

Tuesday 11 June, 10am-11.30am  
At Lordship Hub, N17 6NU (in the middle of Lordship Rec)

# **FRIENDS FORUM / PARKS SERVICE ZONAL TEAM MEETING**

## **How Can We Improve Communications & Collaboration Between Our Groups & The Parks Service?**

### ***Agenda***

#### **1 Intros & Apologies**

**Present:** Joan (Lordship Rec); Deborah (Paignton Park & Manchester Gardens) – Minutes; Dave (Lordship Rec) – Chair; Brian (Chestnuts Park); Cathy (Parkland Walk); Ceri (Chestnuts); Pamela (Wolves Lane, Totm Cemetery and Totm Green); Klaus (Bruce Castle Pk),  
**Council:** Glynis (Zonal Team Manager), Jake (Zonal Team), Chris Poore (Zonal Team - online)  
**Apologies:** Emma Betts (Engagement Officer), Claire Parry (Downhills Park)

#### **2 Background**

Agenda & last meeting notes from nearly 2 years ago. It was very positive & there is a desire again for this meeting to focus on 'solutions' not criticisms. It was a specific action point at that meeting to hold a follow-up meeting. This has been late due to illness & staff shortages.

Different responsibilities in Zonal Team Management Plans & Action Plans across the different green spaces.

For some green spaces, especially those which are 'nature reserves', it is essential to meet also with the Conservation Officer (Annabelle). Such a meeting has proved very difficult/impossible due to time & a proposal to set out the terms of reference in advance.

Lines of communication have been difficult. It is essential there is a 2-way process: a collaboration with respect, appreciation of complexity & level of resources available.

There exists a confusion between 'zonal' & 'project' team roles. Friends would like to be involved in the early stages of all projects planned in their green space.

Haringey Council online apps, eg Love Clean Streets (including greenspace) - encouragement to use. However, the groups noted this is a focus on individual & doesn't really recognise a relationship between a local friends group & green space officers.

#### **3 Roles and responsibilities of Zonal Team**

Glynis explained that the Zonal Officer roles haven't changed. But what has changed is that Glynis now has Chris Poore back from sick leave & new starter Jake, who has jumped into the role with both feet. Glynis was managing the workload of 3 officers over 8 months. The Zonal Team has clearly been chronically understaffed for several months.

In Glynis' view, the Zonal Officer, should be the reliable point of contact for Friends' Groups at the Council. Regarding the Conservation Officer, the Zonal Officer should be a conduit if there is no direct contact.

There are 148 parks & green spaces across Haringey for the Zonal Officers to monitor/inspect. Reports/audits are submitted to a system (on a tablet). This system also receives information from 'Love Clean Streets' & the Haringey Council Online Reporting Tool. The audits are conducted 3-monthly for larger spaces & 6-monthly for smaller spaces. Very small spaces, eg, horse troughs, are

annual. This is unless there is a defect. The audits report all 'hardware' in the greenspaces, eg play/sports equipment, benches, etc.

Cathy noted for greener spaces, eg, Parkland Walk (Chris used to do it) now Operations & ground staff.

Park Operations Supervisors mimic the Zonal Officer structure (Glynis sent round a chart). The Operations Officers are Alex Goodyear, Cristina Oliveira, and Andy L. Finsbury Park is separate: it has its own Manager, though Glynis still does hard assets there.

The division of labour is:

- Operations - ground staff
- Zonal - small maintenance
- Projects – substantial maintenance and projects

Take 'play' equipment for example:

- quarterly inspections
- some fixes - Zonal Team
- bigger fixes - Projects

For the Friends understanding the complicated Parks structure is quite difficult. More explanation/understanding required - Glynis sent round an organisational diagram.

However, Glynis said that the key is to start with the Zonal Officer, but she feels that this model could do with some improvement. What is missing? How to get it right?

For the Parks Dept, the Friends Groups are a point of contact & trust.

Joan asked if Glynis reports up? Glynis said that no, there wasn't one record of everything outstanding. This is because currently the Defects Reporting System (which takes in 3 types of reports) does not offer a complete report. It would seem that this system is missing an SQL enquiry at the back end, which should be made available at the front end to the Zonal Officers. This was made glaringly clear when Jake started in his new role, & wanted to get an overview of the problems/defects in the parks/green spaces for which he had responsibility. Glynis, as sole Zonal Officer, had taken a 'belt & braces' approach, submitting all defects to the system, but using her own notebook system.

Some issues:

- Spotlight / inspection reports for 65 Friends Groups. Backlog vs ongoing or urgent action.
- Spotlight Site Visits are only for green-flag sites, so do not cover other green spaces such as Manchester Gardens.
- Continuity: Klaus asked how to avoid a knowledge drain, when staff leave?
- Communications: Deborah said the biggest problem was no reply to emails.

Emails: Glynis is reluctant to commit to a plan that is likely to fail, which would be demoralising. What is achievable to move forward? A New Policy could be that emails receive a response within 5 working days. (An auto-response with lots of different alternative contacts is not really adequate.)

Spotlights: Should be held regularly (this financial year). It is advised that both the Zonal Officer & the Friends Group take notes & share those. Spotlight Notes should be shared by the Zonal Officer with the Friends Group within 10 working days.

There was a brief mention that the system previously used to set up Spotlight Visits did not work properly on all devices. Deborah reported that her phone showed an empty message instead of a meeting invitation. But it was unclear that there was a problem & easy to interpret as an 'error' email, especially when everyone is so busy - most Friends have to fit Friends work around other work, so they need to be able to tune in & out easily.

How do we know who is doing what? It was asked how Friends know if their task has been passed over to someone else? Does the Zonal Officer remain the point of contact & ensure that a task has been satisfactorily completed?

There was a discussion about whether the Friends should be copied in to all communication regarding their green space given their role as key partners. Glynis thought this would be too much, wouldn't always make much sense & would over-complicate. Deborah agreed no need to be swamped with unnecessary info, but that would mean that the Zonal Officers were across what was happening & didn't just pass the Friends rep onto another person. (The Friends shouldn't need to know the intricacies of the internal workings of the Council.) It was suggested that Ward Councillors should also be kept informed of key stuff.

Friends are partners, so need to be part of/across the communication. Friends should be 'in the loop' as to what is happening, but they maybe don't need to know every aspect about how this is achieved, especially as they are volunteers & their time is limited.

How are decisions made...

... regarding projects? For example, when the Council is offered chess tables or playzones? Who/how is it decided where to locate them?

... regarding meadow cutting?

The Zonal Officer Team needs to be kept informed by other Council Teams.

### **Memos of Understanding (MOUs)**

- Created to help clarify what Council commits to, and what the Friends commit to
- None yet signed by groups present. Do any Friends have them? Crouch End Open Spaces wanted one...
- If there's a Management Plan, should be also an action plan. These need to be regularly shared and properly functional

How are tricky issues resolved?? Ideally behind the scenes, and by honest communication (not by secret unilateral action, or via the media/by going public). We're in it together as partners.

Lordship Rec Users Forum, chaired by Friends, co-manage the park. All accept that Council has veto, but they have never used it in the last 20 years.

Cathy, for Parkland Walk, there is a feeling that the Friends are not important & that decisions have been made without them. Eg. Stanhope Road wheelchair access. Also Parkland Walk encroachment.

Zonal Team meets with Ops Team to communicate every 2 weeks

Next meeting in 3-6 months time, with aim to create a Working Functional Document to work towards solving the problems discussed.

Budgets - It is useful for Friends to be aware of budgets, eg, paddling pool costs as a proportion of the budget is huge, + are they under the right budget??