

THE FRIENDS OF RICHMOND PARK

MINUTES OF THE 2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held at King's House School, Richmond at 10.30am on Saturday 15 April 2023

Roger Hillyer, Chairman, took the chair and welcomed members to the 62nd AGM, being held in person for the first time since 2019. With 75 members present, he confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

Roger Hillyer was joined on the platform by two fellow Trustees: Judith Pearson, Secretary, and Hugh Deighton, Treasurer.

Roger Hillyer noted that the Minutes of the last AGM and the Annual Report and Accounts for 2022, together with the Programme and Agenda for the meeting, had all been posted for a while, and were still available, on the FRP website. Printed copies of the Programme and Agenda were also available in the room.

He said that the meeting would be in four parts, namely the formal elections and approvals, a presentation on the Beverley Brook, the Chairman's report on the activities of 2022 and then questions and feedback from members. He invited members to stay on afterwards: the Trustees looked forward to the opportunity to chat to members over a glass of wine.

APPROVALS AND ELECTIONS

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Vivienne Press, Richard Gray, Max Lankester, Peter Burrows-Smith, Sheila Hamilton and Diane McLaughlin.

2. Minutes of the 2022 AGM

Judith Pearson proposed the acceptance of the Minutes of the last AGM held on 23 April 2022. The minutes were agreed.

The Chairman said that he would pick up key matters in his report and any other matters arising could be covered in the questions session.

3. Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2022

Hugh Deighton presented the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2022. The accounts had been examined and approved by Feltons Accountants in Richmond and were available in full on the FRP website, as part of the Annual Report and Accounts.

He summed up the financial position as strong, which allowed the Friends to support our objects of conservation and education projects in the Park.

He summarised the four principal sources of income, namely:

- membership subscriptions, which had continued at a similar level to 2021, with member numbers almost constant; the Friends are able to claim Gift Aid on the majority of the membership income;
- continuing sponsorship from Russell-Cooke and The Property Partnership, which had produced £5,000;
- sales of publications and other merchandise at the Visitor Centre and online; the 2023 calendar and Christmas cards raising significant amounts; and
- donations (including legacies), which totalled well over £10,000.

The Treasurer also noted the time and effort contributed by hundreds of volunteers, which is not included in the accounts because it is freely given but the nominal value of which would far exceed the cash value of the Friends' income and provides tremendous support for the charity and the achievement of its objects.

As a result of the income and the bank balance, FRP were able to make grants of over £56,000 in 2022 to The Royal Parks for conservation projects. We also funded an electric bicycle to help the Parks Police with their work.

The financial position of the Friends continued to be healthy and the closing balance for 2022 was £153,500. The restricted fund balance had reduced to zero after the grants made to The Royal Parks for tree fencing and the Queen's Green Canopy project. The balances at the end of the year were higher than required by our reserves policy so the charity was well placed to continue to fund projects which further its objects.

On behalf of the Trustees, Roger Hillyer proposed the approval of the 2022 Report and Accounts. The 2022 Report and Accounts were agreed.

4. Election of Officers

(a) Judith Pearson chaired this item. Nick Coleman proposed Roger Hillyer for Chairman. Roger Hillyer was elected; he said that he was honoured to continue to serve FRP for a third year.

(b) Max Lankester proposed Judith Pearson for Secretary. Judith Pearson was elected.

(c) Richard Pender proposed Hugh Deighton for Treasurer. Hugh Deighton was elected.

5. Election of Trustees

Roger Hillyer said that all the other Trustees were willing to continue in office. As well as jointly managing the charity, each Trustee carried out a specific role for the Friends:

Trustee	Proposed by	Role
Janet Bostock	Van Quan	Leads our Conservation volunteers
Nick Coleman	Lucy Tarleton	Co-ordinates our volunteering and leads on many projects and campaigns including Heathrow and flight paths

Helene Feger	Monique Sarkany	Leads on our press relations
Chris Mason	Richard Pender	Membership Secretary
Monique Sarkany	Helene Feger	Leads our Discoverers programme for children
Nigel Sherwin	Lucy Tarleton	Leads the Adopt-an-Area litter picking scheme
Lucy Tarleton	Max Lankester	Leads our Events team
Vivienne Press	Judith Pearson	Leads on publications including the Park Life magazine, the Calendar and Christmas Cards as well as various projects

All were elected as Trustees.

6. Appointment 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, which was carried out on a pro bono basis. On behalf of the Trustees (who, in approving the accounts, included a recommendation that they be re-appointed) , Roger Hillyer proposed Feltons as the Honorary Independent Examiner. Feltons were appointed.

PRESENTATION ON THE BEVERLEY BROOK

Roger Hillyer welcomed Mike Hildesley of Barnes Common Limited and Harry Gray of South East Rivers Trust to the platform, to give a presentation, illustrated by slides, on the Beverley Brook.

The presentation described the Brook, from source to the point where it flows into the Thames; and how, unlike many other watercourses, it becomes more natural and wildlife-friendly downstream. Mike and Harry also discussed past and current projects to improve the Brook.

The presentation was warmly received and provoked many questions to the speakers.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Roger Hillyer presented the 2022 report of the Friends of Richmond Park.

He opened by saying that the Friends continued to be a thriving charity – a community of 3,700 members brought together through a shared love of Richmond Park.

Everything the Friends do – volunteering, campaigning, educating, fundraising - is organised and carried out by volunteers. Some of those volunteers are prominent and some operate behind the scenes. He thanked each of the 300 volunteers, including the Trustees, who give their time, energy and skills for the benefit of Richmond Park.

He then reviewed some developments in the Park in 2022 and the activities of the Friends, illustrating his report with photos.

Storm Eunice and then a hot summer

2022 was memorable on the weather front for two events.

Storm Eunice in February led to the Park being closed for three days; about 50 trees were lost and 50 substantially damaged, including the attractive hawthorn at the Richmond Gate end of Sawyers Hill.

In the summer we had no significant rain for 2-3 months and record temperatures. The trees looked stressed. Fortunately, through some good work and with some luck there was no fire.

Early in 2022, the Friends organised a webinar with Tom Jarvis, Director of Parks, where he outlined the implications of climate change for Richmond Park and the response from The Royal Parks. This includes a number of interventions to slow water flow and develop natural resilience. The loss of trees from Storm Eunice in a couple of days is dramatic – the slower long-term impact from climate change on the Park's 130,000 trees may actually be greater.

Movement Strategy

Traffic

In October, The Royal Parks announced that the traffic restrictions that had been the subject of a trial since August 2020 would be made permanent. As a result, the temporary unsightly plastic cones were replaced by wooden gates.

It was back in 2020 during the pandemic that The Royal Parks started consultation on various traffic restrictions in Richmond Park. These were:

- the closure to vehicles of the road between Sheen Gate and Sheen Cross,
- and the closure of the road between Robin Hood Gate and Broomfield Hill Car Park; and
- at weekends and public holidays the road between Richmond Gate and Roehampton Gate.

The Friends' charitable objects are to conserve and protect the peace and natural beauty of the Park and to 'limit the adverse effects of activities that damage its attributes', so we had always been in favour of reducing through traffic, especially as it is a National Nature Reserve.

The closures have had the effect of reducing access to visitors who are less mobile who wish to enjoy all the Park, especially at weekends. To mitigate this, The Royal Parks had this year extended its summer minibus to three days a week.

Pedestrians

The Friends have emphasised the importance of pedestrians and pedestrian priority in Richmond Park. We therefore pressed The Royal Parks for improvements to the existing 'raised-table' crossings and the introduction of additional crossings.

As a result, a lot of work had taken place recently on this.

Designing changes to the crossings had been a challenge for The Royal Parks – how could the crossings be made more effective without features like Belisha beacons which would not be appropriate in the natural setting of the Park?

FRP welcomed these works, which are intended to make the Park safer and more accessible for pedestrians, and planned to monitor their effectiveness in practice.

Investment, restoration and changes

Early 2022 saw significant work underway in Richmond Park – much of it funded by a DCMS Covid Recovery Fund grant to The Royal Parks.

One of the most visible changes was the path works from Sawyers Hill to Pen Ponds, where people had tracked a wide path to avoid mud, and this had been replaced by a narrower surfaced path enabling habitat restoration. Paths had also been diverted away from trees needing protection.

FRP were pleased to see the extensive work to rebuild Upper Pen Pond Island to provide a much larger bird habitat.

FRP understood the need for path works, as The Royal Parks management wrestles with the challenges of climate change and visitor numbers. The works in 2021 seemed a reasonable response. However, as regards the more recent works of the last few months, FRP were concerned that the extent of the works could change the essential character of the Park.

A change of Park Manager

Simon Richards

Simon Richards stood down as Park Manager in May after 25 years. He made a significant contribution to Richmond Park. The Friends were grateful too for his support and co-operation. Simon is currently working on a tree strategy for Richmond Park.

On behalf of The Friends, the Trustees presented Simon with a bowl made of Richmond Park wood.

Paul Richards

Paul Richards (no relation to Simon) joined last summer. He grew up in East Sheen, has extensive relevant experience, most recently at Hillingdon Council, including responsibility for a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve.

We are working closely with Paul and last November we hosted a members' Zoom Q & A with Paul.

Roger also welcomed the fact that later this year many staff who work at Richmond Park will move from being contractors to being permanent staff of The Royal Parks, as The Royal Parks increases its total staff.

Flight paths and Heathrow

The Chairman referred to the process now underway to re-configure flight paths (separate from the third runway proposal that has now been delayed). The Trustees considered there was a real prospect of increased flights over Richmond Park from about 2028, and had therefore fully engaged in the process – meeting Heathrow several times to put the arguments for the protection of Richmond Park.

FRP produced a short film: *Richmond Park - the quietest and darkest place in London* so that the unique beauty and tranquillity of Richmond Park can be celebrated and appreciated; and to draw attention to what might be lost.

The Trustees will continue to actively engage with Heathrow.

Publications

This was another active year for publications. With the vast majority of members receiving the news by email, the newsletter had been evolving and in 2022 FRP recognised that by giving the publication a new name “Park Life magazine”, with a new style front cover.

FRP published the second in the Let’s Discover series for children – this time on history – and the Calendar and Christmas Cards again proved popular – although, with no lockdown restrictions, online sales fell.

The reach of FRP’s publishing and education was surprisingly wide:

- With 8 cards in a pack, 13,000 people will have received a Friends of Richmond Park Christmas Card.
- And on YouTube, a ¼ m people watched our YouTube channel in 2022.

Activities

The Friends continued to be an active charity.

Our Discoverers programme for families with school age children grew significantly with 22 events in 2022. The Platinum Jubilee Teddy Bears’ picnic in the Isabella Plantation was attended by 120 children and their families.

After a gap of a few years, our outside Events came back – with a stall at Ham Fair and at the Duathlon. For 2023, the Friends were looking forward to the return of the Richmond May Fair and a presence in September at The Holly Lodge Open Day.

For the first time since 2019, The Visitor Centre was open all year – in 2022 serving nearly 40,000 visitors. The Visitor Centre continues to educate the public about the Park and raise money.

Our monthly guided walks continued to educate visitors.

Active volunteering in Richmond Park

Our Conservation Volunteers have spun off some of our conservation work into a new team which carries out work in Holly Lodge meadow.

Our 200 litter pickers work to maintain the beauty of the Park (many of them as part of the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme) and a specialist team goes into the Beverley Brook to pull out litter.

Platinum Jubilee Woodland

In 2022, The Friends paid £30,000 for the trees, their planting and the initial maintenance for The Platinum Jubilee Woodland. The new woodland near Ham Cross is part of The Queen's Green Canopy set up to celebrate the late Queen's 70 years of service.

Looking forward

The biggest long-term threats we see for Richmond Park are climate change, flight path changes and the increase in visitor numbers.

A rollout of new signs is expected. The Friends' analysis and survey work has helped to improve the signs and also means that Richmond Park will be one of the first of the royal parks with the new-style signage.

For 2023, the Friends will be monitoring the effectiveness of the new raised crossings and the impact of the converted take-away kiosks being constructed at the Ham Gate and Kingston Gate toilets.

The kiosks at Broomfield Hill and Pen Ponds are being upgraded and plans for the replacement of Roehampton café will continue to be developed.

Roger Hillyer concluded by saying that, whatever the challenges ahead, he was confident that members and volunteers will ensure the Friends of Richmond Park will continue to be a highly active charity, successfully pursuing our objects to promote the conservation, protection and improvement of Richmond Park and educating people about Richmond Park.

QUESTIONS TO THE TRUSTEES AND DISCUSSION OF MATTERS OF CONCERN

The Chairman began with pre-submitted questions.

Rangers

Mike Ricketts asked; "*What do you see as the function of Richmond Park Rangers?*" He added that some people wrongly think that the Rangers have enforcement powers.

Nick Coleman outlined some of the history. The Rangers were originally an idea of the Friends, proposed in 2016 at a time when the police presence in the Park had reduced significantly and there was concern about visitors' behaviour around cycling and deer. The Royal Parks took on the idea and the Rangers began to operate in 2018. Originally, FRP was on a TRP advisory group but that was later disbanded, so FRP no longer has any direct influence over the programme.

However, it has been regarded as a success and rolled out by TRP across other Royal Parks. The Rangers work in pairs. Their function is purely educative and advisory. In terms of enforcement, they have to make a referral to the police.

Signage

A question from Sally Hobbs who is *concerned that the rules/signage is not clear enough as bicycles and horses frequently use the footpaths and pedestrians frequently use the horse trails.*

Nick Coleman explained that the Friends did a lot of research on effective signage and briefed TRP on their findings and recommendations. TRP are now rolling out new signage across the Royal Parks, beginning with Richmond Park. However, it has to be acknowledged that signage will never provide a complete solution.

Cycling (except by children under 10) is not permitted, except on tarmac roads or the Tamsin Trail. However, there is a risk with the new paths that look similar to the Tamsin Trail – FRP will be monitoring the situation. Any problems should be reported to the police. Horse tracks are shared spaces for horses and pedestrians.

A change is coming whereby the police will lose their power to impose on the spot fines for minor offences, such as littering, off-road cycling, dogs off leads. The enforcement method will be to bring serious breaches before the court.

He noted that there is a police mobile number for the public to use.

Kingston Draft Local Plan

Elizabeth Matharu asked about *the Friends' response to the Royal Borough of Kingston's draft local plan for housing and commercial development and its impact on the Park.*

Roger Hillyer said that RBKuT are planning for a population increase within their catchment area. FRP have received advice that any objection to the size of the proposed developments is unlikely to make a difference because the Mayor of London has imposed a duty on local councils to cater for increased resident populations.

However, the Friends did respond regarding the protection of the view from the Park across Kingston town centre, which would be harmed by very tall buildings.

Pollution

Annabel Harris asked *what measures are in place for monitoring pollution levels of water and air, and whether FRP believe increased flights are having a bad effect on wildlife.*

Nick Coleman replied that the Park sits within the Richmond AQMA, within which levels of NoX are monitored at 35 points by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. The lowest levels, by far, are reported in the Holly Lodge area of the Park.

The level of particulates in the Park is not specifically monitored but the levels are considered to be acceptable across the whole area.

Thames Water and the Environment Agency are responsible for the Beverley Brook, carrying out a monthly count of river fly larvae. Harry Gray added that the South East Rivers Trust plans to step up its monitoring.

Turning to the impact of flights, Nick noted that helicopters fly across the Park and some planes depart from Heathrow over the southern part of the Park.

However, the real concern relates to Heathrow's flight path modernisation proposals (part of a UK-wide CAA initiative). FRP have engaged intensively with Heathrow since 2019. Based on the latest information, FRP are concerned about the possibility of 16 new arrival paths over the Park (compared with none at the moment) and 18 new departure routes over the Park. At the moment, FRP are involved in private discussions but, in the future, may seek public support.

Dogs

Su Hume asked *whether there was a limit on the number of dogs one person can bring into the Park.*

There is a specific limit under the commercial dog walkers' code of conduct, of 4 dogs per walker, and commercial walkers must not congregate in groups of more than 8 dogs.

There is also the general rule that owners must keep their dog under control.

Conservation Volunteers

Milène Hayaux du Tilly wanted *to understand the programme of work by the Conservation Volunteers (and specifically whether it is suspended over the spring/summer) and the collaboration with TRP.*

Janet Bostock answered on behalf of the Trustees. The Conservation Volunteers were founded 12 years ago. The original task was to remove rhododendron ponticum from Pen Ponds Plantation and Sidmouth Wood because it is not good for wildlife – releasing toxins such that it does not host insects or birds. However, in both areas, some birds nest in the upper canopy of the woodland between the end of February and the end of August, so the remit of the Conservation Volunteers had evolved to work on other projects over that period.

All work is carried out under the supervision of TRP – Peter Lawrence has been the contact, recently appointed Deputy Park Manager.

Other projects that the Conservation Volunteers have worked on include – removal of bramble on Spankers Hill (it needs to be controlled although it is a useful habitat for some wildlife); planting of honeysuckle in Ham Bottom fenced enclosures for the benefit of white admiral butterflies; removal of invasive, non-native weeds; clearing walls of ivy; coppicing gorse enclosures; wild flower meadow at Holly Lodge (now spun out into a separate group).

In 2022, the Conservation Volunteers contributed 1,600 hours of work.

The Chairman then took some questions from the floor.

Benches

A member asked about *the state of the benches in the Park*.

Roger Hillyer said that some new seats had recently been installed between the Broomhill car park and the Isabella Plantation. He noted that, as a general matter, TRP do have funds to invest in new benches if a need is identified.

Use of FRP funds

A member asked about *how the Friends spent their funds*.

Roger Hillyer referred to the expenditure in 2022 on the Platinum Jubilee Woodland, the veteran tree fencing and the electric bicycle for the police, as mentioned in the Treasurer's and Chairman's reports.

He noted that there is very little expenditure on "administration" because the charity is wholly run by volunteers.

New Paths

A member said they had witnessed a visitor being confused by the new path between Sawyers Hill to Pen Ponds and trying to drive down it.

Roger Hillyer said that a new gate and signage was planned.

Roger Hillyer thanked all for their attendance, and closed the meeting at 12.20 pm