

General Meeting Minutes

Zoom Meeting



Saturday 22 March 2025

Present:

Dave Morris (Chair)	London Friends of Green Spaces Network (LFGN) + Haringey Friends of Parks Forum
Paul Ely (Trustee)	Parks Community UK
Shelly Quinton-Hulme (Treasurer)	Friends of Trafford's Parks and Green Spaces
Nicola Dempsey (Trustee)	Sheffield Green Spaces Forum
Suzanne King	Barnet Green Spaces Network
Roger Chapman	Barnet Green Spaces Network
Chris Blythe	Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)
Cliff Munn	Brighton & Hove Green Spaces Forum
Len Wyatt	Bristol Parks Forum
Sarah Tolley	Edinburgh Green Space Forum
Jeni Rowe ??	Edinburgh Green Space Forum
Barbara Rouse	Friends of Derby Park (Sefton)
Alison Brown	Glasgow Parks Forum
Elizabeth Bowskill	Grantham Green Spaces Forum
Tom Bliss	Leeds Parks & Green Spaces Forum
Roberta Peak	Liverpool Parks Friends Forum
Jan Ingham	Luton Friends of Parks, Green & Blue Spaces
Judie Collins	Trafford & Greater Manchester Parks & Green Spaces
Nigel Sharp (Secretary, NFPGS)	NW Parks Friends Forum

Apologies

Sarah Royal (Trustee)	Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)
Michelle Furtado (Network Coordinator)	Green Tides (Adur & Green Spaces Worthing Partnership)
Wasył Strutynskij	Association of Manchester Open Spaces Societies (AMOSS)
Caroline Williams	Liverpool Parks Friends Forum

Welcome, Introductions and Apologies	
DM welcomed all, including some reps new to NFPGS.	
NFPGS Updates	
Trustees provided a brief update on areas of work. Further details are available in Trustee meeting minutes at: https://natfedparks.org.uk/resources/minutes/	
Parks Working Group (PWG) – DM	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PWG relaunches - as a similar group to the one set up under the previous Government. It brings together key reps from the parks sector alongside Government officials 	

<p>from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DM and ND attend from NFPGS, with DM chairing the PWG’s Community Empowerment theme. - Next PWG meeting will focus on funding for green spaces. <p>NFPGS Working Groups</p> <p>Research WG (PE/ ND)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group was established following the AGM (16.11.24) • Currently 6 members, with additional reps to contribute too. Strong academic focus at present but others welcome to contribute. • Group has met 3 times, emerging priorities are to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the relationship between Friends groups/ Area Forums and their Local Authority; ○ the support needs required by Friends groups / Area Forums. • Surveys are in preparation – PE invited groups to participate in a pilot to test the process. • ND noted survey feedback will inform further planning and funding bids. • DM added that a draft ‘Inclusion & Diversity Checklist’ has also been prepared to support groups – it is intended to compliment the existing ‘Better Friends’ Strength Checker toolkit already available on the Parks Community UK website at: https://parkscommunity.org.uk/betterfriends/ Over 500 local groups have already filled that in! ○ TB added that Leeds CC has involved the Leeds Forum in survey work – details in the chat. <p>Funding WG (SQ-H/ PE/ NS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This new group has only met once with initial focus on preparing a strategic approach to future NFPGS funding. • The ultimate aim is to develop our capacity, initially to include at least a member of staff. • DM highlighted the vital and unique grassroots role of NFPGS, noting that aside from limited project funds, activity has been entirely volunteer led, with great potential if NFPGS could access additional resources. <p>Campaigning/lobbying WG (DM/ SQ-H/ ND)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is intended to set up this new Working Group, reps are invited to get involved. • DM noted the current threats to green space sites from development, land sale and general commercialisation. Also of course the shocking Government underfunding of Local Authorities. <p>APSE¹ Parks Seminar 2025</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NS was invited to attend following previous support for APSE working groups • The Seminar theme was ‘health’ with the programme split to consider healthy parks/ planet/ people. • NS will prepare a separate update note but highlighted two presentations: 	<p>See chat</p> <p>See chat</p> <p>NS</p>
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¹ Association for Public Service Excellence

<p><u>MHCLG ‘Sustaining Success in Parks’</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A ‘rapid evidence review of working for parks teams ▪ The review considered Islington and Leeds council teams ▪ Report conclusions recognized the value of retaining staff with relevant skills to support and co-ordinate with community organisations and volunteers. ▪ Report also noted that these council engagement officers generate benefits that exceed the council’s investment in these roles. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustaining-success-in-parks/sustaining-success-in-parks <p><u>APSE State of UK Parks Survey 2025</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual snapshot of sector from parks officer responses • 80% agree parks are affected disproportionately – a soft target for cutbacks. • 64% expect a reduction in service levels or standards. • 57% expect growth in community engagement/ involvement. • 52% have rangers (with 73% of these involved in volunteer supervision). • 46% report community sector involvement has increased. 	
Parks Forum UK Issues Raised	
<p>NFPGS supports community based enquiries and comment through our e-mail platform that all Forum reps can post to and seek advice, examples of good practice, share minutes etc: parksforumsuk@lists.riseup.net</p> <p>NS briefly outlined examples of the range of topics raised over the previous few months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank charges for community groups - LW (Bristol) 6.12.24 • LA re-organisation - threat to community engagement - CM (Brighton) 26.1.25 • Development threats inc. Enfield (12.2.25) + Colchester (8.2.25) - DM (London) • Local Plan - new park development comment - LW (Bristol) 20.2.25 • Lottery Funding – ND (Sheffield) 3.3.25 <p>SQ-H also mentioned a recent campaign and national petition to provide free access to tennis in public open spaces².</p> <p>DM reminded all of the opportunity to share or seek information through this parks forums mailing list.</p>	All
Area Forum Updates and Discussion: How to create and sustain a strong area forum	
<p>DM invited all to provide an update and link to the discussion topic, suggesting reps consider their Area Forum development in the context of certain key considerations viz.:</p>	

² https://www.change.org/p/keep-public-park-tennis-courts-free-and-accessible?recruiter=29567207&recruited_by_id=bb7aff40-e855-012f-73c6-4040ea65fa16&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=petition_dashboard_share_modal&utm_medium=whatsapp

- Set up and organisation (committee?, constitution?)
- Communication (how you keep in touch)
- Meetings (frequency, venue, etc)
- Membership (just parks friends groups, or other groups too?)
- Local Authority (LA) links
- Activity and Resources

Note: additional comment and links are included in the Chat (see Appendix).

Haringey (DM)

- Est 2001. Approx.. 65 groups, not including allotments (separate Forum)
- General meeting every 2 months. LA attend for part of the meeting, and the partnership is good.
- Forum role is to coordinate, encourage communications, lobby, and liaise with Council – it does not have any funds e.g. for projects and events.
- No formal constitution. Has a website, an email list all groups can post to, plus WhatsApp Coordination Group open to any reps.

Trafford (SQ-H)

- 53 groups
- group is constituted with a committee and bank account
- activity is limited to meetings and lobbying
- meetings with members and separately with the Council

Barnet (SK)

- established for 6 years
- not constituted
- 55 groups
- LA provides funds to support the Forum's own website
- Quarterly meetings, guest speakers attend
- LA biodiversity officer attends
- Input to Strategy through workshop
- Use MailChimp to keep in touch

Leeds (TB)

- Constituted group
- Limited funds – generated by raffles
- Website, facebook site
- Around 100 active groups but additional groups and organisations
- 4 general meetings and 4 committee meetings annually
- include speakers from LA and guest speakers, Council member attends but group rep attendance still down from pre-Covid times
- activity has included accessibility survey, input to consultation and now reviewing impact of car park charging on sites.

Grantham (EB)

- new group set up Jan-24 with 18 reps attending
- aim to involve other groups and locally relevant partner organisations – e.g. Rotary, Woodland Trust, National Trust
- Forum still establishing, potential to cover a wider area.

Edinburgh (ST)

- approx. 70 members
- website, facebook page and e-mail
- 4 meetings/ yr with speakers including the LA
- part of Edinburgh's Thriving Green Spaces³
- activity has included consultation re. litter bin provision
- input re. parks activity regulation and sustainability

Liverpool (RP)

- Forum constituted with secretary, treasurer and chair
- Executive committee of 8 members
- Over 40 groups engaged but only around a third attend meetings
- No LA attendance, limited input (ongoing issues re. Fields in Trust site transfer)
- Committee e-mail and facebook site
- Bank account issues – now with local Credit Union

Sheffield (ND)

- set up by the Council, established 10yrs
- constituted
- 11 committee members, many strategic
- 6 meetings/yr, split between University and different parks locations
- parks based meetings tend to be better attended, include site visit but options limited by facilities available
- 100+ groups, mailing list of 200 contacts

Bristol (LW)

- Committee of 4
- Small amount of funds
- Use facebook page, MailChimp (275 contacts)
- 4 meetings/yr at different locations
- around 70+ groups
- membership is park groups but links with Allotment, Tree groups, etc
- good link with LA, helped support various joint initiatives and bids

Birmingham (CB)

- 146 member groups, around 70 others.
- groups include litter pickers, community gardens also links to allotment groups.
- moving from X (Twitter) to Blue Sky (<https://bsky.app>)
- also use MailChimp.
- LA input with Future Parks Accelerator link <https://www.futureparks.org.uk>
- LA discussing new protocol with BOSF, concern at this introducing funding controls
- Recent 20th anniversary with events – 50 attended AGM.
- Events include socials (coffee mornings, Christmas), walks, etc
- Recent 'evening of memories' also hold Conference and Volunteer Celebrations
- Monthly meeting with Head of Parks, bimonthly meetings with Strategic lead member.
- Volunteer data collected monthly, collated quarterly and annually – enables funds to cover group insurance costs, provides evidence to show contribution of groups to parks and the Council.

³ <https://www.thrivinggreenspaces.scot>

- Forum administers funds – in addition to monthly £10 for groups returning volunteer data, also manage 'Greening the Grey' fund and funding support to cover partner fees to help with funding bids (e.g. £30K investment → £260K grants received).

Luton (JI)

- 4 meetings/ yr
- Constituted – 15yrs
- LA reps alongside volunteers, Cllr portfolio member attends
- Also reps from Friends of the Earth, Wildlife Trust, etc.
- 20 regular park reps
- frequent planning and development issues (e.g. threat to Wigmore Valley Park due to airport development)

Glasgow (AB)

- new group establishing with LA and NFPGS support (PE attended launch)
- constituted with 10 on Committee
- 20 groups attend, approx. 70 groups, 40 active with crossover of members
- issues re. access to tech for communication
- Council support with webpage

Brighton & Hove (CM)

- set up and constituted in 2017
- 7 on Committee, includes a Councillor
- around 100 groups
- mix of sites, including parks and housing green space, highways, community gardens each with slightly different needs
- linked by group e-mail, also facebook site, website hub including member directory and map.
- Committee meetings as required
- Annual general – all member meeting with guest speakers – good networking opportunities
- Regular newsletters
- Good LA link through rangers (concern at Council reorganisation impact)
- Funds in account with Metro Bank from LA community fund – support zoom and events

Sefton (BR)

- concern that community has been unable to set up a Forum
- little LA support due to lost capacity
- Friends groups focused on own activity

London (DM)

- London Friends of Green Spaces Network has extensive links to around 20+ borough-based Area Forums through emails and a monthly bulletin
- around 1000 local groups throughout London supported by LFGN regular online coordination meetings, seminars and 'showcase' meetings
- Have a part time worker through collaboration with GoParks London

North West (NS)

- currently inactive due to loss of key committee members, notably Prof Robert Lee

<p>- NS retains contacts and provides e-support on request</p> <p>Additional comment:</p> <p>NS noted the discussion feedback could inform further NFPGS guidance for our Parks Community UK platform. Comment that area Forums could be attractive to potential funders, with networking and related synergy representing good value to funder investment.</p> <p>Additional comment that communication is vital to develop/ sustain networks and tech barriers could be an issue – NS added that many community groups seek support with social media and this could also be an area of need for the Park Friends community.</p> <p>Further discussion noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - importance of recording (or at least estimating) volunteer hours – particularly to ensure LA support e.g. insurance aid. CB agreed to share a volunteer data recording template for circulation with the minutes. - potential to share information – e.g. forum updates, newsletters, minutes using parksforumsuk@lists.riseup.net - need for new Forums to grow capacity, become established before lobbying or undertaking any campaigns. 	
<p>Any other business</p>	
<p>DM invited all to become further involved with NFPGS, either as a member of a Working Group, or as a Trustee.</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Date of Next Meeting</p>	
<p>The NFPGS AGM will be held on line in the Autumn 2025.</p>	<p>All</p>

Appendix: Meeting chat (abridged)

Re. NFPGS Working Groups - Research

- Suzanne King (Barnet)
 - o Happy to pilot
- Alison Brown (Glasgow)
 - o Yes happy to pilot
- Jan Ingham (Luton)
 - o Yes include me
- sarah toley (Edinburgh)
 - o Edinburgh can join pilot
- Barbara (Sefton)
 - o Barbara Sefton happy to help with survey
- paul ely Trustee and Research sub
 - o Thanks everyone for volunteering to be part of the Pilot survey.
- Suzanne King - Barnet
 - o I'm a retired social researcher - surveys, interviews and focus groups plus evaluation
- Nigel Sharp – Secretary NFPGS
 - o The Better Friends link is on the Parks Community UK website:
<https://parkscommunity.org.uk/betterfriends/>
- Nicola Dempsey, Sheffield
 - o This report was written by Meredith Whitten at UCL who we've asked to join our Research Group
 - o <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustaining-success-in-parks>
- Len - Bristol
 - o apologies for this - my reading of the Sustaining report is that it was aimed and interviewed councils and formal organisations - rather than friends groups.

General update

- Chris Blythe - Birmingham
 - Who is responsible for the 'list'. I keep asking to be added but it never seems to happen
- Cliff Munn - Brighton & Hove
 - o Please can the APSE seminar summary be shared with us all?
- Nigel Sharp - NFPGS
 - o yes Cliff the review from APSE will be circulated to all
- judie collins - Trafford
 - o maybe bank hubs that are being set up will help
- Nicola Dempsey, Sheffield
 - o and thank you to Forums who got back to me! Thank you
- Len - Bristol PF to Everyone:
 - o forgot to say thanks to the Nat Fed for writing in on the Lloyds issue - much appreciated.

Re. comments about free access to tennis and inclusive sport

- sarah toley - Edinburgh
 - o cricket???
- Tom - Leeds
 - o angling?

Re. Parks Surveys

- Tom - Leeds
 - o Leeds: Green AWARE (stands for: Access, Wellbeing, (for) Residents) The University of Leeds is working with Leeds CC and Bradford MC to ascertain residents' access to greenspace – who's using it and how – and, as important, who is not using it and why. For Leeds, it will an update on the 2016 survey, and is seen as an important indicator to determine Council planning on a number of levels e.g. park design, Parks' dept staffing.
 - o An online survey was released this week plus there'll be focus groups, 1-1's with residents, Councillors and community anchor/partner organisations. The Forum and its members will be part of publicising the survey, especially to try to reach people who don't visit, so there'll be posters and flyers available to display in communities.
 - o "Your voice matters! Tell us about your local green spaces and win a £100 voucher! Filling in the Leeds Access to Parks and Green Spaces Survey should take no more than 20 minutes of your time, and will help us make your local green spaces even more welcoming, safe, and accessible for everyone.

Visit <https://bit.ly/m/GreenAWARE> to complete it!"

Re. Area Forum Updates and Discussion: How to create and sustain a strong area forum

- Nigel Sharp - NFPGS
 - o How are you set up? How do you communicate? Meetings? What is your membership - just parks? LA input - good or poor? What activity does your Forum have - events, projects? What resources do you have? What are your Forum needs?
- sarah toley - Edinburgh
 - o io email is useful for groups
 - o Thanks for arranging this meeting. I'm now heading off to our Saturday park session. Will read the minutes.
- Tom - Leeds
 - o We also hold 3 of our meetings out in parks - the AGM in winter is held in the civic hall.
- Len - Bristol
 - o part of the review I was talking about is finding a new terms of reference/constitution if anyone has any examples for a forum, a copy would be appreciated.
- Robbie Liverpool
 - o I can send you a copy

- Len - Bristol PF
 - o Robbie great - use len@bristolparksforum.org.uk . Will also put it on our Fed email.
- Tom – Leeds
 - o Our constitution can be downloaded here:
<https://leedsparksforum.org/about-the-forum>
 - o This might be useful too”
<https://leedsparksforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/membership-benefits-final-2.pdf>
- Nicola Dempsey, Sheffield
 - o Chris why do you get money from the council? What is that for?
- Shelly Quinton-Hulme - Trafford
 - o How do you collect the volunteering hours please?
- ChrisBlythe - Birmingham
 - o they are collected by our administrator every month - a form to fill in via email
- judie collins - Trafford
 - You’ve already heard from Shelly and I have to go I sit on exec for greenspace Happy to send in devolution opportunities to Nigel
- Nicola Dempsey, Sheffield
 - o @Alison Brown - Glasgow - it has been interesting to see more strategic people being attracted. It has definitely been because of our newish Chair who has that more strategic bent. The Chair before this was different. Personalities make a difference!
 - o @Cliff Munn - Brighton & Hove - we’re about to move to Metrobank
- Cliff Munn - Brighton & Hove
 - o So far we have been very happy with Metro Bank
- Tom - Leeds
 - o We show all our members on a map, so that groups can see who is active nearby, and maybe visit to get or give support.

https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1vMF8fsJ4F_XKCvf2cv5Fk9kkmyM66mbm&ll=53.83468206654616%2C-1.5732972303482873&z=13

- Nicola Dempsey, Sheffield
 - o forgot to say where we had our money from - the Forum got £500 from council ten years ago and have about £370 left. We need to raise more money. Council provides insurance for 28 groups only contingent on attending our meetings. 28...not sure why this number.
- Barbara - Sefton
 - o 25 friends groups in Sefton.
barbrouse@yahoo.co.uk
- Tom - Leeds
 - o We have just started publishing the minutes of the forum meetings (not the committee meetings), on our website. I’m hoping these can be illustrated to make them more like a newsletter that people will want to read (we did this with Feed Leeds - our food-growing sister group - and it really helped to build up interest. <https://feedleeds.org/>

- Suzanne King (Barnet)
 - o Barnet has an adopt a place agreement and groups are insured by Barnet under that for work done as long as stick to certain conditions

Re. Any other business

- Nigel Sharp - NFPGS
 - o also looking for wider input to Campaigning Working Group...
- Suzanne King (Barnet)
 - o I'm interested trustee. stepping down from another charity soon
- Nigel Sharp - NFPGS
 - o Thanks Suzanne - we'll be in touch!