

Haringey Friends of Parks Forum

www.haringeyfriendsofparks.org.uk

Next Friends Groups meeting - Sat July 7th

Minutes of general meeting –12 May 2012

Present: Rod Wells (Downhills Park) – Chaired; Joan Curtis and Dave Morris (Lordship Rec); David Warren (Parkland Walk); Ulla Lefmann (Ducketts Common); Martin Laheen (Bruce Castle); Ros Abrams (CREOS); Mal Hawley (Downhills Park); Helen Steel (Lordship Rec and Chestnuts Park); Ceri Williams (Chestnuts Park); Michael Johns (Queen’s Wood) – note-taker; **Items 7-14** Andy Briggs (London Borough of Haringey), Paul Ely (London Borough of Haringey).

Apologies: Joyce Rosser (Priory Common), Gordon Hutchinson (Alexandra Park), Peter Saunders (Hornsey Church Tower), Jackie Goodwin (Finsbury Park), Kate Franzmann (Finsbury Gardens); Catherine Appleby (Coldfall Woods)

1. Minutes of last meeting - agreed.

2. Matters Arising

Events – Haringey were now publishing events in parks in their What's On list and Friends Groups were encouraged to let them have details of their events.

3. River Moselle

A walk along the route would be held on 24 June starting at 10.30 at the Queen's Wood cafe with lunch at the Broadwater Farm Community Centre at 1pm. £500 had been raised for publishing leaflets; a further £100 was needed; contributions were sought from Friends Groups. Any surplus could be used for further walks. The authors of Hidden Streams of Haringey were speaking at Alexandra Park Library.

4. Love Haringey's Parks Week

This would be 21-29 July. Groups were encouraged to hold events in their parks that week – details should be sent to Dave Morris who would issue a press release in due course.

5. Funding Issues

Cllr Canver had held a meeting with Friends Groups on 12 March. No minutes had been issued as yet. Friends Groups were unhappy that the Council seemed to be organising a separate series of meetings on matters which could be dealt with at the Forum, thus taking up people's time unnecessarily. At the meeting, it had been announced that a one off capital grant of £200k for infrastructural maintenance had been found for 2012/13. This only restored part of the £300k cut in maintenance and needed to be permanent. The Council had presented a proposed volunteering framework. There was concern that volunteers could not replace the need for adequate resources

for basic staffing and maintenance. The initiative would further absorb time of hard pressed and scarce paid staff. The KPIs proposed for the initiative would encourage a tick box mentality: what was needed was that general standards were maintained. There was concern that Friends Groups could be restricted by bureaucratic rules. There was no acknowledgement that paid staff were needed to preserve safety in the parks. Friends Groups felt frustrated and angry that the Council were not addressing their real concerns.

6. BTCV

BTCV had changed their name to TCV. They were closing their Kings Cross office and moving part of their cross London staff to Railway Fields. There was concern on what would happen to the courses they ran at Kings Cross. There was also concern that they would squeeze out the specifically Haringey activities from Railway Fields and that the Resource Centre and schools visits needed to continue.

7. Local Reports from the Friends, plus Council response

Downhills Park

The new pond was leaking and the contractors were being called back to try and trace and repair it. There would be an Art in the Park day organised by the Friends on 15 July and several bat walks. The cafe had suffered from graffiti, which had now been painted over. The Friends were discussing whether to invite the local school to set up a board where graffiti would be permitted or whether this would set a bad precedent. Paul Ely agreed that council officers needed to be notified at once of graffiti and had a responsibility to remove them at once before they spread. The Forum felt that there needed to be more staff in the parks to achieve this. The Friends were considering whether the cafe could be improved with a canopy. They were not sure whether this would need planning permission. Paul Ely said he would check. He would let Ian Holt know about the pond because of its importance for biodiversity. The park was getting a table tennis table and the renovation of the playground equipment was going ahead. The flower beds were getting full of weeds.

Parkland Walk

Regular work sessions had made a real impression on the space. Guided walks were being held. One entrance had been badly churned up by a builder. The council had quickly stepped in to stop this but there was still a problem in getting the damage cleared up. A camp of rough sleepers had been discovered in Stroud Green. This had been dispersed but there were rumours of another one. Paul Ely was unaware of any new rough sleepers and asked to be informed if evidence emerged. If drug dealing was suspected, the police should be contacted but it was also helpful for parks staff to be informed. Litter bins were being emptied but there was a problem with litter outside bins. Andy Briggs said he would need to look into this issue as the system for emptying bins was different in Parkland Walk from elsewhere. Property encroachment remained an issue. Paul Ely agreed it was very frustrating and there was going to be another review of progress with a view to speeding up the process if possible.

Ducketts Common

The Common was very waterlogged after the rain. The new basketball area had also been delayed by the weather. Dogs were getting into the play area. Drugs were being sold. The police were aware but could not be there all the time. Ice cream vendors had come onto the common

but had been moved on by the police. There was a memorial to a deceased child on the common which kept on being vandalised. It was not clear whose responsibility it was to maintain such memorials and the Friends wondered what the policy was. Andy Briggs said he would review the position. It had arisen in another park. He would also look into the waterlogging problem.

Bruce Castle Park

The litter and recycling bins had been moved into the park but there was a fly tipping problem in the area where they had been. The Friends thought a solution could be to extend the wall. The refurbished tennis courts had won an award and were recently launched by a major event. The Friends were concerned whether the content of recycling bins was genuinely being taken to the recycling centre and asked that Council officials should discuss this with Martin Laheen. Andy Briggs agreed to look into this. He also said there had been three thefts of lead from the Castle building and they would be keeping the vehicle gates to the park locked in future.

CREOS

The North Middlesex planning application for four all weather pitches had been rejected by Haringey but this had been overturned on appeal. They had also put in an application to create a large cafe and the Friends were having to watch this carefully.

Queen's Wood

The Friends were holding a Woodland Arts Fun Day on 17 June and would be holding a tree walk and a bat walk. The Council had promised no cycling signs and an official sign by the new frog pond forbidding dogs to use it. The signs had not yet been produced. Andy Briggs promised to chase this up. The old Victorian toilet had been restored as a store room for Friends tools with a Making the Difference Grant. The boundary behind the toilet needed repair because it was dangerous. Groundwork were developing a bid, but advised that funders would need some redevelopment of the whole area to justify expenditure. The Friends had some concern that Groundwork's plans would detract from the character of the Wood and make it more like parkland. If it was necessary to do more than just the boundary, they wanted to be kept closely involved to ensure that the character of the Wood was preserved as they felt the existing proposals had been developed without adequate involvement. Paul Ely promised that they would be closely involved. There were also plans for quite extensive coppicing using Forestry Commission funds. The Friends Committee supported coppicing but it was not popular with some members and residents and again it was important that the plans were developed in close consultation with the Friends to help manage expectations and publicity. Paul Ely promised that Ian Holt would do this.

Lordship Rec

The regeneration works were nearly completed. The Shell Theatre had been refurbished and parks staff would move into the new depot shortly. There would be a new environment centre of carbon neutral construction to be called the Hub which was nearly complete. The new river channel was being planted out and would hopefully be ready for the Moselle walk. User groups were flourishing. They had raised £2k for a memorial for people who had died in the World War 2 bombing of a shelter. There would be a festival to mark the completion of the work on 22 September. It had been a highly successful project but had involved an enormous amount of work by the Friends.

Chestnuts Park

The beds were getting very overgrown and full of litter. There was a danger that all the work on new planting would be undone unless there was maintenance. The pavilion remained an eyesore and needed to be demolished. It was repeatedly vandalised but, because Veolia was in occupation, the vandalism was patched up. Steadily, however, the building was falling into ruin. The entrance from Cornwall Road which was promised by the developers needed to be opened up – it was currently dangerous – and the contractors needed pressure kept up. p; Andy Briggs said Planning was in the lead and he would chase them. Members were getting frustrated as the park deteriorated. They had held an event in March and would hold an Alternative Paralympics on 16 June to celebrate the sensory gardens and try to drum up new members.

Tower Gardens

A meeting of residents had been held and it was hoped to set up a new formal Friends Group. Joan was helping prepare a questionnaire for park users there. There was some concern that a private firm might have been interested in maintaining the park which could lead to fragmentation of the parks department staff. Paul Ely said that the council had no plans for private sector firms to maintain individual parks. The Forum said that any enquiring firm should be told this was the policy and any proposed change in policy should be discussed with the Forum before any individual approaches were entertained. Paul Ely promised to convey this view to councillors.

Alexandra Park

A Red Bull BMX event was being held on 19/20 May. Enormous works had been constructed for this and there was some trepidation about how the land would be restored afterwards but Red Bull had a good reputation for clearing up. The Friends had produced an impressive guide to the park and programme of activities. It was pointed out that there would be a consultation on the regeneration of the building shortly and it would be important for views to be expressed.

Hornsey Church Tower

The Friends were not sure how the proposed dog control orders would affect the churchyard. Andy Briggs agreed to find out.

8. Litter collection and maintenance

Andy Briggs said that the unseasonal fine weather in March had led to litter problems starting early so the Council had recruited 10 Park Stewards from early April, instead of May as planned. They were keeping litter bins cleared and he thought that generally they were on top of the litter problem. When litter bins had been emptied, they were expected to do what they could to tackle litter lying around. They were operating extended shifts seven days a week. Extra resources would be put in over the Olympic period. The Forum asked if there were any plans to extend Veolia's remit to cover litter collection in parks, rather than recruit additional permanent cleansing staff, as they were concerned that this would undermine further the viability of the understaffed Parks Department. Andy said there were no plans to do this.

The Council accepted that weeds were appearing. They had had to review whether it was worth putting in summer bedding because of the hosepipe ban. They had decided to risk it as many of the plants were drought resistant. If the summer were dry it would have to be accepted that much

of the bedding would die. Due to lack of parks staffing they would bring in additional agency staff to plant the summer bedding and this would enable them to clear the weeds at the same time. It was pointed out that in parks like Chestnuts there were mainly shrub beds, but maintenance was still needed. Andy said they would try to pick up some of that work. The Forum reminded the Council of Cllr Strickland's promise that no park would go unmaintained; officers needed to keep warning councillors where resources were needed to meet that promise.

Paul Ely said they were considering asking the public to take waste water to parks for watering plants and trees; the Friends were sceptical of the practicality of this. The Council would also probably not be filling up the 4 paddling pools in parks this year to 'show an example' over the shortage of water. It was not just the water needed to fill the pools every day but also the issue of cleaning them. The Forum generally thought that since the legislation allowed it, public paddling pools should be kept filled as they were a huge amenity for children and at least as justifiable as the use of water for private golf courses.

9. Dog Control Orders

At the previous meeting it had been said that public consultation on the plans for dog control orders would start in April. The Forum said they needed an update on the position as it was not thought the consultation had yet started. They said it would be difficult to comment until the definition of a footpath and a public space had been clarified.

10. Resources

The Forum stressed that its position remained unchanged that the cuts needed to be reversed and that the parks would steadily deteriorate unless this was done. They did not understand why councillors needed special meetings to consult when they could use Forum meetings to do so and the separate meetings caused duplication which busy people could not afford. The Forum felt it would be helpful for any papers to be issued in electronic form so they could be circulated and for minutes to be produced promptly.

11. Volunteering

The Forum hoped that the concerns expressed at the LBH/Friends Groups meeting on 12 March (Item 5 above) were recorded in the minutes and were being addressed. Paul Ely said that they were giving a clear steer to Groundwork and TCV that the initiative should be complementary to the activities of Friends Groups not an obstacle to them. There had been discussion on how their volunteering websites could be linked to Friends Groups websites and he hoped to come with proposals to the July Forum meeting. The Cabinet were hoping to take a report in the autumn which would cover such matters as the resources and contract terms for Groundwork and TCV and he would consult the Forum in July.

He confirmed that TCV were moving part of their all London team to Railway Fields. The Forum expressed their concern that Haringey specific space and facilities such as the resource room and schools access should not be lost. Paul Ely agreed to come back on this. The Forum also asked for information about the amount of funding being given to TCV and Groundwork, what they were required to do and the cost in staff time of managing the volunteering initiative.

12. Grants

Some Friends Groups had been notified of the outcome of their bid for small grants; others had

not. Paul Ely agreed to let the Forum have a report on the applications and the outcomes.

13. Forum/Council event

Dave Morris said he had not managed to put together a proposal for a joint Forum/Council info/discussion day but would do so as soon as possible.

14. Buildings in Parks

At the last meeting it had been proposed that there should be a survey of structures in green spaces. A form had been drafted and was to be amended, but there's been no further news on this. Paul Ely agreed to find out what the position was.

15. Any other business – None.

16. Date of next meeting

Saturday 7 July 2012 at 10.00 at Bruce Castle.