

London Friends of Green Spaces Network

MINUTES OF LFGN GENERAL MEETING - 13.09.2021

List of Attendees:

Friends Groups/Forums/Organisations reps: Dave Morris – *LFGN Chair* (Lordship Rec, and Haringey Forum), Adrian Stannard – *LFGN website* (Lloyds Park, Waltham Forest), Alona Sheridan – *LFGN Biodiversity* (Mayow Park, and Lewisham Forum), Laura Collins – *LFGN Support* (Figge's Marsh, and Merton Forum. Plus Go Parks), Monika Sudek (Sydenham Parks, and Lewisham Forum), Peter Woodward (Chislehurst Common, Bromley Forum), Simon Braidman (Harrow Parks Forum), Miriam (Caledonian Park, and Islington Forum), Roger and Lindsay (West Ham Park, Newham), Helen Monger (London Gardens Trust), Simon Walton (Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens), Ed Stannard (Habitats & Heritage - Richmond and Hounslow Forums), Ed Allnut (Clapham Common), Geoff Juden (East London Garden Society), Tony Leach (Parks for London), Jonny (The Conservation Volunteers, Waltham Forest), Susan Jellis (Bloomsbury Gardens), Richard Fox (Wandsworth Common and Wandsworth Forum), Roger Harris (Sidcup Garden, Bexley), Kerry Hood – *LFGN website* (Havelock Recreation Ground, Bromley Forum), Maria Barker (Colliers Wood Parks and Open Spaces, Merton).

Minutes of last meeting (7th June). Approved.

SPECIAL DISCUSSION: STRENGTHENING OUR GROUPS - How do we increase and diversify our memberships, for example in terms of age, ethnicity, social class and range of interests?

Dave did an introduction, explaining that it is in everyone's interest that Friends Groups seek to increase and diversify their membership generally, and their 'core' of active members in particular. The aim being to be as representative as possible of the range of users of each local space, and their surrounding communities. He noted that the following guide was circulated prior to the meeting: <https://parkscommunity.org.uk/community-involvement/making-our-groups-stronger-and-more-diverse/>

The idea is to strengthen the influence, effectiveness and long-term sustainability of groups by attracting and involving, for example..

- many more younger people, including families with children, older teenagers and young adults
- people from a range of ethnic backgrounds, especially those making up a substantial part of the local community
- less well off people who often have less time to spare or who live on specific nearby estates
- those interested in sports, children's activities, and other non-horticultural greenspace activities

The discussion focused mainly on how the above can be worked towards, drawing on local experiences (some successful, some less so) and ideas. Contributions included (in the order given):

- Broaden appeal by attracting the widest range of interests - desire to target teenagers to young adults and people in their 20's, including black and minority ethnic (BAME) young people.
- This has often proved a struggle – can get good attendance and short-term involvement but joining a committee and organising events is still a problem,
- Good partnership working, forming new user groups or encouraging existing user groups to get involved.
- Capturing people onto a core email group.
- Time-poor life for many people.. they will participate but not join groups or take active committee roles. Social media meetings (zoom) can encourage time-poor people to engage as they do not have to travel.
- Have regular publicised meetings and an active facebook page and website.
- A membership can be quite large but not everyone is active and attends events and meetings regularly – the same people often older and white middle class form the active membership.
- 30-somethings and teenagers often not attracted to Friends Groups but they will attend active events which are well advertised especially through social media – key is instagram and twitter.
- Linking membership to material benefits eg 50% reduction of cost of haircut from local hairdresser.
- Look at the park from the user groups point of view - what do they want? Capture views by surveys. Public engagement on site at events with event attendee recording sheets and just talking to people in parks. This is the most important point of all - talk to park users.
- The use of Survey Monkey.

- Get local companies to support local friends groups and use their social media skills to create surveys etc.
- Companies can also support via direct volunteering through organisations like the Big Alliance based in Islington. They are allied to the East London Business Association (ELBA) and the Macquarie Group Foundation and so they have an outreach beyond Islington.
- Corporate volunteering can also be advertised via Team London. Get a lot of no shows for individuals from companies.
- Corporates rarely form a very close relationship with a particular parks Friends group as their staff often come from a much wider area.
- Good Gym local volunteers – good for short-term tasks.
- Duke of Edinburgh youngsters - volunteers in parks, those on Silver and Gold Awards are more likely to closer connect to parks.
- Link with adjacent/nearby schools and get them into the park
- There are also Brownies/Guides and Cubs to join volunteer events in the park.
- Sports brings in the younger people so vital to form links with sports clubs using the park and encourage sports in parks - the sports groups involving young people working with the Friends groups will encourage responsible use of the park
- the more people and user groups are in parks the more they feel they have a stake in the park and they will help look after it
- To attract families form Junior Friends Group 4/5 year old up to 12 years with parents to get new people eg see <https://www.goparks.london/articles/the-ups-and-downs-of-starting-a-youth-group-first-hand-experience>
- Excellent guides on attracting and working with 14-24yr olds here: <https://www.fieldsintrust.org/future-proof-parks>
- Link up with Parent and Toddler groups.
- Ensure the Friends group has its own stall at events both in and outside park and advertises upcoming events.
- Advertising using the noticeboards can be successful , laminated sheets on railings, newsletters especially e-newsletters.
- Friends groups when working in parks should have sign up sheets on them.
- Fun events such as Newhams Biggest leaf pile – where kids can jump into giant piles of collected leaves – make sure you capture email addresses via sign up sheets etc.
- Nature events such as bat walks or night walks or overnight camps can attract large and new audiences. Candlelight procession event with refreshments and live choir.
- Also use the heritage of the park and of the local area helps people to realise there is a park there - there are very many park non users.
- An on-line video or drone footage of the park may promote the park and also footage of the events and activities posted on line.
- Outreach to outside user groups to help run greenspace events such as residents association, faith group/building, or rotary group etc - brings new people into the site and new opportunities to strengthen park group by forming alliance or new individual people joining Friends committee
- Encourage people to join a Friends' special core/coordination email list. This could be done systematically, with all members invited to join it if they wish to become more involved.
- Take time out and research who are the park neighbours and then approach them and build a relationship. Form partnerships with these groups especially as they want to reach out themselves to strengthen their own groups. Use their publicity to advertise events and activities in the park such as a guest article. Example of a local Mosque been to 12 events and a few have independently joined committee.
- Bring together the different user groups and Parks Service to form a wider co-ordination or stakeholders body (as in Lordship Rec, Haringey).
- Healthy Parks initiative in Islington – getting people into parks; elderly, disabled..Meditation in parks, exercise groups. Have started regular wellbeing walks as part of a Parks for Health project. Each walk starts in a different square and one of the relevant Friends group gives a very short introduction to the square before the walk sets off . Hoping this will introduce new people to the gardens and the groups. It is to be part of social prescribing
- Partnership with other Council services such as Libraries - outdoor reading and events leading on from reading charities.
- Large initiatives can bring in new people – the no car corridor Hackney to Newham has brought in new people (Tower Hamlets).
- Having an active Councillor promoting parks and the work of friends groups – get the friends info onto Councillor's email bulletins.
- Generally be open and welcoming of new people and new ideas

BOROUGH FORUMS – SOME BRIEF UPDATES

Merton Forum Not met for a while.. relations with Cabinet member that covers parks good, but more reticent relations with other sections of the Council.

Haringey Forum Had 12 meetings on zoom in last 18 months. Now back face to face. 10-20 groups attending each meeting. Working in partnership with Council to develop a new 15-year Open Spaces Strategy, currently checking a raft of draft documents. Parks Service staffing levels to be increased. Some issues with Planning Dept re protecting open spaces.

Harrow Forum Current communication with Council needs to improve due to loss of key officers. Council in middle of restructure.

Wandsworth Forum Working with Enable who is the outside contractor, and grounds maintenance company Continental Landscapes. Meetings continue. Recycling pilot scheme. Survey of personal trainers. One park's 150th anniversary. Wandsworth Common commemorative tree planting scheme.

Bromley Forum Last meeting was AGM back in April. Working well with Council but there have been losses in parks officers.

Lewisham Forum Not met since lockdown. Forum at the mo needs new chair. Communication with/from Council needs improvement. Reps present considering calling Forum meeting.

Islington Forum Ticking over nicely on zoom. Re-started open air meetings, have done a hybrid meeting with 5/6 people on line and 15 in park. Council very positive and supportive - but suffering from low staff numbers and funding. Health initiative continues.

Richmond and Hounslow Forums Coordinated by Habitats and Heritage. Recruiting new members and relationship good with Council. A conduct code has been brought in for Friends Groups.

Tower Hamlets Currently setting up new Forum. No Council interface with Forum as yet. Council have produced an in-house Open Spaces Strategy.

Waltham Forest Forum needed.

Bexley New Parks Forum mooted.

LONDON AND NATIONAL GREENSPACE ORGANISATIONS UPDATES

Parks For London The annual 'Good Parks for London' audit/report is expected in November. Grant funding received from GLA allowing new posts to support work of organisation.

Go Parks London Promotes parks and friends groups, and runs the GoParks Map with a page for every site in London. They are asking all groups to promote Go Parks, eg retweet and repost. Having publicity drives borough by borough. Encourage parks groups to mention Go Parks in newsletters. Also every Friends Group (700) should register for the Go Parks map – over 300 so far.

The Conservation Volunteers National organisation. Support volunteering. Give advice, support and training and tool discount. Offer grants for new friends.

National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces Voice of the UK's Friends Groups movement – LFGN is the London section. Addressed the recent All Party Parliamentary Group on Parks, which have now agreed to call for a review of the 2017 recommendations of the parliamentary Inquiry into The Future of Parks. NFPGS seeking to strengthen its www.parkscommunity.org.uk platform and also its national infrastructure so as to better support the movement.

The More Natural Capital campaign Run by 12 green organisations including LFGN, CPRE and Wildlife Trusts, for the Mayoral elections. They are preparing a report on the implementation of green policies to mark the 1st 100 days of Sadiq Khan's new term. It has been decided to continue the campaign until the local Council elections in May 2022. Asks local groups to put pressure on candidates for next local election.

London Gardens Trust It is a small membership group promoting and protecting historic greenspace sites. They want volunteers to write objections to planning applications that will damage/destroy open spaces and also volunteers to help run the Open Gardens Festival on 11/12 June 2022. See what LGT has done in 2020:

<https://londongardenstrust.org/about/reports/impact-reports/>

Campaigns to save open spaces The London Gardens Trust continues to campaign vs the threat to **Victoria Tower Gardens** adjacent to Parliament. This is the proposed Holocaust memorial which would take up 25% of the open space in an area of open space deprivation. A Judicial Review has been launched on the grounds that the Act of Parliament designed to protect the open space has been ignored. **Campaign to defend Clapham Common.** Use of the Common for large and controversial commercial music events – Lambeth Council is making £300,000 for staging 3 music festivals on the Common. These large events attract 40,000 fans and shut large parts of the park off for many days and damage the ground. The campaign hope to get a public enquiry into this issue. Campaign website:

www.ourcommon.co.uk **Southwark Council** are proposing to build on green space principally at Peckham Green and this being opposed by the local community. **Campaign to Protect Rural England (London)** Continue to defend greenspace across the capital, especially Green Belt, by working with local campaign groups. Issue reports.

LFGN WORKING GROUPS

We have Biodiversity and Planning working groups as part of LFGN. A cycling-in-parks group has also been proposed. **Biodiversity Group** – Alona reported the group had completed its early planned activities, and is interested in any new themes/activities. **Planning Group** – developing a standard response to proposed controversial developments (rather than specific more detailed responses), and to help signpost advice and support for Friends groups. Will respond to policy consultations. **Proposed new Group on Major Events in Parks** – responding to the effect of large commercial events in parks, encouraging local groups and campaigns to share experiences etc. Previous interest in such a group was shown 2-3 years ago by Friends of Finsbury Park, Friends of Victoria Park and Battersea Park Action Group. Laura Collins, Ed Allnutt (convenor) and Geoff Juden all expressed interest, and further people will be sought. A first meeting by zoom will be publicised in the next copy of the LFGN's monthly 'Our Patch' bulletin.

Next Meeting: LFGN Co-ordination Meeting, 1st November 2021 6pm. Reps from all borough Forums, and all those who wish to help coordinate efforts across London, are invited to attend.