

## Bromley Friends Forum

Minutes of the Members' Meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023  
Civic Centre & Via Zoom Video, 7.00pm - 9.00pm

### Attendance:

#### **Forum Committee:**

*See secretary for details*

#### **Friends:**

*See secretary for details*

#### **Apologies:**

*See secretary for details*

### 1. Chairman's Welcome

LH opened the meeting and welcomed everyone in attendance. A quick introduction by each member present followed.

### 2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 2023 were accepted with no alterations. The minutes would be revised with full names removed prior to publication on the Forum website.

#### Matters Arising:

**§2 Training Courses:** LH had discussed the matter of attendee information with *idverde* and it was agreed Forum would receive details of which Groups were attending and how attendance (when oversubscribed) is managed. To date information has not been forthcoming, which is somewhat disappointing. **Action: LH**

**§2 Friends Levy on Commercial Events:** LH had discussed this with both LBB and *idverde* and it is understood that this is now under consideration by *idverde*, who are charged with managing the licensing of commercial events. Options as to whether it is a fixed rate or a percentage of profits is yet to be decided. **Action: LH**

### 3. Forum News

#### 3.1. idverde Staffing

LH opened the discussion on the subject of *idverde* staffing and the recent departure of Andy Hodgson and whether members were aware of this. LH had raised a formal complaint to the Council regarding the lack of communication regarding this matter and to seek an apology for not informing Forum in a timely manner. An apology has been received and both LH and KR have had an introductory meeting with Mark Garthwaite, Andy's replacement. Mark is an internal appointment, so knows *idverde* business but not the parks of Bromley.

LH also commented that Steven Lofting has now left *idverde* and his role is currently being recruited. LH went on to discuss the job titles that *idverde* use, inasmuch as Community Managers look after urban sites whilst Conservation Rangers look after rural and countryside sites. In either case it makes sense for Friends to regard these roles as Site Managers and that they should be discussing matters with their Site Manager, whether they are a Community Manager or a Ranger.

LH referred to a document he had received from *idverde* detailing 234 sites across the borough and naming the Site Manager responsible. It turns out the three existing Community Managers (Penny Read, Victor Chin-Kit & Anita Zambaldo) have 54, 52 & 34 sites respectively whilst the seven Rangers have, on average, 14 sites each. LH did not intend to circulate this document to members but is happy to respond to any query members may have concerning its content.

Some discussion followed regarding *idverde*'s performance, with mixed views as to their efficiency. WH expressed deep concern that things were not progressing as well as they should.

*Post Meeting Note: Forum has been informed that James Hilsden has now left LBB and members should contact either Debbie Howard ([debbie.howard@bromley.gov.uk](mailto:debbie.howard@bromley.gov.uk)) for wards in the west of the borough or Nicola Musto ([nicola.musto@bromley.gov.uk](mailto:nicola.musto@bromley.gov.uk)) for wards in the east of the borough.*

#### 3.2. Parks Signage

LH reported that the working party on Park Signage had met recently and agreed the audit of signs should look at the main park sign(s) only. Since the meeting Forum has been informed that *idverde* has developed a piece of software that uses JotForm that allows the user to photograph a sign and record both its location and condition. The software is still in its trial status and Forum is still undertaking tests to prove its viability. Once satisfied, members will be asked to use the software to record their own site's sign(s). Clearly, there are many sites with no Friends Group and it is expected *idverde* will fulfil that requirement. It may be that it can be agreed that *idverde* undertakes all sites, especially in the event that Friends find the process unworkable.

Some discussion followed over the merit of this proposal and the complexity it posed. Clearly, we are a long way away from the design of any new board and it is also very unclear whether there is any funding available for new signage.

### **3.3. Dog Poo Dispensers**

LH reported that a contract for providing dog poo bags to fit the existing dispensers has been agreed. Each dispenser will be allocated a maximum of 400 bags per month and it is expected that Friends will fulfil the physical aspect of refilling the dispensers. At the current time the revised stickers/logos for the dispensers is being finalised. These will make it clear that the bags are for emergency use only and not intended for mass use. Once this has been completed the new system will start. The contract is expected to run to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2027.

### **3.4. Tremendous Project**

LH reported that the "GT Watering" app was now available for download on iPhone (Android version tbc). This allows users to interrogate the QR codes and get information about the tree and the watering schedule it has received. Members are urged to test this and report any issues/comments they have.

### **3.5. Jubilee Parks Fund**

LH distributed a spreadsheet showing the latest position of the allocation of funds through the Jubilee Parks Fund. In total a sum of £488,597 has been approved, with some wards yet to submit any applications. It is expected there will be some further applications this October. JR and BS confirmed that both their Groups will be making an application.

LH asked the meeting about their experiences on how their projects were progressing, with mixed views. PH was delighted how their playground project had gone whilst WH was very concerned about how new tenders were being managed.

It seems idverde are planning to do a lot of the garden style projects and it is not clear how the funding is being allocated. There was concern that a lot of quotes gathered by Friends Groups are being ignored and the Council is getting its own quotes, which may not be the best value for money. Another concern was raised about time frames and Friends were not receiving detailed information on what was happening.

LH advised that Jane Askew, at the Council, was tasked with overseeing these projects and members concerns should be addressed to her in the first instance to reassure themselves that everything was on the right track.

### **3.6. Friends Group Registrations**

LH reported that 33 Groups had now returned their registration document and that a further 7 had been chased. This left some 16 or so who were either inactive or unresponsive for whatever reason.

LH reported that he and KR had attended a meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> September that agreed to revive the Friends of Harvington and that a new committee had been elected. It was expected that they would now complete the more formal process of setting up the Group (i.e. constitution, bank account etc.) and register their details with Forum.

### 3.7. Training Courses

LH reported that idverde provided an on-line leadership course yesterday (20<sup>th</sup> September) which disappointingly was attended by relatively few Groups. LH also explained that idverde was working on producing a more formal on-line version of this course and it is intended to become mandatory viewing for all Groups. It is also expected that it will be mandated annually to ensure skills are kept fresh and renewed as necessary.

This brings to an end the allocation of five idverde courses for this year and LH asked the meeting to provide ideas/requests for next year's set of courses.

LH added that a First Aid course is planned to be held at the Civic Centre on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> October. The course has been over-subscribed and further courses will be scheduled in the Spring. WH expressed concern that there appeared to be insufficient First Aid courses to meet the need. LH agreed that with 56 Groups potentially 112 volunteers needed training every three years, suggesting Forum needed up to four courses per annum.

### 3.8. Biodiversity Update

JJ reported to the meeting an overview of biodiversity matters. A summary of her report is contained in a separate document that accompanies these minutes.

Normally the Bromley Biodiversity Partnership (BBP) meets every four months or so to discuss a variety of pertinent topics. The next meeting is scheduled for 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024. The BBP can be contacted on [bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com](mailto:bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com).

## 4. Friends Group Successes/Issues

- 4.1. **Bromley Town Parks:** JR reported that work on dredging Glassmill Pond has started thanks to funding secured by Thames21. Lots of positive feedback from residents that progress is being made.
- 4.2. **Chislehurst Rec:** BA reported that progress is finally happening on their Jubilee Parks funding project (pathway improvements to their playground). BA also reported that they had received 'Outstanding' and 'Silver' in the London in Bloom awards.
- 4.3. **Darrick & Newstead Woods:** BS reported that they have put a bid into the Jubilee Parks Fund to improve some pathways that are prone to flooding. BS also asked members about site visits between Groups. Darrick Friends had recently visited Chislehurst Commons and found it beneficial to learn ideas from others. BS would like to see these types of visits extended across more Groups.
- 4.4. **Chislehurst Commons:** PW advertised their Chislehurst Creates event which is being organised as a collaborative between several key parties in the Chislehurst area. BK reported that they have sooty bark disease on a number of sycamore trees. PW reported that there is a London wide webinar on the subject of biodiversity net gain scheduled for 26<sup>th</sup> September. (*Post Meeting Note: the webinar has been postponed to a date yet to be decided*).
- 4.5. **Priory Gardens:** RG reported that they have had a duck feeder installed by their ponds. It's solar powered and built with recycled materials. It works and appears to be quite popular. One drawback is that it dispenses a handful of seeds and users need some way of catching these seeds without them being lost on the ground, which encourages rats.

**4.6. Kelsey Park:** WH reported that silt removal and bridge repairs at Kelsey Park's ponds has been identified and that work has finally started after many years of delay.

## **5. AOB**

**5.1.** KR referred the meeting to the glossy brochure on the Civic Centre rebuild and refurbish. It would seem a lot of it is aimed at the senior citizen for luxurious living.

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

The next meeting will be our AGM at the Civic Centre scheduled for Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> November starting at 6.30pm. This meeting will be in-person only and include a social element to encourage networking amongst Friends Groups.