

Haringey Friends of Parks Forum

www.haringeyfriendsofparks.org.uk

Minutes of general meeting –6 September 2014

Present: Martin Ball (Down Lane Park) - *Chaired* ; Joan Curtis (Lordship Rec), David Warren (Parkland Walk); Ceri Williams (Chestnuts Park); Clif Osborne (TCV); Chris Setz (Haringey Tree Wardens); Chris Chadwick (Priory Park); Robyn Thomas (Alexandra Park); Douglas Palin (Finsbury Park); Michael Johns (Queen’s Wood) – *note-taker*. **Items 4-9.** Paul Ely (London Borough of Haringey); Tony Healey (London Borough of Haringey); Sandra Hoisz (Groundwork)

Apologies: Dave Morris (Lordship Rec.); Gordon Hutchinson (Alexandra Park);

Minutes of last meeting – agreed.

- 1. Matters Arising** – none
- 2. Constitution and objective of Forum**

It was suggested that new members would be helped by having a document explaining the constitution and objective of the Forum. It was recognised that there was no formal constitution and it would be best to remain an informal gathering of interested parties. Chris Setz offered to circulate via email his thoughts on what he believes is the purpose of the forum to start a discussion.

- 3. Income generation from parks**

A Freedom of Information enquiry had uncovered that Haringey had raised over £750k from events in Finsbury Park so far this year. In previous years the target had been much lower at £245k from around five concerts a year. The Council had held a consultation about an increase but merely about whether the number should be 15 or 18 and there had been little local involvement. This restricted the use of the park to others for a very long period and the heavy use damaged it. It was not clear that it was right to hammer one park for the benefit of other issues. It was good that the Council had put up its charges to a more realistic level, though because the negotiations and terms were commercially confidential, it was impossible to tell whether even now the full commercial value was being raised. However, it was dangerous to plan on the assumption that this income would continue indefinitely especially as local residents were mounting a legal challenge. The policy had been called in and reviewed by the Environment Scrutiny Committee; they had accepted the policy but had set up a stakeholder group to involve residents. However, the Friends of Finsbury Park had only one seat and its influence was limited. It was not clear how far the decision to raise income in this way was one by officers or by councillors. The Forum needed to know how this policy fitted into the overall strategy for parks which was to be developed in a paper on ‘Rethinking Parks’. It was felt issues like this needed to be pressed at a political level in the council. There might be other ways of raising money from events which did less damage to the park’s infrastructure.

While the issue was sharpest in Finsbury Park, there was pressure to introduce income raising

activities in other parks – Doown Lane Park had suffered from several events running end to end in the summer.

4. Local Reports from the Friends, plus Council response

Lordship Rec A co-op for running the building had been set up and a license had been obtained to run the café with volunteers over the summer, pending the final lease being signed. Money had been raised by crowd funding for café equipment. It had been very hard work for the volunteers but very satisfying. *Paul Ely said that all terms had been agreed for the lease and these were being turned into the necessary documents.* There had been an increase in vandalism but this probably arose from the greater number of users. A sculptor was working on a memorial for the people killed in WW2 by a bomb on a shelter in the Rec. On 20 September there would be a One World folk festival, a dog show and the Tottenham flower and produce show.

Railway Fields TCV had managed to recruit a lot of volunteer wardens who would enable the garden to be opened some weekends. The dates were published in a notice on the gate and in the Haringey On Line website.

Priory Park Crouch End Players had put on a performance of As You Like It which had sold out over five nights. This would probably become an annual event. The wild flower meadow was being mowed when required but the grass was being left on site which was not good for the meadow. *Tony Healey said the council would have liked to buy machines which would cut and collect grass at the same time but the budget had not been sufficient. He would try and buy these in a later year or possibly make arrangements with the firm which mowed the meadow in Alexandra Park to do Haringey's meadows at the same time.* The Friends had campaigned to keep the tennis courts a free resource for local people. They had been able to raise funding from the Fielding Trust, the Veolia Trust and Marathon Trust and now Haringey had agreed to put in match funding which would enable all three courts to be upgraded to playable condition by next year. A free tennis racket loan scheme had been set up in the café.

Chestnuts Park There had been a delay in the demolition of the pavilion but it was hoped that work would start in November. They had had problems in knowing who to communicate with about local issues. There was an area in the centre of the park which needed mowing; there was damaged equipment in the sensory garden; there were litter problems from evening drinkers near the café; and in each case they had been unable to get these issues sorted. *Tony Healey said that the contact points had not changed. He would pass on a reminder.* It was suggested that it was always worth logging issues like this with the Haringey Front Line on Frontline@Haringey.gov.uk as this enabled progress to be monitored. The café lease had been renewed but with a lower reduction for social benefits of £700 rather than £7,000. There was a risk that the café would not be economic to run at this level of rent and it was a crucial amenity for the park. The Council had refused to discuss the issue on the grounds that it was a commercial issue between the lessees and the Council but the Friends felt it was a social benefit issue in which they had a proper locus. *Paul Ely said that maximising café rents was linked to the overall need to maximise income from green spaces.* The flagpole bed had now been planted and there would be a planting event for native trees with TCV in November. On 18 October there would be an Imagining the Future event.

Alexandra Park The Alexandra Palace Trust was about to get lottery funding for its development scheme but they needed to show the park was well used and they were proposing investments to achieve this. A community orchard was planned and also a Go Ape high level adventure trail. The Friends were scrutinising the plans for the latter very carefully as there were a lot of details which needed to be sorted. There had been two brass band concerts, a bug hunt and several walks. A very successful activity leaflet for children had been produced and Robyn Thomas would circulate this round the Forum for information. Some members of the Forum thought there might be lessons to be learnt from the constitution of the trust running Alexandra Palace as a way of managing other green spaces; other members thought it was not necessarily a very successful model.

Parkland Walk The Friends had organised two nature trails as part of the Crouch End Festival. New benches had been installed and litter collection was now back to normal. There were some remaining potholes in the path to be filled as otherwise flooding would return in the winter and a couple of entrances needed work. Graffiti was a growing problem; Haringey and Islington Councils had promised a joint meeting to agree strategies to combat graffiti but it was proving hard to find a time when everyone could get together. Work was continuing on encroachment issues but very slowly. *Tony Healey said the lawyers had advised that a line survey was needed and this was in hand.*

Queen's Wood The Friends had held a successful Family Fun Day. Lottery money had been received for upgrading the area round the Lodge, but they were not clear what the position was on the outstanding amount. *Sandra Hoisz said that Groundwork had been unsuccessful with Biffa but the Council would find the outstanding match funding. The work would be put out to tender in October with a view to it being undertaken in the New Year.* There had been an incident involving a dogwalker and some picnickers. *Tony Healey said the police had been informed and were investigating.* Vandals had also resurrected a mountain bike trail which ran through the newly coppiced area and were repeatedly removing barriers put up to protect the area.

Tree Wardens The Tree Wardens' objective was to encourage people to learn more about trees in the borough and the benefits they brought. There would be a tree walk at 3.00 that afternoon in the Tottenham Green Fair. They would like to work with Friends' Groups to produce tree maps and tree trails (there was one in Finsbury Park). They would also like funding to expand social media coverage. *Tony Healey suggested they might make a start by using the Small Grant scheme.*

Finsbury Park The Friends had worked successfully with the Council to combat a drinking problem around the pavilion. There had been a problem with duck weed in the lake. *Tony Healey said the Council had sprayed the weed a week ago and would repeat this.* The Friends were waiting for feedback on how the income from concerts would be used. They had visited the new Olympic Park to get ideas. The Friends would welcome information about the plans to demolish the old pavilion as they received questions about it. There would be a walk and talk on the history of Finsbury Park on 13 September.

Down Lane Park The new tennis courts were going well. Business in the Community gave help with maintenance in the park and there had been some flower planting. It appeared clear that the new Harris Academy would not be able to use the park as playing fields but there was a risk that if new

facilities were created for the Academy, the park would not be able to get them too. They were pleased to have won a Green Flag. It was good news that money was being raised from developers for a Green Link from Tottenham High Street to the Lee Valley but there was a risk that the route would go through facilities which had only just been set up. *Paul Ely said the Council would just have to find a route which caused least disruption but it was a complicated task.*

5. Future funding of parks

The Forum asked the Council officers where the increased income generated from concerts fitted into the overall strategy for parks, whether there was a plan B if enough income could not be generated and whether the Council would work with the forum to examine less intrusive income generating events. Paul Ely said that events income was likely to become a major source of income for parks. Following the severe cuts in 2011/12, the parks budget had been around £1.5 million in the last few years but the Council was facing further major cuts in their income. The Council believed this could be managed without reducing services on the ground. If the parks could generate enough income to cover all costs it would be in a strong position for the future. More and more, councillors were looking for cost neutral services. The Forum felt that green spaces should be properly funded out of public money. They were currently places where people could get away from commercial pressures and advertising and this should be protected. If more income activities were to be generated the Forum should be fully involved in the planning. At present there was very little or no consultation. Paul Ely said this was often forced on them by lack of time. When the major cuts had come in after the last election, officers had only had two months to come up with options. The Forum asked what criteria had been used for allocating the funds to different schemes. Paul Ely said that the top priority had been to recycle funds into Finsbury Park as it had suffered the disruption from the concerts, but there had been no involvement outside the council in choosing other schemes. The Forum also thought there was an issue about funding maintenance. There were various sources for funding capital and the income from concerts was being reinvested in capital, but this was of no use if there was no spending to maintain the new assets. Paul Ely confirmed that Haringey had the third lowest maintenance budget of any London boroughs. The Forum stressed that it did not believe it was right for parks to be made self funding and that there should be the maximum amount of public participation in budgeting. Paul Ely said these were points to make to Cllr McNamara, the new cabinet member for the environment.

6. Goodbye to Paul Ely

Paul Ely was leaving Haringey in the latest reorganisation. The Forum thanked him for all his work for Haringey green spaces, recognising his passion for parks, and gave him best wishes for the future. Paul said that the best part of his job had been working with groups like the Friends and he would stay in touch with Haringey's parks in a private capacity.

7. Groundwork

Sandra Hoisz said Groundwork had been involved in regeneration in London for 25 years and had a strong partnership with Haringey. They had contractual arrangements with the parks department and Homes for Haringey. They had a multi-disciplinary team of architects, community gardeners and project managers to run schemes and fund raising staff to lever in external funds. They had a separate employment skills and training organisation which also provided support to Haringey. They had secured £1.2million for park improvements. They agreed with Haringey a list of parks to focus

on, though others were welcome to contact them if they thought they could benefit from their assistance. They contacted Friendsâ€™ groups and set up steering groups to lead consultation. From this, they developed community ideas into workable schemes, sought external funding and finally acted as contract managers for implementing the scheme. Where there was a lack of skills and knowledge locally, they had worked with the council and local groups to create simplified management plans for green spaces which set out what is to be done and by whom. They facilitated sessions to recruit more volunteers. They had tried different approaches and not all had been successful in recruiting many volunteers. One of the best ways was to work with existing groups and get them interested in getting involved with local parks. The value of the community contract was Â£70k a year (with Groundwork bringing in other funds to a similar amount). The contract would come to an end in April 2015. The Forum thanked Sandra for her report. However, Ceri Williams said the Forum had also asked for a copy of the Councilâ€™s evaluation of the cost and achievements under the contract and would still like to see this.

8. Any other business

None.

9. Date of next meeting

Saturday 1 November at 10.00 at Bruce Castle.