



# **Annual Report**

## **1/10/19 - 30/09/20**

## Overview

The Bromley Friends Forum was formed in 2005 and works in partnership with the London Borough of Bromley and its main parks contractor, *idverde*, to create a better environment for all. Through the partnership, users and visitors get a greater say in what goes on in their local areas.

Forum's main objectives are as follows:

- support all Member Groups to promote, maintain and conserve the facilities, and encourage the positive usage of all parks and green spaces in Bromley for the health and well-being of the community
- support Member Groups with their aim to contribute towards the conservation and enhancement of the physical and natural environments
- to raise funds to help Member Groups to improve facilities, environments and activities available within the parks and green spaces across Bromley
- encourage new Friends Groups to form, providing advice and support, where required
- identify training needs and to support training and educational opportunities for Member Groups
- promote the benefits of being actively involved with a Friends Group
- act as a representative of all Member Groups.

Each Friends Group within the Forum helps care for a specific park or green space in the borough. Friends can get involved in improving:

- The conservation, protection and appearance of parks and green spaces
- The recreational facilities available to the general public
- The health, safety and well-being for all visitors
- The educational experience through the natural history and biodiversity of our community.

## Committee

The Bromley Friends Forum operates through a committee which is elected each year. We host up to six meetings a year for our members and invited guests. Committee members also attend a variety of other pertinent meetings. These include Committee Meetings, Partnership & Stakeholder Meetings (with LBB & *idverde*), Biodiversity Partnership Meetings and meetings of the London wide movement on parks and green spaces.

In the 2019-2020 financial year Forum Committee Members were as follows: Larry Herbert (chair), Keith Rodwell (deputy chair), John Cutting (treasurer), Vivien Smith, Sandy Goddard, Barbara Arora, Kari Silvester & Richard Gibbons.

## Chairman's Statement

The 2019-2020 year started with great promise - lots of exciting plans and projects under consideration. However, the Covid-19 pandemic arrived and by March 2020 progress came to much of a standstill. Our communications with LBB and *idverde* dropped off and we were unable to host our members' meetings in the usual way.

Some of the main threads Forum has followed in the year are:

### *Partnership Working*

At the end of the 2018/2019 year Forum revised the partnership statement which details the working arrangements between the three parties LBB, *idverde* and Forum. This revised version was discussed at the various partnership meetings held in the year to clarify some of the finer detail and reach agreement on all the legal implications. Unfortunately the pandemic has restricted progress on this matter and the document is yet to reach final agreement and general publication. It is hoped this will be achieved early in the 2020/2021 year.

### *Communications*

As has already been mentioned communications this year have not always been as clear and up-to-date as would be liked. Lots of face-to-face meetings have had to be cancelled and energies channelled at different priorities. Gradually more and more virtual meetings have been organised until these have now become quite commonplace. Together we will all try harder to ensure communication is given top billing and that Friends Groups are not surprised by unwelcome events.

### *Basic Tool Provision*

Forum has been in discussions with LBB and *idverde* about basic tool provision for Friends Groups. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of PPE and clearly loaning out items such as gloves and goggles is no longer an acceptable arrangement. It has in principle been agreed that *idverde* will supply these types of essential items and stock levels will be maintained to cope with demand. With regard hand-held tools these will continue to be loaned but will undergo a rigorous cleaning schedule before being distributed to Groups. The situation will be kept under continual review and it is hoped that where there is a need *idverde* in agreement with LBB will be able to fully support any request.

### *Park Signage*

As you will well know many of the signs in our parks are showing their age, contain out-of-date information and are generally in a poor state. A long-term project has been launched to look into new signs with commonality across all of the borough's parks and green spaces. This project includes the design team at Bromley College who will be looking at the various practicalities and modern signage techniques involved in producing a fit for purpose solution. Unfortunately like other projects this year the pandemic has delayed matters and the college has not been able to progress matters at this time. It is expected that this will pick up in the very near future and that the project can move forward. It is also expected that due to cost constraints there would be a slow rollout over a number of years, with more urgent high-profile parks taking priority.

### *Drinking Fountains*

The committee has also looked at reinstating some of the drinking fountains in our parks and the practicalities of achieving this is under consideration with LBB. There is the purchase cost as well as the on-going maintenance costs to be considered and whether these can be off-set by savings in a reduction in litter of plastic bottles and cans. As a consequence any definitive plans are on hold for the time being.

### *Footfall*

As you are all aware our parks and green spaces have become extremely popular during lockdown and the level of footfall has become quite extreme. This is creating a number of problems, not least massive damage to pathways, and it will take quite some effort in the coming years to rectify the situation. Some cyclists and horse riders have roamed freely where they are not supposed to, ball games have occurred on wild flower meadows and of course there has been a big increase in barbecues and illegal fires.

### *Litter & Fly Tipping*

Allied to the above the level of littering and fly tipping has increased dramatically. Part of the problem is that there are insufficient bins in our parks, they are too small and the design of some allow foxes and the like to rummage through and redistribute the litter elsewhere. Restricted operational arrangements at the local waste recycling centres has not helped and it is all too easy to dump unwanted material during the hours of darkness. Some of the collection arrangements have equally not met the demand, especially at weekends.

### *Overview Questionnaire*

At the end of the financial year the Forum Committee agreed it would be a worthwhile exercise to collect data from its Friends Groups as to how they have coped with the pandemic and what issues this had caused. To this end a simple Friends Overview Questionnaire was produced and published to all Groups with the offer of a £100 payment on completion and return of the document. The results and findings of this exercise were collated after the end of this financial year and have been recorded in subsequent meeting minutes and are hence outside of the scope of this report. Suffice to say some 32 returns were eventually processed.

### *Friends Groups*

At our AGM in November 2019 we reported a membership of 46 Groups and some 800 active volunteers. This has now risen to 52 Groups though it is believed that the active volunteer count has remained much the same as several members have decided to leave as a consequence of the pandemic.



*Forum Chairman (kneeling) with the Friends of Keston Common and Steven Lofting (idverde, far right) installing a new interpretation board*

## Events

There have been relatively few events in the year again due to government restrictions and the need for social distancing. The normal fireworks events took place in November 2019 and these were all highly successful with no reported incidents.

It is hoped in the coming year that Friends will be able to organise some events and *idverde* are keen to accept applications and help with the organisation of Covid secure arrangements.

## Walks

The same can be said for walks. Those Groups that organise monthly (or even weekly) walks have had to curtail their activities. In some cases walks have been limited to groups of six people or when in lockdown cancelled altogether. Again it is hoped the coming year will allow more opportunity for organised walks in our parks and that more people will be able to take advantage.

## Training

The Bromley Friends Forum, in agreement with *idverde*, organises five training courses on subjects related to parks and green spaces per annum. The courses proposed for this year were Pond Maintenance (Oct '19), Live Hedge Laying (Feb '20), Herbaceous Border Control (Mar '20), Biodiversity (Apr '20) and Reptile Surveying (Jun '20). Unfortunately only the first two of these courses could be delivered, with the remaining three being cancelled due to lockdown restrictions. These three will be carried forward to our 2020/2021 year, when it is hoped a programme of eight courses can be delivered. It is expected that a number of these course will be provided on-line rather than face to face and as a consequence a greater number of attendees can be accommodated.

In addition, the Forum organises Emergency First Aid Courses and aims to provide at least three of these per annum. This year courses were planned for November '19, March '20 and July '20 but due to unforeseen circumstances none of these were able to take place. It is hoped that these can re-commence in June 2021 and Forum will endeavour to provide a series of six courses to make up for the shortfall and allow members to gain or re-gain their certifications.

## Members' Meetings

Following the AGM in November 2019 a Members Meeting was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2020. Topics for discussion at this meeting included an update on the partnership with LBB & *idverde*, the results of the overview questionnaire sent to members, the training schedule for 2020, small grant applications and the GoParks initiative. An update from the biodiversity partnership was also presented to the members as was a roundup of individual Group issues. Full minutes of this meeting are available for download from the Forum website.

A subsequent meeting was scheduled for 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 but had to be cancelled due to lockdown being implemented the day before. No further members' meetings were scheduled for

the remainder of the financial year. Since then virtual meetings have been taking place and these will continue for the time being.

## **Stakeholder Panel Meetings**

The stakeholder panel of interested parties meets every six months or so to discuss developments and issues across the open spaces of the borough. A meeting was held in September 2019, just before the reporting period of this report. A subsequent meeting would have been scheduled for March/April 2020 but did not occur due to lockdown. Indeed no meetings of this nature have occurred this financial year. Since then a virtual meeting has taken place in February 2021 and will be reported on next time. It is anticipated that a stakeholder panel meeting will occur in September 2021.

## **Partnership Meetings**

The Bromley Friends Forum chairs a quarterly meeting with both LBB & idverde. This meeting discusses various aspects of business across the three parties and in particular brings to the table common issues and developments experienced by Friends Groups.

Face to face meetings were held on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019 and 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Full minutes of these meeting are available for download from the Forum website. The meeting scheduled for June 2020 was cancelled as was anything due around Sept/Oct time. Since then two virtual meetings have been held in 2021 and will be reported on next time.

## **Biodiversity Panel Meetings**

The Bromley Friends Forum attends the biodiversity panel meetings, which are held approximately every four months. In this financial year only the meeting in January 2020 went ahead with those planned for May and September being cancelled.

## **National Meetings**

The Bromley Friends Forum has attended several of the London wide meetings during the year. Many of these have been virtual, and these continue on a six weekly cycle. Information, minutes and updates received from these meetings are regularly circulated to members and where appropriate ideas and concepts raised used within the borough.

## **Publicity**

Our social media presence continues to attract followers and our website gets around 200 page views per week. The Friends page continues to attract the most visits and we are continually refining this page to provide the most up-to-date information on all our Member Groups. On

Facebook our followers have risen to over 550 and we will endeavour to post more regularly in the coming year with a hope of attracting more interest and potential volunteers.

## Small Forum Grants

The Forum awarded four small grants in the year. These were as follows:

Date	Group	Reason	Value
June 2020	Kelsey Park	Purchase of bog plants	£233.79
June 2020	Darrick Wood	Repair to finger posts	£173.00
Sept 2020	Goddington Park	New Group support	£97.20
Sept 2020	Winsford Gardens	Interpretation Board	£120.25
			<u>£624.24</u>

## Summary of Accounts

A summary of accounts for the year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 are as follows:

Income		Expenditure		Assets	
Operational Grant	£5,000.00	Stationery	£27.57	Brought Forward	£6,766.28
		Administration	£100.85	Excess for the year	£3,284.65
		Indemnity Insurance	£240.81		
		Website hosting	£67.08		
		AGM '19 Catering	£654.80		
		Small Grants	£624.24		
<u>Total income</u>	<u>£5,000.00</u>	<u>Total Expenditure</u>	<u>£1,715.35</u>	<u>Carried Forward</u>	<u>£10,050.93</u>

Full accounts will be presented under a separate report.

For further details and information of what the Forum does please visit the Bromley Friends Forum website at: [www.bromleyfriendsforum.org](http://www.bromleyfriendsforum.org) or alternatively visit the Bromley Friends Forum Facebook page or email us at [bromleyfriendsforum@outlook.com](mailto:bromleyfriendsforum@outlook.com).

*Larry Herbert  
Chair, Bromley Friends Forum  
As at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020*