



London Boroughs Friends of Parks Forums – Survey and Summary 2019

By Helen Monger, for CPRE (London) with LPGT and LFGN - 12 September 2019

Key Points

- Some excellent work being done at the crucial borough-wide level regarding communication and coordination among Friends Groups, sharing good practice, partnerships with Local Authorities, and taking up strategic greenspace issues
- Patchy coverage of Borough Forums with varying degrees of links with their Friends Groups
- Wide variance in arrangements across Borough Forums that are set up
- Need more and stronger Forums, and better integration with LFGN meetings

1.0 Introduction

A survey on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (London) (CPRE) with the London Friends of Green Spaces Network (LFGN) and the London Parks & Gardens Trust (LPGT) was submitted by email to the LFGN list of borough forums' contacts through Survey Monkey in early July 2019. The aim was to uncover how many Borough Forums were active, who the key contacts were, what their issues and processes were, and to seek tentative interest in a meeting of reps from Forums. This was part of a wider ongoing initiative in partnership with a consortium (that includes the LFGN, CPRE London and the LPGT) to encourage all Friends of green spaces groups across London to sign up to the Big Green London Map on the Go Parks website.

2.0 Responses

There are 33 London Boroughs including the City of London. The theory was that each Local Authority would have a link with a Borough Forum which in turn had links with all the active Friends of Groups in their Borough which can bring common themes up. In practice things are arranged very differently in different areas. There are also a range of other organisations/groupings that have an interest in parks but do not necessarily fit the obvious framework. Examples include:

- Parks for London
- South West London Environmental Network (SWLEN)
- Friends of Bloomsbury Squares – a group of separate friends groups that join together within Camden but are separate from the Camden Parks Forum

3.0 Findings

A list of LFGN emails was provided dated 13 May 2019 listing contacts where know for a variety of forums. These were all contacted. There were 12 responses covering 15 out of 33 London Boroughs as follows:

- Barnet – new independent Forum just set up
- Brent – a developing independent Forum
- Ealing, Hounslow and Richmond occasional meetings – linked through SWLEN (a social enterprise bidding to manage community engagement on behalf of the different local authorities). SWLEN are potentially also working with Kingston.
- Hackney – a long-established but currently inactive independent Forum
- Haringey – a long-established and very strong and active independent Forum
- Harrow – a strong and active independent Forum set up 4 to 5 years ago
- Lambeth – a long-established independent Forum
- Lewisham – a strong and independent Forum set up 4 or so years ago
- Merton – a strong and independent Forum set up 2 years ago
- Redbridge – a Forum of a small number of groups
- Southwark – a currently inactive Forum
- Waltham Forest – an occasional Forum managed by The Conservation Volunteers
- Wandsworth – a newly-formed and developing Borough Forum. Interestingly there was also an individual response from a particular park within the Borough who was not aware of the Forum..

This was despite following up on numerous leads. For example email correspondence with Barking & Dagenham Parks Department went in circles but no named Forum contact provided, likewise Bexley. Need more time to pursue several other Boroughs but prioritising direct contact with Friends of Groups to get them signed up to GoLondon and Big Green London Map. But the London Friends of Green Spaces Network has provided the following additional information:

- Islington – an active independent Forum going around 10 years
- Bromley – a strong, active and long-established independent Forum
- Camden – Council hold regular ‘Chairs’ meetings of Friends Groups
- Croydon – an occasional Forum managed by The Conservation Volunteers
- Enfield – an active and long-established independent Forum
- Greenwich – a strong, active and long-established independent Forum
- Sutton – Council organise occasional Friends Groups chairs meetings
- Tower Hamlets – occasional efforts to set up Forum but only a few groups in borough

This represents around 24 boroughs with some kind of Forum (2 inactive, and 6 with occasional meetings organised for local groups by the Council or their agents).

Note: Parks for London also has a list of the number of groups per borough as estimated by themselves from a London-wide list, and by each borough as part of Pfl’s annual Good Parks For London audit.

3.1 Of those that responded to the survey

3.1.2 Common themes

Most reported some level of frustration with contact and action from the relevant local authorities. Key concerns were:

- Poor maintenance across parks (due to lack of Local Authority maintenance)
- Need for more public engagement
- Commercialisation with lack of return to the parks

3.1.3 Key Differences

The groups are arranged very differently. At one end, there is a loose affiliation of individuals (or even just one individual maintaining a contacts list), 3 or 4 Boroughs depend on an official outsourced Social Enterprise paid to encourage and arrange public engagement, and in some boroughs very clear and formal governance and vision.

Forum Operations and links to the Local Authority: Some Forums have regular scheduled meetings, sometimes serviced or led by the Local Authority with provision of meeting rooms and other support, whilst others struggle to get any meeting space or presence and participation from the local authority.

Communication styles – some are informal links between individual groups; others are growing social media groups – in particular Harrow is an exemplar of social media best practice.

4.0 Need for a meeting and topics

Of those that responded, it was difficult to find agreement on a date and suitable Forum Reps meeting place. Harrow Parks very kindly offered a location in October but realistically attendance will be too low. So it was agreed in discussion at the last LFGN general meeting to open up the next LFGN Coordination meeting for this purpose on 21st October at City Hall

Conclusion

Lots of variation on Borough Forums and what they can and could do – new Forums still being set up, and much potential for further development for both existing and for more additional Forums. Also need to develop the ability for Friends of groups to have direct access to LFGN and Go Parks. Work needed to strengthen sense of regional and London-wide collaboration and the concept of a ‘family’ of Borough Forums that interrelate with Local Authorities, LFGN and their individual Friends of Parks groups.