

Protocol for Southwark Council and Friends of Parks Groups

Aim of Protocol

1. This protocol aims to clarify roles and responsibilities of the Council, existing and new groups, for the benefit of parks, open spaces and cemeteries within the borough. The protocol is an expression of goodwill that will help to formalise the effective working relationship between Southwark Council and Friends of parks groups operating in Southwark.

Objectives of Protocol

2. To establish roles and responsibilities to help facilitate constructive and effective working relationships
3. To facilitate cooperation on issues relating to the development and management of parks and open spaces (including cemeteries) in the borough
4. To provide interactive means of communication between the council and the Friends

Fairer Future for all

5. Following engagement with local people through the council's budget process, the council plan identified the following principles that underpins its Fairer Future for all vision and which guide the objectives of this protocol. They are :
 - Treating residents as we would wish members of our own families to be treated
 - Being open, honest and accountable
 - Spending money as if it were coming from our own pocket
 - Working for everyone to realise their potential
 - Making Southwark a place to be proud of
6. The borough's parks, open spaces and cemeteries contribute towards the achievement of these objectives. Specifically the principle 'Making Southwark a place to be proud of'. The success of Southwark's parks, open spaces and cemeteries contributes towards the vision 'to enhance the things that make Southwark special' by 'encouraging healthy lifestyles among individuals and families by having quality parks, open spaces and leisure services.'
7. As such the council respects and welcomes the role of Friends of parks groups as independent 'watch dogs' representing the community and aiming to ensure the ongoing success of Southwark's parks.

Roles and Responsibilities: The Council

8. The council is responsible for the management and maintenance of parks, open spaces and cemeteries in its ownership on behalf of community within Southwark. The Southwark Plan (2007) sets out a vision for the borough which includes: for Southwark to be a borough with high environmental quality that is attractive, sustainable and performs well on environmental measures.

Parks and Open Spaces Management

9. This management of the borough's parks, open spaces and cemeteries is undertaken by the Public Realm Division of the Environment and Leisure Department.
10. The **Parks and Open Spaces Unit within the Division** is responsible for:
 - The preservation of parks and open spaces (and cemeteries) in its care
 - The day to day operational management and maintenance of parks, open spaces and cemeteries
 - The development and improvement of parks, open spaces and cemeteries through the development of plans and strategies in line with council policies and strategic objectives
11. At a local level the Contracts and Service Area teams (Local area teams) are responsible for the management of the parks in their operational area. They work alongside a Service Development Officer who is responsible for the implementation of specific projects and initiatives.
12. The Local area teams ensure all parks, open spaces and cemeteries in Southwark are managed and maintained properly. Their responsibilities include:
 - Grounds maintenance contract monitoring and administration
 - Ensuring park security and safety
 - Managing a dedicated repairs and maintenance budget
 - Dealing with tree issues
 - Pest control and management
 - Crime and antisocial behaviour
 - Park buildings and other infrastructure
 - Sports and pitch bookings
 - Dealing with water body issues
 - Developing and implementing park management plans
 - Involvement in new developments with parks in area of responsibility
 - Advising on external funding application preparation
 - Events and commercial usage of parks
 - Business or franchises operating in parks or new business ideas (i.e. licenses to run fitness classes etc)

Parks and Open Spaces Management – what the Council will do:

13. The Parks area teams will consult with Friends groups and site users on aspects of parks management, developments, plans and events. Where operational decisions are made which do not accord with the views of Friends groups this will be fully explained.
14. Parks officers will attend Friends meetings when required including their AGM or by negotiation will supply a report for the meeting if they are unable to

attend. In addition, Friends groups should appoint a representative to attend meetings and site visits if they wish.

15. Council officers will support Friends groups to run as democratic, fair organisations that can represent a true and balanced view of the community. They can also help in resolving issues of conflict between users should this be needed.
16. Parks officers will support Friends groups with any developmental needs that they might have, for example providing support with funding applications and developing volunteering schemes.
17. Parks officers will support Friends groups to develop an appropriate structure for their group, whether this is in becoming constituted, including electing a chair and other roles by assisting them in holding an AGM, or by registering with the Charity Commission.

Planning and Parks:

18. All aspects of planning decisions relating to parks and open spaces are managed by the Council's Planning Division which is in the Chief Executive's Department. The Division is made up of five service units, which include Development Management, Building Control, Transport Policy, Planning Projects, and Planning Policy.
19. Planning Policy team is responsible for:
 - Preparing the core strategy and planning policies for regeneration and change, conservation and development in Southwark. The team provides information and advice for residents, businesses, consultants and other interested people on our planning policies.
 - The development of the borough's Open Spaces Strategy which provides a framework for the provision of open space. The strategy sets out a vision and objectives for the borough and identifies key needs and priorities for the different types of open space. The strategy also sets standards of open space for each type of open space and highlights the key priorities for investment and improvement.
20. The Development Management team is responsible for:
 - Assessing development to ensure that proposed new developments meet the council's core strategy, the council's development plan and both national and regional, Greater London Authority (GLA), planning policies.
 - Assessing the impact of proposed development on open space, trees, biodiversity and applying appropriate conditions and mitigation.
 - Providing advice on the quality of design and the conservation of the borough's heritage assets, issues tree protection orders (TPOs), processes applications for works to protected trees including those within conservation areas, and negotiates planning agreements to deliver affordable housing and, where appropriate, other benefits to mitigate the impact of new developments on the environment and local community.
 - Undertaking monitoring and enforcement action (where warranted) to ensure that development proceeds in accordance with consented plans, conditions, and related planning obligations.

21. There is a statutory requirement for the Planning Division to consult on planning applications with those most likely to be affected by any proposed developments and other interested parties which may include Friends of Parks and amenity groups. Such consultation may take various forms including written notices, posted sites notices, and press notices. Each notice is subject to its own separate consultation period. In general, the minimum statutory period required for consultation is 21 days, and consultation is carried out in accordance with the council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
http://www.southwark.gov.uk/downloads/download/1339/statement_of_community_involvement

Planning Applications affecting Parks and Open spaces - What the Council will do:

22. Ensure that Friends groups are consulted on planning applications that are likely to impact upon their sites.
23. Carry out transparent and recorded consultation and communicate with Friends groups about projects/issues that might affect them. Communications will be undertaken through the named contact provided to the Planning team allowing sufficient notice so that responses can be received, considered and agreed prior to any relevant deadlines.
24. Take Friends groups and other stakeholder groups' views into account when making decisions. Decisions that impact on the park will be made in line with the council's constitution and the relevant planning policy. Where these are planning decisions consultation will be undertaken to inform decisions and the planning report will summarise all representations and set out the relevant and material planning matters that were considered.

Roles and Responsibilities: Friends of Parks Groups

25. Friends of Parks groups consist of local volunteers who give their time to help conserve and improve valuable open space. Friends groups work closely with the council as landowner to shape the future of Southwark's parks, open spaces and cemeteries.
26. Friends groups will ensure they represent the views of their members, where a constitutional membership exists, or the views of an area where no such formal membership exists. They should present these views to council officers. Groups will be independent and make every effort to work cooperatively with the council and other stakeholders.
27. Friends groups will try and recruit/sign up members in order to properly represent the local community.
28. Friends groups are encouraged to involve ward councillors by notifying them of meetings in advance.
29. Friends groups will recognise the importance of developing good practice in organisational governance and ensure that policies and procedures are in place to protect and promote the interests of members. This will notably be

from having an appropriate governance structure in place or from being constituted.

30. Friends groups will make all reasonable efforts to send a representative to meetings regarding park and open space maintenance and development and feedback to their members as and when necessary.
31. Friends groups will liaise directly with the local area teams for their park as first point of contact. The Chair or other appointed member of the group will be the main contact for the parks service and will cascade communications from parks officers.
32. Friends groups will work closely with their the local area teams to identify improvements needed in their parks. They will work collaboratively to develop goals and priorities on a yearly basis, as well as on an ad hoc basis.
33. Friends groups will inform the local area teams of any application for funding affecting parks and open spaces, and will work with council officers if funding is awarded in carrying out any works.