

CASE STUDY – Brighton and Hove Green Spaces Forum



Website: www.bhgreenspaceforum.org.uk

Email:

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1) How and when did you come together and form an area forum?

The Forum was established in late 2017 following a number of different 'green' initiatives (Community University Partnership Project; CityParks' Rangers campaign and the B&H City in Bloom driven VACOS project). It became apparent that there was lots of good work going on in the community, but people felt isolated and uncertain about where to go for help or advice. Some key individuals involved with the aforementioned projects responded to this need by taking action to formally establish the Forum. The primary objective being to provide a hub around which member groups could come together, more easily network and share ideas as well as communicate more efficiently with the local Council. We have a constitution and mission statement.

2) How many groups or members in the forum, and how many have attended in the last 12 months?

We have a membership of 88 groups which we estimate equates to about 1,000 individual members. It is difficult to be certain about this figure because the fortunes of the various groups change as people come and go. Some groups are very small while others have a flourishing and active core membership. Attendance at our two events in the last year (see below) has been outstanding.

3) Has anything been difficult or challenging?

Our biggest challenge was the move from project type proposals to a fully constituted organisation with a bank account. This had to be driven hard and required some funds for an initial web site build.

Our next, very time-consuming challenge was making contact with all the groups across the City, validating them and asking them to register with the Forum. The Forum's website is now regarded by Council officers and councillors as the 'Go-To' resource for all communications with green space volunteers.

The building of a web presence was seen as very important by members. It has been prioritised and developed into a physical hub that members can communicate through. We are very proud of our 'Friends of' group website page which provides comprehensive details of all Forum members.

4) What successes have you achieved?

- In 2018 the Forum worked with B&H City in Bloom to promote the RHS In Bloom 'Its Your Neighbourhood' competition to members. This included a seminar on how to get the most from entries. That year the City saw its biggest ever take up of the competition, with many groups achieving high scores. Interestingly the member groups who attended the seminar got as much from sharing experiences with one another, as they did from the subject of the session itself!

- More than 30 people representing 30 groups attended the Forum's first Annual Meeting in October 2018. It was the first time green volunteers in the city had come together in such numbers and was widely seen as a milestone event. The output from this meeting has formed the basis of the Forum's future priorities.
- A 'Spring Seminar' in March 2019 on biodiversity, delivered by one of the UK's leading conservationists, from the University of Sussex. More than 100 members attended and thoroughly enjoyed the event.
- Business students from the University of Brighton constructed and undertook an on-line questionnaire seeking groups' views on their training needs. 45 group responses were received which will enable the Forum to support the Council implement its Volunteering Policy which '*aims to create a consistent approach to volunteering.*'
- We have excellent working relationships with CityParks' Rangers who, in consultation with the Forum, provide an all-day Volunteer Leadership training course which equips volunteers with the necessary training to supervise green workdays for their groups (including insurance cover). So far, more than 12 volunteers have gained this qualification
- We have contacted all local councillors elected in May 2019 giving them the names and contact details of the green volunteer groups active in their Wards. For councillors with Wards containing more than 4 green space volunteer groups, we have suggested Ward/Area specific events. This has been very well received by councillors, helped raise the profile of green space volunteers and helped cement the Forum's role with them.

5) Why do you think you were successful?

We have set realistic and achievable objectives, carefully staying true to our key objective of providing help and support to green space volunteer groups. We have a small committee which works efficiently and effectively to make key decisions.

In addition to the event type activities we have run (see above) we are also now seeing benefits re the conduits we have provided enabling collaboration between member groups. The learning from one group can now be easily shared with others. An example would be the installation of a water butt next to a listed building. One group found a way to install this neatly and get the necessary permissions at no cost, this has been shared with another facing the exact same issue.

Another example would be the coming together of groups to physically help one another. In one situation a group put an appeal out for help cutting blackthorn to encourage a particular butterfly on their site. Three others responded and they had a great morning together making short work of the task. In another situation 3 groups worked together with CityParks Rangers to coppice Hazel and Chestnut from a local woodland and then use it to build a natural fence around a wildlife pond in one of our City centre parks.

All these activities and successes are adding up to grow the reputation of and confidence in the Forum.

6) What's happening now with your Forum?

Perhaps the biggest challenge for the Forum was getting momentum with members and partners like the local Council. Key to this has been the building of trust, delivering on promises and

responding fast to requests and questions. Not all our member groups work on City Parks managed sites, this can create issues when those groups need support. We are currently liaising with the Council on improving channels of communication.

7) What is planned for the future?

It has taken some time to build a validated membership and momentum. Specific intentions for the future follow:

- Our next big event will be our members open forum in the Autumn. This will again give an opportunity to members to meet one another and share issues and ideas.
- We are planning a high-profile forum event in early Spring focused around a topical issue.
- We want to improve our contact/rapport with local councillors in all political parties. This in order that the views of local residents are uppermost in their minds when they are taking key decisions about the allocation of resources in parks and open spaces.
- We want to support the Council to develop a more consistent approach to volunteering.
- We want to encourage inter group activities and intend to further promote our events calendar to include volunteer workdays.

8) Any other comments or information you would like to share?

Scrub clearance on the Downs



Brighton and Hove City Park Volunteers Creating a hedge border.





Brighton and Hove City Park Volunteers - Bulb planting