faces. A quick introduction by each member present followed. LH explained that tonight's meeting was both in person and via zoom and it was hoped that the newly purchased microphone would enhance matters for our on-line members.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 29th September 2022 were accepted with no alterations.

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

Matters Arising:

§4.1 Communications amongst members: LH reported that discussions about various forms of communications had been held but there appeared to be no consensus of opinion. The meeting discussed this further and from those members present it was decided that a members WhatsApp Group should be created. RG agreed to progress.

Action: RG

§4.1 Jubilee Parks Fund: Forum had agreed with the Council that Forum will be informed about the results of the fund and how the various applications in each of the wards was progressing. This is explained further in section 3.2 below. Action complete.

3. Forum News

3.1. Council/*idverde* Feedback

LH reported that a virtual Partnership meeting had been held on 12th January and as usual for recent meetings *idverde* had given a PowerPoint presentation of various highlights over the previous three months. This presentation was available for viewing from the Forum website. A paper copy was circulated for members to see the content this evening.

LH referred to the list of outstanding actions from these meetings and some concern was raised that a number of these were quite long standing (three years or so) and there seemed to be little drive by the Council to see these resolved.

One of these was the basic tool provision. The Forum committee had discussed this recently and concluded that members had not reported an issue with tool provision and so had decided to focus more on developing a 'welcome tool pack' for new Groups. LH hoped to finalise this with James Hilsden in the very near future and draw this action to a close.

Another was water fountains, where again we are waiting for appraisal reports from the Council and some form of decision as to how to take this forward. Forum hopes that one or two new water fountains will be installed in our Parks, so that further assessment and analysis of their value can be attained.

KR reported that he had undertaken a review of the three websites (Forum, Council & *idverde*) and that various discrepancies remained. Many change requests had gone unresolved and many of the links took you round in a circle without offering serious content. It is the intention that the Forum website acts as the master repository for all Group information and that the Council and *idverde* websites make reference to Forum. To this end Forum intends to undertake an exercise of information gathering from its members and try and persuade them all to create a Group email address as their main contact.

LH reported that he was in discussion with *idverde* over their provision of training courses for 2023. It is expected that a 'leading a work party' course will become a de-facto standard and mandatory course each year along with five other courses. Courses are likely to follow a theme of flora and fauna identification along with some practical work-day elements.

LH reported that the latest quarterly collection of Friends statistics had shown 4,810 hours spent on task sessions, 540 hours on events and 2,390 on other activities. It transpired that only 21 of 56 Groups had provided information and LH urged members to send in their data when requested. It was important that an accurate picture of effort spent was recorded as it helps secure grants and other forms of funding for the parks. BA reported that her Group has set up a WhatsApp function for members to record time spent and this can be easily tallied each month.

Action: Membership to complete quarterly returns

idverde reported a number of new faces joining the team. These include Matthew Rich, Conservation Ranger; Ross Fryer, Conservation Ranger; Michael Young, Parks Development Supervisor and Lily Scoble, Events and Activities Manager. It was also reported that Amy Rogers has left and that the Funding team had been re-organised under the management of Angela Woods.

3.2. Jubilee Parks Fund

LH reported that the first tranche of applications had resulted in £456,231 being applied for. Of those recorded all but 6 wards had made some form of application. St. Paul's Cray had applied for £58k, which exceeded the amount available to that ward and would therefore be subject to some form of adjustment/limitation.

At the time of this meeting £277,373 had been approved to progress, though it is likely further approvals will follow. Penge & Cator ward had been awarded the most with approval of £38,823.

Currently this data is not publicly available, though it is expected that the Council will be making further announcements through its media outlets.

The second tranche of applications has a deadline date of 1st April and any Groups wishing to get involved have only a few weeks left to apply.

3.3. Park Signage

LH reported that a working party met last November to discuss the signage in our parks and green spaces. We are still waiting written feedback from this meeting though Forum understands that the Council wishes to conduct a full survey of all signs. This could be quite far-reaching and unless clear guidance and instruction is forthcoming could lead to a degree of inconsistency. Forum was looking to idverde to provide some form of proforma for Groups to complete but to date this has not materialised. LH reported that a quick check at Keston Common suggested that there are some 30 signs across the site, some Council owned and some erected by the Friends, so it remained unclear what the audit would achieve. This would be followed up at the next Partnership meeting to ascertain better clarity.

3.4. Financial Support

LH reported that Forum had a surplus of funds at the moment and that the executive committee had agreed to offer this back to its members in the form of £150 payment per Group. This payment would be intended to help with increased costs that Groups have had to face, in particular those relating to website design and support. A number of free providers were no longer available and due to the high level of inflation these costs were about to rise quite considerably.

VS presented an overview of what Groups could do to improve their on-line presence. A number of website builders are available of which Squarespace and Wix are the preferred choice, though others are available. VS urged members to use a Group email address for contact, as this had the benefit of not using personal information and was easily transferable when membership contacts and roles changed.

Forum is currently looking at ways in which this payment can be affected and one possible way is to ask each Group to complete a detailed registration form. This would firstly help to ensure Forum's contact information is up-to-date and secondly demonstrate that Groups are active and prepared to engage with Forum. This will be discussed further in Committee and actioned in the coming months.

Action: Forum

3.5. Biodiversity Update

JJ reported to the meeting an overview of biodiversity matters that had been discussed by members of the Bromley Biodiversity Partnership (BBP). Specifically, JJ reported about the trial of nature-friendly verges and that 11 sites had been selected. PW asked if these would be publicised in Environmental Matters, as this would greatly help in providing publicity for the trial and to better engage with Bromley residents. It was not known if this would happen as it was a Council decision. More detailed information about JJ's report accompanies these minutes.

Normally the BBP meets every four months or so to discuss a variety of pertinent topics. The next meeting is scheduled for 15th May. The BBP can be contacted on bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com.

4. Friends Group Issues

4.1. Bromley Town Parks: JR reported that after 15 years of campaigning they were now finalising the restoration of the silted up Glassmere Pond. They are working with Thames21, Thames Water and the Environment Agency, who are funding the project, and of course the council, who own the pond. Trees around the pond have been pollarded to make way for diggers to undergo dredging work.

4.2. Chislehurst Commons: PW reported that, as a result of reading 'Our Patch' the London based newsletter, they had acquired 100 tree whips for free and were now in the process of planting these.

PW also reported that following the Green Flag ceremony Chislehurst Friends had invited Darrick & Newstead Woods Friends to visit their site and discuss mutual activity and looking at the various different habitats.

4.3. Cator Park & Alexandra Rec: MK reported that they are having a butterfly scrape done in Cator Park with assistance from Steven Lofting. They have also signed up to the Riverfly Monitoring Initiative (RMI) and are taking samples of the River Pool. This is an initiative managed by Lawrence Beale Collins in collaboration with Thames21 and the Zoological Society of London.

MK also reported that they have been in receipt of tree whips and have now created a hedgerow of some 45 metres.

MK further reported that they have been fund-raising to put a defibrillator in one of the parks. It is understood that the Council is keen to have more in their parks and green spaces.

4.4. Crofton & Sparrow Woods: JA reported that sewage is being released into the River Kidbrooke and has spoken to the Environment Agency to look into the situation. JR suggested that this should also be reported to Thames Water, who would have some responsibility for this type of discharge.

JA also reported that they have had three noticesboards built by Bromley College for free and idverde staff have now installed them. JA hopes they remain in-situ and are not vandalised.

- 4.5. Hoblingwell Wood:** RA reported that they have had a couple of swings installed, one being all inclusive. Also, after about six years, their picnic bench has been returned and installed after it had been kept in 'safe storage' from vandalism.

RA also reported that they are going to have a butterfly scrape installed similar to that of Cator Park.

5. AOB

- 5.1.** MK reported that she had been made aware that the poo bag dispensers are to be taken out of our parks and green spaces. It would appear *idverde* are no longer getting the necessary supplies, resulting in this policy decision. This was the first time Forum had heard this and further discussion by members was invited. Some members supported the action taken whilst others disagreed. It was felt if Member Groups wished to continue with their own arrangements they should be allowed to do so. Forum actioned to discuss with *idverde* at the next Partnership meeting.

Action: Forum

- 5.2.** MK asked if the insurance renewal date could be moved from mid-summer to a quieter time in the year. It appears that as part of the booking process for Friends events *idverde* insist that a valid insurance certificate exists for the date of the event to ensure there is indemnity cover. If an event is booked for a date just after the expiry date of insurance cover (currently 23rd June) then no such certificate exists and approval is kept in limbo. This makes little sense as Friends insurance is purchased by *idverde* and they are in control of its renewal. Processes have now been changed to make this renewal automatic so event processing should be able to take this factor into account and therefore not hold up the approval process. LH agreed to discuss with Andy Hodgson and see if a suitable override solution can be agreed upon. It was felt that changing the date would not necessarily solve the summer problem, it would merely move it to a different time in the year where the same circumstance could arise.

Action: LH

6. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 16th May, starting at 7pm. This will be both in-person at the Civic Centre and on-line via zoom.