

# London Friends of Green Spaces Network

## Minutes of General Meeting, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020 (by zoom)

**Present:** 25 reps from Friends Groups and their borough Forums in Hackney, Lewisham, Bromley, Haringey, Wandsworth, Westminster, Kensington, Enfield, Hounslow, Richmond, Lambeth, Southwark, Barnet, Harrow, Brent **Plus:** Reps from Parks for London, London Gardens Trust, National Park City, Campaign to Protect the Rural Environment (London), GoParks

### 1. Minutes of previous meeting: Agreed

### 2. Borough Friends Forums - updates

**HARINGEY** – continued to meet via zoom every 2 months, 12-20 groups. Groups generally continue to be very active. Continuing to lobby for more resources for Haringey's underfunded parks service (who have done a terrific job during the crisis this year). Working in partnership with Parks Service to develop new 15 yr open spaces strategy.

**LEWISHAM** – Last meeting 9th Sept. Lewisham Council has drafted a new parks strategy for next 5 years for Friends Groups to comment on. Parks maintenance contractor Glendale have been doing a good job during the covid crisis.

**BROMLEY** – Parks managed by idverde. Been quite a breakdown in comms between council and idverde, and with Friends Groups during lockdown. So friends groups have been mostly unable to do much volunteering. Some by individual groups. This should improve in 2021. There's a consultation on a 2021-2031 plan for managing green spaces, which seems to some to focus more on reduction of carbon emissions rather than looking after green spaces properly. A lot of feedback about issues of poor quality, low targets and need for effective action. Will be discussing with forum members.

**WANDSWORTH** – New Forum going from strength to strength. Met in Sept and last week. Support from local Councillor and Cabinet Member for parks. The contracts for various parks management aspects have been up for renewal. New Environment strategy and Biodiversity strategy are out – working hard to engage with friends groups. Promoting some rewilding. Spending £100,000 on trees over 2 years, with 700 waiting for planting this winter.

**ENFIELD** – New blue / green strategy out. No news regarding the Enfield Friends Groups' Consortium. Laura (for LFGN/GoParks) attended a recent Council-organised online meeting for Friends Groups.

**LAMBETH** – The Council are consulting on a capital programme. The Forum is very diverse. At an operational level, there's a big problem of e-scooters / extended use in general area.

**BARNET** – Forum has taken off well in last year but hasn't met since last LFGN meeting. Next meeting January. Do newsletters. Overall Barnet Strategy – analysis was done of quality and value of parks. Barnet don't have Green Flags as don't want to spend the fees. Now some parks are being viewed as 'low value'. Some are being looked at for 'energy generation / creation'.

SOUTHWARK – Forum operates via a newsletter, intermittent. MOL (Metropolitan Open Land) in Green Dale is under threat. Lots of new groups e.g. Trees for Bermondsey. Working quite well but also at loggerheads from time to time on planning issues e.g. two oaks which have been saved at Cox's Walk.

HARROW – Forum meeting via zoom – general meeting in Dec. Main concern is trying to get new groups on board but struggling to find banks to allow them to open bank accounts. They can constitute but obviously can't fundraise, or we can't transfer money to them.

HACKNEY – Consulting on 10 year plan for parks. Forum meeting about that last week - quite well attended. Hasn't been very active lately. Some continuity of attendance but need to do a bit better. Plan is reasonable and includes good responses to some concerns raised in the last year or two. Pilot scheme for heat pumps extracting heat energy from under the ground in parks.

BRENT – Forum is working with the council and with other groups like Clean Air for Brent, Brent FoE, various others which orbit around that. Now involved with proposed new 30 year strategy. Glossy looking document but so far not a lot of detail and not a lot of immediate goals for them to reach. So we're going on a training course via zoom and we're going to learn how to analyse it properly and respond. Under pressure, the council has created the Brent Environmental Network (includes the Forum) and planning a meeting with the Head of Environment. Interested in ground heat pumps and MOL issues.

MERTON – Forum meeting next week. A focus on felling of mature trees - there's been a spate and it's quite worrying. Continuing to liaise over general maintenance issues.

RICHMOND – Friends of Ham Lands reported they are involved with Richmond Biodiversity Partnership. Richmond Forum is chaired by SWLEN (now re-named Habitats and Heritage), no update available.

HOUNSLOW – Friends Forum is chaired by SWLEN (now called Habitats and Heritage) and haven't met recently so hoping this will happen soon.

HYDE PARK – AGM on zoom with 75 members. Park managers – good relations. But CEO won't talk money. Usually not a problem but commercial events cancelled due to covid so money is not rolling in. Otherwise generally OK. Cut back a bit on staff.

### **3. Updates from London and National organisations**

PARKS FOR LONDON - Good Parks for London 2020 (annual audit of all of London's parks services performances) came out last week – available on Pfl website. A great read!

LONDON GARDENS TRUST – Busy fighting applications for inappropriate development affecting historic parks. LGT have shortened their name.

LONDON NATIONAL PARK CITY – Continue to promote community action for greenspace and wildlife. Have set up a new round of NPC Rangers. Setting up a developers group to do with parks. Hoping to see 25 national park cities around the world by 2025.

CPRE LONDON – ‘10 new parks’ campaign is ready to launch. Also have #GreenSpace4All and Streets into Parks. Lots of campaigning going on. Read about it at [cprelondon.org.uk](http://cprelondon.org.uk) in the News section.

A MORE NATURAL CAPITAL - new alliance coordinated by CPRE London is a coalition effort creating a manifesto for the London mayoral elections scheduled for next May. LFGN (via Dave) has been actively involved, as have Friends of the Earth, Woodland Trust, National Park City, RSPB, TCV and others. Good to see the Manifesto calls for support for the Charter for Parks (including for parks to become a statutory, properly funded service). There will be a hustings meeting for all Mayoral candidates, and a twitter campaign to raise the profile of London’s greenspace and green issues generally. Will be promoted in the new year – all Friends Groups urged to publicise this joint effort.

GOPARKSLONDON – Now up to 200 groups’ listings on GoParksLondon map. Big thing now is getting ready to launch walking/cycling routes and publicity in each borough, planning for 12 boroughs next year. Working initially in Merton, Enfield, Brent and Newham.

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF PARKS AND GREEN SPACES / UK FRIENDS GROUPS MOVEMENT - The Parks Community UK initiative/website has launched a special strength-checker tool for all Friends Groups to be able to fill in a questionnaire and evaluate how they are getting along - and get a free written report back. Encouraging all groups to have a look and evaluate, find out where you can improve, get more members, be more effective etc. About 100 groups have already done this! Just google ‘Better Friends’ or go to [parkscommunity.org.uk](http://parkscommunity.org.uk) . Also 2 new guides on the website, one on campaigning to defend sites under threat. Second guide is on the importance of local site Management Plans and how you can help create or lobby for one.

### **Working Groups and Issues**

CARS IN PARKS Royal Parks are consulting on proposed road closures. Have a look on their website. In Hyde Park they have been closing on certain days for a few hours and there hasn’t been too much problem – slowly but surely progress! We have said we should have a discussion about restricting car use in parks. Also car parks in parks could be turned into something more useful. Tim Webb volunteered to start a document on cars/traffic and parks – others welcome to join him. Tim (Hackney Marshes) said he might be able to help.

NATURE CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY Alona has produced a superb 2021 calendar of dates relevant to biodiversity and other key greenspace themes. Anyone can look at it and people could think ‘ooh we could do something on that day’. It could be broader – ‘be nice to nettles week’ !!! It includes ‘outdoor classroom day’ so it is a bit broader. Dave will put it on the national website once it’s ready. It would be nice if someone could make an attractive graphic with it. Also Alona, Simon and others have been working on a ‘How to develop or enhance biodiversity in your greenspace’ hints / advice, working collaboratively with community and management. Roger (Barnet) and Dave (Haringey) offered to join in this working group.

PLANNING – Roger put together a response to the Government’s Planning White Paper – but didn’t submit in the end. The issues he set out on his last page, largely taken from national and regional policy, are things we can use in future for other planning policy responses and campaigns.

Dave explained LFGN have submitted consultation responses on an ad hoc basis over the last 10 years. We will now start a working group on planning policy issues – Roger will lead, Dave will be part of it. Others welcome.

GENERAL - Dave explained we can and should start influencing London's policies and practices regarding a wide range of green space issues important to our local groups and sites – and we want to achieve this with new 'quick project' groups (like the ones above).

Laura explained we're still looking for people who might help with a group on **litter/waste** and one on **cycling in parks** – contact Laura if you'd like to work on these issues.

### **LFGN coordination and issues**

LFGN STRATEGY/VISION We agreed previously that it would be very helpful to have a vision/plan for what we're trying to achieve. Roger has drafted a quite an ambitious aspirational document. Dave ran through the document to see if people are broadly happy with it. It was agreed!

#### Comments:

- Richard (Wandsworth). Do we aspire to make LFGN a one-stop shop for support info for friends groups. Still a bit unsure where you should go if you're a new friends group. Dave responded: [www.parkscommunity.org.uk](http://www.parkscommunity.org.uk) is that national resource created by and for Friends Groups. But our [www.lfgn.org.uk](http://www.lfgn.org.uk) also has a lot of informative and inspiring news and info re London. Key ongoing support for local groups should be through having active Friends Forums in every borough. They make a huge difference.
- Rob (Friends of River Crane) – felt the proposals made sense. A lot of progress has been made over last few years as well. It would be useful, as well as showing ambition, to say where we are now and how much progress we've made.
- Will the document be publicised? Will it be tracked? Alice explained it depends a bit on resources. Roger said part of the plan is to engage with e.g. London Councils and GLA to try to gain some resources there. A simplified version / action plan could be created to be tracked..

LFGN 'OUR PATCH' Excellent monthly bulletins continue – special thanks to Laura and Alice. Dave suggested we continue to have different borough Forum updates in the bulletin. Could people ensure they forward the bulletins to all groups in their borough?!

LFGN WEBSITE – ticking over well. Thanks to Adrian and Kerry for managing the site.

### **AOB**

- We noted lots of info and communication in the 'chat' page during the meeting. This has been retained for reference.
- Should probably meet on Zoom at least once every 2 months. Dave will send out dates. Next LFGN meeting is a strategic coordination meeting (for borough forum reps and others involved in working groups etc – all welcome) by zoom on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> Feb, 6pm.