

Haringey Friends of Parks Forum

Report of General Meeting held on Saturday 6 June 2020 by Zoom

Present: Friends: Ceri Williams (Chestnuts) [**Chair**], Victoria Midwinter (Coldfall Wood/MH playing fields) [**Minutes**], Martin Ball (Down Lane Park), Phil Chinn (Wolves Lane), Joan Curtis (Lordship Rec), Quentin Given (The Paddock and Bruce Grove Cloud Garden), Pamela Harling (Meadow Orchard Project), Mary Hogan (Railway Fields), Klaus Kuerner (Bruce Castle), Leyla Laksari (Living Under One Sun), John Larkin (CREOS), John Miles (Parkside Malvern and Haringey Rivers Forum), Clare Parry (Downhills), Lucy Roots (Queens Wood), Chloe Tait (Hartington Park), Robyn Thomas (Alexandra Park), David Warren (Parkland Walk).

Council Representatives: Lewis Taylor, Glynis Kirkwood-Warren, Paul Ely.

Apologies: Hesketh Benoit (Ducketts Common), Jess/Michael Cordwell-Jones (Woodside Park), Simon Farrow (LBH), Cathy Meeus (Parkland Walk), Dave Morris (Lordship Rec), Alice Evans (TCV/Railway Fields), Glenys Law (CREOS), Joyce Rosser (Priory Common), Alice Tringham (Priory Park), TCV.

Minutes of Informal Meeting held on Zoom 4 April 2020 accepted.

Prior to this meeting Clare and Ceri had circulated draft guidelines for communications via the Forum's mailing list for consultation. 25 responses were received of which 100% were positive so the guidelines are accepted. Some tweaks have been proposed and these will be put on the agenda for our next meeting.

Simon Farrow's e-mail of 3 June was noted.

Friends' Reports

Alexandra Park: Cafés now opening for takeaway. Have been problems of late-night parties. Maintenance has been cut, AP has no council income. Volunteers have been doing litter picks.

Queen's Wood: People have been lighting fires. There have been two rough sleepers. One has moved on with effective help from Thames Reach. Group events have been cancelled although Friends have done some work in pairs. Bins being emptied. Trampling and erosion from extra footfall. Return of TCV much needed. Trees were causing subsidence to a local house. Four are being taken down but one oak is to be kept. Concern this could create a precedent.

Downhills: Increased usage & litter, parties, café open for takeaway. Outdoor theatre and Art in the Park are both cancelled. Tennis & other courts & equipment remain closed. Some tree felling is scheduled to take place. A successful crowd funding campaign had been run to support Downhills Park Café.

Bruce Castle Park: Travellers had been encamped on the Park. Klaus felt there had been a breakdown in communication with the Council. The travellers arrived on a Friday and were defecating in the Park and cemetery, a spanner was thrown at

someone, dogs were roaming free etc. There was no contact from LBH over the weekend. On the Monday Simon sent an e-mail to Friends but there was no response to Friends from Police, Neighbourhood Watch or Cllrs. The travellers have now been evicted from the site.

CREOS: Added footfall and some anti-social behaviour especially on the meadow with use of cannabis, BBQs and fires, litter and loud, intimidating behaviour. The path had been resurfaced with hoggin but has had much wear and tear. Friends concerned that bio-diversity is being affected especially by people taking felled logs off the land.

Living Under One Sun: They are working with developers who are knocking down a wall at the edge of the site. Leyla thanked the Parks Department and noted it would be impossible to achieve all that we need from them. They have had issues of rough sleeping. Last year they celebrated the Windrush generation and need guidance on how to carry on community celebrations during Covid-19.

Hartington Park: Chloe echoed thanks to Parks Department. She asked for the rationale for the pruning that has taken place and why there had been no dialogue with the Friends. They do not have a designated Parks Officer. The vegetation in Carbuncle Passage makes it difficult to walk through and it needs pruning. Pre-lockdown they were in conversation with LBH about an outdoor gym and want to pick this up again.

Parkside Malvern: Working with the LBH Regeneration Team on altered open space and will set up a Friends group. John stressed the importance of ongoing maintenance and management for new green spaces. The work has been done but it was fraught. There was no governing strategy and the relationship with residents as partners, able to assist, was not well managed.

Lordship Rec: Lots of new people visiting and on the Facebook group which is great but woodland has been used as toilet. Too much bread being thrown into the lake. Friends have done litter picks. Park staff have been doing a great job. This is an opportunity to stress to government how important parks are and that they need funding. Edible London is growing veg. There has been some abuse towards them. There is a crowd funding appeal to raise £10k in order to get match funding from Sports England for the Hub which is shut and getting no income.

Coldfall Woods and Muswell Hill Playing Fields: As elsewhere many new visitors enjoying the woods but lots of trampling and litter. Pleased that a boggy path has been drained and resurfaced. A drain has been excavated from the seasonal pond and LBH to liaise with Friends on how to keep the pond, but limit annual flooding of bridge. Travellers moved onto the playing field from Bruce Castle. How did they get in despite the barrier, what support being offered to them, and what is LBH intending re: eviction?

Parkland Walk: The path is too narrow to keep two metres apart and runners particularly do not abide by social distancing making it difficult for older people walking. At the Highgate end a water leak has created a boggy section and Thames Water are taking ages to pinpoint the source. They have had to lock the Nature Trail

up as too many people were using it although they are considering having a one-way route around it.

Railway Fields: Closed temporarily because TCV cannot staff it at present. Biodiversity is suffering from overuse in green spaces but it is a great opportunity to engage people with nature and chat to them.

Meadow Orchard: Same issues as CREOS. People can easily climb into the site. They would like to get the Health Centre more involved perhaps in installing brighter lighting as deterrent.

Down Lane Park: Tennis courts are not open even though other boroughs have opened theirs. There has been a lot of damage and Martin wondered how this will be made good and pointed out that if outdoor gym equipment is repositioned to allow distancing this will eat into the green space. A MUGA was promised in 2018. Will LBH commit to providing this? And what will be the impact of getting no income from events this year. Also, will Cllr Hearn remain in post as Cabinet Member in charge of Parks in light of AGM being postponed to 2021?

Wolves Lane: The Centre is closed to the public.

Stationers Park: Largely reopened and the Council is refilling the pond.

Chestnuts Park: Ceri wanted to pass on thanks to Alistair Smith for excellent liaison on tree felling and was reassured about the works starting on Wednesday including two huge weeping willows. There are nesting birds in three trees and they would like a delay on pruning those. Bins are not being emptied. Grateful to Parks staff for their continuing work. Managing Chestnuts involves Parks service, developers, community centre, toilet and café and the Friends see an inability politically and operationally to liaise effectively at senior level between all these. They have concerns about communication with the public post Covid-19 and the future financial strategy.

Lew Taylor responded:

Travellers: This is the first time the Council has provided WCs and water supply. They broke the height barrier into Muswell Hill playing fields and one of the bollards was ripped out of the ground. It is difficult to prevent them entering as LBH staff need vehicle access in and out of the fields. They will be guided by the enforcement officer but government advice is to treat travellers as homeless people. There has been some anti-social behaviour and the Police are gathering evidence but any action must be within government guidelines. [Since the meeting the travellers have moved off the field.]

Lew regretted the Friends felt they were not treated with respect over the Bruce Castle Park camp but LBH staff were trying to deal with the practical issues. Klaus considered that the Park should have been shut to the public for safety. He reiterated that there was no communication with Friends over the weekend they arrived or he would have been able to pass information on to neighbours of the Park and that the situation had not been under control. Glynis pointed out that the Friends had been e-

mailed – but this was not until the Monday. Lew responded that they had liaised with enforcement and Police and that their strategy aimed to keep the Park open which was the right thing to do.

Tree felling in Hartington Park and elsewhere: Alex Fraser has written a briefing note which will be circulated following the meeting. There has been a backlog of tree works including Hartington, for many years and following inspections this was seen as an opportunity to get work done. This will involve crown lifting, taking out lower branches to raise the tree canopy. Lew will take other questions back to Alex. Chloe had emailed Alex but asked how there could be better communication in future? Also, Alex had asked the Forum to note that there is support available for groups who are willing to water trees during the dry weather. He can source trolleys and containers.

There is a **Parks Project officer vacancy:** An interim person will be starting soon covering Down Lane Park and will be introduced to the Friends groups although this is difficult with social distancing.

Covid-19 update: some facilities can be opened including some WCs. At stage 5 everything would be open but it's going to be difficult. Social distancing means only one person can be in any of the Parks' vehicles. We are at stage 3 currently and this is reviewed every three weeks. Tennis and basketball courts are not yet open because although the LTA has said tennis can restart it could lead to tension if tennis courts opened and basketball courts did not. Islington have opened theirs but they have less green space. It was suggested there could be a notice on tennis courts to explain.

There is going to be a huge **financial shortfall** as not only is there a gap in income but there are extra costs of fencing, damage etc.

Glynis **explained that the role of the Project officers has had to change** as their focus has been on doing inspections, signage, stencils, removing fencing safely. The zonal work has been split up to reduce the amount of travel for staff. Some live too far away and have not been able to come in. They are ready to open facilities at short notice as and when allowed.

Ceri made the point that management and support for biodiversity was super important.

Paul Ely update: He noted there had been excellent examples of communication with Friends groups especially with Alistair Smith and Glynis. He agreed that we are a valuable conduit to communities and that it makes no sense to not talk to us.

He has held eight meetings on strands of the Parks strategy and the last one was cancelled due to lockdown. He has had two externally commissioned reports back and is developing internal reports and has had early drafts to get feedback. By the Autumn he expects to have a draft strategy to share with us. The draft will go to the Cabinet Member with formal consultation to follow in December.

The Asset Management planning session was missed and he will try and convene this on Zoom.

Paul will circulate a note with more info following the meeting.

Lucy noted that they had expected a site visit from Annabel who is preparing biodiversity action plans. Glynis explained some colleagues are unable to come in at present. But they could consider a virtual walk round.

Ceri noted that Parks have risen to the top of the agenda and we need to keep this up. She suggested we have a Forum meeting in August this year although we do not usually.

We need a full discussion on the gap in finances with no income and over £1m costs. How can we support our LBH colleagues to get a decent settlement? It may be possible to hold small events later in the year and get some income but already over budget and will be trying to claim support from central government. Ceri hoped the solution would not be big events trashing our Parks next year. Phil said we would be keen to lobby central government.

Paul said there had not been any discussions around halting the strategy work he is doing but the critical point will be when the draft goes to the Cabinet and there will have to be decisions on the options for asset management. There is an expectation in local government that the loss of income will not be met centrally. We should all make sure our local councillors know how much we value our parks.

Joan pointed out the vulnerability of parks if they are dependent on events. They should be extra, not central to funding.

John asked if there had been any thought given to encouraging cycling away from parks. He highlighted the consultation on cycling and walking routes.

Klaus made the point that there is a lot of energy around parks and green spaces at the moment and we should use it.

Glynis update: There is so much litter and fly tipping at the moment, it is disheartening. They are working on a long-term communications campaign on social media which should start up in a couple of weeks. They can also provide us with litter-pickers and kit. The replacement bin project had to be halted but they are now installing them in hot spots including Shepherds Hill Gardens.

Crowdfunding: Living Under One Sun and Lordship Rec are both seeking crowdfunding to continue their projects if we can share with our groups and on social media.

It was agreed by all that we would meet on Saturday 1 August.