

## **The Next Twelve Years**

### **Chairman's Letter, Summer 2011**

I was recently treated to a trip on a time machine and came across the following piece from the *Surrey Comet* of 2025.

"In retrospect, of course, the decline started in 2011. Looking back, we were all culpable but it was difficult to know when to say "That's enough":

**2011\***: The marathon and film screenings are declared a great success by the participants ("A wonderful experience") and The Royal Parks ("A very useful contribution to our income in these difficult times", say TRP). A few thousand spectators watch the trial of the Olympics road cycling race through the Park.

**2012**: The marathon grows to 500 runners. Film screenings increase to 10 ("The Park is a great place for such events" says the Comet). On a hot day, 25,000 people watch the Olympics cycling race; the Olympics organisers call it "a resounding affirmation of the Olympic spirit", but later apologise for the litter, barbecues, damage to veteran trees and mass swimming in Pen Ponds.

**2014**: 3 marathons are held, each of 1000 ("Still manageable given the size of the Park" says TRP). After local pressure, TRP replaces the film screenings with three small classical concerts which are a sell-out ("Such a lovely location for such lovely music"). Inspired by the Olympics, thousands of cyclists now race around the Park each summer week-end; there is frequent conflict with motorists and pedestrians. TRP make the roads cycling-only on Saturday and Sunday mornings, to widespread local protest.

**2015**: Four marathon runners are seriously injured when the crush along Pen Ponds causeway causes runners to fall down the steep bank. The media criticise the race for being unsafe, and so the width of the causeway is doubled. The steep hill beyond the causeway is also unsafe when it rains, so a new wide gravel path is made across to Pembroke Lodge, cutting through Queen Elizabeth Plantation. 5000 runners take part in each of the next year's three marathons.

**2016**: All three candidates for the London mayoral elections promise to fund a purpose-built cycling route around the Park. In winter, a second perimeter road is constructed alongside the existing one, with pedestrian bridges spanning it and the old road, now reserved for cars. Everyone – cyclists, car drivers and pedestrians- is happy.

**2017**: The plans for ten classical concerts attract criticism from politicians for being elitist, so TRP also stage a small rock concert featuring the local band the Roving Stones, then just starting on their rapid trajectory to stardom. The response is overwhelming, fans try to force their way into the concert, and fights break out. In winter the concert area and the nearby rugby field are combined by covering over Beverley Brook. A new car park is constructed and an area is tarmaced over for a refreshment and toilet "city".

**2019**: There are 6 marathons a year, each of 7000 runners. Charities, under pressure to maximise their fund-raising, continue to press for more. The six rock concerts this summer attract 20,000 people each.

Profits from the races and concerts now cover all the costs of running Richmond Park (“a remarkable achievement” says a Government minister).

**2020:** The Park is re-named the Richmond Park Sports and Entertainment Arena, incorporating the Richmond Park Velodrome.

**2021:** A B-list celebrity running in the marathon is attacked by a deer protecting its young; other deer are chased by two dogs into a concert audience. The media are outraged and demand action. A new deer compound is created with a ten foot high fence. It becomes the foundation of the Richmond Park Nature Zoo and Interpretation Centre, which soon attracts over half a million people a year (“Amazing, you can see the deer so close”).

**2023\*\*:** In the new 20-storey Tesco superstore on Richmond Hill, two local women discuss a planned expansion of the Arena and decided to start a new conservation group: Save Richmond Park.

\*In 2011 the marathon and Olympic cycling trial did take place; the film screening was cancelled after protests by the Friends and the Wildlife Group

\*\* The Friends was founded in 1961 by two local women, Wendy Macaulay and Mary Gueritz, who happened to meet in a greengrocer’s shop on Richmond Hill, and found that they were both concerned about the increasing urbanisation of Richmond Park.