

# Future Parks Accelerator Community Voice Network Meeting Minutes

Zoom Meeting



Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021

## Present:

Chris Blythe	Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)
Sarah Royal	Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)
Suzanne Morpurgo	Brent Parks Forum (BPF) [attending in support]
Jenni Rowe	Edinburgh Green Space Forum (EGSF)
Anni McLeud	Edinburgh Green Space Forum (EGSF)
Kirsten Thorburn	Edinburgh Green Space Forum (EGSF)
Antonia Savvides	Harrow Parks Forum (HPF) [attending in support]
Sarah Manton	Nottingham Open Spaces Forum (NOSF)
Miriam Ashwell	Islington Friends of Parks Forum (IFoPF)
Anna McKane	Islington Friends of Parks Forum (IFoPF)
Dave Morris	National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces (NFPGS) + Parks Community UK 'Rethinking Parks' project (PCUK)
Cherry Underwood	Nottingham Open Spaces Forum (NOSF)
Penny Tarrant	Plymouth Open Spaces Network (POSN)
Dave Curno	Plymouth Open Spaces Network (POSN)

## Apologies:

Jean Glasberg	Federation of Cambridge Residents Associations (FeCRA)
Wendy Blythe	Federation of Cambridge Residents Associations (FeCRA)
Rob Acton-Campbell	Bristol Parks Forum

## Welcome and Introduction

Sarah (BOSF and NFPGS) chaired the meeting and welcomed all. Dave Morris (NFPGS) took the minutes. At the February meeting of 20 of the UK's Area Forums of friends groups it had been agreed to call a meeting of Forums involved in the Future Parks Accelerator programme. Great to see such a good turnout (representing most of the FPA projects around the UK)! As this is the launch of a new Network the notes below are quite detailed to 'give some background and set the scene'.

Note: The official summary of the Future Parks Accelerator programme is to be found here: <https://www.futureparks.org.uk/>

*This states it is a 'collaboration between the National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Trust and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHCLG). By working with nine different Local Authorities and their partners from places across the nation, our programme is designed to protect and develop natural resources in urban areas, and make sure quality green space is accessible for everyone, now and into the future. We selected nine places – covering 20,000 hectares and impacting a population of 5 million – for their ambitious and creative plans to put*

<p><i>green spaces at the heart of local communities.'</i></p> <p>The Future Parks initiative is investing more than £6million of National Lottery and MHCLG government funding, plus £5m-worth of advice and support from National Trust experts in conservation, fundraising, volunteering and green space management.</p> <p>The 9 areas are: Birmingham / Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole / Bristol / Cambridgeshire and Peterborough / Camden and Islington / Edinburgh / Newcastle / Nottingham / Plymouth</p> <p>All winning bids demonstrated four key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making green spaces central to everyday community</li> <li>• giving the public a bigger role in how green spaces are managed</li> <li>• ensuring green spaces contribute more to the public's mental and physical health</li> <li>• transforming the way the green spaces are funded to secure their futures</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Area Forums' FPA Updates</b></p>	
<p>Forum reps provided a very brief overview of their Forums, and their involvement in their local project based on their own impressions and experiences so far. It should be noted of course that the covid pandemic has affected the development of the overall FPA programme to a greater or lesser extent in various towns.</p> <p><b>Birmingham</b></p> <p>The Birmingham Forum (BOSF) is well-established, and involves 130 groups with new groups developing. Do monthly BOSF bulletins. Good relationship with City Council. Considerable input to Future Parks Accelerator programme, called Naturally Birmingham, from Day 1. NB have provided funding to BOSF to support their work and liaison with NB. A fundraising Foundation has been proposed - BOSF are saying they can fulfil such a function so its best to support BOSF and its own fundraising potential rather than set up yet another organisation. Mustn't duplicate or sideline existing efforts. Lots of ideas, including £10k seed funding for local Friends groups. NB also do bulletins – this is the February one:  <a href="https://mcusercontent.com/c006e35b60f26a06b7247667b/files/d0477dca-d191-46e7-9762-b9c79f50cec8/2021.02_FPA_Feb_Newsletter.pdf">https://mcusercontent.com/c006e35b60f26a06b7247667b/files/d0477dca-d191-46e7-9762-b9c79f50cec8/2021.02_FPA_Feb_Newsletter.pdf</a></p> <p><b>Edinburgh</b></p> <p>The Edinburgh Forum involves around 57 of the 71 friends groups. In the last year they have continued with zoom meetings, achieving increased attendance. Good relations with Council. Involved in Future Parks Accelerator programme as a signatory, on steering group and attend board meetings. Good communications. Some good research being done. 8 'workstreams' (eg ecology, partnerships etc), but could be a bit scattergun or over-ambitious. Involved in community engagement stream. Some 'pilots' are planned. Some complex and challenging aspects. A fundraising Foundation is being considered, but concerns re relationship issues with the Forum.</p> <p><b>Islington / Camden</b></p> <p>The Islington Forum is well-established and represents dozens of friends groups. It operates in a small borough which includes many small sites. Has been holding its meetings on zoom (around 20 groups), and has a good relationship with Council. The FPA covers 2 London boroughs, Islington and Camden. The reps present couldn't provide any update from Camden, but noted</p>	

that many Camden open spaces had good sports/activity facilities. [DM: It is believed Camden Friends Groups don't have their own independent Forum but a history of Council-led meetings with Friends Groups chairs]. The FPA focus is on public health, and measuring and demonstrating in detail the benefits of greenspace for people's health generally, and specific people in particular (eg those with health problems). Islington Forum involved from the beginning. Working with GP practices, and social prescribing. Trialling some rangers. Also wellbeing and fitness activities in particular parks (including outdoor gym, yoga etc). Covid has undermined much of this of course. Council being careful to work with existing organisations and not tread on anyone's toes. Some FGs prepared to take on some extra responsibilities. Council parks service really struggling financially.

### **Nottingham**

The Open Spaces Forum has been going for 4 years, originally Council-led now an independent charity with around 30 groups. Involved in FPA early on, lots of community groups around the table willing to share ideas and skills. However since then meetings and info has dried up. Have asked for seed funding for community groups/projects. Forum has asked for funding for a post to help increase capacity and fundraising – but no success with this yet. Instead the idea of a Foundation seems to have dominated recent FPA time. Parks service really struggling financially.

### **Plymouth**

Plymouth Open Space Network is well-established. Was originally set up by the Council, then developed into an independent body run by the Friends Groups. Report similar issues as in Nottingham, but more so! FPA project focuses on encouraging volunteering and public health. It was set up with almost no input from POSN. Very little communications. POSN were told there wasn't money available for community groups. FPA seems to be bypassing the POSN and seeking out direct links to some of the Friends Groups, whilst at the same time suggesting POSN change their constitution. POSN keen for a more positive relationship.

### **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough**

Federation of Cambridge Residents Associations (FeCRA) sent apologies. It includes around 100 small groups including green space and river groups. Issues include income generation pressures from green space also housing development concerns. Interested in linking together the greenspace groups better.

### **Bristol**

The Parks Forum sent apologies. It has been active since 2003 and represents around 40 active groups. The chair of the Forum is also chair of the Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation charity set up as part of the Rethinking Parks programme to support community greenspace projects. The FPA project reported in detail to the Oct 2020 meeting of the Forum, extensive minutes of which can be found on the Forum's website here: <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk>  
More info: <https://www.futureparks.org.uk/bristol>

### **Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole**

There doesn't appear to be a friends groups' forum, but there is a Parks Foundation: <https://www.bournemouthparksfoundation.org.uk>

### **Newcastle**

We've not heard from the Parks Forum for a few months. 33 of Newcastle's parks and 60 allotment sites are managed by Urban Green Newcastle. It was set up in 2019 following 90% cuts to parks budgets over the previous 7 years. Last summer the CEO of Urban Green called on the government 'to commit 5% of infrastructure investment over the next five years to an

<p>Urban Green Infrastructure Growth Fund'. In their FAQ, Urban Green say: 'As outlined in our Articles of Association, the rules that govern how we operate, Urban Green Newcastle will form a community representation group, and continue to hold regular meetings for the chairs of all constituted parks groups, to provide updates, discuss strategic issues going forwards, and explore how we can best work together.' See: <a href="https://urbangreennewcastle.org">https://urbangreennewcastle.org</a> Info about Forum here: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/pg/NewcastleParksForum/about/?ref=page_internal">https://www.facebook.com/pg/NewcastleParksForum/about/?ref=page_internal</a></p> <p><b>Parks Community UK</b></p> <p>NFPGS has a newly-developed platform to support and empower parks friends groups – Parks Community UK. It was originally set up by the Friends of Lordship Rec in North London as part of the Rethinking Parks (RP) programme (a precursor to the FPA programme). There is now a dedicated website <a href="https://parkscommunity.org.uk">https://parkscommunity.org.uk</a> as a 'one-stop shop' providing advice, guidance and case studies relevant to all the UK's friends groups and Forums. Dave, the NFPGS Chair, who helped run the PCUK project, shared some of his experiences with the RP programme and the importance of speaking up for and supporting community empowerment within funded projects and programmes. See this final report. People Power In Parks: <a href="https://www.nesta.org.uk/project-updates/people-power-parks/">https://www.nesta.org.uk/project-updates/people-power-parks/</a></p> <p><b>Note: Harrow Forum and Brent Forum</b> reps also gave a brief update on their own activities and their interest in the FPA programme.</p>	
<p><b>Discussions</b></p>	
<p>It was noted that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Authorities and FPA projects need to ensure good relations with Friends Groups and their Forums. Nurturing these relationships needs to be a real commitment, and not just taken for granted.</li> <li>• Good communications and transparency with Forums is essential for proper engagement and involvement throughout all stages of FPA projects.</li> <li>• It was felt there were external pressures in the various projects to set up Foundations, but the success of these might vary considerably depending on the local demographic and other local issues. For example the Leeds Foundation seemed to be struggling, with up to £1m invested but very low fundraising achieved (maybe only £50k so far?). Any Foundations would need to have the active support of Forums, and not replicate or sideline their activity.</li> <li>• The FPA projects are currently all conducting a mid-term review of their progress. It would be expected that Forums would be asked for their honest appraisals so these can be fed in to any reports.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Conclusions</b></p>	
<p>Reps present agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to set up a FPA Community Voice Network, supported by the NFPGS.</li> <li>- to meet as needed to share and exchange views, and support each other.</li> <li>- to ensure the voices of the Friends of Parks Groups and their Forums are fully engaged in the local projects.</li> <li>- to disseminate the lessons of the FPA programme throughout the Friends Groups movement.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>AOB / Next meeting</b></p>	
<p>Next meeting in May 2021.</p>	