

1. Bromley's Partnership with its Friends

1.1 The statutory responsibilities of LBB for its parks

Councils have a number of statutory duties, including environmental health, refuse, highways, planning and building control, education, social care and libraries, to mention only a few. Ironically, perhaps the most visible service – its parks and green spaces - actually have very few if any statutory requirements. For what it's worth, these cover only:

- safe access,
- provision of allotments and
- burial of the dead using existing unused cemetery burial space only

The provision of maintenance, floral bedding, grass, trees, rangers, signs, toilets, cafes, playgrounds, paths, fences and virtually everything else is only a discretionary activity – i.e. Councils do NOT have to make provision – as long as the public are not at risk if they are invited in. Even the retention of protected status surrounding Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Sites of Nature Conservation is not a statutory duty – although clearly Councils would wish to retain such status.

1.2 Friends of Bromley's parks

Everybody interested in the well-being of Bromley's parks, individually or collectively, is a Friend of Bromley's parks. Indeed – the emphasis should very much be that Friends have a strong over-arching interest in the enhancement and celebration in all of Bromley's green space; not just their own patch. Elected Members, our Councillors, are acutely aware of, and profoundly supportive of this broad palette and benefits of having active Friends Groups that turn sometimes indifferent green spaces into healthy parks. Whilst we live in truly challenging times, with finite resources – we all need to continue working even harder, seeking innovative solutions to traditional problems and forging greater collaboration between everyone who cares for their local environment. *Idverde's* Community Managers/Team Leaders will support the growing number of Friends and Friends Groups, not necessarily by attending every meeting or work day; but sometimes by being the catalyst, that enables things to happen and for Friends to grow. The relationship is one of partnering – not one of them and us.

1.3 What do parks provide that makes them vital to the community's well being?

Parks provide local attractive areas of interest to the benefit of all who use them - our parks, commons, woodlands, recreational areas, playgrounds and path networks. These users include not only the human community but also our natural world of both everyday and endangered species that help to keep our environment vibrant. The landscape provides unique opportunities for active and healthy lifestyles, mental well-being, teaching in an outdoor classroom, both passive and active physical fitness, competitive sport – even places to grow and eat food. Human beings involved with them are passing through, merely caretakers and temporary custodians. Parks, hopefully, will get better and stronger over time if we are encouraged to try to further the improvements from one generation to the next. This includes safeguarding the key elements of our heritage. Once an element is removed – it is sadly a fact of life that it is unlikely to ever be replaced. Buildings and formal features are good examples of this.

1.4 Partners discuss issues if the relationship is healthy

In a healthy relationship partners can discuss issues in a friendly manner. The method employed within Bromley has always been that no one party knows best. If this had not been the case our relationship would have floundered long ago. The Council strongly believes that in most circumstances local people are best placed to fully understand local issues. This is the very reason that self management of allotments and locally delegated sports management in our parks acted as the successful grandparents of the current Friends principle. Mostly amicable agreements are forged in this way. Where that does not happen, somebody has to make the decision about what is to be done. With regard to parks a clear indication of priorities will help, coupled with a unambiguous understanding that *idverde* staff are employed to make the decisions in the context of benefiting all parks as effectively as possible. This frequently involves reaching a compromise or negotiated agreement with other interested user groups to find a realistic and achievable way forward. Everybody involved with our landscapes should be encouraged to listen to issues and seek the best possible resolution of them under the circumstances prevailing at the time.

1.5 Effective communications

Working together effectively only occurs when all parties know what's going on and how they can best play a part in its delivery. As far as practicable everybody involved should know what is happening in broad terms. The implications for individual parks, or groups of parks should arise from this. Where unexpected emergency work has to be carried out the local teams involved should be informed about it, as soon as practical. Good planning makes work easier as it keeps complaints to a minimum. Keeping the broader team in the loop fosters team work and avoids unwanted duplication. Occasionally, things can go wrong – sometimes *idverde* staff forget to tell Friends of activities or actions; and perhaps understandably those same Groups feel overlooked or may conclude that the Friends concept is purely being paid lip service. Nothing of course is further from the truth – but sometimes *idverde* staff genuinely do just simply forget. The way forward is to learn from these omissions and move onwards.