

**THE FRIENDS OF RICHMOND PARK**  
**MINUTES OF THE 2024 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Held at King's House School, Richmond at 10.30am on Saturday 13 April 2024

Roger Hillyer, Chairman, took the chair and welcomed members to the 63rd AGM. With 80 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 2023, 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 by Chris Carbone of the Zoological Society of London, the Chairman's report on the activities of 2023 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, Chris Mason, James Loch, John Hood, Sheila Hamilton and Jean Naylor.

##### ***2. Minutes of the 2023 AGM***

On behalf of Judith Pearson, the Chairman proposed the acceptance of the Minutes of the last AGM held on 15 April 2023. 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 2023***

Hugh Deighton presented the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2023. 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 2022, with member numbers fairly 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 raised £5,000
- sales of publications and other merchandise at the Visitor Centre and online; the 2024 calendar and Christmas cards raising significant amounts, although there is a gradual decline in card sales as people turn to online greetings; and
- donations (including legacies), which totalled almost £5,000.

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.

FRP were able to make grants of over £16,000 in 2023 to The Royal Parks for conservation projects and are working with The Royal Parks to identify further projects for 2024.

The financial position of the Friends continued to be healthy and the closing balance for 2023 was £167,000. 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 2023 Report and Accounts. The 2023 Report and Accounts were agreed.

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

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

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

(c) Peter Allnutt 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:

<b>Trustee</b>	<b>Proposed by</b>	<b>Role</b>
Peter Allnutt	Marilyn Watkinson	Coordinates our volunteering
Janet Bostock	Jane Phillips	Leads our Conservation volunteers
Nick Coleman	Chris Pearson	Leads on projects and campaigns including Heathrow and flight paths
Helene Feger	Nick Coleman	Leads on our press relations

Chris Mason	Ron Crompton	Membership Secretary
Monique Sarkany	Alison Glasier	Leads our Discoverers programme for families
Nigel Sherwin	Lucy Tarleton	Leads the Adopt-an-Area litter picking scheme
Lucy Tarleton	Nigel Sherwin	Leads our Events team
Vivienne Press	Ron Crompton	Leads on publications including 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 LONDON HOGWATCH**

Roger Hillyer welcomed Professor Chris Carbone of the Zoological Society of London to the platform, to give a presentation, illustrated by slides, about London HogWatch.

He founded the project in 2016. The original goal was to measure the distribution of hedgehogs with camera traps and use the data to target conservation efforts. This has produced information on the impact on hedgehog populations of badgers and human activity and infrastructure.

The project has surveyed both domestic gardens and large parks, including Hampstead Heath and Bushy Park, and recorded a wide range of mammal and bird species. As the project scope expands, the results can be used to understand human/wildlife coexistence more generally and produce biodiversity metrics.

With the help of a large team of volunteers organised by FRP, camera traps were set out in Richmond Park on 9 April and will be collected in after three weeks. The huge amount of data will then be analysed, with the assistance of machine-learning software, and provide material for study by the Institute of Zoology over several years. The UK Health Security Agency will also use the results to study the correlation between humans, deer and ticks.

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

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Roger Hillyer presented his 2023 Report for the Friends of Richmond Park.

He opened by saying that the Friends continued to be a thriving and active charity – a community of 3,600 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. He thanked each of the 300 volunteers, including the Trustees, who give their time, energy and skills for the benefit of Richmond Park. Together, they contribute about 15,000 hours of volunteering, which, at the London Living Wage, is worth about £200,000.

He first reviewed some developments in the Park in 2023 and then moved on to the activities of the Friends, illustrating his report with slides.

### **Richmond Park developments – new kiosks and WCs**

New style kiosks were installed at Broomfield Hill and Pen Ponds car parks, featuring some welcome environmental improvements, such as generators fuelled by hydro-vegetable oils and solar panels.

The toilets at Kingston Gate and Ham Gate were refurbished to incorporate grab'n'go catering facilities. FRP welcomed the reopening of the toilet facilities at Ham Gate, although voiced concern about the potential litter from the new facilities.

### **Richmond Park developments – roads and paths**

With the Movement Strategy changes being made permanent, the unsightly temporary plastic cones were replaced with permanent wooden fences.

At Beverley Brook, some road narrowing was introduced to help pedestrians crossing the bridge.

Although cyclist groups had complained about both these measures, Park management had limited changes to some minor ones recommended by a safety audit.

The long-awaited courtesy crossings were constructed. They are a difficult compromise – finding something that would be both effective and suitable for Richmond Park. FRP welcomed work intended to make the Park safer and more accessible for pedestrians and continued to keep this under review.

A significant amount of path work was undertaken. High visitor numbers over a long period of time, climate change and the desire to restore areas to natural habitat create the need for repair works on paths. However, FRP expressed concerns to Park management about the extent of some of these changes and their impact on the essential character of the Park.

### **Richmond Park developments – signs and skylarks**

New improved signage has started to appear, reflecting much work by the Friends over the last few years to push for better signage.

FRP welcomed the enlargement of the skylark protection zones, with associated fencing.

### **Richmond Park developments – landscape management brought inhouse**

About 30 years ago the Friends had opposed the outsourcing of the gardening and maintenance staff and, therefore, was pleased that the work had now been brought back in-house to The Royal Parks (TRP).

TRP has been buying new equipment for this team – meaning a major environmental improvement with a shift from petrol power to electricity.

Roger Hillyer then turned to a review of the Friends' activities in 2023.

### **Flight paths and Heathrow**

As predicted last year, the issue of Heathrow and flight paths became very significant in 2023 and is currently FRP's biggest issue.

This is about the reconfiguration of flight paths across all of the UK, known as "Airspace Modernisation". In August last year Heathrow published its shortlist of flight path options.

The Friends working group analysed hundreds, if not thousands, of pages of material. The options include many possible new flights over the Park.

FRP is one of the most active groups dealing with Heathrow and achieved a significant statement from Heathrow: ***Richmond Park has been identified via community engagement as a specific area that should be avoided where possible.***

FRP's work also led to the London Assembly voting unanimously to express its concern on the potential impact on Richmond Park, that concern being reported in the London Evening Standard and BBC News.

The Civil Aviation Authority, the CAA, is responsible for deciding whether to approve the proposals through various stages. The CAA did not approve Heathrow's approach to shortlisting, especially how it dealt with stakeholders – including the Friends - and required Heathrow to redo its stakeholder engagement work, which is now in train.

In summary, FRP has achieved some gains, but the shortlist still includes many flight path options going over Richmond Park. And while Heathrow say Richmond Park is special, their current plans do not remove any of the flight path options over the Park.

The Trustees remain deeply concerned and continue to work hard to protect the Park.

### **Discoverers - activities programme for families with school age children**

Discoverers is going to from strength to strength, with 200 families on its mailing list.

During 2023, there were 11 main events, some open to the general public and other smaller events for registered Discoverers' families only. They included monthly nature walks, bat evenings, an owl evening, and a "Maths with trees" session.

## **Events**

The Richmond May Fair returned in 2023 after a three year absence.

FRP also had a stall at the Duathlon, as well as monitoring the event and giving feedback to the organisers.

After a five-year gap, there was an Open Day at Holly Lodge, to educate people about the work to run the Park, including the work by FRP.

## **Active Volunteering – conservation volunteers**

FRP volunteers continue to care for the meadow at Holly Lodge, keeping the ragwort under control, planting shade resistant seeds and scything the meadow.

The Saturday morning conservation volunteers had another active year working on projects all over the Park – digging up bramble and rhododendron on Petersham slopes and in the Sidmouth Wood driftway, removing invasive species in Two Storm Wood, and deconstructing dens in Spankers Hill Wood.

## **Litter picking**

The FRP Beverley Brook Litter Clearance team not only collected about 1,000 bottles and cans but also, in 2023, recovered their first shopping trolley.

The Adopt-an-Area litter-picking team, FRP's biggest volunteering programme, continued to thrive and collected a wide range of rubbish.

## **Visitor Centre and member walks**

The Visitor Centre's 60 volunteers hosted nearly 40,000 visitors. They answer a wide range of questions from both first-time visitors and regulars, as well as fundraising.

The member walks on the first Saturday of the month continued to be popular.

## **Publications**

In 2023, FRP produced a variety of publications, including a revised edition of the fascinating booklet on the derivation of names in Richmond Park and a new guide to Pembroke Lodge gardens.

Park Life magazine, now produced twice a year in a larger format, continued to improve.

For the 11th year running, FRP produced the popular Calendar. This and the Christmas Cards continued to be an important source of income, being sold at the Visitor Centre, via the FRP online shop and at several local bookshops.

## **Grant giving**

FRP funded almost all of the trees in the new style crates around the Park.

The impact of FRP grants can spread over a couple of years. In March 2023, the electric bike, which FRP had funded in 2022, was presented to the police and is apparently used every day.

In 2023, FRP paid for the materials to build a kingfisher bank (and the conservation volunteers carried out the work).

### **Roehampton Restored**

Looking to the future, the Chairman reported that The Royal Parks had recently announced its plans for the Roehampton area – a new café and enhanced landscape – to replace the current temporary café installed 20 years ago after a fire.

The Roehampton café area had long needed improvement and the Trustees think the plans are a good balance between providing an attractive facility for visitors and protecting the landscape. The Royal Parks had consulted with FRP and listened to its views on the design.

It is a major investment, including moving the entrance to the car park nearer Roehampton Gate. With planning permission needed, it would not open for a couple of years.

### **Platinum Jubilee Woodland**

The Chairman ended by showing a short film about the highlight of the year – the opening of the Platinum Jubilee Woodland (part of The Queen's Green Canopy).

The event brought together many of the Friends' activities:

- grant giving to The Royal Parks – in this case, £29,000 for the 70 trees
- the conservation volunteers team
- the Discoverers programme for families
- event skills
- FRP's patrons; and
- FRP's many volunteers and supporters of all generations.

## **QUESTIONS TO THE TRUSTEES AND DISCUSSION OF MATTERS OF CONCERN**

The Chairman began with pre-submitted questions.

### ***Heathrow Third Runway***

Rosemary Smith asked *whether it had been officially confirmed that further runways at Heathrow Airport have been cancelled.*

Nick Coleman said not. Heathrow still favour the idea but currently lack funding. The shortlist of potential future flight paths, published by Heathrow as part of the Airspace Modernisation programme (referred to in the Chairman's report), includes new arrival routes looping in from the southwest over Kingston. The suspicion is that Heathrow are deliberately leaving airspace clear to the north of the Park, so as to be able to accommodate flights into a potential third runway in the future.

Nick explained that FRP is concerned about the environmental impact of potential arrivals at less than 2,000ft above the Park. The noise will destroy the tranquillity. There are also concerns about air quality and the effect of air pollution on habitats and wildlife. Heathrow argue that above 1,000ft any pollution disperses in the wind and they are only required to forecast environmental impacts forward 10 years, even though the veteran oak trees and acid grassland, for example, are the result of centuries of growth.

### ***Deer cull signage***

A question from Florence Mitchell: *Why is the deer cull announced at the gates as an all-day mortal danger? It's a danger after dark only but many people don't read the whole text and go away too frightened to enter.*

The Chairman noted the importance of a clear message on the danger but agreed that the wording of the signs is stark and anecdotal evidence supports the concern that visitors are being needlessly frightened away. The signs should be more clearly worded. The point has been raised with Paul Richards, the Park Manager, who was surprised to learn that visitors had turned away in the day.

### ***Conservation Plan***

Deidre Clenet asked *whether there is a coordinated conservation plan for Richmond Park.*

The Chairman pointed to the Richmond Park Management Plan 2019-29, published on The Royal Parks website. He added that TRP are currently carrying out many surveys – including on hydrology, reptiles, trees, woodland management, to name a few, which would inform more detailed planning.

Claire Cockle had submitted a number of questions in advance.

The Chairman said a common theme of the questions was whether the Friends is consulted on changes or stands up to the Royal Parks enough. He noted that the working relationship between TRP and FRP is fundamental and would return to this point in his answers.

In all, Claire made eleven points / questions. He would try to give a brief answer on each of them – not least because many members might be interested in Claire's issues.

### ***Thomson's Teeth***

Her first: *I have been told they were removing the wooden posts along the road borders because they did not like the look. The posts have always been there, do not stick out and destroy the landscape; quite the opposite, they protect the edges from erosion and stop cars parking on the verge.*

Roger Hillyer said that the small posts were put in by George Thomson who was the Park Manager in the 1950s and 1960s. They are designed to stop cars parking on the verge.

Many are in a poor state of repair and they are expensive to maintain. FRP were invited to comment and highlighted the risk of damage to grassland if they were removed, supported by photographs of past problems with cars parking on verges.



However, a 2023 Health & Safety report (which is on The Royal Parks website) identified the risk of severe injuries if a cyclist fell onto one of the posts.

So, some limited removal had been carried out:

- where there are no cars (Sheen Gate to Sheen Cross and Broomfield Hill to Robin Hood Gate); and
- between Richmond Gate and Roehampton Gate, where there is no vehicle traffic at weekends and bank holidays – the high-risk time for unlawful parking – and where there are ditches alongside the road in places
- in areas with high risk of injury – e.g. down Dark Hill.

FRP have been told that the rest will only be phased out when an alternative is put in place - a landscape treatment such as a mound or ditch.

So, although Claire Cockle had heard that the change was because of the look, that has never been mentioned to FRP – the explanations have been about cost and health and safety.

### ***Signage***

Claire Cockle: *There is too much signage.*

Roger Hillyer said that the Friends supports good signage to help visitors who want to do the right thing but may not know what that is. And FRP did a lot of research into what makes good signage, with the findings and recommendations being passed on to TRP.

Regarding location, FRP's position (which has been made clear to TRP) is that it favours signs at gates and car parks (i.e. where visitors arrive, congregate, and first step into the Park) but considers that there should be minimal signage in the main body of the Park.

### ***Beverley Brook bridge***

Claire Cockle: *The one-way traffic over Beverley Brook bridge by Roehampton Gate is not what the park is about and it serves no purpose for anyone as there is no path that side. The cyclists ignore and just go through regardless of who they should wait for. This does not enhance the "look " in the park.*

Roger Hillyer said that TRP had introduced the protected pedestrian route for safety reasons. There has always been a safety problem of pedestrians crossing Beverley Brook over this bridge on that side of the roadway while traffic is passing -perhaps making their way to or from the Roehampton car park and café. The new arrangement keeps pedestrians safe although it does mean cars have to stop at times. As for the cyclists, the law is that they should stop like cars do. TRP and the Parks Police are very much aware of sports cyclists going through when they shouldn't and are working on the problem.

### ***Fencing***

Claire Cockle: *There is....too much fencing off of trees from the deer*

The Chairman responded by saying that she was not alone in feeling that the Park is increasingly full of fencing.

He had put the point to Paul Richards, the Park Manager, a few weeks ago, who has since responded at an FRP Trustees meeting and also provided an explanation in the Park Diary, which is available at the end of the most recent FRP bulletin and currently on Park noticeboards. The Park Diary talks about balancing the competing interests of a historic deer park, an internationally important nature reserve and hugely popular green space for people. He covers a lot of detail – for example about soil compaction damaging veteran trees, the risk of old branches falling on people, the need to protect trees (especially young ones) from deer, and creating areas for habitats to grow.

Having said that, TRP are aware of certain concerns on the extent of fencing and they are looking for places where it can be removed.

### ***FRP relationship with TRP***

In order to allow time for other members to put questions, the Chairman offered to answer Claire Cockle's other questions after the meeting. However, he did want to address her underlying question about FRP's influence on TRP.

TRP, not FRP, manages Richmond Park, so the question (which is an important one) is *whether FRP could influence TRP more effectively?*

This highlighted the extent of recent change – TRP has more money and staff and is increasingly better organised, so it is more active, including catching up on work that might have been done some time ago if resources had allowed.

FRP is regularly briefed and consulted and provides input – questioning and challenging and seeking to understand proposals. For the last four years, FRP has organised an annual Question and Answer session for members with the Park Manager.

The Park's Management Plan says:

*“The challenge for the future is to maintain the **park's essential character**, with its managed deer herds, its ancient and successional trees, its extensive open ground and biodiversity balanced with the need to accommodate the reasonable demands and pressures of public access.”*

So, as the Trustees see it, the challenge for the Friends is, on every change The Royal Parks is contemplating, to take a view on the proposal from that perspective. That's about assessing individual changes, recently a lot of them, understanding them and assessing them, taken together, in terms of what they mean for the Park and **its essential character**.

### ***Movement Strategy***

Christian Gastaldello asked: *As the Royal Park with all the flora and fauna it has to offer is meant to be enjoyed by all (old and young) what are the chances of reinstating access to the whole perimeter of the Park to motorists particularly who may have the elderly or disabled as passengers?*

The Chairman noted that this question referred to the changes introduced by the Movement Strategy, namely:

- Broomfield Hill to Robin Hood Gate – no longer part of the road network
- Sheen Gate to Sheen Cross – closed to unauthorised cars
- Richmond to Roehampton: closed to unauthorised cars at the weekends and bank holidays. Open, for example, to ballet school residents.

The short answer was that he did not think there was any realistic chance of the Movement Strategy in Richmond Park being reopened any time soon, for two reasons.

First, a Richmond Park reason. The changes were the subject of a consultation which started in August 2020. It was originally to last for six months, to February 2021. In fact, the trial, with its feedback and detailed traffic surveys, lasted more than two years, until October 2022.

Secondly, a Royal Parks wide reason. There are still some unresolved Movement Strategy issues at other Parks. For example, there is a consultation currently open in relation to South Carriage Drive in Hyde Park. TRP is more likely to try and close these issues before reopening issues that they consider have been resolved after careful consideration, in the absence of any change in circumstances.

The changes were intended to reduce cut through traffic and have been effective in that aim – something the Friends has always wanted.

However, it was recognised that they also have the effect of reducing access by visitors who are less mobile. The extension of the TRP bus service from one day a week to three days a week is intended by TRP to help mitigate that.

The Chairman then took some questions from the floor.

### ***Disabled parking bays***

*How does TRP decide on the number of disabled parking bays at Pembroke Lodge- several may be standing unused when there are very few non-disabled spaces left?*

Roger Hillyer said that TRP have recently commissioned an Accessibility Audit and seek to comply with the national recommended standard of 5% accessible parking spaces.

### ***Roehampton café - dogs***

*Would TRP consider a prohibition on dogs (other than guide dogs) inside the Roehampton café?*

The Chairman promised to raise the question with the Park Manager.

### ***Roehampton Restored***

*Will there be an opportunity to examine details of the proposals for those unable to attend one of TRP's engagement sessions?*

The Chairman explained that FRP could not share any detailed plans or drawings other than the one included in the slides accompanying the Chairman's report. Full details will be available for public view and comment, on the LBRuT planning website, once TRP apply for planning permission.

### ***Financial reserves***

*What are the plans for spending FRP's sizable reserves?*

The Chairman noted that the current ZSL HogWatch survey is being financed by FRP.

TRP are aware of FRP's desire to fund conservation and biodiversity projects. TRP are currently developing two such large scale potential projects. One is the re-wilding of the Beverley Brook. The other is re-building the island in Lower Pen Pond (similar to the successful recent project in Upper Pen Pond). However, these are not likely to be implemented until 2025/26. Meanwhile, it is likely that FRP will be asked to fund more tree planting. It is also useful to be holding excess reserves in case money is needed to finance the campaign against new flight paths over the Park.

Roger Hillyer thanked all for their attendance, and closed the meeting at 12.10 pm