

Annual General Meeting Minutes

Zoom Meeting



Saturday 27 January 2024

Present:

Dave Morris (Chair, NFPGS)	London Friends of Green Spaces Network (LFGN) + Haringey Friends of Parks Forum
Paul Ely (Research, NFPGS)	Parks Community UK
Sarah Royal (CEO, NFPGS)	Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)
Shelly Quinton-Hulme (Interim Treasurer & Organisational Development, NFPGS)	Friends of Trafford's Parks and Green Spaces
Nigel Sharp (Secretary, NFPGS)	NW Parks Friends Forum
Barry Johnson	Association of Manchester Open Space Societies (AMOSS)
Rosie Novis	Basildon Parks & Countryside Volunteers Network
Chris Blythe	Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)
Suzanne Morpurgo	Brent Residents and Parks Forum
Cliff Munn	Brighton & Hove Green Spaces Forum
Len Wyatt	Bristol Parks Forum
Barbara Rouse	Friends of Derby Park, Sefton
Sally Sanderson	Friends of Horsham Park, Horsham
Diane Ward	Friends of Saltwell Park, Gateshead
Lisa Atwell	Green Tides (Adur & Green Spaces Worthing P/ship)
Jenni Chan	Islington Friends of Parks Groups
Tom Bliss	Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Forum
EanMacKeller	Newcastle Parks Forum
Sarah Manton	Nottingham Open Spaces Forum
Nicola Dempsey	Sheffield Green Spaces Forum
Norman Jones	Stockport Greenspace Forum
Pat Gross	Wandsworth Greenspaces Forum

Apologies:

These included:

Michelle Furtado (Network Coordinator, NFPGS)	Green Tides (Adur& Green Spaces Worthing P/ship)
Angela Tait	Bradford Parks Forum
Kirsten Thorburn	Edinburgh Green Space Forum
Colin Barson	Friends of Greenwood Community Forum
John Jones	Medway Urban Parks and Green Spaces Forum
Laura Collins	Merton Friends Forum
Marion Wolstencroft	Natural Basingstoke
Victor Cadaxa	Sunderland Open Spaces Forum
Ann Ault	Walsall Friends Group Network

Welcome and Introduction	
DM welcomed all and outlined the Agenda as an introduction to the meeting.	
Minutes of previous AGM (5.11.22)	
Minutes of the previous AGM had been circulated to those due to attend prior to the meeting. These were approved.	
Annual Report and Officers' Updates	
<p>A link to the NFPGS Annual Report was circulated prior to the AGM. The report is also available on the NFPGS website at: https://natfedparks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/NFPG-Annual-Report-2022_2023-Final.pdf</p> <p>Chair update (DM) DM provided a brief summary of the report and the sector since the previous AGM:</p> <p>National Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Friends Groups and Area Forums recovery is ongoing, post Covid. - Funding for Local Authorities continues to decline, with loss of staff (including to support community activity). - Budgets are now at crisis level with non-statutory services such as parks particularly vulnerable to cutbacks. <p>NFPGS activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NFPGS is not funded, all activity is volunteer led. - Current priority is to seek revenue funds to sustain the role of the NFPGS as the charity supporting community groups in the parks sector – urgently require dedicated members of staff. - Achievements include the continued development of the Parks Community UK website https://parkscommunity.org.uk as a resource provided by Friends groups, for Friends groups. - The site hosts the Better Friends audit tool designed to support and strengthen the community sector at: https://parkscommunity.org.uk/betterfriends/ - The latest report based on data from 400 groups is available on the NFPGS website at: https://natfedparks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/NFPGS-PCUK-Second-Report-2023.pdf - To date around 450 groups have used the tool. - Additional community sector support is provided through the parks forum e-mail: parksforumsuk@lists.riseup.net - Communication is important to support a potential membership estimated to comprise over 7,000 groups, with 60,000 active members contributing some 7m hours annually to support UK green spaces, a critical resource in an under resourced sector. - NFPGS has established operational links with joint memorandums of understanding with a wide range of sector bodies including: Keep Britain Tidy; Fields in Trust; The Conservation Volunteers; Groundwork and The Gardens Trust. Latest is CPRE. - These links are important to ensure sector-wide collaboration, and community input and a voice in sector activity and initiatives. - With adequate NFPGS resources the impact of our movement could be greatly 	

amplified.

DM concluded with thanks to all groups and their volunteers for the continued commitment and invited questions or comment from members.

- EMcK (Newcastle) noted the need to ensure sector co-ordination, otherwise groups could be competing for the same funds (a concern for his local parks communities).
- SQ-H highlighted the scope for groups to collaborate, with Area Forums potentially providing the basis for stronger, joint funding bids.
- LA (Green Tides) suggested some Area Forums could contribute towards the continued role of NFPGS.
- DM acknowledged that last point however stressed that NFPGS remains committed to maintaining support for the community sector without a membership fee, ensuring the membership is fully inclusive and open to all the UK Forums (many of whom have little or no funds).

Treasurer update (SQ-H)

- SQ-H summarized the accounts which include some historic funds from a previous charitable donation, augmented with contributions derived from activity such as speaking at events, conducting surveys for other organizations, or other sector support.
- Outgoings include fees associated with website hosting and bank charges.
- Full details are shown in the annual report (see earlier link).

Secretary update (NS)

- NS advised that NFPGS receives a wide range of enquiries annually – often enquiries from individual Friends groups relating to membership, which are then supported with signposting to relevant local area forums or encouraged to explore local networking options. NFPGS can support with advice and guidance on new area forum development.
- Requests for more specific support have included organisations seeking sector links to promote new initiatives or research, and those seeking to engage with parks communities.
- Group enquiries also include communities seeking support with campaigns – such as in response to development threats. Resources are available at Parks Community UK and with other sector partners whom NFPGS can share links.

Research update (PE)

- PE reported that NFPGS has established links with University College London (UCL) to engage Masters students in mutually beneficial research activity.
- Topics have included:
 - o review of ethnic minority participation in greenspace Friends groups, with a view to identifying examples of good practice.
<https://natfedparks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/NFPGS-Ethnic-Diversity-and-Friends-Groups-Research-Report-9.2022.pdf>
 - o The relationship between Friends groups and local authorities, aiming to determine any common elements to inform good practice.
- PE added that he is now working with UCL to agree further areas for research which could include (i) how Friends groups develop and support volunteer roles and (ii) how groups are contributing to Local Nature Recovery Partnerships.
- In addition, NFPGS has supported sector partners with their own research, notably

<p>The Gardens Trust, who sought comment from Friends groups on their role in heritage landscapes. Another survey was on how inclusive Friends groups' nature activity is in the context of migrant groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - These opportunities help NFPGS in several ways: ensuring a voice from communities; generating good practice or data to inform future activity; and often a small financial contribution in recognition of the support provided by NFPGS. <p>Member comment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TB (Leeds) added that the Area Forum has good links with the 2 local universities, with links not confined to parks and landscape services, extending into wider area themes. - CB (Birmingham) there has been research with local students on nature recovery and diversity, also on the right to access public land. - LW (Bristol) work on Local Nature Partnerships has shown a beneficial approach to develop a mosaic of different habitats together to support biodiversity, rather than focusing on just specific sites. <p>It was agreed to ensure relevant research reports from NFPGS partners – such as the recent work with The Gardens Trust - are made available on the NFPGS website.</p> <p>The Annual Report (2022/2023) was adopted by those attending.</p>	<p>DM/MF</p>
<p>Election of Officers and Trustees</p>	
<p>DM noted that since the previous AGM several trustees had stepped down. The contributions of Martin Willis (Treasurer), Marion Williams and Cliff Munn were noted, with thanks.</p> <p>NFPGS officers formally stood down and following a nomination and election process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DM was re-elected as Chair - NS re-elected as Secretary - SQ-H re-elected as Treasurer <p>SR, MF and PE are to continue as trustees, including with their specific roles.</p> <p>DM extended the invitation to other Area Forum reps to become Trustees – a role description had been circulated to the membership prior to the AGM.</p> <p>DM noted support for additional officer roles is also sought, notably: Treasurer, Business Development (fundraising and partnerships), and Social Media.</p>	<p>All note</p> <p>All note</p>
<p>Motions / Proposed Constitution Changes</p>	
<p>There were no motions or proposed changes to the constitution.</p>	
<p>See below....</p>	

Discussion:

How do we successfully attract and retain more volunteers for our Friends Groups and Area Forums?

Representatives from Area groups attending outlined activity to keep interest, group attendance and momentum. In the end the focus was mainly on the health of area Forums...

Leeds (TB)

- 4 meetings/ year, with additional frequent committee meetings, use different park venues and include a tour.
- Raffles help raise funds.
- Started by Leeds CC who still provide support.
- Input from senior officer Climate, Energy & Green Spaces.

Bristol (LW)

- Meeting move around locations to keep interest and input.
- Need to sustain positive relationship with Council as intermediary and retain support of both Council and the groups represented.

Sheffield (ND)

- meet alternate months.
- Different locations keep meetings popular – but limited by available facilities.
- Links with University of Sheffield.
- Include guest speakers, council input to provide updates.
- Need to sustain positive relationship.
- Provide link with other sector partners.

Birmingham (SR/ CB)

- Forum established and grew in size and capability to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, with funds to support P/T staff.
- Over 130 groups
- Available to help groups start and develop.
- Trustees have regular committee meetings
- Forum has monthly social get-togethers to involve and get to know groups and their members, sharing knowledge and offering peer support.
- Annual conference for up to 100 reps
- Additional events e.g. Christmas lecture, speakers on specific topics.
- Partnership links to help identify and resolve issues.

Horsham (SS)

- group in relative infancy.
- Rotate the chair role to share the commitment.
- Undertaken SWOT review and mapping.
- Developing a resource pack for protecting green space from shared experience.

Green Tides-Adur & Worthing (LA)

- poor relationship with the Council at present.
- Forum not involved in any consultation re. loss of rangers.

Newcastle (EMack)

- Most greenspace taken over by Urban Green NGO.

- 25 groups, include guest speakers at meetings.
- Poor relationship with UG – site management based on a ‘National Trust’ model not considered appropriate for public parks.
- Need greater commitment from Urban Green to community groups.

Basildon (RN)

- Council input can inhibit volunteer/ community input and discussion.
- Presentations support activity.

Manchester (BJ)

- group based on an environmental network, struggles to engage volunteers.
- Developed to support parks but limited capacity to get involved.
- Limited links to Council owing to lack of group representatives.
- Issues are shared but affected by lack of scale/ scope of group.

Sefton (BR)

- Forum not progressed from initial meetings.
- Hampered by lack of Council capacity to support coordination.
- Loss of Council community development role.

Gateshead (DW)

- aim to explore support/ develop Forum for area.
- Concern re. capacity to sustain specific groups and commitment to additional work.
- Decent relationship with the Council.

Wandsworth (PG)

- most local Friends groups are involved.
- Quarterly meetings, new members encouraged.
- Relations managed by ‘Enable’ (the Council’s service provider).

Nottingham (SM)

- Include links with University, with opportunities for student input to volunteering initiatives and activities.
- Could Universities help more – e.g. support with funding bids?

Haringey (DM)

- 60+ groups
- Senior Council officers attend the bi-monthly meetings (going since 2001)
- Have helped develop new Council Green Spaces Strategy
- Group/Council relations at site level very patchy due to understaffing
- Forum trying to develop a core Co-ordination group

London Network (DM)

- Represent the movement of over 930 local groups
- Meet every 6 weeks (alternating between general / coordination / seminars)
- Been developing Working Groups (eg biodiversity / climate resilience / planning / events)
- Promoting Borough Forums

General comments:

- issues re. Forums retaining independence and a voice for community groups they represent.
- Forum activity – and age profile – often a concern, need to diversify and involve younger people.

DM noted each area will have different characteristics – these examples help show options and potential – with a need to consider what is appropriate for your own area / group.

Discussion:

In the light of the worsening underfunding crisis for local authorities, what can we do to protect green spaces?

DM noted that 6 local authorities – including Birmingham and Nottingham - have issued a Section 114 notice because, despite their best efforts, they expect their expenditure to exceed their income for the financial year, and are effectively bankrupt. Estimated that threats may soon extend to 25% of Councils. This is a shocking crisis which it seems the Government is failing to address. Non-statutory services are being decimated.

Birmingham (SR/CB)

- posts are frozen – no recruitment possible.
- A 'Save Birmingham' campaign has started to save community spaces (details at <https://savebirmingham.org>).
- Groups have been encouraged to register parks as Assets of Community Value
- The Forum (BOSF) has shared details including City Council information and consultation, and also developed it's role as an advocate to promote the importance of parks.
- BOSF has met with the Council cabinet member to discuss support.
- BOSF is able to provide data from its work as evidence to support the advocacy role.
- Issues exacerbated by loss of respected and influential Head of Parks.
- Council issues and discussion on relative value of statutory / non –statutory services.

Nottingham (SM)

- the situation is at an earlier stage than that affecting Birmingham.
- Fortunate to retain a supportive, respected Head of Parks.
- Pressure to submit cuts.
- Need to submit a case for parks nationally.

Green Tides - Adur & Worthing (LA)

- concern at lack of input – Forum/community not involved in debate/ decisions.
- Witnessing inefficient management of resources.

Bristol (LW)

- concern that volunteers increasingly encouraged to take on more responsibility.
- Important that volunteer/ Friends input is recognized as additionality – i.e. the 'cherry on the icing, on the cake' – not even the icing, let alone the cake!

PE noted that NFPGS research shows those local authorities with the strongest, most effective parks relationships with Area Forums are those who invest support.

DM noted it is short-sighted to cut the community engagement role but these posts may be regarded as 'non-essential'.

NS noted that a Forum-Council relationship can provide cost efficiencies with volunteer groups raising funds, providing volunteer hours and advising on the most effective use of Council resources.

It was also noted that although parks remain a ‘non-statutory’ service, parks and green spaces contribute to many other statutory services, notably health – with wider benefits to community, the environment, with impact on the climate crisis and biodiversity.

CB (Birmingham) added that there is concern at threat to BOSF funding from the Council, however ‘seedcorn’ funds for groups with links to Get Grants <https://www.getgrants.org.uk> and support for group insurance cover have been approved for 2024/25.

DM noted that the Government has been made fully aware of the financial crisis faced by public greenspace services at least since the major Westminster Inquiry into Parks in 2016/17, the 2-3 years of the Parks Action Group, and recently with NFPGS and others contributing to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee (2022) - details at:

<https://natfedparks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/NFPGS-LUHCG-Select-Cttee-submission-28.6.2022-pdf.pdf>

Additional evidence submitted to the EFRA Select Committee (2023) is available at:

<https://natfedparks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NFPGS-EFRA-Select-Cttee-submission-20.10.2023.pdf>

AOB / Additional comment [chat]

DM thanked all for attending and reminded all that there is additional opportunities to share information or seek peer support through the network e-mail list for all Area Forums:
parksforumsuk@lists.riseup.net

All

Additional comment - from Zoom Chat (see Appendix – following page)

Date of Next Meeting

Another general meeting will be arranged for later in the year - date to be confirmed.

All

Appendix: Zoom Chat:

From Brent Parks Forum - Suzanne (NWLondon) to Everyone:

- We put our case to Brent Council Cabinet - through the Finance Dept. Community Asset worth and hours of volunteering - What we save the Council p.a.
- CVS Brent willing to support us - Joining up with networks in Brent - Brent Young Foundation ((Youth). Scouts, Biodiversity groups, Thames 21, Waterways groups all have some green spaces along their waterbodies.
- CVS Community Vol Services (support). Countrywide.
- Green and Social prescribing.

From Sarah Royal Birmingham to Everyone:

- Hi Suzanne. That is brilliant. We gather in volunteer statistics on Birmingham and last financial year our volunteers recorded 97,598 hrs which has a financial worth of £1,063,818

From Tom - Leeds to Everyone:

- Two recent research projects on Women’s safety and Park Neatness from Leeds
<https://leedsparksforum.org/>

From Brent Parks Forum - Suzanne (NWLondon) to Everyone:

- Tara Furlong - Beavers Project and Woodcock Park Committee - Has experience within academia and would have a view.

From Len Bristol Parks Forum to Everyone:

- The allotment situation is really important in terms of new rules - but there is a lot more going on behind the scenes - both in policy terms and the wider "political" situation.

From Norman - Stockport to Everyone:

- yes mosaic are essential as is connectivity between sites to get greatest biodiversity.

From Barry Johnson (Manchester) to Everyone:

- I'm also involved in allotments. There are separate networks and National Society for these.

From Paul Ely, Parks Community UK, Policy and Research to Everyone:

- Anyone who'd like to get in touch. My email is paulely8560@outlook.com. I will share the Ethnic Minority Inclusion report with the minutes. I'm really interested to find out more from those of you who are already working with academic institutions.

From Brent Parks Forum - Suzanne (NWLondon) to Everyone:

- Yes we saw the infographic and cited this to Brent Cabinet - meeting in Feb this year. So a big thank you for that from us in Brent.

From Brent Parks Forum - Suzanne (NWLondon) to Everyone:

- tara.furlong@designingfutures.uk Brent Woodcock Park and Beavers Project lead.

From Len Bristol Parks Forum to Everyone:

- Picking up on one of the groups - we have now have three organisations directly involved in our area of interest - the City Council, ourselves - and the Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation - Your Park. The last one is a relatively new Charity which can go into different areas of work - and funding - than the other two. Strengthening the relationship between all three is another area of work we are involved in. Hope this helps.

From Norman - Stockport to Everyone:

- Our Forum was never good at bringing grps together but in 2 adjacent wards of Stockport we have brought 3 of our grps together to balsam bash & remove an invasive sps along the river which runs thru area & now new 4th group is becoming involved.

From Nigel Sharp - NW Parks to Everyone:

- There is some guidance about involving young people in parks groups at Parks Community UK in the website's 'How To' guides.

From Nicola, Sheffield Green Spaces Forum to Everyone:

- In Sheffield, we're going to have to be more specific about what people (e.g. the Parks Department) to present/ talk about at our meetings. So we can get into more honest conversations - otherwise it's like Pat said, the meetings can feel like a waste of time.
- Definitely agree with Sarah - unis can do more, I work at Uni of Sheffield. Some of our students do get involved in volunteering (good way is to go to the university volunteering fairs) - and when the volunteering is sustained, it's really good. We try to get more speakers from Friends groups into uni to talk to the students as well...

From Chris Blythe Birmingham to Everyone:

- Agree Sarah, Nicola, at Brookes there is a big push for students to volunteer, but not sure of take up.

From Tom Bliss to Everyone:

- We have a park which is basically part of the uni campus - and it has a lot of issues from this. I have suggested that it might even be 'bought' by the uni, but no progress.

From Nicola, Sheffield Green Spaces Forum to Everyone:

- Replying to "We have a park which..."
- Yes, Sheffield council has asked the uni for more support on managing parks right next to the uni (where they all go for their graduation photos and have 1000s of BBQs in the summer, and generally benefit from the green space). No response from the uni. Very disappointing.

From Tom Bliss to Everyone:

- We are looking into Asset Based Community Development, which is used by the council in some areas but not parks - though actually the Friends groups are a major asset around which community development can be built. Early days.

From Brent Parks Forum - Suzanne (NW London) to Everyone:

- We are looking at our local Halls of Residences newly built - for volunteering in parks. Now thinking of other skills usage - giving back - thank you for all the tips. Many useful aspects. We are politically 'active' and have a voice...due to linking with Friends of the Earth and other groups in a consortium Brent ACEE Action Climate emergency and ecological threat. In response to Brent declaring a climate emergency.
- We meet with Brent Friends of the Earth a few times per month on 3 sub working groups. All links to parks - and our points are echoed and supported by the various partner groups. Very supportive network.
- We uncovered Section 106 funds that went under the radar - into highways ring fenced for parks, most recently.

From Tom Bliss to Everyone:

- Yes, all Section 106 funds go to the parks dpt in Leeds.

From Brent Parks Forum - Suzanne (NW London) to Everyone:

- Brent tried to reroute some funds - we have uncovered it through the developer. Being willing to approach developers is proving useful for info.

From Chris Blythe Birmingham to Everyone:

- This link contains an overview of current LA financial situations:
<https://www.newstatesman.com/spotlight/economic-growth/regional-development/2024/01/council-bankruptcy-tracker-local-government-authorities-finances>

From Brent Parks Forum - Suzanne (NW London) to Everyone:

- Looking to link with health....and Green Prescribing through Council Health Forum.

From Norman - Stockport to Everyone:

- In my area of Stockport with greenspaces adjoining a tributary of Mersey we have engaged with Mersey Rivers Trust who have used some grant money to improve ponds & dig new ponds/wetlands to reduce flooding & improve habitat & we are doing monthly river monitoring, we have also done bioblitzes to record flora & fauna AT same time involve general public in what is present these areas.

From Len Bristol Parks Forum to Everyone:

- can I ask if any groups have examples of new large parks being created or planned in their city - can you send to info@bristolparksforum.org.uk we hope to get a new park in Bristol. I will email as well.

From Lisa, Green Tides, Worthing and Adur to Everyone:

- Thank you everyone and all the volunteers of the natfed for all your hard work. We battle on :)

From Cliff Munn - Brighton & Hove to Everyone:

- Thank you for the meeting - very helpful.

From Ean - Newcastle upon Tyne to Everyone:

- Thanks all for your input, support and ideas!

From Nicola, Sheffield Green Spaces Forum to Everyone:

- Thanks everyone!

Trustees Meeting – directly followed the AGM / General Meeting

Present: Dave Morris (Chair); Sarah Royal (CEO); Paul Ely (Research); Shelly Quinton-Hulme (Interim Treasurer & Organisational Development); Nigel Sharp (Secretary)

Meeting review	
<p>Good turnout from across England – it was a pity the Edinburgh rep couldn't make it as expected. Also we'd tried hard to reach the Cardiff reps before the meeting, without success.</p>	DM/NS/MF
<p>Great discussions! Let's try to ensure our Forums e-list continues regarding these and other issues..</p>	All
<p>Noted a need to review membership contacts and revise following feedback from the AGM promotion. Dave had conducted a phone round of all Forums before the AGM so has some new contact info.</p>	DM/NS
<p>Circulation of AGM minutes will provide an opportunity for follow up discussion with those unable to attend and to progress additional networking with new Area Groups.</p>	
<p>We will need to continue to encourage Forum reps to come forward to expand the number and breadth of NFPGS Trustees. Let's use the Forums e-list and also direct contacts.</p>	DM/All
NFPGS Update	
<p>Discussion regarding need to maintain advocacy role with particular focus on pre-election campaigning. Dave to send London election material to list.</p>	
<p>Noted that a template letter has been prepared and circulated previously enabling groups to lobby prospective candidates and encourage parks and greenspaces to become a local manifesto concern. PE/DM agreed to review and revise for NFPGS. Letter content could include recognition of the statutory services our parks provide, also noting the contribution made by parks communities both in terms of funds raised and volunteer hours.</p>	DM/PE
<p>Suggested a future face to face trustees meeting could be productive to review NFPGS strategy.</p>	
<p>Need to review AGM information and available material to upload on the NFPGS website – including the brief presentation prepared by The Gardens Trust following the recent survey we conducted for them. Similarly there is material from the minority groups research to</p>	DM/PE/MF

<p>include.</p> <p>Discussion followed re. sequencing of the Annual Report to the Charity Commission and AGM date. Noted that ideally these should be closer in the calendar and with this in mind the next AGM may be brought forward within the next reporting period. Provisionally aim for the next AGM to be held November 2024.</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Date of Next Trustees Meeting</p>	
<p>6.30pm, Wednesday 6 March(by zoom)</p>	<p>All</p>