



# **Annual Report**

## **1/10/23 - 30/09/24**

## 1. 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.

## 2. 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 Meetings; Panel Meetings (Countryside Consultative & Stakeholder) and the Biodiversity Partnership Meetings. In addition, Forum attends meetings of the London wide movement on parks and green spaces, which are held every six weeks or so.

In the 2022-2023 financial year Forum Committee Members were as follows: Larry Herbert (chair), Keith Rodwell (deputy chair), Tony Allen (treasurer), Barbara Arora (secretary), Ralph Ambrose, Richard Gibbons, Vivien Smith.

### 3. Chairman's Statement

#### 3.1 Friends Group Activities

Friends group activities and events continued a pace and a lot of new and exciting plans and projects have taken shape. This was in part due to the advent of the Jubilee Parks Fund which has been providing funding to a variety of different proposals but also due to the community fund-raising efforts of the Friends Groups.

2023/24 has seen some notable success stories and we are delighted to highlight a number here and congratulate the Groups on their collective efforts:

- the Friends of Croydon Road Rec have completed the restoration of the Grade II listed Bandstand along with the installation of new enhanced signage.
- the Friends of Cudham Rec with funding from both the National Lottery and the Jubilee Parks Fund have been able to redevelop their playground.
- the Friends of Cator Park & Alexandra Rec have planted a mini forest and created a new dog agility course.
- the Friends of Coney Hall are developing their multiple use games area (MUGA) with their 'Play for All' concept.
- the Friends of Kings Meadow have installed a wheelchair accessible trampoline and sensory feature within their playground.
- the Friends of Betts Park, as part of Anerley celebrations, have installed a 13-foot obelisk to provide a meeting place dedicated to local residents.
- the Friends of Willett Rec have improved their sporting facilities including a viewing platform for their bowling green.
- the Friends of Biggin Hill have installed an outdoor gym on their recreation ground.
- the Friends of Jubilee Country Park have planted a community orchard.
- the Friends of Richmal Crompton Fields have planted an orchard and sensory garden.
- The Friends of Priory Gardens have made improvements to the beds in the formal gardens ahead of participation in the London Festival of Architecture, which was held in June.

In addition, several Friends Groups have been able to revamp their playgrounds in the past year. Included here are: Bromley Town Parks (for Queensmead), Crofton & Sparrow Woods, Pratts Bottom, Keston Common (for Ravensbourne Open Space), Goddington Park, Chislehurst Rec, Blake Rec and Penge Rec.

Friends Groups have also invested a lot of time and effort in organising volunteer events and activities. These include conservation work days, the big Bromley Brush Up, Bromley in Bloom, habitat surveys and litter picks. They have also been involved in organising community events with a wider reach to Bromley residents. A brief outline of these is given in section 4.3.

Our congratulations also go to the Friends of South Hill Wood & Kingswood Glen, who celebrated their fifteenth anniversary with a special event attended by the deputy mayor and portfolio holder.

The number of active Friends Groups at the time of writing is 58 which includes two new Groups that have joined in the past year. We are pleased to welcome Poverest Rec in Orpington and Foxes Field in Mottingham. Unfortunately, we are no longer able to support the four Crystal Palace Groups, which are now part of the Crystal Palace Park Trust.

### *3.2 Friends Group Assistance*

Part of the Friends Forum objectives, as detailed in the overview above, is to provide support and advice to member groups and we continue to offer this on a regular basis both digitally and in person. Over the past year or so we have taken the opportunity to advise on matters such as insurance, data protection, DoE award scheme, safeguarding and risk assessment. In addition, we have directly liaised with LBB and *idverde* in resolving Friends Groups issues.

As part of our commitment to our Member Groups we have continued to provide support payments to a number of Groups, especially new ones like Poverest Rec. Our WhatsApp Group has proved very successful and has allowed members to exchange a variety of news worthy information and hence improve the flow of communication across the network of Friends.

### *3.3 Partnership Working / Communications*

Communications with LBB and *idverde* have improved but are not helped by continual staff changes. In the year several *idverde* staff have left and as a consequence there have been a number of Friends Groups that have had to report to more than one community manager. In some cases, this has led to an upwards learning curve and a new unfamiliar management style.

Face-to-face meetings have been few in number and there has been a lot more reliance on remote communication. At times these have not been as timely as we would have hoped and resulted in milestones being missed.

In collaboration with LBB's Assistant Director we have developed a new set of standards and practices which we can all adhere to. The resultant document clearly defines the various reporting structures and spells out the key contact information in each case.

### *3.4 Basic Tool Provision*

Forum has been in discussions with LBB and *idverde* about basic tool provision for Friends Groups for a number of years now. In 2024 it was agreed that a basic tool kit would be provided for new Groups and these would be purchased from a grant provided by the outgoing portfolio holder. Some twenty or so kits would be purchased and set aside for future years. The kits would include varied PPE essentials such as gloves, safety specs and hi-vis along with tools suitable to whether the new Group was urban or countryside based. Litter pickers and first aid kits would also be provided.

In terms of PPE provisions for existing Groups it has been agreed that these will be provided on a need basis in discussion with community managers. More significant items will be loaned out from the central stores and where need be items can be purchased for longer term use. The Friends Forum will continue to look at the best way of supporting Friends with their PPE needs and if necessary, invest in high volume purchase to achieve the best deal.

### *3.5 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. As a first step it was agreed to conduct a full audit of all the main entrance signs to our parks and green spaces. *idverde* developed a Jotform to undertake this exercise and Groups were asked to survey their park to gather the information. The process involved taking a photo of the location of current signs (as well as those that were missing) and recording some basic information as to its state of repair. Unfortunately, the audit process has not attracted the full response, as was hoped, and there remains significant gaps in the data recorded.

After much discussion it has been recognised that in the current climate of financial difficulties that the Council finds itself in, there is little chance that any new signage (unless specifically fund-raised for) will be forthcoming. On this basis the project has been suspended for the time being and will be re-visited as and when circumstances allow.

### 3.6 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 fund the cost. The practicalities of achieving this has been under consideration with LBB for a number of years now and unfortunately any decision has yet to be established. 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.

As with the park signage financial constraints mean that there is very little likelihood that any new drinking fountains will be installed in the short to medium term, so again this development has been suspended until circumstances allow.

### 3.7 Jubilee Parks Fund

At the time of writing, it is understood that some £760k worth of funding has been approved and most of the projects are well underway, if not completed. It is anticipated that a further application process will be undertaken at the end of 2024 and, depending on the outcome with respect to outstanding funds, a decision taken as to whether any further applications are processed. The fund is expected to be concluded by March 2025.

It is understood that most projects have been highly successful and warmly welcomed by their respective communities. Some projects underwent a degree of change from their original design concept and this caused some level of dis-satisfaction amongst the Friends Groups involved.



### 3.8 Dog Poo Bags

Forum has been in discussion with *idverde* with regard the provision of poo bags for the dispensers. A new sponsorship deal for the bags has been negotiated with Zoetis, who are the world's leading animal health company. Their advertising campaign in relation to the poo bags is for owners to check for signs of arthritis in their pets.

Forum is pleased to report that a contract has been agreed and new stickers and decals for the dispensers are being finalised. This will make it clear that the bags are intended for emergency use only and not to taken as a free resource. It has also been agreed that each dispenser will receive 400 bags per month and supplies will continue until April 2027. Distribution of the supply of bags will be managed by *idverde*, with Friends Groups expected to fulfil the physical aspect of replenishing the dispensers.

### 3.9 Treemendous Project

LBB's Treemendous Project plans to plant 5000 trees across the borough over the span of the current administration. Some 1500 trees have been planted this planting season and Friends have been encouraged to assist with the watering. An App has been developed which will allow Friends to interrogate the QR codes and find information about the tree and the watering schedule it has received. Friends are also encouraged to report any issues with the trees and report any vandalism or similar that may have occurred post planting. The project is now entering its final year and will be conclude by spring 2025.

### 3.10 Trials

Two trials have been taking place this year. The first is a Nature Friendly Verges trial. This is a two-year trial and has been conducted this year in 11 different sites across the borough. In essence these verges will be free from mowing and left to grow to attract a variety of invertebrates. Comments from the general public are encouraged and it is understood that some 70% of those received are favourable. The trial is now reaching its conclusion and the public comment will be assessed with the view to potentially extending the programme more widely across the borough.

The second trial is for Sustainable Planting. This will be a three-year trial at 10 sites and started in the autumn/winter of 2023. It is aimed at formal garden settings at places like roundabouts and carriageways and will look at drought resistant and perennial planting. Again, public comment will be taken into account and future actions taken accordingly. Friends are encouraged to make comment on both of these trials.

### 3.11 Training

The Bromley Friends Forum, in agreement with *idverde*, organises five training courses on subjects related to parks and green spaces per annum. During 2024 the courses provided were Amphibian Survey Techniques (May); Butterfly Transects (Jun); Moth Trapping (Jun); Tool Maintenance (Sep) and Hedge Laying (Oct). This year *idverde* have been developing an online tutorial to provide a self-certification process for those volunteers who wish to lead a work party. It is currently in the final stages of sign-off and is expected to be in operation early in 2025. The new programme of training courses for 2025 will equally be agreed and announced early in 2025.

In addition, the Forum organises Emergency First Aid Courses and has provided four of these in the past year. These follow a fairly set pattern of two in spring and two in the autumn and will continue as such for 2025.

### 3.12 FixMyStreet

Friends Groups are reminded that their first point of contact for all matters related to their park or green space is their idverde site manager. Friends Groups are also reminded to report any concerns (including praise) on FixMyStreet. This helps to formalise any problems and ensures issues are recorded and monitored. This in turn helps to identify any trends or areas of concern that need to be rectified.

### 3.13 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 and bank holidays.

### 3.14 Websites

A review of the three websites (LBB, idverde and Forum) has been undertaken in the past year 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. Unfortunately progress to date has been rather slow to materialise but it is hoped these matters will be resolved sooner rather than later.

### 3.15 Green Flags

Bromley continues to improve the status of its green spaces and this year nine sites have been awarded Green Flags. These are Biggin Hill Rec, Cator Park, Chislehurst & Walden 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 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive year.



## 4. Publicity

### 4.1 Social Media

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 850 and we will endeavour to post more regularly in the coming year with a hope of attracting more interest and potential volunteers.

### 4.2 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.

### 4.3 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, Cator's Paws in the Park, music festivals in Queens Garden and Croydon Road Rec have all returned. In addition, there have been open days at Scadbury Park and Priory Gardens both of which have attracted large numbers of visitors.

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 secure and health & safety conscious arrangements.

## 5. Meetings

### 5.1 Members' Meetings

We have tried to keep to a schedule of bi-monthly Members' Meetings in the year. In 2024 we held meetings in March, May, & September. Unfortunately, the meeting scheduled for July had to be cancelled due to a clash of dates with other events. All these meetings were held in person at the Civic Centre with an additional zoom option for those who did not wish to travel into Bromley. We expect to continue with this style of meeting in the coming months.

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 meeting in March, we were pleased to welcome *idverde*'s Operations Manager, who presented an insight to how he sees the service evolving over the coming years and answered a lot of Friends' concerns. We plan to continue this trend of invited guests to our meetings for 2025. Once approved by members, previous minutes of meetings are available for download from the Forum website.

### 5.2 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 Microsoft Teams and in the past year have been held in January, March, June and September 2024. The next meeting is scheduled for Jan '25. Full minutes of these meetings, once approved by attendees, are available for download from the Forum website.



### *5.3 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. Forum attended meetings in January 2024 and another in July 2024. Meetings are chaired by LBB and attended by a variety of stakeholders with an interest in environmental matters. 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 2025.

### *5.4 Countryside Consultative Panel Meetings*

The Bromley Friends Forum attends the countryside consultative panel meetings, which are held approximately every four months. In this financial year meetings have been held in October '23, April '24 and July '24. These meetings are held in person with the July one being out on site at a green space within the borough. This year's on-site meeting was held at Hayes Common, where idverde gave an in-depth view of the heathland and woodland areas. Meetings are chaired by LBB and attended by a number of Councillors to gain a better insight as to how parks are managed in relation to the biodiversity needs. There has been a subsequent meeting this October and it is anticipated that the next panel meeting will occur around April 2025.

### *5.5 Biodiversity Partnership Panel Meetings*

The Bromley Friends Forum attends the biodiversity panel meetings, which are held approximately every four months. In this calendar year meetings have been held in January, May and October. These meetings have a revolving chair, are held in person at BEECHE and attended by various external parties with an interest in biodiversity matters.

There is concern at these meetings that the planning department at the Council lacks knowledge with regard biodiversity matters and that some building application approvals have not fully addressed all the issues. It is anticipated that the next biodiversity partnership meeting will occur in January 2025.

### *5.6 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.

## 6. Financial Matters

### 6.1 Forum Grants

During the 2023/24 financial year Forum has awarded the following small grants:

Date	Group	Reason	Value
Aug 2024	South Hill Wood	Event support	£360
Sep 2024	Jubilee Country Park	Interpretation board	£500
Sep 2024	<u>Hoblingwell Wood</u>	Bench restoration	£500
			<u>£1,360</u>

In addition, Forum has provided 9 Groups with a support payment of £150 each, giving an expenditure of £1,350. Further recent grant applications (to the value of £1,000) have been processed and will be made in our coming financial year.

### 6.2 Summary of Accounts

A summary of accounts for the year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024 are as follows:

Income		Expenditure		Assets	
Operational Grant	£7,000.00	Administration	£95.45	Brought Forward	£16,336.53
		Indemnity Insurance	£297.67	Excess for the year	-£357.10
		Website Hosting	£67.70		
		Zoom Licence	£143.88		
		Training	£1,040.00		
		AGM Costs	£255.00		
		Group Support	£2,710.00		
		Hi-Vis Costs	£2,747.40		
<u>Total income</u>	<u>£7,000.00</u>	<u>Total Expenditure</u>	<u>£7,357.10</u>	<u>Carried Forward</u>	<u>£15,979.43</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 2024