

Decision Maker: Environment PDS Committee

Date: 3rd July 2012

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: FRIENDS ANNUAL REPORT

Contact Officer: Louise Simpson, Development and Partnerships Manager, Street Scene & Greenspace Tel: 020 8461 7864 E-mail: Louise.simpson@bromley.gov.uk

Chief Officer: Nigel Davies, Director of Environmental Services

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

1.1 This report updates Members on the work carried out by the Department working in partnership with the Friends (volunteers) of the Borough. The document provides a summary of the progress made from April 2011 to March 2012.

1.2 Appendices providing a more detailed report are available electronically on the relevant meeting page at the Council's website via the following link:

<http://cds.bromley.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=127&MId=4148&Ver=4>

. The appendices are also provided in the Members Room along with copies of the report.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Committee:

2.1 **Receive the annual report and note another successful year for the Borough's Friends, and formally record Members' thanks to staff commitment to working outside of normal hours to deliver this service and the volunteers for their significant and valuable contribution.**

2.2 **Note that £362k and 36,033 hrs was secured for green space improvements by the Friends of Parks and Greenspace through external funding opportunities during 2011/12. To also note the additional £298k of enhancements to green space secured through partnership working.**

2.3 **Note the success of the new initiatives regarding Healthy Lifestyles delivery; and the Snow Friends programme for Winter 2011/12.**

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy - Empowering communities by working with individuals and groups to their improvement of the neighbourhood [public open spaces].
 2. BBB Priority: Quality Environment: Contributes to other BBB priorities.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated Cost £60.1k from LBB budgets, £362k of external funds and a further £298k secured through partnership working
 2. Ongoing costs: Recurring Cost £20.2k and £32.7k
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Streetscene and Greenspace
 4. Total current budget for this head: £ 60.1k
 5. Source of funding: Existing revenue budgets 2011/12 plus additional project funding delivered through external funding opportunities.
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): All officers within Street Scene and Greenspace provide full and continual support. – 3.6 ftes
 3. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: Community partnership is embedded in everything that is delivered by the Street Scene and Greenspace Divisional Team – equivalent to 3.6ftes
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-Statutory - Government Guidance.
 2. Call-in: Not Applicable
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Customer Impact

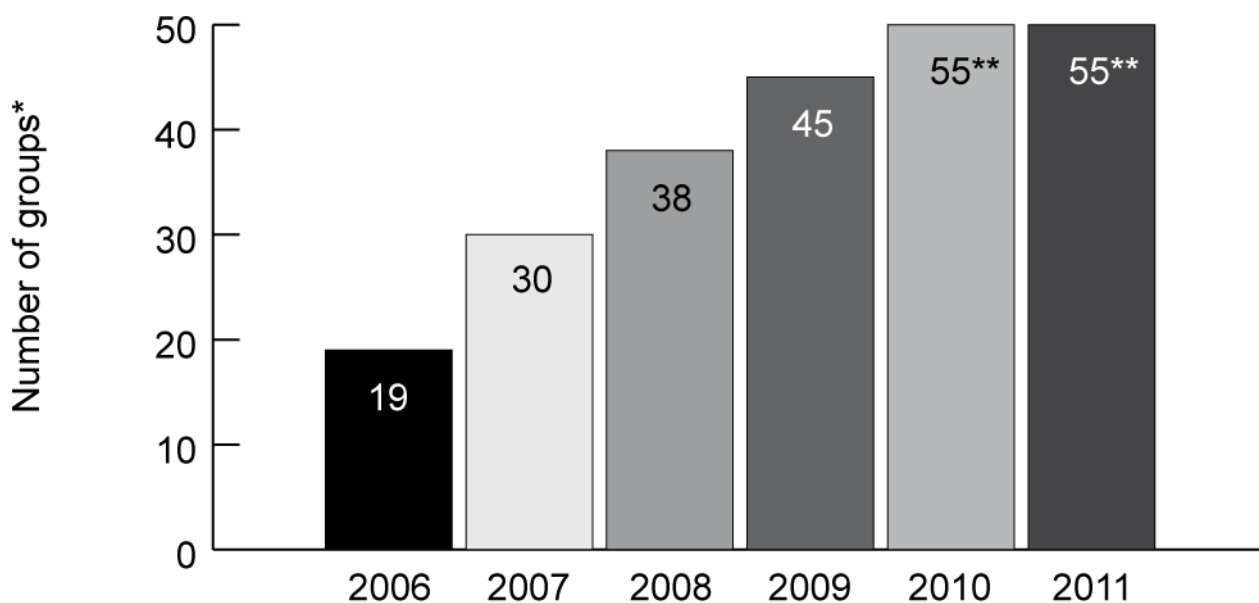
1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): All Bromley residents and visitors.
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: n/a

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 Friends volunteers are local people who work alone or as part of a group to improve their environment, helping to make Bromley a better place in which to live. The selfless work of these individuals has ensured our parks, streets, woodlands and countryside sites are safer, cleaner and greener. The work of Friends inspires civic pride and 'Builds Communities' enabling local people to take an active role in making their local environment thrive. The ethos of 'Big Society' has been embedded in Bromley for over 20 years.



*Friends of parks and green spaces

**Includes expression of interest from people wishing to form groups

3.2 By volunteering, our Friends receive advice, support, training, supervision, and tools, with many officers, across all disciplines, giving up their own personal time to help Friends deliver at weekends. Tasks are many and include picking up litter, removing graffiti, clearing snow, coppicing woods, surveying wildlife, securing funding for play equipment and delivering concerts and community events.

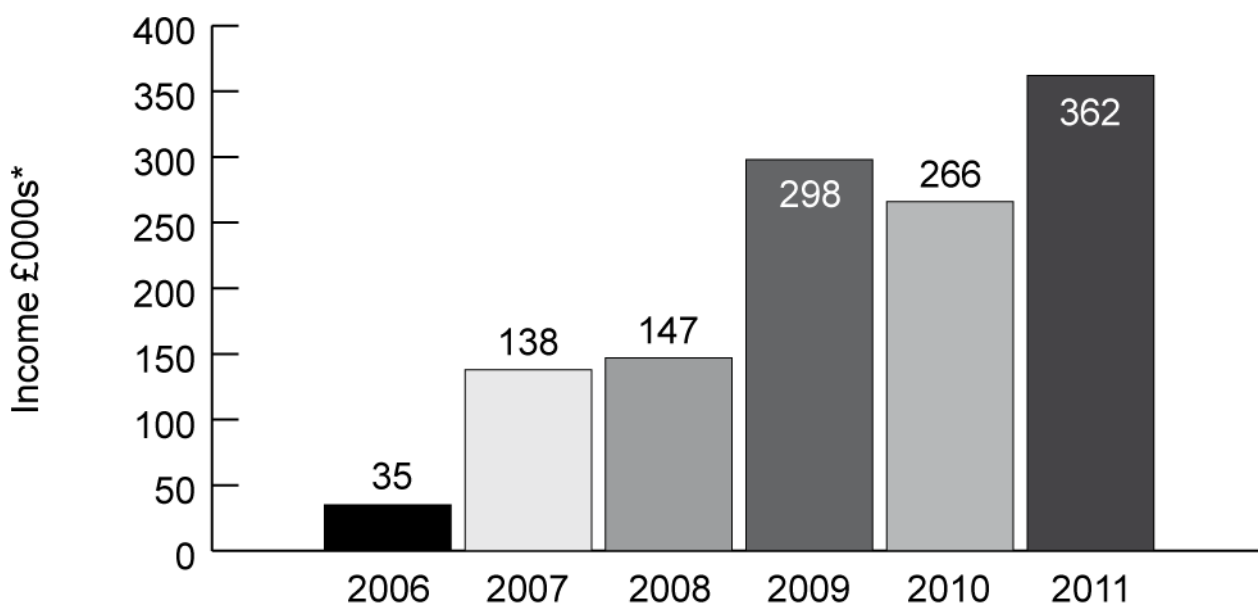
3.3 The last twelve months has produced another successful year for the volunteers, but it hasn't been without challenge. From 1st April 2011, the Countryside Service merged with Parks and Greenspace. The Parks and Greenspace Ranger review lost three countryside expert officer posts and three Crystal Palace ranger posts, which has impacted heavily on remaining officer resources. There has also been a shift in management of Snow Friends and Street Friends, which now come under the responsibility of the Development and Partnership Manager together with the Parks Friends. Bromley's partner volunteers have been extremely supportive through this transition and are working hard to assist officers by building sustainability and self-management into their volunteer processes.

Additional funding

3.4 The big news this year is that volunteer groups are getting more confident in applying for larger grants and are having much success. Grant securement this year has also been increasingly promoted to our wider partners to include grassroots sports providers and allotment holders.

3.5 The symbiotic partnership between Streetscene and Greenspace and its volunteers has secured an additional £362k of external grant funding for our parks, allotments and other public spaces. This figure includes the following greenspace improvements:

- 3.6 The Friends of Southill Woods who secured £43k to provide biodiversity improvements, new paths, signage and the opening up of 0.6 hectares of additional woodland for community benefit; the Friends of Glentrammon Recreation Ground and Foxbury Wood who secured almost £50k to improve play for children aged 7 – 13 yrs; Friends of Chislehurst and Walden Recreation Ground, who secured £18k for a trim trail; the Friends of Biggin Hill received £2k to enable them to continue to encourage resident enjoyment for their sensory garden, opened in 2011 and the Friends of Hollydale Open Space who secured £5k to remedy lake and path repairs, deliver tree maintenance and provide biodiversity enhancement for the resident bat colonies.
- 3.7 London's first Higher Level Stewardship Agreement was secured (funded through DEFRA) to provide an additional £16k per annum over ten years for Bromley's countryside sites and an additional £3.5k for capital works at High Elms, Hayes and Keston.
- 3.8 A SITA grant for £11k was secured to undertake riparian and biodiversity improvements to Ravensbourne Open Space pond, which includes reinstatement of the sluice and bank repairs. A further £5k from Veolia has been provided to desilt Kingswood Glen to improve the habitat of the Great Crested Newt.
- 3.9 TfL LIP funding of £146k has also been used to fund a number of infrastructure improvements (e.g. paths, lighting and new signage) to walking and cycling routes through greenspaces, this has included South Hill Woods, Penge Recreation Ground, Glentrammon Recreation Ground and Pickhurst Recreation Ground.



**Friends of parks and green spaces*

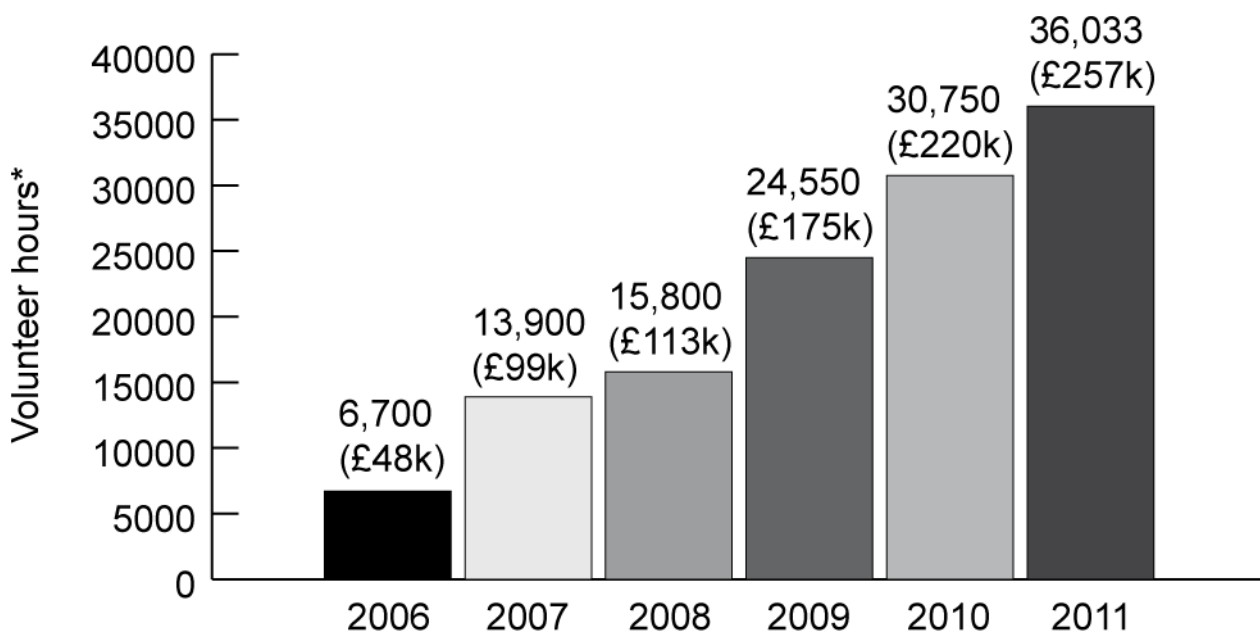
- 3.10 Work has continued this year on the Lubbock Landscape project at High Elms with the £44k that was secured by staff and volunteers during 2010/11, to research the landscape and social history of High Elms. Highlights so far include the restoration of the Birthday Shelter and Grotto, oral history training for volunteers and staff from the Bromley Museum, and a series of 'Memory Days' which has resulted in the installation of an interactive mural in the Lubbock room at BEECHE.
- 3.11 Other funding mechanisms include 3 successful corporate workdays, a 'sold service' to London Borough of Camden to train their officers to deliver Bromley's People for Parks Campaign and

£3.5k Coolings Nursery sponsorship collectively secured with Environmental Strategy colleagues to fund the Bromley Environmental Awards.

3.12 In addition to the £362k, £298k of extra greenspace improvements has also been secured. £130k of this funding was secured from the Lawn Tennis Association by Park Langley Tennis Club to refurbish the tennis courts at Croydon Road Recreation Ground. £150k (circa) was also donated by the Environment Agency to improve the water quality and carry out biodiversity improvements along the River Cray. £18k was secured by community groups and individuals to provide 23 Commemorative seats in parks and greenspaces. When adding these additional figures to the amount the Friends have raised, (the complete list of additional external funding secured can be viewed in the Apdx), both officers and Friends, have collectively sourced an additional £660k to benefit parks and countryside sites this financial year.

Volunteer hours

3.13 The Friends do not only generate income. They continue to increase their invaluable contribution by providing man-hours to preserve, conserve and deliver maintenance and horticultural tasks. Over half of Bromley’s parks and greenspaces, as several groups oversee more than one site, now benefit from having Friends as custodians.



*Friends of parks and green spaces

3.14 The number of work hours the Friends of Parks have gifted is 26,593 hours, which equates to £189,950. An additional 9,440 hours, (£67,430) was delivered through our Healthy Lifestyles work, which includes GrowTime, Nash College, Green Gym and River Keeper clients.

3.15 Numerous hours were also donated by 858 Street Friends, acting as the Council’s ‘eyes and ears’ by reporting street scene problems and supporting officers who manage subsequent repairs and monitor the performance of contractors. Street Friends have also been equipped with graffiti removal kits, litter pickers, and purple rubbish sacks with a dedicated telephone ‘hotline’ to the Council’s street cleansing contractor who in partnership, collected 1,000 purple rubbish sacks this year following litter picking and leaf collection events.

3.16 Friends joined the annual “*Big Bromley Brushup*” campaign during August involving eleven days of activities such as litter picking and graffiti clearance, supported by officers and contractors.

3.17 The newest family to join the Friends organisation is Snow Friends. This year, members were organised into 179 community groups. Volunteers were provided with 2,890 shovels and 6,600 x 10kg bags of salt to keep the streets clear of snow during the winter. Comments included:

It was really enjoyable, a great sense of community. People talking to neighbours they've never spoken to before, new friendships born out of clearing snow, how fantastic is that!

I just want to tell you how effective the council's supply of snow shovels and grit/salt is proving to be. I received a lot of comments confirming public appreciation

3.18 The Rangers provided the Payback Community Service with tools for 61 Payback group work days. Their work included a Multi-Agency Clean-up Operation at Mountfield Estate (BR5), where 8m² of graffiti was removed, vegetation cut back, 56 large compactor sacks and two large trailers were filled with rubbish, and a 60 ft felled tree was taken off site.

Sponsorship

3.19 The Glades Shopping Centre in partnership with Bromley, provided £15k to employ the British Trust of Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) to run a Healthy Lifestyles Green Gym group at Winsford Gardens, Penge. The group, consisting of local people of all ages and abilities, now manage this site by delivering gardening, pruning, litter clearance and other maintenance tasks. This work has really made a difference by providing a welcoming place for the residents of Penge to enjoy.

3.20 Veolia has become a major sponsor, providing Brook Lane Community Nursery, in Plaistow, with over £18k (in-kind) of manpower, flytipping and landfill costs, to clear the site ready for the building of this nursery. Without their support, this project would not have been viable.

3.21 Thames 21 has donated many hours free of charge to work side by side with volunteers who wish to become volunteer water bailiffs.

3.22 Betts Park received funds from Affinity Sutton to provide BMX activities during school holidays.

3.23 The Waitrose 'Community Matters' green coin scheme is still a favourite means of funding with Friends of Chislehurst and Walden, Warren Road, Biggin Hill, BEECHE (who raised nearly £1k for High Elms) and many of our allotment sites utilising this opportunity.

Maintenance

3.24 In 2011/12, the Ranger Service provided Friends Groups with 486 man hours which included tasks such as: dropping off tools, supplying trailers to collect green waste/flytipping, to organising work days to provide industrial scrub cutter work. They also provided 334 man hours to support other community groups such as Blenheim Estate RA and St Johns Church, Penge.

3.25 The Friends work in partnership with the Grounds Maintenance Team, and act as "extra eyes and ears" to report problems. Officers and volunteers are working together to introduce drought resistant planting to ensure sustainability.

3.26 Ground Maintenance has also supported Bromley's allotment plot holders by providing thorned plants to plant against boundary walls to reduce site vandalism. To help alleviate the shortage of allotment space, an additional 28 half plots were created at Farnborough Hill Allotments.

3.27 Young Tree Maintenance and Identification classes have been provided by the Tree Team to increase young tree survival rates and to enable Friends to lead their own Tree Walk Days.

Working with young people to reduce anti-social behaviour in parks

- 3.28 RockCorps biggest event in London 2011 was held at Crystal Palace Park. Sponsored by Orange, 230 young people spent the day painting, clearing scrub, and building paths. They volunteered because Orange RockCorps produces some of the hottest gigs in the music calendar. You can't buy a ticket. You can't win a ticket. You have to earn a ticket, so each volunteer has to donate 4 hours for their community with Orange RockCorps; to receive one ticket in return.
- 3.29 Junior River Keepers has been in existence for 2 years. Young people work with the Thames 21 River Bailiff and for three hours work they earn a £5 voucher. The River Cray had litter cleared, overgrown paths maintained, and tree crowns raised. The young people learn flora and fauna management and put together their own risk assessments. They are taking ownership and the river is the beneficiary. There is also an adult volunteer group that support this work.
- 3.30 Over 1,750 children enjoyed Junior Citizen talks as part of the Safer Bromley Partnership.
- 3.31 The Bromley Youth Advisory Panel (aged from 13 – 18 yrs) has delivered consultation for various park development projects, and has supported the Cray Day festival, raising funds of £50 for their group. They have provided 150 volunteer hours this year.
- 3.32 The pupils from Highfield Infants School led the consultation exercise to secure Big Lottery funding for the Friends of South Hill Wood and Kingswood Glen's programme of works. Pupils from Green Street Green Primary School were instrumental in the design for a new playground using Big Lottery Community Spaces funding secured through the Friends Group.
- 3.33 The work of the Environmental Education team has been going from strength to strength with more schools taking up Forest School programmes - some schools now visit on a weekly basis. 17 teachers from schools across the Borough and wider are have been trained at BEECHE to deliver Forest Schools in their own school grounds; a cost effective and sustainable way to teach children about the natural world, and widely recognised as an excellent way to develop social, cognitive and behavioural issues.

Events

- 3.34 The Park Ranger Service has gone through significant change this year, with the removal of a site based Ranger Service within Crystal Palace, to a leaner, fully mobile team. This service has had its remit broadened to include countryside biodiversity and habitat maintenance across the Borough. This year officers have processed 266 event applications for events such as firework displays, fetes and fairs, and have contributed 113 man hours to provide health and safety support at the bigger celebrations.
- 3.35 A Woodland Festival was delivered by the Friends of High Broom Wood through grant funding and included environmental art activities and a nature trail quiz.
- 3.36 Alexandra Residents Association (Penge) organised their own annual Front Garden Gardening competition and money raised was given to St Christopher's Hospice.
- 3.37 The Friends have proved time and again to be best placed to develop meaningful relationships with schools, churches and other organisations. "Cray Day", organised by the Friends of Cray Valley, attracted over 4000 people to their park, and was paid for by local businesses.
- 3.38 This year the Friends annual "Be a responsible Dog Owner" campaign was delivered over three weekends – two sessions in Bromley Town Centre with a further event in Priory Gardens, and all events were attended by officers. Thousands of residents visited the stands and

sponsorship was provided by Ward Security, Battersea Dogs Home and the RSPCA.

3.39 Bromley Environmental Awards (BEAs) has been recognising the environmental contribution made by hundreds of local people and community groups since 1990. In 2011, the Friends of Mottingham Woods were awarded the Group Environment Trophy and Dorset Road Allotments received a 'commended' for the same category. These Awards publicly demonstrate the Council's commitment to supporting local communities who are themselves committed to improving our shared environment and quality of life.

Healthy Lifestyles

3.40 Being close to nature is universally recognised as an excellent remedy to improve physical and mental well-being, and parks provide an ideal canvas. Many of Bromley's existing Friends comment on improvement to their personal wellbeing when they work with the Parks and Greenspace officers. They receive gentle exercise, make friends and know they are making a positive contribution to their local community, which boosts self-confidence. This area will in future likely attract additional funding from Public Health and will be reported to Members in more detail at the 2012/13 Review of Friends in the summer of 2013.

3.41 Depression and other debilitating illnesses are becoming more and more common. Within society, people are becoming isolated from neighbours and family members, and many are limited by the amount of physical activity they do. By working side-by-side with officers, not only do individuals personal esteem and health improve, but also Bromley's parks and woodland sites improve too with the activities clients deliver.

3.42 GrowTime is going from strength to strength. Up to 20 people, who suffer with a range of illnesses, including depression, stroke and Gulf War Syndrome, are the beneficiaries and these residents get physically and mentally well by working with the land. This year they have started to earn money from selling their produce such as Christmas wreaths and plants, and have also branched out into catering, providing the refreshments for the both the Snow Friends conferences, thereby significantly reducing the Council's expenditure in corporate catering. They have also secured £10k from the Health Lottery to independently employ their own trainer to keep the scheme viable following cessation of NHS funding.

3.43 Brook Lane Community Garden Nursery is to be an extension of our Healthy Lifestyles work to encourage residents to get fit and mentally healthy by growing plants, shrubs and trees to help increase/replace herbaceous materials in Friends' parks. The support from the community has been excellent, and work to build the site will start in summer/autumn 2012. The sister site, Leaves Green, obtained nearly £5k for whips to start populating this new community tree nursery and the Friends of Biggin Hill, Grow Time and staff assisted with the planting day.

3.44 Walking is excellent for health and funding has been secured from TfL to update the circular walks pack which will be available in both hardcopy and as a downloadable pdf, for residents to utilise free of charge. Officers work alongside a dedicated group of route 'custodians' to ensure the routes are in a good condition for walkers with adequate signage.

Conferences, Awards and Promotion of Service

3.45 Two Snow Friends conferences were delivered last summer with over 3,000 residents signing up to become Snow Friends working with LBB to clear snow and ice during the winter period. This is a significant step towards residents taking proactive action in terms of community working during the recent extreme weather conditions.

3.46 Our volunteers were recognised in various campaigns:

Friends of Biggin Hill	Safer Bromley Award
Luke Hagon	Young Sailor of the South East

Bromley Youth Advisory Panel	----- Champion of the Longbow
Alexandra Residents Association Penge	Gold – Penge in Bloom 'Best Kept Area' award
Alexandra Residents Association Penge	RHS London In Bloom 'Its your Neighbourhood' Award
Friends of Tugmutton Common	RHS London In Bloom 'Its your Neighbourhood' Award
Friends of Chislehurst & Walden Recreation Ground	RHS London In Bloom 'Its your Neighbourhood' Award ----- Safer Neighbourhood Award ----- Bromley Mayor's Award
Janet Berlin Volunteer	London Garden Society Gold Winner 'Large Back Garden'
Fleur Wood Volunteer	London Garden Society Gold Winner 'Large Front Garden, Patio, Roof or Balcony Display' ----- Banksian Medal Royal Horticultural Society (achieved most points in all classes)
Howard Clark Volunteer	Formal lunch with the Queen to celebrate his outstanding volunteering achievements
London Borough of Bromley	Wakefield Trophy (organisation who accumulated the highest number of points collectively by entrants i.e. volunteers)
London Borough of Bromley	Reaccreditation for UK Woodland Assurance Standard

New initiatives

- 3.47 Two recently decommissioned toilet blocks have been given new leases of life. One has been altered to provide a new Friends visitor information office at Kelsey Park, to replace the existing old storage container previously used for this purpose, whilst the Friends requested the historic Keston toilet block to be saved by converting it into a tool shed/meeting place for workdays.
- 3.48 The grass roots sports providers have formed the Bromley Parks Sports Federation and secured charitable status to seek external funding to improve the pavilion stock and play fields across the Borough. The Council is now working with the Federation to issue new 25-year leases to satisfy external funder's requirements.
- 3.49 The Bromley Allotment & Leisure Garden Federation have delivered their very first Allotments Award evening, funded completely by the Federation themselves, through ticket sales, a raffle and sponsorship held at the Warren (Metropolitan Police venue).
- 3.50 People for Parks, the Friends annual achievement programme, was re-branded to fit better with existing staff resources. The award has moved away from offering small-scale park projects of their choice, to the gifting of £200 per group to be spent on tools or as match-funding for grants.
- 3.51 Grounds Maintenance officers have led in the delivery of creating a new series of management plans with updated maps for Friends Groups, to help with guidance of long term site strategies to enable grant funding opportunities.

Moving forward

- 3.52 The role of the Council and its staff is to support, encourage and facilitate the aspirations of individuals and groups allowing them to prosper and grow, enabling them to do what they do best – engaging local people, instilling pride in their local environment and working with the Council to Build a Better Bromley.

- 3.53 As the change driven by the Coalition Governments Comprehensive Spending Review works through, officers will have to focus on strengthening their already excellent relationships with groups, businesses and other organisations. With fewer officers employed this year and volunteers increasing aspirations ,partnership working needs to be strengthened. By using other agencies and accepting contractor support, volunteer mentoring will continue.
- 3.54 However, the dedication of both volunteers and officers who deliver this work, must continue to receive the unconditional support, both politically and financially, of Members, the PDS Committee and the Portfolio Holder, if this work to thrive in these challenging times.
- 3.55 A more detailed report from each team is available as appendices in the full report which is available in the Members Room at the Civic Centre, [web link to follow] or on request from the Landscape helpdesk by calling 020 8313 4471 or landscape.helpdesk@bromley.gov.uk.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Friends are voluntary partners and providers who actively participate in the development and maintenance of individual parks and residential streets. Their activities form part of the Divisional Action Plan, the Bromley Biodiversity Plan, and Building a Better Bromley. They are also recognised in Central Govt White Papers – *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Transparency in Outcomes Proposals for a Public Health Outcomes Framework* (Spring 2011) *The Role of Local Government in Promoting wellbeing* (Spring 2011), *Localism Bill* (Dec 2010) *Empowering Communities to Influence Local Decision Making* (June 2009), *Committees in Control: Real Power to Real People* (July 2008) and *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (Oct 2006).

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Expenditure in the region of £20.1k was spent in 2011/12 from the Parks and Greenspace budget and £40k from the Streetscene budgets to support the delivery of Friends activities – this includes training, the purchase of tools and protective clothing, and pump-priming of small scale parks improvement works. It also includes insurance to cover Friends events, and health and safety equipment and training for Friends Officers. Budget expenditure in future years may be subject to reduction as part of the Council’s Spending Review.
- 5.2 To offset this in the past year, the Friends of P&GS have brought in an additional £362k park investment into the Borough through external funding, including £146k of TfL LIP funding, with an additional 36,033 hours of volunteer labour, which is worth £257,380 to the Council.
- 5.3 In addition to the £362k, £298k of enhancements to green space have been secured through partnership working.
- 5.4 It should be noted that some of the external funding that has been secured during 2011/12 will be spent in 2012/13.
- 5.5 Street friends provided an estimated 858 hours of volunteer labour equating to just over £6k and in kind contributions were also received from Kier (Street Cleansing contractor) for litter picking and leaf collection events as well as from Veolia for providing manpower, flytipping and landfill costs to clear Brook Lane Community Nursery site.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Legal implications Personnel implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Appendices to be found in the Members’ Room