

**THE FRIENDS OF RICHMOND PARK**  
**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
**Held via Videoconference at 11.00 on**  
**SATURDAY 24 APRIL 2021**

Ron Crompton, Chairman, took the chair and welcomed approximately 100 members to the 60<sup>th</sup> AGM; the meeting again had to be held using Zoom technology. Although the last AGM had been delayed until August 2020, we were now able to revert to the usual timing of April.

Ron Crompton noted the recent deaths of two FRP members:

Daniel Hearsom, who had run Pembroke Lodge under a concession since 1997, had died earlier this month. He had been heavily involved in the Visitor Centre and had been generous in hosting FRP events in the Lodge. Many FRP volunteers had been involved in cataloguing Daniel's large collection of books, photographs and other items relating to the Park. Over the years Daniel had generated considerable sums for The Royal Parks. His dedication to the interests of the Park and its protection would be missed.

PJ Greeves (always just known as 'PJ') had died a fortnight ago. PJ had been a committee member or Trustee of FRP for over 10 years. He organised the FRP presence at various fairs and open days for many years, as well as other FRP events and both he and his wife, Molly, had volunteered at the Visitor Centre. They had also volunteered in the 'Adopt an Area' litter-picking' initiative from the start. Tributes to PJ had typically used the words 'friendly', 'open', 'kind', 'supportive', 'lovely', 'smiling', and 'generous'. PJ would be greatly missed.

Ron Crompton said that the meeting would be in three parts, namely the formal elections, etc, the chairman's summary and then questions.

Roger Hillyer then explained that those attending had received the agenda, the summary review of the year, the minutes of the last meeting and the Annual Report and Accounts for 2020. All relevant documents were on the FRP website. Questions could be put using the chat button; some written questions had been received in advance. The proceedings would be recorded. Voting would be carried out using Zoom polling which enabled members to vote online.

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Peter Burrows-Smith and Richard Polson.

**2. Minutes of the 2020 AGM**

Max Lankester proposed and Hugh Deighton seconded the acceptance of the Minutes of the last AGM held on 22 August 2020. The minutes were agreed.

**3. Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020**

Hugh Deighton presented the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020. He summarised the four principal sources of income, namely:

- membership subscriptions, which had risen to £27,600;

- sponsorship from Thames Water, Russell-Cooke and The Property Partnership, which had produced £4,500;
- sales, rising to over £30,000 gross, £14,000 net, and
- donations (including legacies), which totalled nearly £53,000.

The single largest outgoing was grants totalling £34,000 to TRP for conservation projects. The closing balance was some £194,000. He summed up the financial position as strong and growing, and FRP will be able to make further substantial grants to TRP for a variety of conservation projects.

Steve Sandham proposed and Richard Polson seconded the approval of the 2020 Report and Accounts. The 2020 Report and Accounts were agreed.

#### **4. Election of Officers**

(a) Vivienne Press proposed and Steve Sandham seconded Roger Hillyer for Chairman. Roger Hillyer was elected; he said that Ron Crompton would be a very hard act to follow, but he was confident that FRP would continue to have a strong rôle going forward, thanks to its members, trustees and volunteers.

(b) Ron Crompton explained that with Roger Hillyer stepping up to be chairman, the post of Hon Secretary became vacant; Max Lankester, who had been a trustee for many years and who had been Hon Sec before Richard Polson, had agreed to fill that function in the short term. Janet Bostock proposed and Richard Gray seconded Max Lankester for Honorary Secretary. Max Lankester was elected.

(c) Chris Mason proposed and Marilyn Watkinson seconded Hugh Deighton for Honorary Treasurer. Hugh Deighton was elected.

#### **5. Election of Trustees**

Ron Crompton said that Teresa Grafton had decided not to continue as a trustee; he thanked her for her work with FRP's Discoverers activities for young families, which she had initiated and developed into a thriving programme. Teresa had kindly agreed to continue with those activities until the end of the year.

Richard Polson proposed and Diane Peake seconded the following as trustees: Janet Bostock, Nick Coleman, Richard Gray, Chris Mason, Vivienne Press and Steve Sandham. All were elected as trustees.

#### **6. Patrons**

Ron Crompton referred to Clare Balding having been invited to be a Patron from December 2020; she had already interviewed Simon Richards for our tree webinar and supported our skylark campaign. Richard Gray proposed and Janet Bostock seconded the appointment of Clare Balding as patron in addition to Sir David Attenborough and Baroness Kramer. Clare Balding's position as a Patron was duly confirmed.

#### **7. Election of Vice-Presidents**

Sheila Hamilton proposed and Teresa Grafton seconded the appointment of Ron Crompton as a Vice President. Ron Crompton's position as a Vice President was duly confirmed.

#### **8. Election of Honorary Independent Examiner**

Feltons had kindly carried out this function for some years, and were prepared to act in that capacity again. The Chairman thanked Richard Rhodes of Feltons for his work. Nick Coleman proposed and Max Lankester seconded Feltons as the Honorary Independent Examiner. Feltons were elected.

## **9. Tree Photography Competition Awards**

Vivienne Press gave a presentation of the eight photographs which had either won, or been a runner-up in, the 'Winter', 'Summer' and 'Autumn' categories in the recent photographic competition. The winners had been Cath Gothard (Winter and Autumn) and Paul Thompson MBE (Summer). The Spring competition would remain open until 31 May.

## **10. Chairman's Report**

Ron Crompton spoke about (i) the 60 years of the Friends, (ii) events of 2020 and (iii) the future.

Ron Crompton touched on key dates in the history of the Friends and of the Park, including: FRP's foundation in 1961 by Wendy Macaulay and Mary Guerritz with the aim of resisting urbanisation of the Park, including reducing the speed limit to 20mph and ensuring that the Park would be closed to traffic at dusk; the campaign in 1969 to prevent the Park's roads from being taken into the national road network; the demolition of the Kingston Camp; the closure to traffic of Robin Hood Gate; the rediscovery and subsequent protection of the view of St Paul's cathedral from King Henry's Mound; the diversion of traffic through the Park in 1979 following the collapse of a section of Petersham Road, and the deaths of 10 deer per month through collisions with cars; the BBC's 1984 documentary about the Park; the SSSI, NNR and SAC designations; the report in 1996 by Dame Jennifer Jenkins into the management of the Royal Parks, much of which remains relevant today; the creation of the Tamsin Trail; the refurbishment of Pembroke Lodge; the period prior to 2004 when divisions within the Friends' committee over traffic led to there being four chairmen in four years; John Collier's chairmanship, starting in 2004, which established volunteering by the Friends and saw the opening in 2007 of the Visitor Centre; and the wide public engagement now pursued by the Friends through its walks and talks, publications, the Discoverers programme, the film narrated by Sir David Attenborough, and ongoing campaigns, including in relation to Heathrow flightpaths.

Ron Crompton then dealt with events of 2020, which had been overshadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic. There had been interruptions to various Friends' activities, including the Visitor Centre, walks and talks and the litter-picking volunteers. But many activities had taken place online, including 'Tree of the Month' a tree photo competition, three webinars and the publication of walking guides. On-line sales with delivery by Royal Mail or by 'click and collect', from the Visitor Centre were a success. Funding had been provided for more works to Beverley Brook. And Clare Balding becoming a Patron was a positive feature of the year.

The Park itself had been closed to traffic and cyclists for a period creating a serene atmosphere. But as it was reopened, many people unfamiliar with the Park started to visit, and there were many instances of deer harassment, off-lead dogs, barbecues and off-road cycling. The Park also suffered from a very wet winter, and is currently in a state from which it will take two or three years to recover. TRP are undertaking works, including to fence more areas and to de-compact the soil.

TRP started a six-month trial of through traffic restrictions, the next big step in managing traffic since 2004. The greatly increased number of cyclists in the Park once traffic had been removed, including many high-speed club cyclists, had made it difficult for pedestrians to cross the road in some places; TRP were addressing this and new crossings were expected this year. The restoration of Adam's Pond is welcome.

Ron Crompton then touched on future challenges, especially the conflict between conservation and visitor numbers. The need to protect the Park's flora and fauna may require consideration of restrictions on visitors and cyclists and dogs. Any changes would require the encouragement of changed behaviours as well as enforcement. Other medium- and long-term challenges for the Park included the effects of climate change, and the Heathrow flight paths, topics on which the Friends would be engaged.

On behalf of the Trustees, Richard Gray paid tribute to Ron Crompton for his outstanding 14 years as Chairman. Richard referred to Ron's qualities of patience, tolerance and diligence, his lack of ego, and his abilities as a motivator, decision-maker and as a communicator with a wide range of stakeholders. Richard recalled the day in the recording studio with Sir David Attenborough, and presented Ron with a framed, hand-written letter from Sir David.

Vivienne Press said that a bowl was being created from oak grown in Richmond Park, and it would be presented to Ron at a later date; in the meantime, he was given a pop-up card, made by Valerie Reading-Kitchen, showing a tree and a bowl.

Ron Crompton thanked the Trustees for their support. He was grateful to them, to the members of FRP and to all the groups of volunteers.

## **11. Questions to the trustees**

The following questions were raised and answered by the trustees.

### Signage

Mike Harrison referred to the deteriorating behaviour of some visitors to the Park; many, when approached, said that they weren't aware of the restrictions or requirements. Signage was inadequate: there could be notices at each gate about the Park's status as a SSSI, and signs about rubbish, for instance.

Roger Hillyer said that a number of members had made reference to signage, including Margaret Dangoor, Carol Bloomfield, Ronald Barnett and Diana Loch.

Nick Coleman responded. It is acknowledged by TRP that existing signage is not good. In 2019 FRP had counted some 1,500 signs in Richmond Park and found that the situation was chaotic ; signs needed to be where people would be likely to see them, eg at 'pause points' close to the gates, and on the pedestrian exits at car parks. FRP gave that research to TRP for a signage strategy being developed, but the relevant officer had left. However, in February this year, the TRP Board approved a new Interpretation Strategy and FRP was trying to arrange a meeting with Ali Jeremy, who now has responsibility. It had to be accepted that not all visitors would be compliant even if the signage was perfect. And a balance had to be struck between imparting adequate information and the increasing urbanisation of the Park.

### Traffic restrictions

Francesco Lopez and Miriam Howitt both asked about aspects of the current restrictions. Could there be exceptions for the disabled and/or those with young families? Could permits be issued to some for the use of the road from Sheen Gate to Sheen Cross?

Ron Crompton responded. Those with disabilities can continue to access all the car parks, including the disabled car park serving the Isabella Plantation, and nearly all

the roads in the Park. TRP had received some approaches from disabled and other groups asking for exceptions, but had concluded that the disabled did not in reality have greatly reduced access.

The closure of the Sheen link had caused great controversy, and Sheen residents appeared to be evenly split. That stretch was the second biggest contributor to 'cut-through' traffic and, although the closure was clearly causing difficulties for some, TRP feared that any concession would trigger requests for similar exceptions elsewhere. It is possible that some changes could emerge before the end of the current trial.

#### Fines for beaches of Park regulations

Beverley Smith asked whether offenders are fined or just warned by police.

Nick Coleman, a member of the police panel, responded. Most offenders received a verbal warning. Some were warned and reported; those reports were kept on a database for 12 months, so further action would be taken if the same person offended again within that period. Ultimately, prosecution in the Magistrates' Court could be pursued and £60 fixed penalty notices could be issued for certain matters but both were rare.

#### Parking charges

Nigel Jackman asked whether the Friends could lobby for more reasonable parking charges.

Ron Crompton responded. FRP did seek concessions for regular visitors, whether by means of a season ticket or reduced hours of charging so regulars could park for free after 16.00. TRP decided on the second option and reduced the hours during which charges would be levied from 9.00 until 18.00 to 9.00 until 16.00.

#### Publicity about wills and legacies

Ronald Barnett asked whether more publicity could be given about leaving money to FRP.

Roger Hillyer responded that it was open to anyone to make a bequest or legacy to the Friends, and those would be welcome. Such donations would be used towards the conservation of the Park. Consideration would be given to wider publicity of this.

#### Diversity of membership

Sam Glenister-Batey asked about FRP trying to attract new and diverse members.

Roger Hillyer responded that membership had actually increased quite markedly in recent times, and the Friends was now active on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, as well as on You Tube. It also hosted webinars. A wider audience could be reached through such channels, and since the education of the public features in the Friends' objectives it would be desirable to get the Friends' message across to a greater range of people.

#### Ladderstile Gate

Ronald Barnett asked about the nature of the access via Ladderstile Gate: at times of social distancing it was difficult to see who was trying to come in and out of the gate.

Ron Crompton responded that the problem had reduced somewhat with the falling numbers of pedestrians using the gate in recent weeks. He would ask Simon Richards about the issue and respond directly.

#### Volunteer Rangers

One question had been received about the Friends' attitude to the introduction of volunteer Rangers. Ron and Roger responded that it had been an FRP suggestion, and their presence in the Park was very welcome.

Ron Crompton thanked all for their attendance, and closed the meeting at 12.32 pm.