

Community Works

Summer Conference – 13 June 2016

Open Session: Parks and open spaces

Present:

Duncan Blinkhorn	Community Works
Aaron Cameron	Brighton and Hove City Council – Parks Projects team
Alan Moon	Friends of Hove Park
Allan Brown	Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation
Carol Smith	Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project
Chris Todd	Brighton and Hove Friends of the Earth / Biosphere Board & CW Rep
Claire Morgan	Brighton and Hove City Council
Denise Taylor	City in Bloom
Eric Mayne	Withdean Park Dog Walking Community (formerly Save Withdean Park Fence Group)
Jake Barnes	University of Sussex
Jannet Cook	Metamorphosis Art Group
Jodie Ivermee	Safety Net
John Cook	Patcham Community Action Team
John Patmore	Brighton and Hove Wildlife Forum
Jordan Back	Trust for Developing Communities
Lorraine Prince	Community Works
Lydia Majic	Friends of Farm Green
Mary Funnell	Metamorphosis Art Group
Maureen Winder	The Level Communities Forum / Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation
Paul Campbell	Brighton and Hove City Council – Parks Projects team
Roz Reyburn	The Level Communities Forum
Ruth Urbanowicz	Brighton and Hove Organic Gardening Group (BHOGG) KEEP
Val Cane	Working 50 Plus
Yvonne Hunt	Volunteering Matters

1. Collaboration for sustainability –

Jake Barnes, University of Sussex – Science Policy Research Unit

Jake described a recent series of workshops, which he facilitated, to explore how local communities and the city council can collaborate to pursue environmental sustainability. Parks and green spaces was one of the key focuses.

- Context of change in the city – massive reductions in local authority budgets making non-statutory services like parks very vulnerable to cuts.
- Green spaces are recognised as important ‘entry points’ for public involvement with and consciousness of environmental issues and concerns
- Three workshops were held covering: i] governance processes ii] priorities to address iii] action points / road map to achieve
- Priorities included greater community involvement and multifunctional development
- CHANGE drivers include funding reductions from central government
- Extent of Change, not clear where it will lead

- Opportunity in Change – including 10 year strategy. What works well? What to keep? What works less well? – tensions?
- Learning is needed to make the most of the opportunity. We can't keep doing things the same way.
- Recognising expertise and skills in the city and making the most of this to collaborate – VCS, BHCC, Businesses
- Reflections on open Spaces
- Huge Potential especially – sustainability, diversity, learning and skills
- Building Trust will be key
- Creating a Space for Collaboration
- Inclusive and open, including to BHCC to form relationships and trust
- Share information and resources, act as conduit both 'up' and 'down'
- Projects
- Meet regularly to build momentum and close working relationships and trust
- Not just digital
- Parallel work with BHCC 'Collaboration Framework'

2. **VACOS proposed open spaces network for community groups**

Denise Taylor (City in Bloom)

- Recognised need for group focussing on open spaces
- Burden / dwindling resources
- Started Volunteers Alliance of open spaces – 20+ groups so far
- Aim to work together in partnership
- Supporting needs of volunteers – training, insurance, recruitment
- Sharing information and resources
- Attending meetings is optional. Possible steering groups to disseminate information
- Groups invited to join
- Thanked groups who have input – CW and BHCC
- Contact Denise for Information cityinbloom@gmail.com (no web page yet)

Q&A

- If / When webpage set up share info!
- Defining which spaces included – parks, Downland, etc.
- Volunteer insurance... What is actually needed? What is covered by BHCC?
- Training? Volunteers to train volunteers? David Larkin offered to progress BUT capacity at BHCC reducing – fewer staff
- Direction of travel for volunteers to be more involved BUT need some support! - Key part of Open Spaces strategy – alongside BHCC volunteer / collaboration strategy – will cover insurance (Sam Warren)
- Could the Alliance get insurance to cover all groups?
- Insurance often a block to getting things done...
- PLI covered by BHCC if certain conditions met (tools, training, risk assessed, constitutional, management plan, age agreed with ranger, first aid

- Template Risk Assessments can be useful
- Groups can take out own insurance if they have funds / can fundraise eg CHF
- Need for a BHCC summary in plain terms of legal and technical information
- Strategy can clarify position in different scenarios
- What exactly is needed when Ranger is / is not present?

3. Collaboration Framework (handout circulated)

- Applies across all services
- Culture change in relationship between public sector and communities
- Work in progress – ongoing consultations... Deadline Autumn 2016. October NCE committee
- More effective relationships for collaboration

4. Open Spaces Strategy

Paul Campbell, Brighton & Hove City Council: Parks Projects

- Due to complete October 2016. Currently consulting
- Possible event in July
- Seeking framework for 'friends of groups' to work with BHCC and standardise ways of working
- Resources mean activities stopped / stopping. Disheartening to see 'controlled neglect'. How can parks team still deliver, and where?
- Support to 'friends of' groups to be efficient and clear.
- All of our time is equally valuable
- Committed to 2 x meetings per year to network, share information and good practice
- Aim to set response times for non-emergency enquiries (e.g. monthly / quarterly)
- Prioritising is in context of services across the city with less resources
- Could do more with better co-ordination e.g. volunteering, healthy activities / walks, schools and education – including forest schools (develops personal ownership and connection. Can be part of school week)

Q&A

- 'standardisation' – plan for minimum standards... to be determined but some minimum will be needed
- Groups do great stuff! Support needs to be there, but ideal is minimal
- How will BHCC support communities with less volunteers groups?
- City in Bloom are co-ordinating working across the city and develop overarching community
- Support currently goes to those who 'shout the loudest'
- Community Development need – Groups support each other
- Less 'vocal' areas likely to be identified by CCG / public health as areas of deprivation needing most work
- Will layer map with existing groups, plus S106 (£2m)

- There will be a 5 year plan to check all areas and recognise areas needing improvement... this is the current system which is not working in all areas. Where collaboration not already happening
- Not just greenery – play areas too
- Minimising extent of decline with loss of resources
- Some groups are more proactive BUT process can be inhibiting. Harness this resource where it *does* exist. Enable initiative. Opportunity for solution-focused ‘just do it’ which can feel like a risk to the council but not to communities themselves
- Moulescoomb high indices of deprivation BUT shared by student residents so not recognised by BHCC / reflected in resource
- Contextual issues of social impact of government policy / economy affecting local people. BHCC recognise groups already stretched and might do *less* than before not *more*.
- It takes resources / investment to manage volunteers – will feed back in open spaces strategy
- Not expecting volunteers to take over parks work, existing effort often different eg events
- Resources for co-ordination and management in general needed... challenging – difficult to see how can happen with resources... difficult decisions inevitable. Will be a need for collaboration with groups.
- Move equipment from one park to another where not used? Parks noted and will assess use of assets
- For strategy to work needs to be taken seriously across BHCC and work with PH / CCG to address health and deprivation perspective.
- Can a network identify neglected spaces to address together?
- Importance of standing up for our open spaces and their value. The amount of resources is a political decision. Network needs to lobby too otherwise resources will keep dwindling. It is possible to influence (strong agreement within groups)
- Counsellors listen to the public more than officers...?
- What does BHCC want from ‘friends of’ groups?... volunteering? Fundraising?
- Groups uniting around issue of parks not being maintained. Many benefits for a range of reasons, not just because they ‘look nice’
- Acknowledgement that open spaces are a great asset to the city. Cost = 14p per person per week. Great health and well-being benefits and opportunities. These are well recorded on maps.

5. Summary

- Opportunities ... BUT still opaque?
- Need for BHCC to understand, recognise, value and thank us...
- We can be proactive and invite them along to things to take us seriously and build relationships.
- Communication currently lacking
- Network can be a conduit to find answers on behalf of all groups and share information.
- Will ‘Volunteers’ be mentioned in strategy explicitly?
- Low budget disempowering for BHCC
- Where groups exist won’t allow decline

- Co-operation of volunteers vital to strategy. They need to be recognised as a resource and taken seriously
- Training key – should not be de-prioritised... * needs clarification.
- Finite number of parks and large populations – potential for management
- Scope of strategy remains unclear. Consultation ongoing. July date TBC (ensure this is before school holidays.)
- Evening meeting accessible to more groups / volunteers?
- City in Bloom meeting – Monday 25th July – collaborate around meetings? / Reschedule this date to make further apart from this meeting? - Duncan to liase with Paul on this. They will set a date together, not during school holidays. At Community base, 5.30 for 6pm with refreshments.

6. Reps update – Chris Todd, CW Environment rep

- City Plan 2 is out for consultation at the end of June, including possibility of housing being built on urban fringe sites.
- (Phase 1 has the wrong information about wildlife sites – location and numbers)
- CW to circulate when out

7. Member updates

- Loss of buildings in Moulescoomb is being proposed + sale and new development. Consultation upcoming.
- CW to circulate Stanmer Park consultation when out – August.