

THE FRIENDS OF RICHMOND PARK
MINUTES OF THE 2026 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held at King's House School, Richmond at 10.30am on Saturday 11 April 2026

Roger Hillyer, Chairman, took the chair and welcomed members to the 65th AGM of the Friends. With 82 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 2025, 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 Matthew Pottage, Head of Horticulture and Landscape Strategy with The Royal Parks; the Chairman's report on the activities of 2025; 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 Peter Allnutt, John Hood and Ann Levick.

2. Minutes of the 2025 AGM

On behalf of Judith Pearson, the Chairman proposed the acceptance of the Minutes of the last AGM held on 12 April 2025. 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 2025

Hugh Deighton presented the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2025. The accounts had been examined by Feltons Accountants in Richmond, approved by the Trustees 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 2024, at £27,000, with member numbers fairly constant; the new membership system which was introduced at the end of 2024 was now fully functioning; the Friends were able to claim Gift Aid on the majority of the membership income

- continuing sponsorship from Russell-Cooke, which had raised £2,500
- sales of publications and other merchandise at the Visitor Centre and online; there were strong sales at the Visitor Centre, which is very popular with Park visitors; the 2026 calendar and Christmas cards raising significant amounts, although there was a gradual decline in card sales as people turned to online greetings; and
- donations (including legacies), which totalled almost £13,000.

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 provided tremendous support for the charity and the achievement of its objects.

FRP were able to make grants of £10,500 in 2025 to The Royal Parks (TRP) to fund hawthorn protection and for Audiomoth acoustic survey devices, which will be used to identify and confirm the bird species and numbers in the Park.

During the year, the Charity established a wholly owned trading subsidiary, FRP Trading Limited, which took on the sales and trading previously carried out by the Charity. FRP Trading Limited donates its surplus to the Charity; its first donation was £4,000.

The financial position of the Friends continued to be healthy and the closing balance for 2025 was just under £175,000. The balance at the end of the year was 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 adoption of the 2025 Report and Accounts. The 2025 Report and Accounts were adopted.

4. Election of Officers

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

(b) William Wells proposed Judith Pearson for Secretary. Judith Pearson was elected.

(c) Marilyn Watkinson proposed Hugh Deighton for Treasurer. Hugh Deighton was elected.

5. Election of Trustees

Roger Hillyer said that during the year Vivienne Press stood down as trustee. Vivienne made a very significant contribution to the Friends - as a trustee, on projects (for example, on signage and the rangers) and on a wide range of publications (including the newsletter, the Calendar and much more). On behalf of the Friends, he thanked Vivienne for all her work for the Charity.

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
Peter Allnutt	Alan Pendrill	Coordinates our volunteering
Janet Bostock	Emma Aarons	Leads our Conservation volunteers
Neil Brereton	Sally Greatwood	Membership Secretary
Nick Coleman	Steve Walsh	Leads on projects and campaigns including Heathrow and flight paths
Helene Feger	Amanda Boardman	Leads on our press relations
Monique Sarkany	Anna Benson-Gyles	Leads our Discoverers programme for families
Nigel Sherwin	Richard Polson	Leads the Adopt-an-Area litter picking scheme

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.

GUEST SPEAKER PRESENTATION – GARDENING FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET

Roger Hillyer welcomed Matthew Pottage, Head of Horticulture and Landscape Strategy at The Royal Parks, to the platform, to give a presentation, illustrated by slides, entitled “Gardening for People and Planet”.

Matthew has spent most of his career with the RHS, most recently at Wisley. Each Royal Park has its own Head Gardener, now co-ordinated by the new role filled by Matthew.

He reminded members of London’s RHS gardening heritage and the key elements of living landscapes – horticulture, biodiversity habitats, trees, turf for sports and events, healthy soil. He identified several challenges to the Royal Parks: new pests and diseases, changing attitudes and the expectation to be sustainable, and managing a wilder aesthetic in designed landscapes.

In January, a new Sustainability Strategy was published which puts a lens on all TRP’s decision making. In June 2026, The Royal Parks will launch a new Horticultural Vision, empowering the team of 11 Head Gardeners with 5 clear objectives: everyday wonder, iconic horticulture, diverse planting to address climate change and the biodiversity crisis, respect for heritage, a sustainable future. A

new 2-acre garden will open at The Regents Park in April 2026 marking TRP's step-change to 'planet friendly gardening' - horticulture that is great for people and biodiversity.

The bones of the historical layout of the Royal Parks are strong. The new Horticultural Vision may involve challenging old routines e.g. no longer sweeping up fallen leaves, choice and care of roses in the world-class Queen Mary's Rose Gardens in The Regents Park, replanting with fresh, hardier exotics in the tired overgrown Dell in Hyde Park.

The presentation was warmly received and provoked several questions, including ones about a baseline survey to assist in monitoring hoped-for biodiversity gain, the newly created TRP Treescape Officer role, the loss of many mature holm oaks in Brompton Cemetery because of disease and concern about the risk of canker stain to central London planes, the likely insourcing of staff in other parks following the Richmond Park trial, and recent/forthcoming work and challenges in the Isabella Plantation. On this last topic, a very generous donation will fund a replanting of the heather garden; bold hard-pruning of rhododendron has opened up views to the water; rhododendron are struggling with climate change; there is a plan to share the Wilson collection of azaleas with gardens further north.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Roger Hillyer presented his 2025 Report for the Friends of Richmond Park, with slide illustrations.

He opened by referring to a programme aired on television on New Year's Day in which our patron Sir David Attenborough reminded everyone how special Richmond Park is:

"Standing among these marvellous trees, it's hard to believe that I am in a capital city. Richmond Park is one of my favourite places. Just minutes from my house, it's been both a refuge and a source of inspiration over the years.

I have been coming here ever since I moved to London [over 70 years ago]. Even after all that time and after all the places I have visited,

I wouldn't want to live anywhere else."

These words inspire us to continue the work of the Friends; and mean we look forward with excitement to his 100th birthday in just four weeks. To help celebrate, the Friends have produced a booklet about Sir David's association with us and with Richmond Park – on sale soon and highly recommended.

The Chairman then described some of the work of the Friends in 2025 to protect and support Richmond Park — the issues tackled and the extraordinary work of our volunteers.

Policing in the Park

2025 will unfortunately be a year remembered for the end of 150 years of a dedicated parks police unit.

The Friends argued strongly against the change, working with local politicians. The team we have lost had a deep knowledge of the Park, the wildlife and the Park Regulations.

However, the Metropolitan Police remain responsible for policing Richmond Park – but doing it in a different way – with local community police teams, 999 and 101.

The Friends pushed for the local community police teams to use Holly Lodge – and are pleased that some community officers are using Holly Lodge as a base - at least for now. That provides some visibility and brings them into the Park on a regular basis.

We are still concerned that there is much less focus on some matters, especially the Park Regulations, and we continue to monitor the situation.

Flight Paths and the Peace of the Park

Another major area of work has been the continuing threat of new Heathrow flight paths over Richmond Park.

One of the remarkable things about the Park today is that it is largely free from aircraft noise. That tranquillity needs our protection.

In 2019 we faced the threat of a third runway. The financial impact of Covid suspended that. Since 2021 we faced a new and different threat with “Airspace Modernisation”. This produced many flight path options crossing the Park.

In 2025 the government invited Heathrow to propose a 3rd runway. A 3rd runway could mean an increase in flights from 480,000 to 720,000 – meaning, inevitably, a desire to fly over Richmond Park.

The government is impatient with slow progress, so is doing two things:

- First changing much of the underlying policy and regulations. We have been responding to consultations and influencing politicians.
- Second, the government is taking responsibility for the local flight paths away from Heathrow (with whom we had built a good working relationship) and creating a new body - the UK Airspace Design Service. They, not Heathrow, will be designing flight paths going forward.

Roehampton Restored project

The existing café was always intended to be temporary after the original building burnt down two decades ago. What we have today is therefore a long-standing temporary solution.

In 2025, The Royal Parks received planning approval for the £7 million project to redevelop the site with a new café, new toilets and improved landscaping.

We have been involved in discussions about these plans for many years. Overall, we support the project — particularly the emphasis on biodiversity, sustainability and improving the landscape.

A couple of months ago, we saw the first physical sign of work, with the work on the new electricity sub-station. Looking forward, we expect to see a lot more activity over the next year or so and then a much better environment.

Art in the Park

Art in the Park was a new concept for the Friends in 2025.

It was all about seeing and therefore appreciating Richmond Park from a new perspective. Artist Tim Craven spoke to us about Trees in British History – we had 200 attendees in person and online.

And we organised an art walk – sketching or painting trees in Richmond Park.

New patron

At the start of the year, we welcomed tennis star and TV presenter Annabel Croft as a new patron.

Annabel planted a tree – one of many trees and crates donated to the Park by the Friends.

Wildlife Survey with ZSL

One of our most exciting projects is our wildlife survey in collaboration with the Zoological Society of London and The Royal Parks.

In 2024, 80 volunteers set out more than 150 camera traps across the Park. In 2025, in a huge Citizen Science project, volunteers categorised the more than 600,000 images. The next stage is analysis and reporting.

This project should ultimately give us a much richer understanding of how wildlife actually uses the Park.

Discoverers – Families in the Park

Our Discoverers programme for families continues to grow. These events introduce children to the wildlife and ecology of Richmond Park through activities such as skylark walks, bat detecting evenings and learning about fungi.

Moments like these can spark a lifelong interest in nature. The programme is helping to build a community of families who care deeply about the future of the Park.

Publications

It was another successful year for our publications.

Our magazine, Park Life, gets great feedback. The Christmas Cards continue to sell well. The 2026 Calendar, our best ever, was a sell out.

Our Social Media presence grows – for example last year our Threads followers broke through 1,000 and our Instagram followers have now broken through 6,000.

Volunteers

Our volunteering activities continue to thrive.

Conservation work takes place throughout the Park, including the Holly Lodge meadow, cutting back bramble, removing ragwort and much more.

Litter picking – both in the Beverley Brook, where our team collected everything from golf balls to a bicycle, and throughout the Park – with the help of 200 volunteers litter pickers.

The Visitor Centre had more than 55,000 visitors in 2025 and enjoyed record sales.

The Friends ran a promotional stall at Richmond May Fair.

Our volunteers also led our regular monthly walks, on the first Saturday of every month.

Improving our operations

Some of our volunteering is quite visible; some is behind the scenes and makes the more visible volunteering possible. Behind the scenes, we continue to improve our operations.

2025 was the first full year of our new Membership system, which we launched in November 2024. We introduced Direct Debits – and now have nearly 800 subscriptions paid by Direct Debit, which makes a significant improvement in the efficiency of running the charity and lightening the load on volunteers.

In 2025 we put our central volunteer records on the new system – making a much more efficient process.

And a few days ago we launched an improved submission process for photos for our Calendar.

Conclusion

Roger concluded by saying that this activity by a charity of volunteers is extraordinary. Seeing the work of our volunteers is inspiring.

It makes him realise that Sir David Attenborough is not the only person who regards Richmond Park as one of their favourite places. And he is not the only person to say that they wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

QUESTIONS TO THE TRUSTEES AND DISCUSSION OF MATTERS OF CONCERN

Cycling Speed

Michael and Lydia Hansbury asked the Trustees to confirm whether cyclists in Richmond Park are legally required to abide by the 20mph speed limit.

Roger Hillyer recalled that there was much debate for many years as to whether the 20mph speed limit applied to bicycles - and that this was resolved when a Freedom of Information request was put to The Royal Parks in 2021. The clear response was that it did not apply.

FRP are deeply concerned about this, not least in terms of the implications for pedestrian safety and the consequences of the Park's ring road being used by speeding cyclists, especially on summer weekday evenings and weekend mornings.

However, the legal position is now clear.

Having said that:

- (1) The Park Regulations forbid the riding of a cycle in a manner that endangers or is likely to endanger any person. *That is clearly more subjective than a speed limit and is therefore harder to enforce.*
- (2) The Royal Parks Cycling Code of Conduct says: "Always be mindful of your speed, specifically noting the speed limits in force on park roads and trails. Do not ride in excess of 20mph in any circumstances and do not use the park roads for unauthorised competitive cycling of any kind. Reducing speed helps maintain a safe and welcoming environment for all visitors." *That is a code of conduct rather than a legal requirement.*

On the legal point, after the Friends Trustees discussed cycling in summer 2024, we concluded that it would be better if there were a specific legal speed limit. So, Roger wrote to The Royal Parks

requesting that cyclists should be subject to the same speed limit as drivers of motor vehicles. If TRP did not consider they had the power to do that, then they should request a change from those that do have the power.

Roger was told the letter was well received. It was not the only factor - the death of Hilda Griffiths, after being hit by a cyclist in Regents Park, was an important issue.

TRPs subsequently wrote to the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) in October 2024. requesting that the Park Regulations be amended so that the speed limit is made legally applicable to cyclists as well as motor vehicles.

FRP are not aware of any response from the DCMS to TRP.

From the floor, Max Lankester noted that the Park Regulations do impose a 10mph speed limit on bicycles on the Tamsin Trail.

Members noted that fallow deer are also at risk from speeding cyclists and, as well as speeding on authorised cycling routes, there is a problem of off-road cycling. Riders of hired bikes have been seen behaving dangerously.

Janet Bostock added that, in any case, whatever the legal position, with the disbanding of the Royal Parks police unit, there is a lack of capacity to enforce any speed limit. Nick Coleman explained that an FRP team are monitoring the impact of the loss of a dedicated police unit to enforce Park regulations, gathering hard evidence to present to the Met Police.

Benches

Diane Wood pointed out that the two seats on Spankers Hill facing south/west are in desperate need of replacing because they are very uncomfortable. Also, it would be nice to have more seating around this beautiful viewpoint. The seat at the top of Broomfield Hill facing Roehampton also needs replacing – the ground is so worn away that, when seated, one's feet don't touch the ground.

Roger reported that the Trustees had passed this request to TRP Park management.

The good news is that TRP recently ordered six new benches. The two on Spankers Hill will be replaced as part of that six. And, in response to FRP's request, the one at Broomfield will be replaced as part of a further order.

It is worthwhile reporting any similar bench maintenance issues to TRP, ideally with a W3W location reference.

AOB

A member asked why there is no AOB item on the Agenda.

The Chairman said that this Q&A item fulfils that function.

Visitor Centre

A member asked about Daniel Hearsom's idea for a larger VC combined with an exhibition space and meeting room which might, for example, be used by Discoverers.

Roger recalled that TRP had opposed such plans. It is hoped to renovate the existing VC premises over the next 2 years, after TRP take the building back under their direct control (instead of being part of the Pembroke Lodge concession).

Toilets at Pen Ponds carpark

Diane Wood asked why there are no toilets at the very busy Pen Ponds carpark/ coffee shop.

Roger explained that the main issue here is services and utilities. At this site, there is no electricity supply, no running water and no drain. The last time a cost estimate was produced – several years ago – the cost was estimated to be about £1/4m. It would be much more now. Presumably services would need to link to the Ballet School and / or Robin Hood Gate. So, there are real cost and practicality issues.

Having said that, the toilets at The Isabella Plantation might provide an example of what could be done - possibly a disabled /accessible toilet using the waterless system.

National Nature Reserve status

Several members were in favour of FRP doing more/persuading TRP to do more to publicise Richmond Park's status as an NNR eg:

- Printing on the tarmac at the entrance gates
- Less signage clutter – in particular, the new electronic displays were criticised.

Roger noted that the front cover of the FRP calendar and the FRP YouTube video already publicise the NNR designation but recognised there is always more that can be done. The Friends were very conscious of the need to balance the education of the public and urbanisation of the Park environment – that's why the FRP signage proposals a few years ago recommended clustering signs at entrance gates rather than scattering them through the Park landscape. He understood that the electronic displays were temporary and had been introduced to manage parking space over the May Bank Holiday weekends.

Polo

There was a question from the floor about TRP's plan to host polo in Richmond Park.

The Chairman said that FRP had been notified of possible proposals last autumn and had responded by saying that FRP had concerns, noting its impact would depend on the scale and nature of any activities. A large spectator event would not be suitable in an NNR. TRP had only provided fairly high-level information to FRP on their firm plans for 2026. Our understanding is that polo will be played on the existing rugby pitches and activity will be similar to a local club match.

Members expressed concerns about the impact on habitats and wildlife.

Plans and Goals

Rosemary Smith asked about the Trustees' plans or goals for the future at this difficult time.

The Chairman said that the Trustees are guided by FRP's charitable objects:

- Promoting the conservation, protection and improvement of Richmond Park; and
- Educating people about Richmond Park.

At the beginning of each year the Trustees look forward, taking into account what is going on in the Park and the wider environment, and FRP as an organisation. The priorities and initiatives for 2026 are:

- Continue our core strength of fantastic volunteering

- Stay close to and monitor major changes in the Park:
 - Roehampton Restored
 - The first full year of the new police arrangements
 - Pembroke Lodge – a new concession arrangement from November – continue to make progress regarding the implications for the Visitor Centre
- Meet the external threat of new Heathrow flight paths:
 - Get close to the new UK Airspace Design Service
 - Stay close to local politicians
 - Hold those with influence to the commitments we secured from them.
- ZSL Wildlife Survey – move from having lots of great data through analysis to reporting.
- Influence and contribute to conservation developments in the Park - we think the first phase of a rewiggling of the Beverley Brook 10 years ago was a success and anticipate making a significant financial contribution to encourage more of that work.
- Celebrate our patron, Sir David Attenborough's, 100th birthday.

Thanks to TRP Volunteers and AGM speaker.

Members said that the FRP walk leaders are superb and instructive and also thanked the Trustees for their work.

Members also expressed their thanks to Matthew Pottage for his interesting talk.

Roger Hillyer thanked all for their attendance and closed the meeting at 12.05 pm