



The Park's value Getting the message across

In last spring's newsletter, I wrote about the value of the Park, citing the benefits to us of its peace and tranquility, its wonderful views, its fresh air and its

biodiversity. I carefully avoided putting any monetary value on all this.

Now, I find that the city council of Melbourne in Australia has done just that. They have valued their parks (and they have many superb ones) by working out what they would fetch as land for commercial or residential development.

Their logic is, that by protecting them as parks, the community is foregoing what they could get from developers for the land, and effectively that is the value they place on it.

On that basis, what is the value of Richmond Park? Land prices for residential development in London areas such as Richmond and Kingston are at least £7 million per hectare. Richmond Park has nearly 1,000 hectares. So the land value of Richmond Park with planning permission for residential development would be £7 billion. If you invested this, you could expect to get an annual income of around £175 million a year.

These are enormous sums and dwarf the £3 million a year The Royal Parks spends on managing and maintaining the Park. If we value the Park this much, isn't it worth spending time and effort protecting and conserving it?

The Park has been seeing a lot of new visitors recently. Some are tourists, some young urbanites (judging by their unsuitable footwear), some are Asian extended families picnicking, some are cyclists and runners. Being new, few seem to know much about the Park: its history, its wildlife and how to treat it.

How do we convey to these new visitors the need to respect and protect the Park? We have the message – "Tread Lightly" – but how do we get it across? It's a problem the Friends' Committee has been debating for some time now, without a good answer. It's unlikely to be through the Visitor Centre, since only 1% of visitors use it; nor via the noticeboards at the gates, since few visitors (and none of those coming by car) read them.

Nor is it through the Friends' website; it has relatively few visitors and 40% of those only want the Park opening times; nor via bigger signs, since we want to minimise signage to preserve the natural feel of the Park; nor by giving out leaflets to visitors, which risks confrontation and more litter.

Should we try a YouTube video (hoping it will go viral)? A free "Introduction to Richmond Park" app? "Shock horror" publicity in the *Evening Standard* or *Metro* about a deer dying from ingesting litter or run over by a car after being chased by a dog?

Answers or ideas, please, on a postcard – or its modern equivalent, an email to chairman@frp.org.uk.

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