

Haringey Friends of Parks Forum

www.haringeyfriendsofparks.org.uk

Saturday March 2nd

Special Friends of Parks / Parks Service Joint Open Day for all Friends Groups

In the Hub, Lordship Rec N17. 10.30-2pm.

Minutes of general meeting 12 January 2013

Present: Joyce Rosser (Priory Common) *Chaired*; Dave Morris (Lordship Rec, Downhills PK,& F of Harmony Gdns); Joan Curtis (Lordship Rec and Tower Gardens); Helen Steel (Lordship Rec and Chestnuts Park); Martin Laheen (Bruce Castle, Lordship Rec and Ducketts Common); David Warren (Parkland Walk); Jackie Goodwin (Finsbury Park); Ulla Lefmann; Candy Amsden (Wards Corner Community Coalition) for item 5; Michael Johns (Queens Wood) *Note-taker*. **Items 6-12** Paul Ely (LBH); Andy Briggs (LBH).

Apologies: Deborah Cawkwell (Markfield Pk); Catherine Appleby (Coldfall Woods)

1. Minutes and Matter Arising

Last minutes agreed.

Tower Gardens Since the last meeting it had been discovered that Groundwork had sent a questionnaire to some of the residents nearest to the gardens but others had not known about it. They were still trying to set up a Friends Group.

2. Resources and survey of parks

The Council, having recognised that the shortfall in resources was giving rise to problems, had appointed consultants to review the parks maintenance operations. Cllr Canver had told the Forum in September that there would be an impact assessment of the cuts. The Forum had found out about the review indirectly and had circulated a questionnaire to Friends Groups about the impact. Despite promises at the November meeting, the consultants had never approached the Forum for its views and its report had not been offered to Forum members. In the end, a copy had been obtained by a formal Freedom of Information request but it had only arrived the previous day and no-one had been able to read it. It appeared to relate largely to the possibility of privatisation of the service and large elements had been redacted on grounds of commercial confidentiality. The Forum, as the Council's key partner for parks, felt that the failure to consult or voluntarily show the outcome of the review was unacceptable.

In spite of this, the Forum had conducted a very informative consultation. There had been a good response with 15 out of the 40 Friends Groups responding. A large proportion of the non-responders were either groups relating to parks not owned by Haringey or groups relating to small sites, largely unaffected by council service cuts. The conclusions of the consultation were that even

before the cuts the standard of maintenance was not high. Since the cuts, standards had deteriorated significantly. Friends were very satisfied by the service they got from the parks staff who were left and the main remedy for the deterioration was seen as more staff and resources. Relations with TCV were good; the experience with Groundwork had been more mixed. Friends Groups volunteering, where it occurred, contributing only a tiny and unreliable % of what was needed to maintain their green spaces and the groups did not see scope for much increase in this.

The Forum approved the draft Friends Survey report, subject to correcting the omission of some individual comments on page 2. It had been sent to all Councillors in advance of the cabinet budget meeting.

3. Friends / Council Joint Open Day

A revised timetable for our open day was agreed. It was agreed it should be held on 2nd March in place of the normal Forum meeting. Everyone should contact groups not present and encourage them to attend an occasion which would improve personal contacts and understanding between the Friends and all departments of the Council involved with Green Spaces. It would also enable people to see the impressive Eco-hub building. An invitation would be sent to Cllr Canver as the Cabinet member responsible for parks; it would be left to individual groups to decide whether to invite other councillors. TCV, Groundwork and other partners should be invited.

4. London and National Forums

The National Federation of Parks & Green Spaces (for all UK Friends Forums) was preparing to launch a petition to the Govt to maintain adequate resources for green spaces. The aim is to involve all national organisations involved with green spaces. **The Forum agreed to support.**

5. Walks and Guides

We agreed to repeat our walk along the course of the Moselle - to be held in the summer (80 attended last year) with press publicity, including from Haringey People. Angela Bullock was trying to get funding from the Lottery for a project with schools on the river. **The Forum supported the proposal [Now confirmed].** There would also be another walk from Alexandra Palace to Bruce Castle through nine parks on 7 April. It was proposed to produce a similar leaflet to the Moselle leaflet, but funding would be needed. **The Forum warmly endorsed the idea.** It was suggested it might be worth relaunching the Haringey Trail, which the Council had published some years ago.

The Wards Corner Community Coalition was publishing cards with pictures of Haringey scenes, including many of parks, as a means of raising money for legal fees for their campaign. Anyone who wanted copies could buy them by contacting them through www.wardscornercommunity.org.uk.

6. Local Reports from the Friends, plus Council response

Priory Common. The Friends were working every week on the orchard. They had more woodchips than they needed and were happy to give some away to other groups who could use them.

Parkland Walk. They were half way through a boundary inspection with Lew Taylor which had

shown up lots of rubbish and examples of encroachment. When completed, they would decide how to take it forward. With TCV they had opened up a pond near the Highgate end.

Queens Wood. Coppice work had been completed quickly and efficiently there had been no complaints, only thanks. There was an ongoing problem with many years of rubbish tipped into the wood out of Bond and White. The company had accepted responsibility for clearing up in principle and the council continued to chivy them, but it would be a major problem to rectify and it was taking a long time to resolve.

Finsbury Park. As a result of the wet weather, there had been a lot of flooding which had not drained away. *Andy Briggs said that the council would look at the situation and asked that other Friends Groups let him know of any similar flooding problems.* Gate locking was inconsistent and incomplete and the Friends felt it might be better to give it up and use the cost of the gate locking staff for other needs of the park. *Andy said he would review the issue.* The Friends were concerned about the impact of the increasing number of concerts planned for the park and felt they ought to be spread more evenly and the revenue returned to the park. *Andy said the council was working on an open space events policy.* The Friends were also concerned about the privatisation of the tennis courts and running track. *Paul Ely said that a contract was proposed with a consortium of sports organisations using the facilities because the Council had no funds to invest in them and bring them up to a good standard.* There was pond weed on the surface of the pond and aeration needed to be considered. *Andy agreed to look into this.*

Downhills Park. Two lots of works were in hand in relation to the playground and play area. Water was leaking from the pond, which was being looked into. There was a flourishing reading group in the cafe.

Harmony Gardens. This is adjacent to Lordship Rec but in the grounds of the Community Centre. It was set up by Back 2 Earth mainly as a food garden. When the Community Centre had been contracted out, volunteers thought it important to set up a separate Friends Group to deal direct with the management of the Centre.

Lordship Rec. There were a lot of small issues to look at following the completion of the main regeneration project. The new gates and urns were magnificent. The Rec also suffered from flooding. The Eco-hub was still not open but the Friends were negotiating for a contract on the community room. The Performing Arts Collective held a concert on 16 December in the Shell theatre; 100 people had attended and it was hoped to hold regular concerts there. Lordship Rec had been joint runners up in a national competition for the most improved playing fields, and the Friends were applying for Green Flag Community status for the Woodland.

Chestnuts Park. The Friends felt that maintenance standards were going down. Still awaiting the new entrance to be finished and a new zebra crossing.

General issues arising:

Recycling. The Council had still not met with the Forum's recycling champion to review how waste

was recycled in practice. *Andy Briggs promised to get in touch with Martin Laheen very shortly.*

Driving on grass. In some parks lorries clearing litter bins were driving onto grass and damaging lawns. *Andy Briggs said they had been told they should not do this and anyone who saw it happening should let him know.*

Haringey Time Bank. HTB had sent round an email encouraging people to volunteer to help in parks as part of the scheme. The Friends Groups wondered how this fitted in with their own work and that of TCV. *Paul Ely said he would have to look into this. He was considering putting together a paper to Cabinet to formalise the existing arrangements with TCV and Groundwork. He would ensure that the Friends Groups were effectively consulted about this.*

Flooding. The Forum felt that with global warming likely to lead to more extreme weather conditions, the council would need to adopt a strategy towards tackling flooding and build in avoidance strategies into initial designs. It was accepted that it was not easy and would take a long time to make improvements.

7. Review of parks maintenance operations and budget

Paul Ely apologised for the Council's failure to consult the Forum on the review. It had been under very heavy time pressures. The Council had considered the review and had decided keep the service in-house and to invest significant amounts in additional plant and machinery to improve productivity. There would be no cost savings in going to the market. No further cuts in resources over the three year period of the next financial strategy were planned, despite the need for the council overall to find a further £25m savings. Because of the proposed investment, it was likely that the decision to keep the service in-house would be a long term one. Councillors were concerned about the consistency and quality of the finish in the parks. Andy Briggs would be considering how to improve productivity, both by increased investment and by changing the deployment of staff. He was asked whether resources would be focussed on Green Flag parks and what the impact would be on smaller sites. He said he would need to review the competing demands of Green Flag sites, HLF sites, Homes for Haringey sites and small sites. He was asked what the position was on the investment of money into improvements in particular parks. He said that Haringey would continue to seek external funding for these and where match funding was needed, they would look for it from Haringey's general capital funds, not from within the parks budget. The Forum noted that at least the parks were being protected from further cuts, even if that still meant that maintenance budgets were £1m below the pre-cuts level which had in any event previously been in the lowest 20% of comparable London boroughs.

8. Open Day

The Council was happy to jointly organise the proposed open day. John Morris would be asked to nominate a contact person.

9. Ash die-back

The Forum asked that Alex Fraser should send it a statement of the Councils policy on ash die-back, even if it was only to do nothing.

10. Dog control orders

The Forum asked for a clear statement of the new rules and when they applied from. Notices were being produced and would be distributed shortly. Information was on the Haringey website. Enforcement would be intelligence based. Parks staff could not take enforcement action. If they or the public became aware of a problem, they should notify the front line services and they and/or the police would visit.

11. Any other business

Jackie Goodwin said she would put together a directory of useful names and telephone numbers for the different services affecting parks.

12. Date of next meetings

Saturday 2 March 2013 This would be subsumed in the Open Day in the Eco-hub in Lordship Rec from 10.30 to 2.00 (with a free lunch to follow).

The remaining meetings for 2013 would be at 10.00 in Bruce Castle Museum on **4 May; 6 July; 7 September; 2 November.**