

## Minutes of Haringey Friends of Parks Forum – 3rd November 2012

**Present:** Joyce Rosser (Priory Common) – *Chaired*; Dave Morris (Lordship Rec); Joan Curtis (Lordship Rec and Tower Gardens); Mal Hawley (Downhills Park); Helen Steel (Lordship Rec and Chestnuts Park); Martin Laheen (Bruce Castle, Lordship Rec and Ducketts Common); David Warren (Parkland Walk); Ceri Williams (Chestnuts Park); Pat Farrington (Shepherds Hill Gardens); Gillian Livingstone (Stationers Park); Adam Coffman (Fairland Park and Ducketts Common); Loyda Fanusie (Bruce Castle Park) – *briefly part of item 1*; Michael Johns (Queens Wood) – *note-taker* **Items 5-12** Paul Ely (London Borough of Haringey). **Apologies:** Jackie Goodwin (Finsbury Park); Susan Moore (Bruce Castle Park)

**1. Minutes of last meeting** – agreed. **Matters Arising** It was agreed that Adam Coffman would look into the possibility of some small signs being erected for the Moselle River walk.

**2. Resources** The Forum had discovered that staff in Parks Department had been informed about a review of resources in the department. They had succeeded in getting a copy of the letter. The review would:

- Collect information on the current standards being achieved
- Consider the resources being used to achieve those standards
- Identify opportunities, if they exist, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the current operation
- Consider delivery models that could improve standards
- Review and redefine future maintenance standards
- Quantify any investment of capital or revenue required by the Council to deliver improvements
- Propose action plan and timetable.

It was agreed that it was a major step forward in that the Council were admitting for the first time that there was a shortfall in resourcing which could not be made up by use of external sources of funding and greater use of volunteers. The use of consultants was an expensive way of dealing with the issue and there was concern that the view might be taken that handing over maintenance to a private sector firm might be a solution to a problem which was essentially one of shortage of resources. Much more information was needed on who was conducting the review and how. It was very important that Friends Groups gave evidence to the review about the impact of resource cuts on their parks.

It was agreed that Dave Morris and Joan Curtis would issue a questionnaire to all Friends' groups asking for a report on the effect on their green spaces of the shortfall of resources and related issues

**3. Open Day** A draft timetable for the day was circulated and agreed, subject to the proposed getting to know you session being shortened to no more than a quarter of an hour and with lunch being correspondingly earlier. It would be held in the new Lordship Lane Rec hub building. A date should be found in February which would need not to clash with the Bruce Castle planned History Fair.

**4. London and National Forums** The National Federation of friends' forums had

worked alongside other national green space bodies and pressed the Government to retain the Green Flag scheme and it had been agreed that it would continue for another 5 years under the auspices of Keep Britain Tidy (see their website for full details of the scheme). Members of Friends' Groups could become inspectors for Green Flag applicant sites (after a couple of days training) if they wanted. Dave had attended a number of national crisis meetings about green space resources cuts across the country, though Haringey's 50% cuts (from an already low base) appeared to be possibly the largest cuts anywhere. A lot of boroughs were identifying ways in which parks provided statutory services like flood control, children's welfare and health.

## **5. Local Reports from the Friends, plus Council response**

*Stationers' Park* The Friends had worked with Groundwork using legacy money from Marks and Spencer to draw up landscaping plans. These had been discussed at their Jubilee event and a volunteering group had been set up. They had done some tree maintenance and would also do planting. The park had deteriorated since the park keeper had left some years ago and the effects of the volunteers were to some extent only tinkering with the problem. However, it had been useful for the Friends to be working with Groundwork as partners as this enabled their voice to be more effective. For example, they had managed to get the grass immediately around the water feature to be scythed rather than mowed which meant less grass got into the feature.

*Lordship Rec* The community-led regeneration works were now more or less complete and showed the fantastic results which could be achieved by devoting adequate resources (£4m capital and £2-3m 10 year maintenance budget.) There were a lot of user groups and community activities going on. The Friends had applied for an award from Fields in Trust for the most improved park with 'QE11-status' playing fields in the country and was in a short list of three. They had coordinated a magnificent relaunch community festival attended by 8,000 residents, which cost £20k, raised from a variety of sources.

*Tower Gardens* The residents association had decided to set up a Friends' Group and had started work with Groundwork on a questionnaire about what was needed. However, the person at Groundwork who was dealing with this had left and nothing had happened since. The Residents Association was going to pick up the questionnaire and do it themselves. Paul said he would ask Simon Farrow to look into what had happened.

*Downhills Park* The staff were doing a tremendous job, but were really suffering from the lack of resources. The border round the formal garden was covered by weeds. The table tennis table was now installed and very popular. The West Green area had been transformed although there was still a need for safer pedestrian / cycling crossing. The playground now looked rather shabby. Paul said funds had been secured for this.

*Priory Common* 1,000 bulbs had been planted in the Rectory Gardens area and further bulb planting and tree/shrub pruning was planned. There was also a community orchard.

*Fairland Park* This now had a new website ([www.fairlandpark.org](http://www.fairlandpark.org)). The Friends asked if it could be substituted for the existing website address on the park welcome board. Paul Ely said they should contact Sarah Jones. There were still a few pieces of tidying up outstanding from the work on the park and the Friends were frustrated by the absence of any timetable for completion. Paul agreed to chase. A tennis programme for children was going well. There

had been an open air film in September, which, for once, had had good weather and was attended by 300 people. There had been a Big Draw sketching event in October, attended by 150 people.

*Ducketts Common* There had been an approach by a local resident who wanted to set up a cafe. This was supported by the Friends and she would invest in the premises herself, but the council appeared to be blocking the proposal. Paul agreed to find out who was dealing with it and what the problem was. The new playground and green gym were very popular, but there were problems about the robustness of the equipment. Paul understood that where there were faults on installation, the contractors were being brought back to correct but he had not heard complaints about the basic robustness of the equipment and he agreed to check. The table tennis table was also popular, even though people had to bring their own bats and balls. Zippo Circus had caused a lot of damage to the south end of the area. There was concern that the financial bond they had given might not be enough to cover the damage. Lorries parked under the trees and compacted the soil – there was a need for decompactors to restore the ground for the health of the trees. Paul Ely said he would get his colleagues to look into this. He also said that Ducketts Common appeared a good candidate for Green Flag status, though they will need a management plan for this. He would look into the possibility.

*Parkland Walk* The Friends were working with TCV on a programme to keep paths and entrances open and clear up the old meadows which had now reverted to scrub. However, some tasks needed power tools which neither the Friends nor TCV had access to and it was necessary for the Council to do these. There also appeared to be some litter bins which were not on any hygiene team's standard rounds. Paul said that if there were parts of the Management Plan which were not currently in anyone's responsibility, they should be reported to Simon Farrow. There were emerging problems about the structure of the bridge over Stanhope Road which would be very expensive to deal with. Paul Ely would look into this. Some encroachment issues had been sorted; others not. Paul said the council planned to draw up a map with the help of the Friends showing all the areas where there was believed to be encroachment or where leases had been granted in the past; this could be used to plan action systematically. There was one particular problem where a contractor working on a neighbouring house had damaged an entrance to the park. Although he had accepted liability for other damage, which he had repaired, no agreement had been reached over the estimate for the work on the entrance. Under the Localism Act, Highgate was trying to set up a Neighbourhood Forum. In principle, its plan would include recreation and open spaces but it was not clear what impact this would have on planning for Parkland Walk.

*Queen's Wood* The Highgate scheme also affected Queen's Wood, the whole of which was proposed to be in the area covered. There was some concern because more of the wood was in Muswell Hill ward than in Highgate ward and probably more users came from outside Highgate than from in it. The Friends had decided, however, to accept the proposed boundaries so that they could influence developments from within. It did not appear that the Forum would have any money to spend initially so it was not clear what difference it could make. Paul Ely said he did not know what the impact, if any, would be. The Wood had benefited from a number of improvements funded by outside bodies. The latest proposals, for improving and making safe the area near the Lodge had been passed to Groundwork to prepare a bid. They had taken an enormous amount of time and had now developed an over elaborate scheme containing several errors. Paul Ely promised to check on the situation.

*Chestnuts Park* There were several problems arising from the lack of staff. A few years ago

roses and other shrubs had been planted along the path by Cornwall Road. This had become in need of pruning and very overgrown with weeds. An emergency team had pruned the shrubs in a very amateurish fashion and the result was that they were even more overgrown with bindweed. Similarly a circular bed of hydrangeas was being choked by thistles and an emergency cut back of the thistles had been done badly. The grass cutting was not following a comprehensive plan. Lack of sweeping was leading to deterioration of the surface of the playgrounds. Some areas were becoming very boggy and, in the Friends view, until this was dealt with, no events which required any vehicles larger than a private car should be approved. There was a concern that the financial bond for a recent sale event had been only £500 or less than the damage caused. Paul said that the size of the bond should be commensurate to the type of event. There was still no action to enforce the s106 agreement to improve the path from Cornwall Road. Young people were continually breaking down the temporary barrier but the path was unsafe. Paul agreed to chase up. The pavilion building was also becoming unsafe – the management plan called for demolition but the £80k cost was not forthcoming. It might be possible to tie it into a planning agreement if the St Ann's Hospital site development was to take place. The Community Centre was also now dilapidated. There were issues around whether the building was to be released and, if so, to whom. Paul said he would set up a meeting to see if an overall plan for the area could be developed. The Friends had a new email address which needed to be put on the Welcome Board.

*Shepherd's Hill Gardens* The Friends group had been going for five years. It had improved sight lines to improve safety. It had planted spring bulbs and set up meadow areas. One problem was with fires and barbecues. It had taken a long time to get a 'No fires' sign but it was hoped this would now be installed. Japanese knotweed needed addressing. They thought they needed to have a management plan. Paul would ask Ian Holt to get in touch with them about this.

*Bruce Castle park* At the AGM of the Bruce Castle Friends, it had been agreed to set up a subcommittee covering park issues. The Council was understood to be considering putting together a lottery bid covering the museum, park and neighbouring areas. Paul Ely said the scope of the bid was not decided as yet – in particular, whether it would just cover the museum and park or more.

**6. Recycling in parks** There continued to be concerns that although there were recycling bins in many parks, when they were cleared the contents were mixed up with general rubbish. Nothing had been done to set up an opportunity for Martin Laheen (our Recycling Champion) to follow the process on the ground. Paul Ely promised to put someone in touch with him.

**7. Open Day** The Forum outlined its latest plans for the Friends / Parks Service open event in February in Lordship Rec, which were acceptable to the council.

**8. Dog control orders** These had now come into force. The only difference from the proposals was that Russell Park would not be subject to a complete ban but only to dogs being required to be kept on a leash.

**9. Ash trees** The Forum said that the Council needed urgently to have a policy on avoiding and dealing with ash die-back and to disseminate advice to the public. It was understood that if diseased trees were found, the Forestry Commission or Woodland Trust

should be notified. Paul Ely to contact Alex Fraser, the Council's Tree Officer, regarding any plans for action.

**10. Review of parks maintenance operations** Paul Ely confirmed that the review outlined in para 2 above was taking place. It was being conducted by a firm of external consultants with experience in the area; he promised to let the Forum know the name of the firm and the cost (which would be borne out of the Parks department budget). The review had started in the late summer and would report by Christmas. The Council had accepted that something needed to be done. So far they were bringing together facts on what the department did and the costs. The Forum were disappointed that they had not been approached. Paul said they would be consulted, but it was pointed out that there was not another Forum meeting scheduled before the review would report. The Forum would be issuing a questionnaire to Friends' groups as a matter of urgency to find out what impact the cuts had had on their parks. They would then consider whether a special meeting with the consultants was desirable or feasible. They were pleased that the council now recognised that resources were inadequate. The review should note that before the cuts, Haringey was in the lowest quintile of London boroughs in its spending on green spaces and the budget had then been cut by 50%. That cut needed to be at least completely reversed. They were concerned about any proposal to transfer the work to outside contractors. Experience elsewhere showed this fragmented the overall service and led to communication problems. They asked if consideration was being given to merging or working with other boroughs; Paul Ely said he was not aware of any such options being considered. The Forum pointed out that many boroughs were now making explicit the ways in which open spaces contributed to meeting statutory duties such as flood prevention, child welfare and health and thought the review should consider this. Paul stressed that the council regarded the involvement of the community through Friends' Groups a major strength and would want any new arrangements to preserve this.

**11. Any other business** There was still a need for more stewards for the Sustainable Haringey (SH) compost giveaway on Nov 11th and there were two places left on the SH trip to the Ecopark.

**12. Date of next meeting** **Saturday 12 January 2013 at 10.00** at Bruce Castle.