

Haringey Friends of Parks Forum

Report of meeting - Wednesday 27th September 2023 – online

Attendance: Robyn Thomas (Alexandra Park), Liz Ixer (Railway Fields), Laura Dekker (Queen's Wood), Dave Morris (Lordship Rec) - *chaired*, Martin Ball (Down Lane Park), Joan Curtis (Lordship Rec), Gregg Hutchings (Downhills Park) – *took minutes*, Klaus Kuerner (Bruce Castle Park), Simon Olley (Parkland Walk), Quentin Given (The Paddock), Cassandra Li (TCV), Giovanna Lozzi (Haringey Tree Protectors + Parkland Walk), Dan Meigher (Belmont Rec), Peter Gray (Nightingale Gdns), Chris Arnold (Stationers Park + Hornsey Tower Gardens), Pamela Harling (Meadow Orchard + Wolves Lane), Gina (Finsbury Park), Louise Wass (Finsbury Pk), Sandra Sutherland (Harmony Gdns), Ceri Williams (Chestnuts) **Apologies:** Claire Parry (Downhills Park), Susan Beckett (Nightingale), Beth (Finsbury Pk), plus 2 more

1. Special meeting. It was noted that the September 2nd meeting had been switched to today. This would be a special online meeting, and that most local reports would be postponed to the next general meeting. Also there were no Council reps present.

2. Minutes of last general meeting (see link): Accurate!

https://www.haringeyfriendsofparks.org.uk/minutes/2023_06_03_hfopf_minutes.pdf

a. Matter arising: Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) reports – reports have been circulated by TCV to the relevant groups in draft form. They contain important ecological information and assessment of biodiversity. Feedback is sought from Friends by TCV by end of October on matters that are related to their green space. Final reports will developed with feedback in mind by the writers then taken to the special Wildlife Board by spring 2024. Some meeting delegates raised that they hadn't seen their report and were keen to input. Cassandra thought all groups will have received them earlier in the year and this was a re-issue.

Action: Cassandra at TCV to resend the reports to relevant groups that are missing them.

Action: All friends groups to email feedback to TCV if they wish via: cassandra.li@tcv.org.uk

3. Report from Parks Summit Approximately 100 people attended the event on Ducketts Common on 16th September 2023. The event consisted of talks, panels and stalls, and some sport. Dave Morris gave an opening speech about Friends Groups and the Friends Forum, and some of the current challenges facing the Parks Service and our groups. Feedback included:

- The event was trying to be too many things to different people. It lacked focus.
- It would have been good if lots more people had attended.
- It was felt to be useful, and good that Friends Groups were involved in the planning of the event, the talks and panels, plus our Forum stall (a big thanks to all Friends reps who took part or helped in any way).
- A missed opportunity to have a serious policy discussion as well as a celebration of local parks. There could have been two events - a) discussion forum for groups and agencies involved in local parks and b) event for the wider public.
- The biodiversity panel discussion went well – 35 people.
- The Diversity and Inclusion session had some really good ideas and examples, but could have been better attended.

- Felt like a PR and marketing job at time. The Council talked about their aspirations for local parks (ie introducing the new Strategy).
- The interactions with Council reps were disappointing, a missed opportunity to raise issues. The friends groups had questions dealt with quickly with very general responses.
- The younger people who attended made a report to meeting but very few people were around to listen to them. Feeling that their ideas should be heard by the Friends group in a meeting in near future.

It was noted that Simon Farrow and other council officials were making notes of the ideas and responses of delegates at the event. Will these be written up and a response given. The meeting agreed that it was important that the summary and any official response was captured and put on record.

Action: Invite the younger group to a special meeting of this Forum or to our diversity working group, and incorporate other more diverse groups to engage with park issues.

Action: Dave Morris to write to Simon Farrow to request a summary of outcomes of the event and their response. Also ask if there are recordings or ppt presentations available.

4. Parks Service understaffing An email was shared from Glynis Kirkwood-Warren (Zonal Team Manager) regarding understaffing in parks and difficulty in recruiting the right people to the roles.

The Forum discussed staff levels in parks and sympathetically recognised the capacity issue in the Parks Service teams and how this was holding back the Council in its role as custodian of local parks. This is with regard to both the practical day-to-day management (on the ground or office-based staff) and also looking after green spaces within planning and development schemes taking place in the borough. The Forum discussed how this situation might be resolved, noting that even with all posts in place the level of staffing and resources would still be low due to years of budget cuts forced on all Councils.

Action: Members agreed to publicise details of Parks Service vacancies within their networks with the aim of boosting applications. Dave to send out to our list for forwarding widely.

5. Parks Service Zonal Team / Friends Forum reps meeting 1 year ago a Forum delegation met with the Project Team. It was a positive minuted meeting. This discussed how the project team and groups should be communicating and working together re their sites. It was agreed that a similar meeting between the Forum and Zonal Team (which should be leading on much of the comms) was needed. Since then both teams have struggled to communicate effectively with Friends Groups and the Zonal team in particular has been under strength for a while and this has restricted their capacity to engage to the satisfactory level. It was agreed that the meeting with the Zonal Team didn't need to wait until they were at full strength. Glynis who leads that team had suggested a date in September but we had decided it would be best after this Forum meeting.

Action: Dave Morris to arrange date with Glynis. *Update: November 8th, 10am-11am has been scheduled. Details to follow. If FG reps want to be part of delegation, please get in touch with Dave.*

6. Memorandum of Understanding This was a long-discussed voluntary agreement to help guide, clarify and strengthen relationships between Friends groups and the Parks Service. Final version incorporating all the Forum's proposed amendments was recently signed off by the Council. The Forum agreed with the final text.

Action: Up to each group if they would like to agree it for themselves – contact Michelle Lindson.

Update: *Michelle is leaving her post as Volunteering Coordinator at the end of October.*

7. Friends volunteering and events In the interest of time, this item was to be taken offline and members asked to share updates on the network list.

8. Major local schemes and issues - supporting the local Friends Groups This section of the meeting was reserved for Friends Groups to share updates on some key major schemes of concern in their green space and plans for how other groups could support them.

a. Finsbury Park Louise Wass updated on the increase in intensity of use of the park for major events and concerts and this was effecting nature recovery. There is real concern for the impact of this on nature and the park. It appears the Council and their commercial partners are exploiting the park to detriment of wildlife and resident users of the park. There is concern that the council does not properly recognise the work and views of the Friends Group nor the needs of wider regular users. This is reflected in how use of the park is limited by these events for large sections of the key summer months. 12 staff are based in the park but it doesn't seem like it most of the time.

It was explained that the Forum has always supported the Friends over the past few years in opposing these huge inappropriate and damaging commercial events, despite the income they raise for the Parks Service. A vote was taken to reaffirm the support for the Friends in their actions to try to resolve this. This group know their park and how best to deal with this. It was pointed out that there were other similar controversies around London and the London Friends of Green Spaces Network would support such groups' efforts to link together for mutual support.

Action: FoFP to consider how other groups might be able to support them, then share at the next meeting

Additional point: Boundary review of gate access is underway and concern it shouldn't take away any green space.

Action: FoFP to keep the Forum informed.

b. Parkland Walk Simon updated on the proposed plans for Parkland Walk nature reserve to increase accessibility. Concern was raised by FoPW around a review being undertaken to consider signage and disability access. Now however it seems to be focussing on access for cycling and resurfacing with agencies such as Sustrans bidding for the work. It appears that Highways dept are leading this work. Concern around safety due to speeding bikes, and around biodiversity and the impact of this (linked to SINC) and need for natural resurfacing. Not enough consideration to nature recovery. This should not be about recreation or cycle access. Need to remind council that this is first and foremost a nature reserve.

Friends Forum voted to support FoPW in their efforts to steer this project to a satisfactory position.

c. Chestnuts Park FoCP raised their concerns and calls for widespread planning objection to a new scheme being developed in their small park. The Chestnuts project is a large Flood retention basin using water from the surface water drains in local streets, which are known to be highly polluted. Thames Water have said they may be able to address the worst aspects of the pollution, but not till the end of 2024 at the earliest. The project team - led by Highways Dept - are

determined to start the project before Xmas, and have the water running into the basin by next March 2024. For background on the project in Chestnuts here's the link to the planning objections including FoCP and the GRA's. https://publicregister.haringey.gov.uk/pr/s/planning-application/a0i8d000005U1n2AAC/hgy20232099?c_r=Arcus_BE_Public_Register&tabset-3892f=2

The park service should be representing the interest of the park and its users, not just following the money. There is a sense that Council is forcing the project forward and not understanding urban drainage. The FoCP noted the lack of time to respond to proposals. Need to solve this by moving back the timelines to reconsider the project as a whole and elements of it properly. There is concern that this will be decided by planning officers rather than go to the Planning Subcommittee where plans could be objected to and properly publicly scrutinised. FoCP seeking support on this. It was noted that a similarly controversial Queens Wood flood/drainage project led by Highways was cancelled and rethought and is now moving forward in a better way after intervention by the Friends there.

FoCP position is they want this postponed to enable proper consideration and an alternative design created. The Friends to be involved in all the decision-making. The Forum voted to support the FoCP.

Action: Friends will draft a letter to go to planning – raise concerns to councillors on planning subcommittee.

Action: Laura Dekker of FoQW to communicate with Ceri from FoCP.

9. The Forum's inclusion and diversity working group Liz Ixer reported on our sub-group, and the discussions at the Parks Summit. This group needs to meet up again and consider how Friends Groups can engage and involve a more diverse cross section of local residents from their local communities across the borough. One way could be to hold a special meeting of the working group, or the whole Forum, and bring in other interest groups, to stimulate discussion and joint activity.

Action: Liz and Dave to call another meeting of the working group.

10. Forum admin and process - sharing the responsibilities better

Action: Dave to write up an outline of the various work that goes into keeping the Forum going and effective so it can be discussed at the next meeting and responsibilities shared better. [eg booking, publicising and preparing for our meetings, plus charring and taking minutes; managing our email list, list of groups, and website; writing to and liaising with Parks Service officers; supporting new Friends groups; leaflets and stalls; etc]

11. AOB - Local Plan The Council is about to launch its 2yr-long revision of its 'Haringey Local Plan' which guides all planning and development issues in every corner of the borough. The forum noted that this will result in a long and large amount of complex consultation and engagement. However, it was important to ensure all green spaces should be protected. Some green spaces are vulnerable and need protection from development, for example, on housing estates.

12. Date of Next meeting - face to face at Bruce Castle Museum, Sat 6th November 10am to 1pm