



Annual Report

1/10/21 - 30/09/22

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 2021-2022 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

At the start of 2021 we were still in the grips of the Covid-19 pandemic and a lot of the exciting plans and projects were slow to take shape. As the year progressed and more of the country opened up things gradually got back to a more normal footing. Communications with LBB and idverde remained strained and the majority of meetings were held via zoom rather than face to face. This continues today though a number of one to ones are taking place.

In May local elections at the council resulted in a number of changes with both a new portfolio holder and a new assistant director. It is expected that these changes will result in a significant improvement in relations and that the level of progress and responsiveness will be forefront of all decision making.

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

Partnership Working / Communications

As stated above communications this year have not always been as clear and up-to-date as we would like. Lots of face-to-face meetings have had to be cancelled and there has been a lot more reliance on remote communication. At time these have not been as timely as we would have hoped and resulted in milestones being missed. Towards the end of 2021 the Partnership Statement document was finally signed off, following delay in its final approval by the council. Though complete, the document still lacks some clarity in the area of communications and it has been decided to review this element again and produce a separate document with more stringent terms of references. It is hoped these will be completed early in 2023.

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 its is hoped that where there is a need idverde in agreement with LBB will be able to fully support any request. It is anticipated that a clear definition of what constitute 'basic tools' will be defined before the end of 2022.

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. A working party made up of senior Friends volunteers has been established to look into the practicalities and modern signage techniques involved in producing a fit for purpose solution. This group will have met by the time of our AGM and it is hoped the project can then make a step forward. It is 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

Following a brief survey conducted by Forum it became evident that there was a lot of interest to have water fountains in our parks and that several Friends Groups were prepared to at least partially to fund the cost. 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. Equally the cost of the actual water usage and who pays will need to be looked at. It is anticipated that only one or two fountains would be installed each year, with those sites that have had previous installations taking priority. It is expected that these installations would be brand new rather than restorations of the old facilities.

Fundraising

Forum has been discussing the fundraising process with the team at idverde for a number of months now and it is hoped that a well defined set of processes will put in place by the end of 2022. In essence the process for fundraising will be divided into three separate categories. The first is described as a 'Community Project' which does not make any material change to the open space portfolio and can be removed at a later date (e.g. a flower bed). These projects are of low value with no external funder required. The second is described as a 'Fast Track Project' which makes a minor or moderate change to the open space portfolio. These projects are of low to moderate value and may have external funder involvement. These projects may require other permissions and entail a level of on-going maintenance costs. The third is described as a 'Strategic Project' which makes a major change to the open space portfolio. These projects are of high value and will have external funder involvement. These projects will require a range of permissions with considerable on-going maintenance costs.

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 (2022) were Amphibian and Reptile Ecology (Feb), Leading Work Parties (Sept), Hand Tool Maintenance and Safety (Oct), Invasive Species (Nov) and Identifying Winter Twigs (Dec). A new programme of training courses for 2023 will be agreed early in the new year though it is expected that certain favourites (e.g. leading work parties) will be repeated.

In addition, the Forum organises Emergency First Aid Courses and aims to provide at least three of these per annum. As these courses are very much hands on we were unable to run them in 2020 and the start of 2021. Since then we have been able to run five courses and gradually we are making up for the shortfall to allow members to gain or re-gain their certifications.

Websites

A review of the three websites (LBB, idverde and Forum) is being undertaken to ensure consistency of information and to try and avoid un-necessary (and inaccurate) duplication. It is envisaged that the Forum website will hold the detailed information of Friends Groups whilst the LBB and idverde ones contain links to this data. The LBB and idverde websites will additionally hold strategic information such as policies (e.g. Open Space Strategy, Tree Strategy) and governmental requirements.

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.

Friends Groups

At our AGM in May 2021 we reported a membership of 52 Groups and some 800 active volunteers. This has now risen to 54 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.

Green Flags

Bromley continues to improve the status of its green spaces and this year eight sites have been awarded Green Flags. These are Biggin Hill Rec, Chislehurst Rec, Chislehurst Commons, Darrick & Newstead Woods, Hayes Common, Keston Common, Queens Garden and South Hill Wood. In addition Winsford Gardens received a Green Flag Community Award for the 8th consecutive year.

Walks

Over the past year organised walks have been able to return to our parks and green spaces and gradually more people have been able to take advantage. A number of these walks are advertised for health benefits and it is recommended that Groups contact their local GP surgeries if they plan to formulate a regular programme of walks.

Events

In a similar vein there has been a huge increase in the number of organised events in our parks over the past year. Events such as Chislehurst Rocks, Whitehall's Apple Day, Bowie's Beckenham Oddity, Cator's Paws in the Park, music festivals in Queens Garden, Crystal Palace and Croydon Road Rec have all returned. At Crystal Palace there was a major event entitled Wireless Festival and in the run-up to Christmas will be Lightopia. In addition there have been open days at Scadbury Park and Priory Gardens both of which have attracted large numbers of visitors. In November the fireworks display will return to Norman Park.

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



Members' Meetings

Following the AGM in May 2021 we have been able to return to a more regular schedule of Members Meetings. Meetings were held in November 2021 and May 2022 and were both virtual via zoom. Meetings held in July 2022 and September 2022 were in person with a zoom element for those did not wish to travel into Bromley. We expect to continue with this style of meeting and have now purchased some technical equipment, which will hopefully improve the listening experience for those volunteers who remain online.

Topics for discussion at these meetings include updates on the partnership with LBB & idverde, as well as topical issues raised by Friends Groups in attendance. There is also an update from the biodiversity partnership with timely reminders of seasonal information. At the last meeting in September we were pleased to welcome the new portfolio holder, who presented an insight to how she sees the service evolving over the coming years. Once approved by members, previous minutes of meetings are available for download from the Forum website.

Partnership Meetings

The Bromley Friends Forum chairs a quarterly meeting with both LBB & idverde. This type of 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.

These meetings have now become virtual via teams and in the past year have been held in December '21, March '22, June '22 and September '22. The next meeting is scheduled for Jan '23. Full minutes of these meetings, once approved by attendees, are available for download from the Forum website.

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 January 2022 and another in July 2022. As above these meetings are now held virtually with written updates on progress in the interim three monthly periods. It is anticipated that the next stakeholder panel meeting will occur in January 2023.

Biodiversity Partnership Meetings

The Bromley Friends Forum attends the biodiversity panel meetings, which are held approximately every four months. In this financial year meetings have been held in January '22, May '22 and October '22. The meeting in January was virtual whilst the subsequent ones have been in person at BEECHE. It is anticipated that the next biodiversity partnership meeting will occur in January 2023.

National Meetings

The Bromley Friends Forum has attended several of the London wide meetings during the year. All 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 some 700 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

Since 2020 the Forum has awarded the following small grants:

Date	Group	Reason	Value
Nov 2020	Havelock Rec	New trees	£300
Nov 2020	Jubilee Country Park	Interpretation board	£300
Jan 2021	Scadbury Park	Picnic bench	£300
Mar 2021	Widmore Green	Boards	£300
July 2021	Cator Park	Willow arch	£300
July 2021	Winsford Gardens	Map design	£183
			<u>£1,683</u>

Summary of Accounts

A summary of accounts for the year ending 30th September 2022 are as follows:

Income		Expenditure		Assets	
Operational Grant	£7,000.00	Administration	£54.95	Brought Forward	£9,220.96
		Indemnity Insurance	£265.49	Excess for the year	£5,235.69
		Website Hosting	£64.99		
		Zoom Licence	£143.88		
		Training	£960.00		
		Hall Booking Fees	£175.00		
		Group Support	£100.00		
<u>Total income</u>	<u>£7,000.00</u>	<u>Total Expenditure</u>	<u>£1,764.31</u>	<u>Carried Forward</u>	<u>£14,456.65</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 or alternatively visit the Bromley Friends Forum Facebook page or email us at bromleyfriendsforum@outlook.com.

*Larry Herbert
Chair, Bromley Friends Forum
As at 30th September 2022*