

FRIENDS FORUM OF BROMLEY PARKS & GREEN SPACES

MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Civic Centre, Bromley, Wednesday, 23rd November 2022, 6.30pm-8pm

1. Introduction and welcome of the Committee

Chairman, Larry Herbert, opened the meeting, thanked the Council for their assistance in arranging the evening's event and welcomed guests and those present. He was especially pleased to welcome new members to the proceedings. Attention was drawn to the documents that were issued with the invite and that these would be referred to as the meeting progressed.

2. Present / Apologies

LH wished to record a vote of thanks to John Cutting, Forum's treasurer, who was standing down from his role at this AGM. JC has been part of the Forum Committee since November 2014 and made an invaluable contribution to proceedings. Unfortunately, due to ill-health JC is unable to be with us this evening.

Forum Committee:

Larry Herbert (LH)	Chair, Friends of Keston Common
Keith Rodwell (KR)	Vice-chair, Friends of Winsford Gardens
Vivien Smith (VS)	Friends of Scadbury Park
Kari Silvester (KS)	Friends of Bromley Town Parks
Richard Gibbons (RG)	Friends of Priory Gardens

Members:

Alan Brooks, Keston Common	Alison Stammers (ASt), Chislehurst & Walden Rec
Brian Knights, Chislehurst Commons	Brian Street (BS), Darrick & Newstead Woods
Frank Whitcombe	Jane Andrews (JA), Crofton & Sparrow Woods
John Bruce (JB), Jubilee Country Park	Jason Glen, Whitehall Rec
Jeff Royce (JR), Bromley Town Parks	Karen King, Crofton & Sparrow Woods
Louise Thompson, Cator & Alexandra Rec	Mai Bunce, Chislehurst & Walden Rec
Michael Hudson, Pratts Bottom	Mike Titheridge, Tugmutton Rec
Peter Hudson, Pratts Bottom	Peter White (PWh), South Hill Wood
Peter Woodward (PWo), Chislehurst Commons	Ralph Ambrose (RA), Hoblingwell Wood
Sandy Goddard (SG), Whitehall Rec	Shirley Bryant
Tiziana Herbert, Keston Common	Tony McPartlan, Kings Meadow
Val Atkinson, Richmal Crompton Field	Wendy Gowlett, Harvington

idverde:

Andy Hodgson (AH)	Andy Simpson (ASi)	Sue Holland (SH)
Angela Wood (AW)	Penny Read (PR)	Steven Lofting (SL)
Amy Rogers (AR)	Anita Zambaldo (AZ)	Ross Fryer (RF)

Bromley Council:

Cllr Aisha Cuthbert (AC), Portfolio Holder
Hannah Jackson (HJ), Assistant Director
James Hilsden (JH), Parks & Green Spaces Borough Manager

Apologies:

Barbara Arora, Chislehurst & Walden Rec
Emma Prescott, Havelock Rec
Judy John, Biodiversity Partnership
Peter Runacres, Jubilee Country Park
Walter Leonard, Betts Park

John Cutting (JC), Forum Treasurer, Kelsey Park
Gregor Campbell, Willett Rec
Millie Knights, Cator Park & Alexandra Rec
Sarah Chant, Coney Hall
Martyn Bradley (MB), Operations Director, idverde

3. Minutes of the last AGM held on 12th May 2021

The minutes of the last AGM were accepted without comment or error. There were no matters arising.

JR proposed and PWO seconded.

4. Presentation of the Committee's Annual Report

LH referred to Forum's annual report and gave a brief overview of its content. In particular he highlighted the on-going actions with LBB/idverde. This included reference to park signage, drinking fountains, basic tool provision, project fundraising, maintenance costs and training. LH also referred to its collaboration with other volunteering groups and external national bodies. LH concluded his presentation with a look at the year ahead, fundamentally more of the same.

LH explained that he didn't plan to present Forum's report any further and hoped that members had read it and found it of some value. LH invited questions:

Questions about the Committee Report:

None

5. Presentation and Adoption of the Annual Accounts

In JC's absence LH presented the accounts which covered the financial years ending 30th Sept 2021 and 30th Sept 2022. It was noted that at the start of the year our bank, HSBC, started charging a monthly fee so the Committee took the decision to change banks to Metro Bank.

An increase in the LBB Grant from £5k was negotiated, in view of the increase in the number of Friends Groups to 56 as present. This was agreed at £7k and we received this sum shortly before the end of our 2022 financial year. The Council kindly agreed to backdate the increase to our previous financial year (ending 30th September 2021) and we will receive this extra £2,000 shortly.

In the year ending 2021 Forum offered Small Grants to the value of £1,693 but so far in 2022 there have been none. The Committee would encourage Groups to check the terms of the policy and come forward with valid applications.

LH went on to report that 2022 had been a year of consolidation and appraising its Member Groups. It is currently finalising the provision of quality Hi-Viz vests for all volunteers and is considering how best to provide financial support to all Groups. It will continue to provide training courses on a regular basis and will use its financial resources in a cost-effective manner.

LH closed by thanking Peter Runacres, the Examiner of the Accounts, for his speedy and efficient attention to the task and invited questions from the floor.

Questions about the Accounts:

Q: PWO asked how Forum helped new Groups?

A: LH explained that in the first instance Forum offered new Groups a £100 to cover incidental expenditure to get the Group started (e.g. admin costs, help to set up media facilities, arranging a bank account). Secondly, Forum offered an array of useful documents and literature that new Groups could adopt to their specific needs. This included writing a constitution, defining policies for safe-working, risk assessments etc. and providing one-to-one advice, as required.

The Accounts were then formally adopted: proposed by SG; seconded by PWh.

6. Approval of Independent Examiner

JB outlined the details of our independent examiner, Peter Runacres (treasurer at Jubilee Country Park), his qualifications and that he had agreed to undertake the role for the coming year.

Proposed by JB; seconded by JR. Approval and election for next year was agreed by all.

7. Election of Committee

LH outlined the procedure for the election/re-election of the Forum committee members:

Nominees for the general member roles were as follows and all were taken en-bloc:

Barbara Arora, Chislehurst & Walden Rec
Kari Silvester, Bromley Town Parks & Gardens
Richard Gibbons, Priory Gardens
Vivien Smith, Scadbury Park
Walter Leonard, Betts Rec

A vote of approval by members was called with unanimous agreement for all nominees.

The nominee for the Treasurer role was as follows:

Tony Allen, Scadbury Park

A vote of approval by members was called with unanimous agreement.

The nominee for the Vice-chair role was as follows:

Keith Rodwell, Winsford Gardens

A vote of approval by members was called with unanimous agreement.

KR took the chair and presented the nominee for the Chair role as follows:

Larry Herbert, Keston Common

A vote of approval by members was called with unanimous agreement.

8. idverde Report

AR opened *idverde*'s presentation with information about their work on revising the project proposal forms. These have now been converted to online forms and were available for use from the Forum website. The whole process has been streamlined and a full set of guidance notes of how to develop your project provided. Projects were now categorised under three headings: Community, Fast Track and Strategic. AR explained that Groups should contact their Community Manager at the earliest opportunity and ensure they had approval before progressing further.

AW continued the presentation with a look at some of the highlights of the past year. These included Green Flag awards, Great British spring clean, Biggin Hill community day, raised beds at Whitehall Rec, Kings Meadow hedgerow planting, Church House Garden pond restoration, Priory Gradens conservation work, Hoblingwell Wood's playground improvements and BMX track development.

PR followed with further highlights from the more urban side of the borough. This included the River Cray clean-up, Alexandra Rec's impact day, bulb and bedding planting at various sites and Betts Park canal improvements. PR concluded her talk with a look at some of the events that had taken place over the summer and looked towards all the exciting projects that may emerge from the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund.

SL completed *idverde*'s presentation with a look at biodiversity matters and the improvements this was bringing to the borough. Items here include hay cuts, the provision of bat boxes, a training day for LBB graduates, the Brilliant Butterflies project and looking at work completed by volunteers including training provisions. SL reported that over 8100 of *idverde*-led volunteer hours had been recorded for the year plus over 13,600 of self-led hours

Questions for idverde:

There were no questions as such but JR wished to record his support and express his appreciation for a list of 'wonderful things' being achieved.

9. Bromley Council Report

HJ opened LBB's presentation with a quick review of the Open Space Strategy. HJ confirmed that this had been adopted by the PDS committee towards the end of last year and gave a summary of the first year's achievements. This included the BMX track at Hoblingwell, the restoration work at both the moated manor in Scadbury Park and the bandstand at Croydon Road Rec. HJ continued to report that the priority for year 2 was to a) conduct an audit of the open space portfolio; b) review the governance arrangements and c) manage financial sustainability and modernisation.

HJ then reported on the first submissions of the Jubilee Parks Fund. 30 applications had been received comprising a wide range of proposals. Initial assessments are underway and it is hoped an interim decision will be made by the end of the year. HJ confirmed that not every ward had made a submission, so further opportunities for Friends Groups remained.

HJ gave an update on the Treemendous project of planting 5000 trees across the borough. 1,472 trees were planted in year 1 and it is believed some 95% are showing good health despite the challenges of this year's heatwave. 1,568 trees have arrived for year 2 and planting is under way. Members were encouraged to speak up if they know of areas where more trees are required. Requests can be made through FixMyStreet.

HJ concluded her presentation with the comment that three sites have been identified for woodland establishment. These are Edgebury Grazing Land in Chislehurst, Kemnal Road in Chislehurst and World Ends Lane in Chelsfield.

JH gave a report with respect to the Council's service provision in parks and green spaces. JH explained that the Council's neighbourhood officer roles had been re-organised and continued with their inspection duties. Again, *idverde* were thanked for supporting this work and ensuring operations continued in a smooth and coherent manner.

JH explained that it had been a challenging year due to the weather conditions and that the seasonal bedding had suffered as a result. Plans were being drawn up to consider more drought resistant plants and, where possible, use those that required a level of low maintenance. JH confirmed that the displays for the Diamond Jubilee had been a great success and *idverde* were to be congratulated on their efforts. The Council was most grateful to *idverde* for their hard work and dedication to continue to provide a fully managed service.

JH was also most grateful to all Friends Groups for their efforts in making parks and green spaces a welcoming place to visit. Their continued efforts were much appreciated. JH also thanked Forum for their continued support.

Questions for the Council:

Q: RG asked about grass and its on-going issue with certain Bromley residents - to be cut or left to grow? What was the position of 'Nature Friendly Verges'?

A: HJ confirmed that a trial was underway and that they were awaiting feedback to draw conclusions. HJ agreed that more signage on 'what they were doing' was required and that the Council needed to manage and communicate this issue much better.

JB asked how big was the trial? HJ stated it was 11 sites spread across the borough. LH asked how long was the trial? HJ replied that it was for two years after which a decision would be taken as to whether changes would be permanent.

Q: BS asked about the installation of a flag pole at a Green Flag site and why the process was not factored into the accreditation process?

A: JH agreed it should be simplified and hoped that arrangements for Darrick Wood would be settled in the very near future. ASi confirmed that a six metre flag pole had been identified and he was awaiting agreement to install it (it is hoped that any planning considerations will be waived as it is to be sited on Council owned land).

Q: VS asked about the planned work outlined in the OSS and what the highlights were for the coming year?

A: HJ confirmed that a year 1 update report had been discussed in council along with a status on a variety of projects. These will be made available to members as part of the issue of these minutes.

Q: JA asked about targets for the first tranche of Jubilee Parks Fund applications?

A: HJ confirmed that the aim was to have an initial response by Christmas. This response could be one of three outcomes: yes, no or maybe. This latter category meaning that further work/clarification on the bid was required.

ASt asked if the infrastructure for appraising these applications was in place?

HJ confirmed that two portfolio holders were involved and that the council will have the support of the team at *idverde*.

Q: JA asked about guided walks and the new concept of ‘social prescribing’?

A: After some discussion by members it was agreed that Groups should pursue this at local level. They were best placed to know their area and what walks could be offered to local GP practices. RA added that this type of social activity could be linked to Parkrun, which they offer at Hoblingwell.

10. Questions & Answers

Q: JR referred to Forum’s recent campaign about improving member communications and asked if any decisions had been made?

A: LH replied that feedback was still being appraised and it was currently too early to come to any definitive decision. The new Forum Committee will be looking at the options again and will hopefully have feedback early in the new year.

11. Any Other Business

PR referred to a new health scheme called ParkBathe. This provided 1hour mindful walks using aspects of ‘forest bathing’ in urban green spaces. More details were available from <https://linktr.ee/parkbathe>.

KR gave a brief update from his role as vice-chair. He had spent a lot of time reviewing the three websites (LBB, *idverde* and Forum) with a view to streamlining the information on Friends Groups. Some progress had been made but there was a considerable element of change still needed. KR went on to report that he had a close connection with the Ramblers Association and that he was involved in improving the walks around London. In particular he had assisted with the signage of walks like the London Loop. KR also reported that he had written to MB at *idverde* about the view that the Penge area of the borough was being neglected, with regard the upkeep of its parks and green spaces. Since making his views known, *idverde* had responded in kind and there is now a plan of action. KR is most grateful to *idverde* for taking the matter seriously and acting in a timely manner.

AC introduced herself as the new portfolio holder and offered to give her support where needed. AC offered a vote of thanks to the Forum for a very informative AGM.

12. Close

LH thanked members for their attendance and wished them well.

It is expected that the next members’ meeting will be early February 2023 (tbc). The next Forum AGM is scheduled for November 2023.