

Haringey Friends of Parks Forum – General Meeting 7 September 2024

Present: Friends Groups reps: Dave Morris (Lordship Rec) - chaired, Quentin Given (The Paddock), Chris Chadwick (Priory Pk), Cathy Meeus (Parkland Walk), Frances Sanders (Hornsey Church Tower), Anna Pole (TCV), Thunder Raven-Stoker (Queen's Wood), Ceri Williams (Chestnuts Pk), Martin Laheen (Bruce Castle Park), Deborah Cawkwell (Manchester Gdns, Paignton Pk) - minuted; **From 11am: Council reps:** Glynis Kirkwood-Warren (Zonal Officer Manager); Lily Labonte (Physical Activity Officer); **Apologies:** Vicci Midwinter (Coldfall Woods & Muswell Hill Playing Fields), Kate Swade (Tower Gdns Pk), Liz Ixer (Railway Fields), Joan Curtis (Lordship Rec), Jane (Alexandra Park), Pamela Harling (Tottenham Green, Tottenham Cemetery & Wolves Lane), Klaus Kuerner (Bruce Castle Pk), Clare Parry (Downhills Pk), Joyce Rosser (Priory Common, & Rectory Gardens); **Council:** Emma Betts (LBH Community & Partnerships Engagement Officer), Sahina Choudhury (LBH Head of Parks Operations).

Document pack: Minutes of last meeting (1 June 2024), Minutes of Friends Forum/Parks Service Zonal Officers, Haringey Parks Zonal Map: infrastructure & repairs; Grassroots Community Networks in Haringey; **Publicity:** Tottenham Flower & Produce Festival 2024 (14 September); Age Well Festival (21 September); Women & Girls Need Parks: Make Space; A Walk in the Park (Haringey Parks guide).

PART 1

- **Minutes** of June meeting agreed, with Priory Park amendments (Chris will email to Deborah).
- **Matters arising:**
 - **Senior Officer attendance** - useful to have senior Council Officers, eg, Simon Farrow, at least once in while, so that he gets an overview of how the land lies for the Friends groups – Cathy to email. [Done – positive response]. However, we appreciate the benefit of the regular attendance of all the officers who always engage constructively & try to pass on relevant points to other officers.
 - **Need meeting with Nature Conservation Officer** (Annabel Foskett), especially for nature reserve green space like the Parkland Walk & also for Friends who have not yet met Annabel. Could there be a separate focused meeting with Annabel on Zoom? We have tried to arrange this previously, so far without success.
 - **Collating results of biodiversity surveys** Pamela encouraging people to contact her with details.
 - **Forum Inclusion Group meeting** - Deborah offered to convene some time after the summer.
 - **'Restore Nature Now' national demo** on 22 June - huge success – 50,000 attended, including from Haringey, & good positive atmosphere.
 - **Joan wrote Forum letter to MPs re need to fund parks properly** - 2 replies - they love parks, very positive, but no indication of them applying any pressure to secure the funding needed. Joan circulated.
 - **Forum Co-ordination Group:** needs to be set up & probably useful to have a specific WhatsApp group. This is for our own communication and collaboration between meetings - a lot of the stuff that gets done needs to be shared around more. Dave to set up a Whatsapp group.[Done]
 - **New Friends groups:** none reported.
 - **Haringey Networks:** Dave has published a small leaflet outlining 7 borough-wide residents' networks - Deborah to post on Forum website - https://haringeyfriendsofparks.org.uk/haringey_networks.php
 - **Forum/Zonal Team meeting:** Last month. Good turnout from Forum reps, plus 3 Council officers; some felt treading same ground as 2 years earlier due to understaffing and under-resourcing issues; organisational structure clarified & a chart has been circulated by email & also at this meeting. Most effective way to organize and monitor Friends / Council site meetings/visits is for us to keep own notes & to chair the meeting, and to keep a rolling maintenance bulletin or audit trail. Hard-standing parks audits are maintained by David Theakston - very good & detailed.
- **Local green spaces under threat:**
 - **Ally Pally railway corridors** - tree protection activists have raised concerns about clearance/cutbacks planned to important nature corridors due to maintenance and safety issues.

- **Crouch End Playing Field / CREOS** next to Highgate Wood School. School want to annex part of it and just use it for the school. Cathy asked what is the reason?? Campaign against it - "Keep the Playing Field Open" (we've seen off threats to White Hart Lane and Downhills Park in the past). Why can't we share? What do the Council say? Application has gone in to Planning. 'Town Green' - public access - can't apply for it if there's a proposal for development. Thunder to get something from the campaign to pass on to the list. Worries about setting precedents. Urgent!
- **New borough Local Plan.** Threat by Council to downgrade protections for some Metropolitan Open Land. Possible green spaces designated for housing. We need to insist on the full implementation of council policy that all public open space already designated in Plan should be protected with legal covenants through Fields in Trust. Agreed about 5 years ago – but (in)action by legal officers is holding it up. We need to campaign. Planning officers most powerful in the Council due to closeness to property developers who of course try to grab every space they can get hold of. The 2016 draft Plan caused uproar due to threats to some open space – the campaign was successful. We must be alert and ready to respond.
- **Hornsey Church yard:** Worries that its unclear who is responsible for it / shares responsibility. Might put the site at risk; it is becoming overgrown. Don't want it to become a 'no-go' area.
- **'Green Flag Scheme':** This year the Cabinet Member for the Environment has unilaterally decided to overrule Council policy and manifesto commitment (including in the new 15 year Green Spaces Strategy) to increase the number of Green Flag sites. Instead 11 green spaces in Haringey out of 22 are to LOSE their green flags whilst claiming this will not lower standards. The scheme is more than just a flag & an external inspection; it is a commitment to minimum standards, a 'process' with regular spotlight walks, management plan, TCV support etc. The Council admit this is a cost-saving measure due to the chronic underfunding of the Council. People reported standards falling, as well as less joint 'spotlight' site visits etc – examples were given. Some staff positions have been 'frozen'. We affirmed our view that site visits, regular reports, genuine Management Plans are all essential elements to maintain effective collaboration and minimum standards.
- **London and national reports**
 - **London Friends of Green Spaces Network:** regularly hold a series of seminars & meetings. The next one is a Co-ordination Meeting, followed by ones on Flooding, one on starting new Friends Groups, and one with London Wildlife Trust for Friends groups about sites of importance for nature conservation (SINCs).
 - **Good Parks for London** is a useful bi-annual audit/awards/appreciation event/report organised by Parks for London that works closely with local authorities. Haringey, in recognition of its collaboration with us drafting its new 15-year strategy, may well be praised during the launch in November. Booklet will be online. Dave has seen draft & was asked to say a few words. <https://parksforlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Good-Parks-for-London-2024-Collaborative-Solutions.pdf>
 - **National Survey from the NFPGS and Fields in Trust** - Please fill in any national surveys circulated to Friends Groups – they lead to good research and reports – which strengthens our voices and calls for action. The latest one looks at sites having or seeking protection (by Fields in Trust).

PART 2 (with Council reps) * * * * *

■ **Local Reports:**

- **Queens Wood:** Noted that Highgate Wood got on national news due to discovery of Roman kiln. Busy few months in QW. Well attended ancient tree walk. Walk for blind & visually impaired people. Bat walk with expert. Couple of working parties June & July - well attended. Plan Oct/Nov fungi walk. Hoping to commission entomology (insects) survey. Asked about bylaws, & asked re new cadre of enforcement officers (remit?). Relevant because o fly-tipping on Queens Rd. Reporting on council website - apparently photo size restriction which is problematic with modern mobiles. Established ecology sub-group within committee for surveys, regeneration.
- **Parkland Walk:** Bat walk with Cindy Blaney (London Bat Group) - delighted with teen asking fab questions. Grateful to TCV esp dead hedges to keep people on path & not wander into undergrowth &

disturb nature. 'Birdsfoot Trefoil' good for some butterfly - didn't work, but glad for the effort. When is next spotlight walk with Council?? Stanhope bridge works dominating currently – loss of habitat, but expected. Friends contacted by contractor re some trees - why not the Council's tree experts asked? Good news that friends are being consulted but also necessary to involve Council conservation team. Sub-group having conversations re developing Management Plan. Seem to be stuck in loop re detailed surveys (which take a long time to organise). Are they really necessary for a management plan?? Upcoming meeting with Annabel. Friends are crowd funding for surveys. There is a feeling that the Friends are being asked to 'front' something for the Council. Long-term maintenance an issue. Parkland Walk users complaining about electric bikes - Too fast. Dogs off leads a problem. Request to run events on the Walk should go to Council Events Team first, but good that the Friends are consulted..

- **The Paddock:** Wildlife spotting - posting pics on Friends FB group. Dragonflies on pond. Sparrow hawk. TCV based there and are improving site.
- **Chestnuts Park:** Friends have FB, and X. (TCV recommend using Instagram, which for them has better social involvement.) Need more people to be active. Emailed everyone letter re shock at Green Flag loss. Asked some questions which haven't been answered. Don't like the few days sudden intense Parks Service activity before green flag inspection. Mixed blessing. Sometimes workers rip out shrubs & put in geraniums. Beech hedges now towering high & need cutting. Hedges in playground covered in brambles. Friends feeling defeated. Supposed to have a revised Management Plan. Met with Kristie from Project Team who is seeking wider diversity of responses in consultation, including Sewing group. Chestnuts building needs attention and plan for regeneration. Can't raise any money because new lease needed. Affects plan for park. The controversial plan to deculvert a watercourse in the main playing field has at last been abandoned - 'lessons-learned' review promised, but still not held meeting with Simon Farrow. Young mums at Chestnuts School raised £8k for new playground at school. Need spotlight Walk and meeting with senior council reps. Friends due to hold their AGM. Held lovely event in Summer - Midsummer Fun - about 60 attended & gained 10 new friends. Aiming at parents of new schools.
- **Paignton Park:** Monthly litter 'PickNic' (last Sunday of the month) continues regularly with great support from regular Council collectors of rubbish: very valuable relationship. Glad to have had recent walkabout with Zonal Officer, Chris, as some outstanding problems: playground broken down & in a terrible state, child-safe gates not working correctly or missing; double-gates for maintenance use only almost always left open; table tennis table still has end-to-end movement; dangerous divots in centre of park used for football by children & adults. Plan for formalise Paignton Park working group into an official 'Friends' group, rather than being sub group 'under' residents association (Vartry Community Residents Association). Bulbs will be planted as well as some plants (lavender & crocosmia) in borders & the octagonal bed in the Community Square, as well as small bulbs round the playground (where is there is shallow earth due to a concrete fence footing). Triangle Centre is essential for park events, eg, tables, chairs, toilets, kitchen & rainy day fallback, but sometimes booking admin can take up a lot of time.
- **Hornsey Tower Churchyard:** 2nd oldest building in the borough. 13th century. Relationship with Priory Park parks serv ice team - huge improvement. Will take away green waste. Green waste bins coming - not sure when. TCV came & were very helpful. Had felt a bit glum about biodiversity in the church yard. Seasonal pond?? Will follow up with TCV. Loyal core of gardeners twice per month & some one-off intensives. Too much for volunteers. Getting overgrown & feeling may become a no-go area. Need help. Couple of years ago promised a tree survey. Some trees urgently need managing. One new tree died – planted by Trees for Streets. Still have issues with lighting. Some lights are on during the day. New small mower has arrived. Not heard anything about the agreement as to who manages the site: Highways or Parks. Tower top teddy Bear zip-line event - cancelled due to winds. London Open House - 21 Sept - has been v popular in the past.
- **Priory Park:** new tennis courts up & running since early Aug - v popular. Delay because of new access path. Finalising next year's calendar – goes to printers next week. 12th year. Doing fundraiser - Usually make about £500 - £600. Paddling pool busy all summer - no major shutdowns... Quite a lot of tree planting planned by council. Memorial trees. Norman Beddington passed away – had set up environment group - obituary in Guardian. Also bench for him in old bowling green financed by botanic

group. Meeting re new hedge. New gardener is very good. Maintenance on historic sundial. Elite Transformations running a boxing group. St Paul's Fountain - lovely meeting Millie & Emma – bid to National Lottery turned down by HLF. Will carry on pursuing.

- **Lordship Rec:** Serious problem with uncut border hedges turning into trees. Maintenance getting worse including flower beds. All benches going to be repaired. Problem with installation of new LED lighting - Half didn't work - got to relay the cables. Friends have 12 different autonomous volunteer working groups each month - going well in different parts of the park (lake, river, orchard and wood, plus litterpicking group). Friends annual Tottenham Flower & Produce Festival is planned to be bigger this year, involving more groups and activities. Loads of other summer events. Benjamin Zephaniah commemoration/ celebration planned at Lordship Hub for 3 October due to his Tottenham connections.
- **Bruce Castle:** Holocaust Memorial Garden - someone camping in it.

■ Council responses

- **Fusion withdrawal from Leisure Centres contract** has taken a lot of Simon Farrow's time
- **Parks Bylaws:** will take between 2 to 3 years to review and amend. Fairly comprehensive. Model set of bylaws produced by Secretary of State. Other councils have taken on as are. But nothing about encroachment & trespass. Want to include everything. Plus Licenses for dog walkers. Clauses re dogs on leads. Public consultation planned. Forum expect to be consulted before 1st draft. Possibility to be site-specific, eg, for e-bikes in a churchyard.
- **Green Flag:** Any issues on the controversial withdrawal for half the sites need to be taken up with Cllrs.
- **Queens Wood:** fly-tipping varies by place. Glynis aware it can be difficult to report in some locations.
- **Parkland Walk:** Glynis will take back issue re contractors asking about trees. E-bikes: lime bikes not allowed to be left in parks. Speed limitation within parks (can be done because all controlled with geo-location). Working now with Forest to do similar. Events issues - first point of contact is Events Team, then consultation with Friends. No inappropriate events will be allowed there.
- **Chestnuts Park:** Sahina wanted to be here today. Horticulture issues. Meeting needed with Simon Farrow for 'way forward' meeting.
- **Paignton Park:** Triangle Centre issue - Deborah to contact Glynis - how is lease set up? Could that be the problem? Deborah to talk to Glynis re 'flowerbed' work by Friends.
- **Hornsey Church:** we think lights are network issue. Liaison with Glynis. Dead tree replacement.
- **Bruce Castle and other sites:** homelessness and camping are sensitive issues (should use Streetlink to report). Any legal action takes a while. Great oak tree – fencing there to protect it, and stop fires. Conversation stalled.

■ **Activities:** People Need Parks programme still happening. Spring programme. Funding to start, then longevity. Ageing Well Festival - 21 Sept. Lots of Walking Sessions happening. Event hopefully next year around that. Any park activities, please let Lily know. 3 progs: Autumn/Winter, Spring, Summer. Also helping coordinate the Safety for Women and Girls meetings.

■ **TCV:** Paddock - delays next phase of work: paths, signs, benches, lining pond & educational building. Hoping to start in Oct or later. Status: "local nature reserve". Liaising with Council conservation officer. Railway Fields – working with Friends Group. TCV Volunteer groups going well – anyone can join.

■ **Staffing:** Jack has left Active Communities Team. Lou Taylor retired (thanks for your long service Lou!), replaced by Chris Cavaleri - Operational side senior to Sahina. Daniel Wales - Senior events officer leaving - will be recruiting new one. 2 new enforcement officers hope in post end Oct / beginning Nov - their remit pending bylaws changes will be based on Public Safety Control Orders - will work with safer neighbourhood teams. Project Officers - recruiting - normally 6 - currently 4 but recruiting only 1 extra (due to cuts).

- **Budgets:** The Forum needs proper financial information re parks service budget - it helps a lot to understand.
- **Green Flag – further discussion:** Many GF losses. Some already have other designations (eg nature reserve). Resourcing issue. Shouldn't be a drop in standards. Parks cut because can't manage green flag process. Spotlights & Management Plans flow from Green Flag. Needs to be registered that we are not happy. Manifesto commitment. Work in partnership means need to discuss with us and talk about this openly, not unilateral decisions from 'on high'. We need to mobilise if standards not maintained.
- **Project Team:** Project stuff needs to be separate from Zonal stuff. We need a further, more focused meeting, re standards, spotlights and Management Plans.
- **Recycling:** Council are considering what the first steps may be and when, re recycling in parks. We agreed at last meeting that we need to be involved in those discussions. Once the new operations chief is in post (Oct), then Council will deal with this. Simon has had no time because leisure centres coming back in-house.
- **Fields in Trust:** how many now? It was agreed all sites named in the current Local Plan would be legally protected. It is crucial that Covenants for all are in place. It was agreed the Forum will publicise this, and the Green Flag issue.
- **Paddling Pools:** Need to check before next year – Lordship Rec slope caused slipping; Bruce Castle access cover keeps being removed.