

The Friends of Cator Park & Alexandra Recreation Ground (FoCPAR)

Annual General Meeting 2022 - Thursday 17 November 2022

7.30 – 9.15

Beckenham Bowls Club Alexandra Recreation Ground SE20 7LX

Present

Committee: Millie Knights (Chair MK); Lou Thompson (Secretary LT); Debs Lader (Treasurer DL); Helen Parker (HP); Gareth Parker (GP); Siobhan Caswall (SC); Colin Napthine (CN); Gill Cawdron (GC)

Apologies received: Claudia Rios (CR) Maureen Kennedy Brookes, Simon Jeal, Kevin Kennedy Brookes

Members: Need list from mtg: Ian Jerome; Jenny Napthine; Merryn Fergusson; Mat Knights; Richard Comaish; Tali Emden, Sarah Tucker, Paul Curran (representing the bowls club), Rory O' Kelly.

Invited guests:

Penny Read (PR), *idverde* Community Parks Manager.

Vanessa Potter, ParkBathe

AGM Business

MK opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and introduced both guests: *idverde*'s Penny Read and Vanessa Potter, our AGM speaker on the Park Bathe project.

MK invited the committee members present to briefly introduce themselves and their FoCPAR roles. She thanked the bowls club for allowing the Friends to use their facilities.

Minutes of the previous FoCPAR AGM held 17/11/21

The minutes were accepted with one amendment – the addition of Gill Cawdron to the list of those present.

Chair's Annual Report

MK presented a comprehensive overview of the work of the FoCPAR volunteers over the year October 2021 – September 2022. The PowerPoint presentation is available on request. Key points were:

MK reminded those present of the purpose of FoCPAR, namely:

To improve the appearance of the parks; to educate and to reduce antisocial behaviour (ASB) in the parks. There are over 50 Bromley Park Friends groups, some like us covering more than one park site

And others cover natural woodland areas such as Keston woods.

MK thanked the volunteers for all their hard work, commitment and enthusiasm. We have given 2700 hours this year (Winter Oct 21 – Mar 22: 625+hrs; Summer Apr – Sept: 2082+hrs).

The volunteer activities undertaken include:

Supporting biodiversity:

Core actions in Log piles and bug hotels and (in conjunction with *idverde*) the management of areas of both parks as grass meadows - with new plant species identified in the parks as a result. Other interventions to increase biodiversity are both in the final planning stages: the hedgerow project in Alex Recreation Ground (ARG) and the compost bins in Cator Park (CP).

Planting:

Bulbs: We are just finishing our 2022 spring bulb planting programme. We purchased just under £500 of bulbs and received various generous donated bulbs from the Metropolitan Public Garden Association charity. This year's planting included hyacinth, allium, chionodoxa, English bluebells, daffodils, tulips and ixia in both parks.

Saplings: The long hot dry summer was a severe challenge to our 2020 planted saplings (whips), with watering taking a lot of time and effort from many people – particular thanks to Millie, Lou & Claudia, the Good Gym and to those who “adopted a sapling” this year and kept it going in the heat. We had 30 of 60 sapling survivors from 2020 and planted a further 30 including Rowan, Birch and Cherry Blossom whips donated by the Woodland Trust. Our now established orchard planting in AR survived, with a good crop of apples and plums. We are also grateful to the Football Club for new access to the outside tap in AR – it means we can access on site water though we have to carry them some distance across the park. We continue to struggle with no proper water source in CP.

Willow Arch (CP): With lockdown restrictions being lifted we were finally able to purchase and receive the components of the Willow Arch. Total cost £1932.00– delivered early one morning to Aldersmead Road. With the help of *idverde* and ten tireless volunteers we built and filled the two raised beds. The following week saw us using the willow whips to create an arch and finally, we planted the boxes with nasturtiums, marigolds, herbs and

strawberry plants. The arch is now well established and much commented on and complimented.

Hedgerow (ARG): *Idverde* donated c 140 hedgerow saplings that had been warehoused during Covid. We pruned and repotted them and over 100 are thriving, all set to go into AR this winter.

Benches: This programme has continued under LT & MK's stewardship. We now have three rainbow benches; six memorial benches and five refurbished benches spread across both parks.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB): Sadly, we are experiencing an upturn in ASB, namely graffiti; removal and destruction of event signs and other notices; attempted theft of planters, litter; plant thefts; motorbikes in the park and increased awareness of nitrous oxide and illegal drug use in and around the parks. CN represents the Friends on the Safer Neighbourhood Panel. MK met with Aaron Field, Police Community Support Officer and Councillor Simon Jeal to review the situation. We are all advised to report any and all incidents of ASB to the police (using this email: SNMailbox-PengeandCatorSNT@met.police.uk) so they can build a portfolio of events and perpetrator descriptions.

New Thursday afternoon volunteer group (CP): Since early September a small group has been working in Cator Park on Thursdays 2-4. We hope to continue this working party as it allows a different group of volunteers to attend and provides a regular focus on the park.

Events:

Carols in the Park; Dec 2022 ARG. A very popular event with c 200 people joining the Beckenham Concert Band to enjoy carols, mulled wine and mince pies.

Easter; April ARG. Very popular family event with face painting, rock/egg hunt and cake stall. New this year was a beautiful Easter art trail by artist Eleanor Howard in Cator park.

Pride; June CP. New this year, a successful and fun family Pride Picnic took place in CP. Proceeds were shared between the Friends and *Metro*, the local Bromley LGBT+ Youth Group.

Music; July ARG. A hot sunny, well attended day with music from the Beckenham Concert Band; Squawkers & Strummers and the Sydenham Singers. Himalayan Kitchen, our frequent event caterers, kindly donated their takings at the event to the Friends.

Paws in the Park; Sept CP. Again a very successful year with lots and lots of well-behaved dogs and people. A range of canine product stalls and dog

show prizes being donated by local businesses. The Friends food stalls – hot dogs; Pimm's, cakes were very busy doing a roaring trade and MK thanked Gareth & Ruth, Scott, Tali & Jon & Siobhan for their help on the hot dog stall on such a hot day, alongside numerous volunteers who set up and ran stalls, donated or made goods, maintained safety and handled registration.

Community Day; Sept ARG. This was a new event set up by Millie in conjunction with Penny Read, *idverde*. It coincided with the MOPAC day and so the local Fire Service, were able to attend. They were a big draw for children and we succeeded in refurbishing two benches., planting bulbs, weeding the sensory beds and painting the ARG children's area main gates.

MK recorded the Friends particular thanks to the *idverde* team: Penny, Andy, Paul and the account director, Martyn, who had made two very supportive site visits this year. MK was also grateful to our local councillors Simon Jeal & Kevin Brookes and the Penge Bid Lead Mark Painter for their ongoing event participation and support.

MK closed by thanking everyone who had volunteered throughout the year; those who had baked or made things for sale, had worked in summer heat on stalls at shows; joined in gardening sessions – sometimes in the dark and the rain; and contributed to the Herculean effort to keep saplings and planting areas watered over the summer months. Those who had donated raffle prizes, plants, equipment and bulbs and those who were working in the background to keep our website, membership, accounts, newsletters and social media up to date.

Membership We currently have 103 members – 36 are due or overdue a renewal and 4 Honorary members. Membership income has been beneficial to the Friends, to share communications, garner support and of course for the income it generates, especially when we have not been able to fund raise at events.

Treasurer's Report

DL took us through her report for the Friends' Financial Year 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022. Two members have reviewed the accounts entries against receipts.

Our opening bank account balance was (all figures rounded) £7,440, we took around £12,050 from various events and bench donations and we spent just under £11,640 leaving an end of year closing balance of £7,850. Some of which is ring-fenced for bench refurbishment and running costs of items such as the website and insurance.

Income breakdown includes: Events profits (Paws £2,240; Wine tasting £410; Carols £310; Pride £2480); Membership £175; Grants £160 & Donations £660.

Expenditure includes: £1,930 Willow arch (£711 grant funding towards this project was received in 2020/21 but spending was delayed by the pandemic); £1,330 on tools and plants; £730 publicity; £330 on a PA system and £150 on a refurbished barbecue.

There was a brief discussion about whether there were any rules giving an account ceiling of £5,000 but there is no apparent evidence for such a limit. It was agreed that it was a sensible notional ceiling in order to ensure that monies raised were spent straight away on park activities.

Election of the Committee

The constitution (updated in 2021) requires all committee members must stand down at the AGM and, if they wish, stand again for re-election. MK explained that she had been Chair for three years and would be very happy to relinquish the role if anyone else wished to take it up.

Two Committee members are standing down and do not seek re-election:

MK thanked Helen (HP) for serving on the Committee for over five years and for all her hard work including leading cake stalls at many events and running the Easter Event.

Debs (DL) has been Treasurer for three years and MK expressed the gratitude of the Friends for her very able and careful custody of both monies & financial records.

Louise (LT) is stepping down as Secretary after three years and was warmly thanked, especially for managing our gardening, committee and event calendar, Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) award lead and many other aspects of the role. She wishes to remain on the committee.

All those demitting office were presented with plants in recognition and appreciation.

Friends Committee elections

Name	Committee Role	Nominated by	Seconded by	Outcome
Millie (MK)	Member & Chair	HP	CN	Elected
Lou (LT)	Member	MK	SC	Elected
Tali Emdin (TE)	Member & Treasurer	MK	CN	Elected
Claudia (CR)	Member	HP	GP	Elected
Gareth (GP)	Member	GC	LT	Elected

Colin (CN)	Member	GP	MK	Elected
Siobhan (SC)	Member	JN	TE	Elected
Gill (GC)	Member & Secretary	LT	AS	Elected
Andrea Spain (AS)	Member	MK	LT	Elected

LT agreed to continue to undertake some existing areas of responsibility such as a DofE volunteers and support for Friends email account management.

Future projects

ARG Paddling Pool. Despite the long term efforts of the Friends to keep a focus on the paddling pool and substantial local support for reinstating the paddling pool in ARG which was last filled in 2019 (in our 2020 survey, 69% of respondents wanted to keep a child-friendly water feature of some kind) the Bromley council and the Open Space Strategy decision had finally been “no” (Nov 2022). In summary, the decision states that it does not make good economic sense to invest so heavily (c£250k with ongoing maintenance) in reinstating a water play feature on this site, especially since there is an existing water feature at Beckenham Recreation Ground, Croydon Road, 1.8 miles away. Any comments on this decision should be addressed to the Bromley Parks & Green Spaces Manager via customer services at LBB on csc@bromley.gov.uk

Whilst awaiting the above decision and in order to maintain the paddling pool area as a dog-free, child friendly protected space *idverde* have provided some rainbow coloured benches and replaced the gates, new planters had been installed by the Friends, plants & soil had been generously provided by Designer Drapes, an children's Art trail established and many bulbs planted which had improved the area in the absence of a paddling pool facility. The friends have also been litter picking to keep the area clean and tidy.

Platinum Jubilee Fund application

This fund offers up to £10,000 per park with a maximum of 40k per ward within the borough. MK detailed our application, based on feedback from park users & members for the following:

Alexandra RG:

- Resurfacing and painting of the pool site as a play area
- Installation of two permanent table tennis tables (one at a suitable height for smaller children to use)

- Further planters to develop a community garden.

Cator Park:

- Dog agility equipment.

Friends' groups have to add £500 per park so the total value of the application is £21,000. A decision is expected (at least in principle) by end 2022/Jan 2023.

Planting

ARG: More bulbs, new and existing planters; sensory beds in the children's area.

CP: Further shrubs; willow arch beds; rose memorial garden and existing beds

Refurbishment/installation

ARG: Playground fence

CP: Millennium milepost & three compost bins

ARG & CP: Ongoing bench refurbishment & installation

Events 2022-3 in addition to gardening dates- see website and Facebook/ twitter for more information nearer the time.

<http://www.friendsofcatorandalexandra.com/>

FB: @catorandalexandra, Twitter: @catoralexandra, Insta: @catoralexandra

Date	Event	Park
4/12/22	ParkBathe & Tree Dressing	Cator
10/12/22	Santa Paws Walk	Alex to Cator
11/12/22	Carols in the park (ITP)	Alex
2023		
Monthly -	ParkBathe walk https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/untitled-1649269	Cator
8/4/23	Easter ITP	Alex
18/05/23	Tree walk	Cator
May TBC	Spring Bat Walk	Cator
23/7/23	Music ITP	Alex
10/9/23	Paws ITP	Cator
Oct TBC	Autumn Bat Walk	Cator
10/12/23	Carols ITP	Alex
17/12/23	Santa Paws Walk	Alex to Cator

Questions

CP Compost bins

Ian (IJ) asked about the decision to have compost bins, having experienced some issues of inadvertently creating rubbish dumping opportunities with compost projects in allotments. Further information was given about the plans – using upcycled wood from pallets and the Hollydale Friends Group, effort and expertise from Penge Green Gym and liaison with Winsford Gardens who have successfully introduced them. IJ's question was welcomed and his expertise in this area will be valuable to AS (CP compost bin project lead) and the project as a whole.

Anti-social behaviour deterrents

Richard (RC) asked whether installing CCTV in “problem” areas of the parks had been considered. A discussion ensued about the practicality, expense and likelihood of the equipment being provided. It is possible it might be introduced temporarily to specifically deter use of and dealing in drugs in CP for example. At present the plan is to populate the Safer Neighbourhood team log of ASB by emailing in details of any incidence to

Plans for depleting large woodchip piles in both parks

IJ noted that the woodchip piles in both parks have built up to quite substantial levels with all the tree maintenance work undertaken in the year by LBB contractors. He asked what the plans were to use it all. MK explained that the woodchip is being left to season and then will be used to fill in hazardous ground holes in the riverside path/field in CP; mulch the rose beds and create grass and weed-free areas around the saplings throughout both parks. The hedge project will use a large amount of the woodchip.

Tree safety

JN asked about the frequency and depth of the tree survey work undertaken in the parks as a huge oak near the children's play area in CP had lost a large branch shortly after the survey had found no apparent problems. PR advised that the Tree officer has various Wards to cover at this end of the borough. There are, in fact, 5 officers, 1 manager and 1 admin asst. but they are incredibly busy as it's such a large borough, with many trees in parks and roads) Tree surveys are undertaken every three years and that a considerable amount of work had been done in CP to trim the oak trees this year.

Update from Penny Read, idverde

Penny thanked the Friends and volunteers for the significant work they have undertaken in this and previous years. She reported better communications

(confirmed by MK) had led to improvements in relationships and many outputs achieved this year with the Friends of CP & ARG including the very positive Community Day. idverde continue to address their vacancies in grounds maintenance staff and look forward to continued effective working in 2023. Penny wished us well with our forthcoming Jubilee applications.

Vote of thanks to MK

The committee gave a vote of thanks to Millie, and her husband Mat, who has assisted the Friends tirelessly this year, enabling so many of the achievements to be made.

Close of meeting 9:05pm

Signed:

Chair: Millie Knights

Secretary – Gill Cawdron

Park Bathe notes

Vanessa Potter is joint lead with Dr Kirsty McEwan on the Park Bathe project based in Crystal Palace Park. Vanessa outlined the history of Park Bathe, the ongoing development and explained briefly what Park Bathe is. Vanessa also covered the evaluation of the project and some of the scepticism and the benefits!

Park Bathe = Wellbeing on your doorstep, an initiative to provide affordable, accessible green space health benefits.

VP is an established wellbeing author who met KE after hearing KE's podcast. Park Bathe is developed from the concept of "Forest bathing", popular in Japan since the 1980s as a way of reducing workforce stress. Forest bathing in the UK has conventionally been an expensive day long activity around a three hour walk deep in ancient woodland accessible only by car. Park bathing is a hybrid, involving a free one-hour walk (so it fits into a lunch hour) in a local park (easily accessible). Funding to date has come from the National Lottery and is focussed on evaluating the health benefits of the activity. In particular participants "heart rate variability (HVR)" is measured at the start and end of the walk. HVR is closely correlated to stress levels.

Anecdotally and historically, forest bathing and, ipso facto, park bathing, has been somewhat mocked, derided and misrepresented as some sort of “spiritual, tree-hugging wu-wu”. Having spent 15 years walking and chatting with friends in CP, Vanessa wanted to start something that provided similar benefits, was practical, easily available and “wu-wu” free. Forest Bathe is just that – a secular, quiet meander in which participants interact with the park landscape rather than each other. It is based on breaking our modern lifestyle of working on screens for long hours, multitasking and being constantly bombarded with “Flight, fight, fright, freeze” triggers causing our sympathetic nervous system to be stuck in full flow, resulting in “attentional fatigue”. Park Bathe aims to stimulate our parasympathetic system which allows sleep, rest, repair and digestion to take place.

Park bathing is a mindful (literally), gentle walk in the park, being invited (rather than instructed) to explore visual, olfactory, auditory and touch experiences. It takes place in silence, without access to mobile phones or other devices, with occasional opportunities to share the memories or thoughts that the activities evoke.

Over 300 people have taken part in Park Bathing and it is suggested that you do it more than once to feel the effects more deeply.

The early evaluations show that the initiative has been very timely after the social anxiety and loneliness induced by repeated and prolonged Covid lockdowns over the last two years. It is specifically aimed at the sceptical stressed! The effects reported by participants are:

40% report a reduction in anxiety levels

50% report a reduction in “mind chatter”

36% report an increase in feeling “connected” (rather than lonely)

36% report an increased feeling of connection with nature

15% show an increase in heart health as measured by HRV levels

The final result is very satisfying – if your doctor was to prescribe something that reduced your heart dis-ease by 15% it would be welcomed with open arms. Incidentally, getting more and better quality sleep also has a beneficial effect which is often overlooked.

Women report a greater feeling of safety in green spaces and a reduced sense of “vigilance”, often drifting off as new-found friends after a Park Bathe session.

The other gratifying result is that it appears that the more you Park Bathe, the more benefit accrues!

It is deliberately designed to be simple and techniques easily learned and shared. It can be used in virtually any green space and you are actively encouraged to go off and do it yourself and set up Park Bathes of your own. This makes it a very suitable activity for Park Friends Groups to run.

Engaging families, adolescents, people with a range of auditory and sensual overload sensitivities and deepening the connection with our parks and green spaces also encourages people to "see the park with new eyes". The entranced, joyful "noticing" of a green space can provide a gateway to other volunteer activities such as Friends gardening and a reduction in ASB through a heightened sense of connection and "belonging".

MK thanked Vanessa for an informative, engaging and entertaining introduction to the Park Bathe Project and invited members to sign up for one of two Park Bathe sessions happening in Cator Park on 29 November and 4 December.