

Haringey Friends of Parks Forum

Report of general meeting, November 2nd 2019 at Bruce Castle Museum

Present: Friends:, Clare Parry (Downhills) **[Chair]**, Joyce Rosser (Priory Common), Phil Chinn (Wolves Lane), Joan Curtis (Lordship Rec) **[Minutes]**, John Miles (Parkside Malvern and Haringey Rivers Forum), Robyn Thomas (Alexandra Park), Alison Watson (Queens Wood), Susan Beckett (Nightingale Gardens), Anne Scott (White Hart Lane Rec), Robert (recycling/youth), Hesketh Benoit (Ducketts Common), Alice Evans (TCV/Railway Fields), Cathy Meeus (Parkland Walk), Diana Shelley and Ivana Curcic (Chestnuts), Klaus Kuerner (Bruce Castle), Pamela Harling (Meadow Orchard Project), Victoria Midwinter (Coldfall Wood/MH playing fields), Quentin Given (The Paddock and Bruce Grove Cloud Garden), Martin Laheen (recycling). **Council Representatives:** Paul Ely and Sahina Choudhury. **Apologies:** Ceri Williams (Chestnuts), Dave Morris (Lordship Rec), Martin Ball (Down Lane Park), Matthew (Ducketts Common).

Chair's opening comments (Clare Parry)

In July 2018, the Council organised a meeting for all Friends to discuss the upcoming Strategy for Parks. Nearly a year later talks started on inviting us back to carry on the discussion. There is a level of frustration felt due to the lack of continuity. We were asked how the Forum wanted to be involved and we considered this and responded. However we did not get a response and as of this meeting we are still waiting.

It was decided that we should change our usual structure of the meeting to give full concentration on the Parks 10yr Strategy so that the discussion could be more substantial. It was noted that this was the third meeting that Simon Farrow had not been able to attend and it was felt that as it was central to our partnership, that it would be beneficial for him to attend our meetings. We agreed that most of us had good relationships with council workers/officers on the ground in our local parks but that communication with those higher up, with a strategic view, had somewhat broken down. However, some felt that if we don't get adequate response from officers then we should start asking questions of councillors/MPs.

Paul Ely's Schedule and Scope of consultation It was noted that workshops had been moved back again. It seemed that issues of funding and events policy had been taken off the discussion table and would not be part of the workshops.

Discussion before Council Reps entered meeting:

Alice from TCV introduced herself as the new Senior Project Officer of TCV. Matt will be responsible for Volunteers and Logistics. TCV will be involved in development of Conservation Action Plans and will incorporate our ideas and challenges. TCV meet quarterly with Sarah Jones and Alice intends to meet with project officers and wants regular team meetings. She explained that due to fact that they had not did not have formal updates they would not be legally able to do first aid training but would carry on for a few more months. TCV will make sure that all their training courses are circulated.

Robert and Hesketh raised the issue of involving young people and how this will be addressed in the consultations on 10 yr strategy. There needs to be training available for young people to enable them to form groups and become involved in community organisations.

John Miles – Rivers Forum This has been going for nearly 2 years and has got involved in academic study of Moselle. Feels that the Rivers Forum should be more accountable and wanted to have a stronger relationship to the Friends Forum to build a better working model for raising the issue of Rivers in parks strategy. (discuss more at February meeting)

Friends of Queens Wood worried that sometimes Council come up with projects that are not necessarily felt to be relevant to the immediate needs of a green space. The council is discussing erecting a public toilet and disabled changing room in the Wood and the Friends feel that the paths in the woods are not very wheelchair accessible and that the whole environment of the wood is fragile. They will share details of the project at the February meeting.

Ann Scott, White Hart Lane Rec –Council should be more sensitive to the history of a green space and be more sensitive to local knowledge when developing plans.

Green Flag process is not mentioned in Paul Ely's strategy document. We feel that to do intense emergency repairs for Green Flag visits is not an effective form of management. We need financial information about how much these cost.

Paul Ely's presentation of strategy document

Paul is External Support and Project Manager for the Strategy consultation. Financial crisis has changed the landscape of funding. Things have changed so much with climate change and more involvement of community and we need to rethink partnerships and know more what to expect.

Biodiversity Plan, Asset Management, Water Courses, Engagement policy documents all need to be updated.

Parks will be divided into different types and redefined standards will be attached to each according to type. Elements to look at: economic value, health benefits, access study, funding plan, action plans (5yr detailed, 10-15yrs less detailed).

Final Strategy will summarise critical elements – brief 20 pages. More focussed around health benefits and outcomes including role of communities in decision making. 15 year period will be covered but will need refreshing and updating during its life. Some elements not included – green spaces owned by different people than council, review of council approach to Green Flag (operational), Play, sport and outdoor gyms, Outdoor events (previously agreed in 2014). It is a defining project seeing what elements are involved, things that need to be done to make sure that resources are there to make necessary things happen.

Not possible to inform the meeting on schedule for consultation at this point. (will have talked to all involved by end of November). The major consultation will take place January to March 2020 to develop draft strategy by end of May which will be shared to get input. Action plan draft recommendations by Sept 2020 and advance draft circulated with further meeting in Autumn. Draft strategy will be put out online for public discussion. Final report will be April 2021.

Questions and points to Paul:

Clare asked if Paul had seen the email sent by the Friends Forum to Simon about how we had decided we wanted to be involved in the consultation. From our side the process had caused much frustration because of lack of communication and response. She said it was good that Paul had been engaged to manage the process but we wanted it to be a "meaningful" engagement and process. We had been specifically asked how we wanted to be involved and sent our thoughts but got no direct response. We are trying to remain positive but we need to feel respected.

Klaus We need to know it is a true consultation and not a tick box exercise.

Cathy The earlier timetable for early engagement stage 1 is now passed we want to know that will be updated to include us in a later stage. We feel a little that our input has been concertina'd. We feel we need enough time to be properly heard and to be able to input information from our own experts in the field.

Quentin – Do senior officers have their own idea of what they want to see happen? Is outsourcing to the community one of those ideas? **Paul's reply** – there is no agenda. He has been taken on because of his past experience of working with groups.

Chestnuts – how can we separate events from general discussion as this is a major part of the strategy for funding parks?

Coldfall – how can the Green Flag process be excluded when so much money is spent on it.

Parkland Walk – in terms of typology, different kinds of parks and inappropriate plans, we need to be involved at looking at how parks and green spaces are categorised. Green Flag and Events will obviously be a big part of the strategy but we are being told that we will not have input on these issues through the consultation and that feels wrong, given that this strategy is possibly for next 15years. Green Flag always necessitates a huge flurry of activity and this needs to be open to discussion.

Bruce Castle – Officers are very available in the parks before Green Flag but are not so available after

Lordship Rec – Difficult to see how certain aspects can be taken out of the remit of the consultation when everything is so interrelated especially Green Flag and Events strategy.

Wolves Lane – We need to be much more fully informed about Parks financials if we are to be proper partners. We asked for information on spending on Parks specifically at meeting with Cabinet Member but the information we were given included estates, cemeteries etc. We were promised at our July meeting a presentation before the consultation but now it seems we are presented with a fait accompli. Councillor Hearn was keen that "No stone be unturned".

White Hart Lane Rec - Young people are central to strategic planning and it is important to find ways to engage them.

Robert – Young people (15+) are not necessarily “meeting” people. We need to find practical ways of connecting and involving them and to generate an understanding of responsibility and how negative actions incur costs. Recycling is a good way of engaging young people.

Quentin – Aware that 5 year plans are a bit irrelevant for young people. We need quick wins to keep their attention. Is it possible for small improvements from the consultation be pushed through more quickly to keep them engaged?

Alison – In relation to events, worried about overuse and damage caused.

Nightingale Gardens – Having a project manager has been great for our space and we have a good, positive relationship. We want more of that and for that relationship not to change. We are not launching any attack on council operatives and project officers.

Bruce Castle – Other Council departments depend on there being properly-funded, well-managed functional parks. Parks are social/human asset and their contribution to other areas should be calculated. Outcomes are only as good as income and input allows. We need to make sure that as many stakeholders as possible are reached and involved during this consultation.

Chestnuts – low level of staffing means that things are not being done. There needs to be more regard to the bigger picture.

Rivers Forum - Important to consider Biodiversity and flood risk. There is a lot of flood risk and climate change funding available now. Water course management is an important part of any strategy. Council should learn from other Boroughs experience. Need also to look at the impact of development and planning on biodiversity. How will we fund this research. Need to involve scientific community and be more ambitious. The strategy should look at all space as “natural space” and there is a real opportunity there to increase and support biodiversity.

Alexandra Park – In terms of the remit of the consultation, although Alexandra Park is not run by Haringey Council it must be seen as a major part of the Haringey Wildlife corridor.

Meadow Orchard Project – Some green spaces are part of green grid of the borough even if not owned and run by the Council.

TCV – Have as yet not had any direct contact about the Strategic Plan. TCV is a key partner in developing conservation action plans and developing holistic and integrated link for wildlife between parks. Want to develop greater communication with parks operations. TCV could be used for training on biodiversity issues. Very keen to be involved.

Martin Laheen - Waste Management should be called Waste and Recycling Management. It is really important to engage with people on this. Maybe develop projects for disabled or people with learning impairment to be part of the strategy.

Downhills – Clare said she went to a meeting on social prescribing. A pilot is being carried out. We cant put a price on the joy of being outside in a park. Need to share value of parks to people and the inherent value of parks.

Paul Ely responses:

Funding - there will be a funding plan and discussion on budgets need to be shared meaningfully.

Participation – important to involve groups who don't usually are not so represented in consultation ie BAME, young, old, disabled etc.

Quick wins - this sounds a good idea and will take it back.

Partnership – Dialogue seems to have diminished and through this process can be increased.

Further points from reps:

Parkland Walk – lack of joined up working – parks need way of linking with enforcement, legal, property and public health etc.

Bruce Castle - We need this process to cement the partnership relationship between Friends/park users/residents and Council. If ‘events’ are outside the remit of this consultation it will alienate people rather than include them.

Wolves Lane – Natural Capital Accounting could lever more funding. Conventional accounts need to be improved, involve financial colleagues.

Coldfall Wood – Sixth formers have good views on recycling, climate change and environment and should be engaged - and also Woodcraft organisation.

Rivers Forum – In terms of biodiversity, Network Rail should be a partner as we are losing valuable land. Dog walkers should be encouraged to constitute themselves because of environmental impact and needs.

Recycling – learning how to run a compost system is important and there could be compost ambassadors.
Clare – education needs to be part of any project. Clear labelling of bins important.
Bruce Castle – New recycling facilities need to be developed so that separation by residents is less important in the process.
Robert – Use regular events and activities to advertise consultation and use park and street notice boards.
Lordship – Groups could inform Paul of when any useful events will take place where the consultation could take place. These could be written into the schedule?
Parkland Walk – We need dates soon so we can be properly prepared.

Sahina, LBH parks operations

New recycling bins, and looking forward to seeing how they work. Need to educate people on what to recycle. Perhaps make use of Haringey People?

Next steps

Paul Ely – will come back with plan by end of November and this could be amended.

List of key themes summarised in relation to the strategy discussion

- How the separate strands of work/focus come together
- Events - these cannot just be separated out/not discussed as they are integral to the Council's approach to parks & because of their impact on parks
- Green Flag Awards
- Typology of the park - how this is taken into consideration
- Finance/funding - clarity required on this & particularly in relation to how it links to events
- Engagement - don't forget representatives from areas that fall outside of the consultation but are relevant in terms of green spaces - e.g. Alexandra Park, Meadow Orchard etc. Also, ensuring engagement of all communities & methods - e.g. different approach for younger people etc.
- Environmental concerns
- Statutory service
- Biodiversity

Other important issues for the meeting

1. **Appointment of new Conservation Officer** – this is very important, especially for nature reserves, woodlands etc.
2. **Our email list problems** – present system not working for many members and a lot of messages go into spam automatically. We need to sort this as communication is key to our effectiveness as an organisation
3. **Forum Petition for more resources for the Parks Service** – this has been held up by discussions with council on how they would accept the online version. We have around 300-400 paper signatures so far. We have missed our original deadline for the November Full Council meeting so it was agreed to put this off and discuss again at a later meeting ready to present for a later Council meeting. Cathy from Parkland Walk felt that we were being too respectful of Council processes in our petition campaign for proper funding and staffing and that we should go ahead and do our own petition and be more vocal and share our concerns with media. We need to engage the widest amount of people.
4. **Stephen Hall**, a long standing member of the Parks team, has sadly died and we all send our condolences to friends, colleagues and family.
5. **Dates of Forum meetings for 2020:** 1st Feb, 4th April, 6th June, 5th September, 7th November
6. **Next meeting: 1st February 2020, 10am, Bruce Castle Museum**