

**General Meeting Minutes followed by
Trustees meeting**

Zoom Meeting

Saturday 12 September 2020



Present:

Dave Morris (Chair)	London Friends of Green Spaces Network (LFGN) + Haringey Friends of Parks Forum
Sarah Royal (CEO)	Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)
Martin Willis (Treasurer & Vice Chair)	Nottingham Open Spaces Forum (NOSF)
Michelle Furtado (Network Coordinator)	Green Tides (Adur & Green Spaces Worthing Partnership)
Antonia Savvides	Harrow Parks Forum
Barbara Rouse	Sefton Friends of Parks
Cliff Munn	Brighton & Hove Green Space Forum
Jenni Chan	Islington Friends of Parks Groups
Kirsten Thorburn	Edinburgh Green Space Forum
Lynda Kitching	Leeds Parks & Green Space Forum
Mark Fiddy	Friends of Glasgow Parks Forum
Peter Underwood	Croydon Parks, Woodland & Green Space Forum
Rob Groves	Friends of Thurrock Parks
Shelly Quinton-Hulme	Trafford Friends of Parks & Green Spaces
Nigel Sharp (Secretary)	North West Parks Friends Forum (NWPFF)

Apologies:

Alona Sheridan	Lewisham Green Spaces Forum
Colin Cooper	South-West London Environment Network
Gill Moore	Parks Community UK
Keith Elder	South Staffordshire Friends Group Network
Sally Sanderson	Horsham Green Space Forum
Tim Wright	Sunderland Green Open Spaces Forum

Minutes of previous meeting (28.3.20) & Matters Arising

Minutes were agreed.

Matters Arising

See Trustees mtg. mins.

NFPGS Update

National review (DM)

During 2019 NFPGS led a series of successful regional conferences around England ('Parks and People: Stronger Together') to improve national coordination and build the network. [Funding limited it to England]. These events were led by DM / MF, backed by Locality and Groundwork, and supported by funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

A report was prepared and circulated in June, highlighting the commitment and contribution of parks and green space community groups, the importance of community empowerment and value of peer to peer support and local, area and national networking. The conferences and report stressed the need for adequate funding and protection of the nation's parks and green spaces. And the need for adequate support infrastructure through the NFPGS (currently unfunded).

Although the conference development grew from the Parks Action Group¹(PAG) this body has subsequently been inactive owing to competing Govt demands (Election/ Brexit/ Covid-19).

Additional information was prepared by MF through a national survey – details at: <https://natfedparks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NFPGS-MHCLG-Survey-Report-Summary-23.4.2020-converted.pdf>

Collectively these initiatives effectively doubled the NFPGS contacts database, raising the network profile and strengthening the grass roots parks movement.

NFPGS has been supporting The Parks Alliance <https://www.theparksalliance.org>(TPA) to prepare 'Make Parks Count' a report to support the PAG and make a business case to HM Gov. for increased funding. The report is available at: <https://www.theparksalliance.org/making-parks-count-the-case-for-parks/>

Another sector report – prepared by The National Trust made recommendations for a major £5.5bn investment in parks: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/press-release/new-research-shows-55bn-fund-needed-to-level-up-access-to-urban-green-space-as-part-of-uks-green-recovery>

A more recent and highly detailed report by Friends of the Earth <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/englands-green-space-gap> calls for £4-5m annual funding for the sector to address deficiencies, and praises the Friends Groups movement.

An NFPGS survey (Jun/Jul) reviewed, at the behest of the MHCLG, the impact of Covid-19 with 800+ groups contributing within 48hrs – further evidence that the network is creating a responsive movement. This, and our Chair, were then quoted positively in a Govt press release about the vital need to keep parks open. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-secretary-welcomes-response-to-his-call-for-parks-to-open>

The Parks Community Project developed through Friends of Lordship Rec. is a 2yr programme including the one-stop shop website <https://parkscommunity.org.uk>. A new resource to be launched 24/9 is a community group health checker 'Better Friends'. These initiatives have been supported through Nesta with a 'People Power' leaflet to highlight community empowerment in parks also due soon.

Networking (MF)

Alongside the project work, MF has continued to provide communication and promotion including regular MailChimp bulletins, updates and additional social media activity, linking with sector partners including Parks Community UK, Fields in Trust, etc. Twitter (@NatFedParks) has almost 1900 followers.

AS highlighted the value of Facebook and it was noted that the NFPGS natfedparks site is in need of updating and further development and promotion.

NFPGS development and funding (NS)

The network has developed as a voluntary body but it is recognized that additional

¹ Established by HM Gov in response to the Public Parks Enquiry 2016-17 – details at: <https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/public-parks-16-17>

<p>resources are essential to sustain and develop NFPGS activity and ambitions.</p> <p>A funding working group of trustees and other key personnel has met 3 times and is developing proposals for development and investment. A pragmatic approach has identified a series of options comprising staff and resources considered necessary to support and develop NFPGS including a national network, regional coordinators, ancillary communication and fundraiser roles, and development of Parks Community UK work.</p> <p>A scoping briefing paper has been prepared as the basis for discussion with key partners, with consideration of operational outcomes and potential funders also being explored.</p> <p>NS noted that although the pandemic has changed the funding landscape with many funders prioritising emergency funding and pausing regular funding programmes, future funding will inevitably have a Covid-19 context and response related outcomes. With this in mind it is recognised that the huge value of parks and green spaces has been highlighted by the pandemic, while community resilience initiatives including capacity building, engagement and activity are also likely to be important areas for future funding support.</p> <p>Early discussion – notably with National Lottery officers – has been encouraging and NS noted the potential for NFPGS to meet strategic ambitions of both the National Lottery Community Fund and National Lottery Heritage Fund.</p> <p>The working group is continuing to develop project options and potential funder links.</p>	
Area Forum Updates	
<p>[NB some projects and initiatives were highlighted by members as of wider interest. Actions show items to be shared, if possible]</p> <p>Thurrock (RG) A relatively new Forum, developed by Friends of Hardie Park as part of the Nesta Rethinking Parks programme includes 20 groups working to show how Friends groups can add value.</p> <p>Glasgow (MF) https://www.facebook.com/GlasgowParks/ Affected by lockdown and reduced activity. Supportive links with the City Council, approx. 46 groups (10-20 active in the Forum). Encouraged greater community ownership, and raised profile of issues – esp. litter currently.</p> <p>Edinburgh (KT) 73 FGs. Good level of membership of Forum, supported groups with details of volunteer activity guidance during lockdown. Zoom network mtg. planned, shared examples of Covid-19 risk assessment. New Friends groups developing, support from City Council with Parks Accelerator Fund project to develop park sustainability.</p> <p>Brighton and Hove (CM) http://bhgreenspaceforum.org.uk Formed 3yrs ago, 92 member groups, up to 80% active. 2 member mtgs per yr., usually with a guest speaker presentation, last mtg March 20. Work closely with the City Council, includes development of a volunteer leadership course to enable groups to lead on a site plan of works under the Council insurance. Approx. 40% take up.</p> <p>RHS gardening (in bloom?) and In Your Neighbourhood have helped group development, provide judging criteria as framework for site improvement. Groups affected by Covid, reduced to individual activity but resumed activity following risk assessments. A survey has helped show how use of parks has changed in response to the pandemic – more intensive use – shared with Council. Parks affected by loss/ redeployment of parks staff (60% reduction).</p> <p>Forum has developed partnerships with other key local agencies e.g. CPRE Sussex. Forum</p>	<p>RG</p> <p>CM</p>

has entered for local awards.

Leeds (LK) <http://www.leedsparksforum.org>

Established 8 yrs, now 92 groups. Green Spaces Forum to include cems, woodlands, etc and link with key partner organisations e.g. RSPB, RHS, W Yorks. Wildlife Trust.

Setting up Love Leeds Parks, a fundraising charity – links to the Leeds Community Foundation with £23K grant. Fundraising through an online Festival 'Give a Little Back' campaign raised £3K, helped raise Forum / Fund profile.

Debate re. litter – a recorded debate including the Forum, volunteers and Keep Britain Tidy (KBT), chaired by the University.

Now available at: https://youtu.be/af7_moOXOPM

Forum set up by the City Council, current work to develop a Memorandum of Understanding and support future work with the Council on activity.

Trafford (SQ-H)

Active over 15yrs with links to 30 groups. Last met Dec.19 – zoom mtg. planned, links with the Council have improved recently and supported the membership.

Birmingham (SR) <http://bosf.org.uk>

A charity now supporting 130+ groups, new groups forming. Supported by funds from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. Regular newsletter and zoom social coffee mornings for friends groups and partner organisations, including funders to develop support.

Guidance for volunteers, risk assessment info on website, regular online meetings with Council parks. Planning a blended conference – online/ face to face sessions with focus on impact of Covid-19.

BOSF collate volunteer activity data (registered the equivalent to 23,000 volunteering days last year) – provide small donation to groups for their returns, groups receive insurance cover. Planned litter pick (with KBT) now jeopardized by renewed local lockdown.

Nottingham (MW) <http://nosf.org.uk/index.html>

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/NottinghamOSF/>
Established 4yrs with support from City Council, 50-60 groups. Noted increased site use but associated litter issues. Council involved with Parks Accelerator Programme, ongoing issues of strategic review and funding.

North West (NS) <https://nwpff.wordpress.com>

Regional network est. 2012/13 to provide bridge link between the region's few hundred individual friends groups, around 7 Forums and the NFPGS. Activity affected by loss of key members - particular challenges affecting regional Forum – hard to sustain on voluntary level over extensive area and large potential membership – communication and capacity issues. Last met March 20 – need additional active members, activity focussed on workshops, conference deferred to 2021. Retain profile with twitter @nwparksforum linked to website.

Adur & Worthing (MF) <https://greentides.org.uk>

During lockdown continued to recruit new Committee members and strengthen. New strategic project to develop wildflower areas.

Sefton (BR)

Local focus on Derby Park, Bootle – celebrations for 125th anniversary, and Sefton's 'Borough of Culture' affected by Covid-19. Links with Green Sefton (Council) and Sefton CVS support to develop Friends group network further – previously met twice yearly – includes Friends of Beach groups.

SR

<p>London http://www.lfgn.org.uk Regional network for the 700 FGs across the city, supporting development of local area Forums, now 18-20 of 33 boroughs . 2-monthly mtgs (good turn out by zoom) covering local and strategic issues.</p> <p>Islington (JC) Smallest of London LAs, parks open and busy through lockdown, well supported by Council. Network meets every 2mnths, 40 Friends groups, up to 20 attend. Volunteer gardening has increased with support of staff on furlough, many users discovered 'new green spaces'.</p> <p>Croydon (PU) https://www.facebook.com/groups/1524365977855433 40 groups, relatively informal forum including wider interest groups. Borough is very green but traditionally relatively low level of site use, now increasing, reflected by increased facebook interest. Commuter town which has found increased value in local facilities and amenities – now aim to capture new volunteer support. General concern at loss of Council resources and role of community groups who may be expected to take on more (i.e. above the previous 'additional value' role). Additional concerns re. development threats, relaxed planning conditions, increased financial pressures etc.</p> <p>Harrow (AS) https://www.facebook.com/harrowparks/ Forum has held zoom mtgs, although groups have been unable to work there has been recruitment of members. Positive impact of site use off-set by site issues – BBQ / parties / 'pub use' of parks. Project work with Plantlife to diversify verge management, increase biodiversity also looking at park mowing regimes. Make extensive use of fb pages.</p> <p>Haringey (DM) http://haringeyfriendsofparks.org.uk Long established (20yrs), mtgs every 2months, 4yr long lobbying strategy to get more resources for borough's parks – lobbied to get a parks scrutiny committee, commitment to get all parks protected by Fields in Trust and key parks supported by site based staff. Full Council debate in July (by zoom) following 2500 signature petition. Funding issues but a 15yr Open Spaces Strategy being developed by the Council and Forum, ensuring the Council 'maximises aspirations' for green spaces.</p>	
<p>Discussion</p>	
<p>Consider key challenges from Covid-19 for parks / parks community groups. Issues raised included digital tech and capability – potential exclusion issues esp. for older volunteers and members due to lack of equipment, services, skills. Include need for support with networking platforms – e.g. zoom, What'sApp and other digital communication media inc. facebook, twitter and more alternative platforms to engage young people.</p> <p>Consider making YouTube 'DIY / Friends Groups' guidance videos, etc. Noted the value of zoom also facebook esp/ locally to like and ink with other networks and groups. Scope for development of additional resources through Parks Community UK website.</p> <p>PU highlighted need for sector groups to be more inclusive, more diverse.</p> <p>Noted scope to engage more widely and share good practice to develop peer support. Zoom has shown potential for wider involvement, more regular mtgs.</p> <p>PU suggested streamlining member update input with brief reports of key issues ahead of the meeting to enable key, common issues to be identified for meeting discussion.</p>	
<p>Any Other Business</p>	
<p>Additional comment from zoom chat:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - JC - Islington is also involved in a Parks and Health national project. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SR - Birmingham also involved in the Future Parks Accelerator programme – details at: https://bosf.org.uk/projects/naturally-birmingham-future-parks-accelerator-project - KT - Additional reports to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o European Environment Agency https://www.eea.europa.eu <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/healthy-environment-healthy-lives o EnvironmentAgencyhttps://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ https://www.gov.uk/government/news/investing-in-nature-is-an-investment-in-the-nhs-says-environment-agency-chief-executive - NS – Covid-19 has generated a wide range of reports + press items – he'll share a summary of links with the mins. - LK – recommend respond to MCHLG consultation re. Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Keen to involve communities from the beginning in 'zoning' areas for development or not. Green Belt, green spaces can be put into 'Protected' zones along with some Conservation Areas. It was suggested the Gov wants to be seen as keen to break the hold of the volume house-builders, and promote 'local distinctiveness'. But also suggested it is controversially keen to promote and strengthen the power of developers, and to remove community challenges and input into planning committee decisions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future 	
Date of Next Meeting	
Provisionally: November 2020	all

Trustees Meeting

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Minutes of previous meeting (28.3.20) & Matters Arising	
<p>Minutes were agreed.</p> <p>Matters Arising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public Liability Insurance– agreed to defer pending change in level of NFPGS activity and increased potential risk. - No progress on MoU with Social Farms & Gardens - Possible Awards for All (NLCF) bid deferred (fund is paused at present anyway) - Roland Bruce is no longer a trustee – need to update records, advise Charity Commission - MW / DH has added a donation button to natfedparks website 	<p>DM</p> <p>MW</p>

Next steps	
<p>Countrywide initiatives, projects, partnerships and campaigning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping of gaps in sector support could be useful. Need to consider additional partner links, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o NAVCAhttps://navca.org.uk o NCVOhttps://www.ncvo.org.uk o Localityhttps://locality.org.uk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ My Community https://locality.org.uk/services-tools/my-community/ - Agreed to consider possible MoJ links with these organisations - The Parks Community UK website has provided a focus for collating/ sharing resources, NFPGS site is less active – there is a need to coordinate. Also a need to review impact and ‘traffic’ web hits, downloads, etc. This support will be enhanced with the launch of the Better Friends Strength Checker <p>Communications (internal and external)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - may be useful to ask groups re. support/ contact - Parks Community UK are developing a 2 Question survey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Re. added value of Friends groups- aim to develop an online tool, inputs to include vol. hrs, funding raised, activity, etc o How have groups been affected by Covid-19, what are the local issues, needs, advice, support required. - consultation and community involvement will support future funding bids - need for a dedicated communications/ social media role - existing include twitter, MailChimp newsletters, only limited Facebook presence - Agreed to set up a Comms Working Group. RG & AS agreed to offer further support and advice <p>Finances and funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MW noted need to recruit additional accountancy support to verify the accounts and report to the Charity commission. Will need a more experienced treasurer if successful in our funding bids. A role request is required to promote the need for support. - Next funding working group meeting 6 October [postponed to 10th Oct]. 	<p>DM</p> <p>RG AS</p> <p>DM MW</p>
Any Other Business	
<p>All wished MF well in her new venture and agreed to designate a new role as NFPGS International Networking officer. MF elected to that role, but there will be a transitional period.</p> <p>Dave to do a presentation about the UK Friends Groups movement at a World Urban Parks online international conference. https://natfedparks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/NFPGS-Community-Involvement-and-Empowerment-WUP-ppt-9.2020.pdf</p> <p>Post mtg. comment MF (Glasgow)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NFPGS could benefit revisiting the Charter, engaging with Charter partners sharing updates on their ongoing commitment, to the Charter, promoting action in support of potential funding opportunities . - Additional value and benefits of parks re.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o health & wellbeing (Covid-19 response) o climate change mitigation 	