

Big Cut in Richmond Park Police

By Ron Crompton

Changes that started in mid-October have drastically reduced the number of police in the Park. The police forces in Richmond and Bushy Park have been merged, Bushy Park police station closed, and the combined force reduced from 20 to 7 officers (i.e. 3½ for Richmond Park). With two shifts a day, holiday/sick leave and assignments to central London parks, there is now often only **one officer on duty for the two Parks combined.**

The special Royal Parks Operational Command Unit (OCU) has been retained, but responsibility for taking 'response' calls (999 and 101) will be transferred to the local Borough police (Richmond in our case). Those calls will be subject to the Borough's priorities, and calls about off-track cycling are not likely to figure highly.

There is also a new team at Royal Parks police HQ in Hyde Park who can be deployed here on a specific task such as policing mushroom picking. However, this deployment will be subject to priorities across all the Royal Parks and we expect central London parks' priorities will dominate. We are also promised

better police coverage of bank holidays and busy weekends, with the local recruitment of special constables (part-time volunteers who are trained and have the same powers as normal constables), but we won't be holding our breath...

Before 2004 The Royal Parks agency (TRP) employed its own police force, with 165 officers for all the Royal Parks, of whom 35 were in Richmond and Bushy Parks. They were then merged into the Metropolitan Police and funding and numbers steadily reduced to the 20 for our two Parks two years ago. Over the 10 years, the Met has repeatedly shown that, in spite of the best efforts of the officers on the ground, it cannot provide the type of environmental policing needed here. Its training, systems, targets, priorities and management approach are all focused on major crime and social disorder that are not issues affecting the Park.

We are very concerned about these changes, which will leave the Park with clearly inadequate policing and no policing at all for long periods of time.