

Bromley Friends Forum

Minutes of the Members' Meeting held on 7th March 2024
Civic Centre & Via Zoom Video, 7.00pm - 9.00pm

Attendance/Apologies: [See secretary for details](#)

1. Chairman's Welcome

LH opened the meeting and welcomed everyone in attendance, in particular our guest, the Operations Manager from *idverde*. A quick introduction by each member present followed.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 21st September 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 sending attendee reminders in advance of pending courses and *idverde* have agreed to ensure this happens. Also, Forum will receive details of which Groups were attending and how attendance (when oversubscribed) is managed. Action complete.

§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. Still under discussion. Action continues. **Action: LH**

3. *idverde* Operations

MG gave a brief introduction to himself and explained he had taken over from Andy Hodgson in July 2023. MG explained that he has been in the industry for 28 years and many years with *idverde*. When he started there was a lot of contractual matters to get to grips with and MG apologised for his relatively low profile in the interim period. MG hopes to engage more with Groups and get out and about once things are back on an even footing. MG went on to explain that *idverde* have spent a great deal of effort maintaining their equipment over the winter months as well as having spent upwards of £250k on new equipment.

Questions / Answers

Q: VS ask to learn more about MG's background.

A: MG explained he has a degree in horticulture, been in the industry since Uni and started with window boxes and hanging baskets. From there soft & hard landscaping and interior designs. Joined what is now *idverde* in 2008.

Q: VS followed this up with asking about the ground maintenance work and its attitude towards biodiversity and working smarter.

A: MG explained that this is the first contract he has worked on where they manage everything, including ground maintenance, education, cemeteries etc. Bromley regards *idverde* as the experts in this field and allows them a relatively free hand in achieving what it needs to achieve.

Q: RG stated that after multiple requests we still hadn't received a redacted version of the contract and it was often difficult to know exactly what *idverde* were expected to do. LH added that Forum had received a tender document which included all the bells and whistles but we did not know which parts had been bid for and which had been ignored. RA explained that requests for certain ground maintenance activities had been ignored and that plants and wildlife had suffered as a consequence.

A: MG explained there had been a lot of problems last year, a high degree of staff turnaround and that certain areas of local knowledge had been lost. It is hoped that this summer's activities will prove to be much more successful.

Q: JA ask about grass cutting and whether there were any reports and/or assessments about the trials of biodiversity banks.

A: MG confirmed there was and *idverde* have that information. MG agree to send info to LH to circulate to members.

Q: CP explained that several hard-standing pathways at Croydon Road Rec were too narrow for *idverde*'s vehicles and that they were causing damage to the grass verges. Can smaller vehicles be used or is there some other solution?

A: MG explained that the infrastructure costs they hold are for repairs not renewals, so it is unlikely that pathways will be rebuilt wider. Some of the damage can be caused by driver behaviour and so more needs to be done to educate drivers.

Q: RA added that some repairs to pathways are being done piecemeal and this wasn't necessarily the most efficient way.

A: MG explained that these matters needed to be looked at on a case by case basis and offered to take up individual issues on request.

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Q: SG asked about rubber matting in playgrounds. Whitehall Rec has a heavily used playground with lots of new equipment. There are areas where the matting and surrounding brickwork is all broken up and it is a hazard to toddlers running around. This is a very neglected area across the borough. Are playgrounds checked daily?

A: MG stated that playgrounds are checked daily but in terms of equipment failures rather than aesthetics. Wet pour repairs will not be high on the agenda due to cost. At current time these types of issues are being assessed and past to the council to determine costs and whether a solution can be found.

Q: SG reported that a piece of play equipment had been taken away for repair but so far after many years nothing has been returned. What's happened to it?

A: MG asked SG to send him precise details and he would look into the matter. There is currently many issues with the supply chain and this may have had a bearing on the situation.

Q: MK expressed praise for *idverde* staff working at Cator Park and Alexandra Rec. Her ongoing problem is the fencing around the site. Holes are often repaired with cable ties and this is just not working, as the foxes and dogs just break through and can end up in the play areas.

A: MG grateful for the feedback.

Q: RG asked about butterfly banks and their ongoing maintenance.

A: MG stated that this was not his area of knowledge but believed Sue Holland and her team would be aware of the situation.

Q: KR explained that he had been in touch with an organisation called Nature Vibes, who were interested in setting up forest school liking training in Bromley Parks, especially in the Penge area. The feedback received had indicated there would be a charge for the use of Bromley Parks and this had not been well received. Could *idverde* offer anything similar in the Penge area away from the education centre at BEECHE?

A: MG agreed to speak to Sue Holland and investigate possibilities.

Q: RG asked about the grass cutting regime bearing in mind the problems of 2023.

A: MG confirmed they were better prepared this year and in a better position to react to changing weather patterns due to climate change, i.e. starting earlier in the season and taking into account periods of drought and/or prolonged wet weather. MG agreed that any litter shredding should be avoided by picking up first but if it does occur then it should be collected afterwards.

Q: BW asked if there was a budget for bulb planting and whether these will be supplied by *idverde*?

A: MG replied that he did not know but will seek an answer.

Q: SG asked about hedges, which were cut in August. This is too soon as nesting birds are still insitu.

A: MG agreed this would have been an oversight and the hedge cutting was not required until later in the year.

Q: LH asked about staffing arrangements. It seemed that there had been quite a significant reduction since the time of the start of the contract and there had been many leavers in recent months.

A: MG did not feel there had been a reduction in staff numbers since the start though clearly roles had changed and evolved over time. MG confirmed that retaining ground staff was hard, they did pay more than minimum wage but they were competing in a market where higher pay was easy to find. Working for *idverde* was often a lifestyle choice with the ability to be outside.

Q: RG added that he felt the Community Manager role was becoming more administrative and less hands on. Was this an active *idverde* decision?

A: MG did not believe this to be the case and that their role was meant to be reactive to the circumstances presented to them. There is no change of focus.

4. Forum News

4.1. Council Update

LH opened the discussion on the subject of council staffing and asked whether members were aware that David Braybrook had now taken over from James Hilsden. It is anticipated that David will be more responsive to enquiries/issues raised to the council.

4.2. Dog Poo Dispensers

VS gave an update of the poo bag situation. Though we are not quite at launch point the decals have been produced and were available for pick up by members attending in person this evening. These can be affixed to dispensers now or members can wait until advised by their community manager. There are 55 dispensers across the borough, 49 insitu and 6 to be relocated. It is expected that groups will be given three months' supply to start and then as required thereafter. A press release with the portfolio holder is planned prior to launch.

4.3. Funding

LH updated members about funding that Forum planned to provide over the coming year to its members.

First was in respect of small grants. The policy had been revised and Forum was now offering grants up to a maximum of £500 and amounts up to 75% of the cost,

whichever was lower. Details of this were available on the 'how do I' page of the Forum website along with the associated forms of application. Clearly, if there is a large response then Forum may have to be more choosy in its acceptance but it was hoped that the added amounts will incentivise more Groups to apply. MK asked how often Groups can apply and whether multiple applications in one year were allowed. LH confirmed there were no restrictions in that sense and that it would be in the gift of the Forum Committee to decide whether applications were successful or not.

Second Forum is looking at purchasing a large batch of hi-vis jackets for distribution amongst Friends Groups. If this goes ahead then these will be offered to Groups free of charge. Some discussion around the wording and use of 'Green Spaces' as well as 'Park' was suggested. **Action: Forum**

Third was in relation to support payments for all Groups. This will be reviewed as the year progresses and determined by the state of available funds.

4.4. Parks Signage

LH referred to the signage audit (jotform) of main signs in parks and that to date the uptake and response had been very low. LH agreed to recirculate the request and see whether additional information can be collected. Forum plans to discuss this matter further with *idverde* at the next partnership meeting and agree once and for all if there is any purpose in pursuing this activity, i.e. if there is zero funds available for signage why waste effort now. One option is to use some of the surplus platinum jubilee funds to revise some of the worst of the main signs.

4.5. Training

LH reported that two first aid courses have been planned for this spring and invites to these had been sent out recently. There are still a few places left on each course so if any member has an interest in attending, they should let us know asap. The courses will be re-run in the autumn.

LH also advised that *idverde* is required to provide five courses each year and for 2024 they had decided to offer us a sixth course in the shape of an online leadership course which members could view at their leisure. *idverde* would like to mandate this course and would monitor that Groups had indeed viewed it.

After some discussion of the options, it was agreed the five courses would be as follows:

- Butterfly & transect survey
- Reptile & amphibian survey
- Moth appreciation & survey
- Tool maintenance
- Hedge laying

LH reported that we have been in discussion with idverde over the provision of a course to help members organise and run events. This has included using the expertise of Lollipop Events, as trainers. They have offered to provide a fully embracing course at £1000 plus £25 per delegate plus VAT. Forum have agreed this is far too costly and a simplified arrangement is needed. LH will explore this further and ascertain why idverde's events team can't offer something at cost.

Action: LH

5. Friends Group Reports

5.1. Hoblingwell Wood: RA stated that Hoblingwell were hosting the Woodland Trust (and other partners) who will be running a course on their Woodland Condition Self-Assessment Tool. This would be bookable via the Eventbrite interface and full details will be circulated shortly.

5.2. Whitehall Rec: SG reported that they having problems having their defibrillator installed. It was supposed to be fast-tracked but for some reason progress has stalled and SG doesn't know why. Forum to escalate.

Action: Forum

6. AOB

6.1. KR advised members that the Friends page on the Forum website has recently been revised and all Groups listed have now got a link to their own dedicated page that lists info about them and provides contact details. KR ask members to check these are correct and forward any comments/corrections so they can be amended with the most up-to-date information.

6.2. KR offered to organise a tour of the parks and open spaces in the Penge area. The meeting agreed this was a good idea and asked KR to proceed.

Action: KR

6.3. MS reported that the chair of the Friends of Darrick & Newstead Woods was stepping done and asked the meeting if a Group had to have a chairman. LH advised that it very much depended on what their constitution said and if necessary suitable changes to the constitution should be completed. This would need to be approved by the membership at either an AGM or EGM at the earliest opportunity.

6.4. JR reported that dog licensing notices have been put up in areas where no dogs are allowed. This has caused confusion amongst visitors and given the impression dog walking is allowed. The meeting proposed that these erroneous signs should be removed.

6.5. PW requested that in future meetings more time was allocated to Friends Groups' Reports.

7. Date of Next Meeting

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