

London Friends of Green Spaces Network

On-line general meeting on Monday 8th June 2020

Attending: 32 reps from Friends Groups, Borough Forums, and London and national organisations. Dave Morris (Lordship Rec, and Haringey Forum – LFGN Chair), Alice Roberts (Campaign to Protect Rural England [London] and Hackney Downs – took notes), Laura Collins (LFGN/GoParks and Figge’s Marsh), Jean (Tooting Common), Alona Sheridan (Mayow Park, and Lewisham Forum), Richard (Wandsworth Common, and Wandsworth Forum), Pam (Woodcock Park, and Brent Forum), Susan Stephenson (Ealing), Ray Liffen (Sutton), Jenny (Holland Park), Monika (Sydenham Wells, and Lewisham Forum), Pat Gross (Wandsworth Park, and Wandsworth Forum), Adrian (Lloyd Park, Waltham Forest), Symon (Hilly Fields Park, and Lewisham Forum), Simon Walton (Hyde Park and Kensington Gdns), Catriona Sinclair (Burgess Park and Southwark Forum), Lucy (Ruskin Park, Lambeth), Chris Norris (Ruskin Park and Nesta), Miriam Ashwell (Caledonian PK, Islington), John (Mile End Park, Tower Hamlets), Emily (Dulwich Park, Southwark), Richard Desmond (Victoria Park, Tower Hamlets), Clare Argent (Tufnell Park), Suzanne Morpurgo (Tenterden, and Brent Parks Forum), Rob (Fr of River Crane, Richmond and Hounslow), Anthony (Tooting Common, Lambeth, and Woodfield Project, Wandsworth), Ian (Harrow Forum), Jenni Chan (Paradise Park, and Islington Forum), Tony Burton (Merton Forum). **And:** Helen Monger (London Parks and Gardens Trust), Tony Leach (Parks for London)

1. **Minutes of May 4th meeting.** Accepted as true record. <http://www.lfgn.org.uk/minutes-of-4th-may-2020-meeting/>

2. London and National Updates

Parkscommunityuk Some of the things London's Friends Groups had reported on 4th May that they were still doing during the pandemic made it into this nationally-circulated digest: <https://parkscommunity.org.uk/case-studies/how-can-friends-groups-stay-effective-in-a-pandemic-we-share-some-fantastic-examples-from-around-the-uk/> The www.parkscommunity.org.uk website, set up by the Friends of Lordship Rec for the NFPGS as a resource for all the UK's Friends Groups, is going from strength to strength - and is now doing regular twitter updates @ParksCommUK. As is the NFPGS @natfedparks

The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces (NFPGS), the umbrella network for the Friends Groups movement (of which we are the London section), has recently produced 2 major reports articulating the views from the grassroots. The first is a summary of the series of 9 'Parks and People: Stronger Together' regional conferences of Friends Groups held throughout England (including our London one) during 2019. <https://natfedparks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NFPGS-PAGCE-2019-conferences-aggregated-report.pdf> The second was a report of the NFPGS's Greenspace Community Empowerment Survey in which 380 Friends Groups gave their views on what kind of strategic support they felt was needed at all levels up to the Government. <https://natfedparks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NFPGS-Greenspace-Community-Empowerment-Survey-Report-June-2020.pdf> The voices of Friends Groups are pretty clear - greater recognition and influence for our movement at every level, good community/Councils partnership-working, more resources and better protection for our public green spaces.

Parks for London reported they had been producing various covid-related guides for parks managers/services, which can be easily found on their website. These include ones re volunteering, public toilets, takeaways. <https://parksforlondon.org.uk/covid-19-impact-advice-parks>

Nesta Re-thinking Parks projects Grant funded programme working with 13 parks projects nationally. In last 6 months of 2 year programme. Parks Foundation toolkit is here <https://www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/how-set-parks-foundation/> Will be publishing something on using data; on renewables; and on contactless donations. Also on community engagement/empowerment. Other learning publications will be at www.nesta.org.uk/project/rethinking-parks/ They'll be publishing something roughly monthly between June and September

London Parks and Gardens Trust Struggling financially due to having to cancel 'Open Squares' weekend this year. Still campaigning to save Victoria Tower Gdns next to Parliament. Happy for enquiries about Planning and encroachment threats to come to us - email: office@londongardenstrust.org Heritage listings for most of London's parks are now incorporated in <https://www.goparks.london/> map.

GoParks.London Map going well. Incorporating available info from a range of sources. Need all Friends Groups to register and animate/update their special page. Doing social media publicity.

3. Updates from borough forums

Brent Working with Friends of the Earth on active travel and transport. Issues with parks staffing. Problem of lack of toilets and the results. Working with community safety team and council officers to assist protection of parks and with information where needed. Continued to be active and made more connections as a result of virtual usage.

Harrow Awful problems with drug dealing, esp children's playgrounds. Working with the council and the police / safer neighbourhoods team. Couple of parks closed briefly for 2/3 days. Car parks were closed to stop people travelling too far. Increased density of people in the smaller parks. Have had a couple of Zoom meetings to try to keep in touch.

Hackney People using parks as a toilet. Huge issues with parties into the night and litter.

Haringey Massive increase in use pretty much all week but esp at weekends. Including new demographics. This is great news, but needs a properly-funded service to manage. Service is understaffed with additional work to do (fencing and signage etc) and some staff unwell. Also a large part of the parks budget is dependent on commercial events income, which is down to nearly zero. Forum continues to meet approx every 6wks by zoom – well attended, including by senior Council officers. Forum's Lobby/deputation to Full Council meeting to press for more resources for parks is on hold – maybe in July. Community-run centres and cafes struggling to survive massive financial losses during pandemic – Lordship Hub raised £31k via a crowdfunder effort.

Richmond / Hounslow within Crane Valley Friends group doing weekly usage surveys to see what's happening in the parks and open spaces and reporting back. Weekly use is about 300% of normal. But for spaces not well used before it's about 1000% increase. Loads of new social media engagement with new park users - around 2350 users on their group's Facebook now

Islington Forum continues to circulate info to groups. BBQs big problem and big problem with litter. Islington in Bloom is going online - people should submit photographs! Council concerned about the additional expense due to C-19 and Friends Groups are now looking at how they can develop volunteering programmes to help the staff so maybe able to solve 2 problems with one solution as people who are working from home can volunteer – also promote healthy and effective use of the parks.

Kensington and Chelsea. No Forum. But have many of the same problems.

Lambeth Just about keeping on top of things. Maintenance (an in-house team now) seems to be at a reasonable level

Lewisham Forum haven't met since lockdown. Huge increase in use of parks. Fewer litter collections - staff issues. Tried to encourage people to take their rubbish home. BBQs. Safer neighbourhoods team have had to come in. Similar issues to everyone else.

Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum Discussing: (1) more variability in maintenance by idverde (2) concerns over physical distancing and more littering (3) green spaces being eyed up for new cycling routes funded by TfL's StreetSpace funding (4) keeping up to date with changing rules, such as BBQ bans (5) worries that Merton in Bloom

may not run this year and (6) concerns over whether Merton Council's monitoring regime for idverde delivering maintenance contract will be relaxed

Southwark Forum is ticking over as a newsletter – get responses back. Big problems with litter / rubbish. BBQs have been banned, but people still having them. Toilets opening hopefully. Playgrounds not opening. In one park police want more lighting but concern is this is not great for biodiversity and it would bring people in parks at night. Thinking about giving out bin bags. Cycle routes are also a concern.

Sutton No meetings recently. Feel get good service generally from parks officials. Emails to relevant official usually gets things done.

Tower Hamlets Still trying to get the toilets open. Though Mile End park has no toilets, so people going in the shrubs. Friends of Victoria Park have been embroiled in a range of controversies re the park (to open or close?) but their facebook group has tripled in size.

Waltham Forest Parks open. All ticking over. Save Lea Marshes managed to persuade the council / licensing committee to turn down a big commercial festival and now the company have given up. A real win for the Lea Valley and its wildlife and biodiversity.

Wandsworth Forum meeting mid-May, got the council involved and the contractors. Signage was a big issue at the time. Useful discussions about signage at pinch points. Social distancing not going well, including among the increased number of joggers. One big beer garden. Police come but can't be there all the time. Litter and toilets a massive problem. Wandsworth had increase of 4 tons to 12 tons rubbish in one week! Vols gonna start litter picking. Concern about the drought on biodiversity and soil compaction etc. Also about transport. Elderly people worried about going to parks. People bringing sound systems/DJs. Wandsworth Park have lots of motorised scooters, skateboards, etc... problematic.

Westminster Last week in Kensington Gardens they removed 10 tonnes more litter than the corresponding week last year.

4. Other thoughts

- **Parks popularity.** How can we talk to all the new people and engage with them?

- **Micro mobility vehicle** Consultation running until early July (electric skateboard and scooters etc). Go to www.gov.uk and search under 'future of transport regulatory review: call for evidence....'

- **Dogs on leads?** Many have ignored putting their dogs on leads but many owners would like it. Debate over % compliance – 5%? 20%? Victoria Park got the dogs on leads rule removed. The government advice on dogs on leads was updated to include "consider having your dog on a lead".

- **To Zoom or not to Zoom?** Doing it on Zoom works really well, perhaps 50:50 online and face-to-face is the long term answer! 50:50 could work very well for those who cannot travel each time. Or is face to face irreplaceable?