

London Friends of Green Spaces Network

General Meeting minutes – Monday 11 September 2023

Attending [Reps from Friends Groups and Forums]: Dave (chair) – Lordship Rec, Haringey Forum and LFGN; Laura (notes) – Figge’s Marsh, Merton Forum and LFGN/GoParksLondon; Tony – Stonyfield Park; Henry – Perivale Park; Tricia – Epping Forest and Wanstead Park; Jenny – Norbury Park; Simon – Misc green spaces, Harrow; Benoit – Eckington Gardens; Mandy – Culpepper Community Garden; Peter – Chislehurst Common; Charles – Coronation Gardens, Wandsworth; Miriam – Caledonian Park, Islington Forum; John – Brookway Biodiversity Project; Catherine – Cannizaro Park; Johanna – Bury Lodge; David – Lee Forum; Adrian – Lloyds Park, Waltham Forest; Carolyn – Cannon Hill Common; Nia – Arnos Park; Mary – Yeading Walk; Roger – Cherry Tree Wood, Barnet Forum; Marcia – Waterlow Park; Simon – Hyde Park; Clive – Manor Park; Jonathan – Pinner Village; Frank – Mill Hill Residents Association; Alona – Mayow Park and Lewisham Forum; Gill – Harlesden Town Garden; Larry – Keston Common, Bromley Forum; Symon – Hilly Fields, Lewisham Forum; Mary-Jane – Cannon Hill Common and Merton Tree Wardens; Jeff; Suzanne – Brent Forum **Other organisations:** Helen – London Parks and Gardens; Charlotte – Habitats & Heritage; Tony – Parks For London **Apologies:** Roger – West Ham Park, Newham Forum; Jenni – Islington Forum [Apologies for anyone missed out]

1. Discussion – how we work with councils – what is going well and what can be improved?

Friends groups [FGs] are bringing management of green spaces back into the community. Years of austerity cutting council budgets has led to reduced support and communication with friends groups in some instances. Factors to consider in relationships between friends groups and council are: walkabouts, meetings, communications, issue resolution, maintenance and reportage, project management, mutual respect/appreciation, collaboration with forums, knowing who to contact, and raising awareness of the role friends groups play. There is a wide range of how councils interact with FGs, from councils with dedicated officers who work with FGs under a memorandum of understanding, to councils who are working to establish the total number of groups operating within their borough.

A FG in SW London commented that the groups in their borough meet regularly with the contractor and have a good relationship which involves creating new green spaces, improving biodiversity and enriching existing green spaces. The friends groups are charged a nominal fee to hold events but the key is to have a positive outlook and attitude toward the relationship.

A FG in NW London commented that while there is a good relationship with the grounds maintenance teams and the council appreciates the work of friends groups, they struggle to feel heard and build relationships with the council parks team, even to the extent that dangerous issues are not resolved in a timely manner and require much persistence by the friends.

A FG in SW London commented that they appreciate how short staffed the council is and try to support the council by helping out which often can lead to support in return by the council.

A FG in SW London commented that they feel the council is focused on achieving Green Flag awards and neglect the green spaces that haven’t been targeted for Green Flags. Sometimes they offer to support the council by taking on things on their own but never hear back from the council.

A FG in NW London echoed the comment that the maintenance crews are excellent but that officers don’t communicate well.

A FG in SE London commented that they have good relationships with councillors in their area, but that it is difficult to recruit and sustain volunteers.

A FG in NW London commented that it is difficult to find funding opportunities.

A Forum rep in NW London commented that the forum is growing and they work closely with other groups in the sector to help lobby for parks, and that working with councillors is yielding some results slowly. There are issues with the contractor and an underresourced parks department but they have an excellent relationship with the team in the depot. They are trying to get a foothold in supporting the development of the council’s strategy for green spaces.

A FG in west London commented that it has been difficult to set up a forum – that the council had taken initial steps but it was overly complicated and unclear. Attempts to form a forum independently had not taken root.

A FG in NE London visited parks in other parts of London and commented on both what is achievable (Hampstead Heath) and what happens when parks are underresourced/neglected (QEII Park). There is a community liaison officer for the friends groups in the borough but not particularly supportive to friends groups. The maintenance teams are good but friends groups feel the council wants to monetise parks and make money through inappropriate events.

A FG in NW London commented that the council is strapped for cash and it can be hard to communicate with them. They used to come to meetings but now the friends group struggles with maintenance and maintaining volunteers as the council is less involved. It can be difficult to get volunteers to take on a committee role, for example treasurer.

A FG in SW London commented that working with ever-changing personnel is a challenge. The forum has been independent since 2011 and receives a grant from the council. The forum is positive about working with the council and has undertaken projects in biodiversity.

Dave summarised that the situation is patchy, but with lots of examples of good practice. Large commercial events can strain relations but it is difficult when councils are desperate to raise money. Working with councils will require patience and slow progress can be made. It is vital to create and strengthen forums to help support the relationship between friends and councils.

2. LFGN Working Group updates

The biodiversity and planning working groups will hold an event on Biodiversity Net Gain on 26 September at 7pm on Zoom. Find out what this means for your friends group and how you can harness BNG to improve your green space. **The dogs working group** is hoping to develop some materials that can be shared by friends groups to encourage safe management of dogs, respecting wildlife, humans and other dogs. **The climate resilience working group** is meeting later this month. Note: Anyone interested in joining a working group should contact Laura on laura@cprelondon.org.uk

3. Updates from London-wide organisations

'London Parks and Gardens via our national body (The Gardens Trust) is a Statutory Consultee in the planning process. As a result we are theoretically consulted on all building development applications that may impact on registered historic landscapes. We like to ask Park Forums and/or individual Friends of Parks groups to feed in to our responses to the Council's Planning Applications Committees (PACs). We rely on the information in our inventory: <https://londongardenstrust.org/conservation/inventory/> Please do check the entry for your park as we welcome corrections and updates.'

Habitats & Heritage work in SW London – specifically Richmond, Kingston and Hounslow. Please get in touch if they can help recruit volunteers, improve/advise on biodiversity and rewilding or conservation. <https://habitatsandheritage.org.uk/>

National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces is working on developing policy and promoting friends groups. NFPGS is the voice of the FGs movement. LFGN is the London section. <https://parkscommunity.org.uk/betterfriends/>

Parks for London has done a piece on grassland management and published its Good Parks for London report over the summer. In December they are launching a new green space quality manual with categories including biodiversity, safety for women, and climate resilience. <https://parksforlondon.org.uk/>

4. AOB

Check out the **Breathe London** website and register for information on air pollution around your green spaces. <https://www.breathelondon.org/>

15 September is World Cloud Appreciation Day – take photos and upload them to the Cloud Appreciation website/map to share with others. <https://cloudappreciationsociety.org/>