

Friends of Turnham Green

Consultation Paper

Friends of Turnham Green (FoTG) was set up in 2006 under the auspices of CIP, one of many (long departed) companies to which LB Hounslow's parks and leisure maintenance services were outsourced.

Hounslow describe Friends' Groups as follows;

“A Friends group (or Community Group) is a group of local people that have a vested interest in their local open space or park, and have a collective desire to work with Hounslow Council to further improve their space.”

At the time of our inception, CIP provided a “plain vanilla” template constitution document which proposed that members pay an annual £5 subscription. This was adopted formally at a meeting on 10 July 2007. A copy is attached (although for some inexplicable reason, the actual amount of the subscription does not appear to feature).

We found that the money wasn't really needed as we managed to access funding for certain individual projects. Therefore, subscriptions were not pursued after 2007. We also found that participation was initially rather low, so we made meetings open to everyone and eschewed a strict membership policy.

FoTG operated in a relatively informal manner, with more focus on getting the job done than following strict procedures. However, we feel that this approach now needs to be reviewed.

Firstly, the voluntary sector has changed exponentially since 2006. Funding bodies and public agencies ask for evidence that an organisation seeking funding is properly managed and is able to deliver upon its commitments. Funding opportunities are very much reduced as well.

Secondly, early last year we leaned to our cost what can happen when procedures are ad hoc. A motion was passed at an AGM to plant a number of cherry trees along the existing rows, the cost of which was to be met by a private donation. Two members argued that there had been insufficient consultation on the proposal and took their complaint to a local councillor. Hounslow was sympathetic to FoTG and supportive of the proposal (and so remains), but found itself having to decide whether we had correctly followed our own procedures.

We think therefore our first priority is to update our constitution and wish to consult with Members on the attached draft. We propose that this be adopted at a General Meeting of FoTG when it is safe to hold one.

We are trying to find something that is detailed but not over-prescriptive. We have taken some guidance from a template that Hounslow has put together from other Friends' groups.

For the most part, we hope that the draft is self-explanatory but would specifically highlight the following.

Structure: FoTG is presently an unincorporated association and we propose that it remains so. This structure involves the least administration and compliance burden. The alternative is to incorporate ourselves as a company limited by guarantee and we believe the cost, compliance and notification requirements are too onerous.

Membership and subscriptions; We feel we have to move back to a formal membership with subscriptions a condition of membership. We suggest that membership be open to "*anyone with an interest in the conservation, protection and maintenance of Turnham Green*"; we think that a geographical qualification is likely to be too restrictive. We invite members' views on what they view as an appropriate level of subscription.

Membership conduct; We believe that Members must agree to a code of conduct which requires them to respect democratically made decisions and - this is a related point - behave respectfully to one another. We are after all supposed to be a group of friends. We also want to try to prevent the Group from being hi-jacked by special interest groups; a casual view of the local community website will illustrate how badly behaved and intolerant certain individuals can be.

Consultation; We believe that if there are to be "major" proposals in future, these should be put on the website first and all members (not just one particular group) given the opportunity to comment.

Committee size; A committee of just 3 people has been shown to be vulnerable and not conducive to good governance. We need more committee members and an earlier shout out from the Secretary upturned significant interest. We propose a maximum of 7 with the power to co-opt up to 2 to provide specific expertise.

Committee composition; The Chair wishes to have a deputy who can help share the workload and also provide for a succession plan. This creates a new role which is to be written into the Constitution.

Sub-Committees; If there are to be sub-committees, they have to be regulated and their scope and powers made clear.

We ask that Members please submit their comments to us by email within the next 28 days to fotgreen@outlook.com and we plan to report on the outcome on the website once the comments have all been put in. The last day for submitting comments will therefore be 24 March. Please be aware that we do not intend to enter into individual correspondence whilst the process is taking its course, as we

want everything to be as open and transparent to everyone as possible. Nor will we take into consideration communications which we are told are “private” and not for repetition in open correspondence. We will however treat contributions as anonymous and will not disclose the author(s).