

## **FRIENDS OF RICHMOND GREEN (FoRG) – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2017**

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The Annual General Meeting was held at 7:30pm on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2017 in the upstairs room of The Cricketers pub, The Green, Richmond.

Attendance note: In total, **31** people attended the meeting (including the 6 members of the Executive Committee: Vivien Harris/chair, Mark Sebba/Treasurer, Peter Willan, Peter Griffiths, Anna Newton Dunn and Linda Christmas).

### **AGENDA**

- 1. Apologies**
- 2. Minutes of last meeting**
- 3. Matters arising**
- 4. Report of the Executive**
- 5. Financial report and adoption of Accounts**
- 6. Election of Officers for 2017-18**
- 7. Any Other Business**

## **MINUTES of AGM**

The meeting began at 7.32pm

### **1. Apologies**

Nick Coleman

### **2. Minutes of last meeting**

The Minutes of the 2016 FoRG AGM were agreed.

Proposed: Martin Anderson

Seconded: John Lee

### **3. Matters arising**

Question from the floor: Charles Clarke asked about the post-box on the edge of The Green, still concerned that the collection is too early. He sees a Post Office van parked there each day, and has written to ask for more frequent and later collections. VH: we've tried, but with no success... the Post Office says that usage of this particular box is so low they cannot justify more regular collections and the post man empties this box on his round.

### **4. Report of the Executive**

A detailed report on key issues and on-going activities is contained in the FoRG Newsletter for April 2017, but in summary the chair noted the following:-

- **Graham Walker.** VH: we were very sorry to hear of the death, after illness at the end of last year, of Graham Walker, a long-term resident on The Green and a serving member of the FoRG committee. FoRG has contributed to the costs of a commemorative bench for Graham on The Green. VH invited any volunteers who may want to take his place and join the FoRG committee to make known their interest.
- **Heathrow.** PW summarised the state of play over airport expansion. While engagement with Heathrow and Government has been harder over the past year, RHC continues to work hard on the several issues of concern. Aside from expansion of Heathrow itself, the wider Airspace Modernisation programme is a huge exercise in its own right, covering the whole of the south-east, much of the UK and Europe. There is

still the unresolved question of Night-flights – an important issue, with RHC arguing for no flights at all between 11pm and 7am. The threat of rising air pollution, against the backdrop of everything we know about Climate Change, is very real. There are impacts in local economics, and also arising from Surface access to an expanded Heathrow. If it does all go ahead, the impacts on Richmond residents begin with the reality that respite from noise from overhead airplanes will be halved, down from 8 hours to 4 hours. New take-offs raise the threat of rising air pollution. The rail network in the borough is going to come under increasing pressure: greater numbers wanting to get to Heathrow, while using only the existing rail infrastructure, will potentially result in overcrowding and traffic bottlenecks at level crossings in the borough. While the timetable of current events is somewhat chaotic – there are 20 consultations running at the same time – it's important that people engage and respond. In particular those on Airspace modernisation and the National Policy statement both close on 25 May. RHC remains confident that expansion can be stopped, although the battle is going to be difficult. From stopping it altogether, to frustrating and compromising the process, to mitigating damage caused, there is much work still to do and RHC continues on its course. Perhaps the only way to stop the Heathrow expansion project is to make it consume itself. There are serious questions over the affordability of expansion: Heathrow will have to raise some £80bn in funds, and when they can't find those funds, it'll be the taxpayer required to pay. "There's a long battle ahead of us"

- **Licensing.** VH: there have been significant changes over the past twelve months. There is an on-going shift in the Richmond economy, with an increasing number of smaller retail outlets vanishing and being replaced by an increasing number of food and drink-led premises. As a result, the character of the town is changing. PW's assiduous work for the Richmond Society on monitoring and tackling new license applications is increasingly frustrating with the council's resources diminishing before our eyes.
- **Spending FoRG's funds.** VH: we are considering local projects on which spending of FoRG's funds would be appropriate. Among them is the ambition to restore the Greenside fountain and its surrounds and we're exploring a number of approaches.
- **New local history talk.** VH: Following the success of local historian Valerie Boyes's talk on the history of The Green, we've invited Valerie to offer another talk. This is likely to happen sometime in September this year and we'll announce details in due course.
- **Old Palace Lane project.** VH: FoRG is making a contribution to the costs of the Old Palace Lane project to highlight, through an exhibition at the Museum of Richmond (with App attached), the history of one of Richmond's oldest thoroughfares. New research has helped to clarify the role of Old Palace Lane as having been the 'back entrance' to the Tudor Palace in its heyday.
- **Old Deer Park.** VH: the ODP Working Group, on which FoRG is represented along with other local groups, continues to encourage the council to focus on improved access and renewal of facilities. While the closed off A316 underpass is not likely to be re-opened (there are safety worries about it becoming a refuge for rough-sleepers), there are plans to install decking and a raised walkway to help people avoid the mud and flooding that regularly happens under the arches closest to the river.
- **Events.** VH: we continue to monitor events happening on The Green and in Old Deer Park. We are working well with the council on Green events. In ODP, although the damage to turf following the RWC Fanzone has still not yet been made good, the council has now at least hatched a plan to re-seed and re-turf where necessary.

Questions from the floor on the Executive Report:-

John Lee reiterated his view that a mirror is required on the blind corner where the narrow road on the left hand side of the small grass triangle meets Friars Lane. The junction, he says, is a “nightmare” both ways, and it can only be a matter of time before an accident occurs. VH: the council no longer permits wall mirrors in any circumstances. JL: might it not be possible to block off the small slip road so that drivers have to take the longer way round where there is at least more visibility? Others were not sure that step was merited. It was noted that the road markings at the junction of King Street, The Green and Friars Lane had faded badly and needed repainting. While cars coming around Greenside have the right of way across that junction, the blotting out of a mistakenly placed dotted line suggesting otherwise is now thinning so that the wrong dotted line is becoming visible again. Drivers can be seen hesitating owing to the confusion. VH: we should at least ask the council to review the road-markings at this junction so that confusion can be removed.

Charles Clarke noted that the unpainted lamp-post on the edge of The Green has still not been finished. VH: the council is going to give it the required attention in the next few months along with other specific lampposts on the Green. VH added that the dead spotlights at the Gateway from the corner of the Green to the railway bridge were also to be replaced by the council soon.

### **5. Financial report and adoption of Accounts**

Treasurer Mark Sebba issued the FoRG accounts for the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, summarising as follows:-

- FoRG’s income, which comes totally from filming projects around The Green, had dropped from £1,200 in 2015 to £700 in 2016. This probably indicates a general decline in this income stream, with fewer big filming units taking up parking spaces (for which compensatory payments are made) and more low-key hand-held cameras being used instead.
- Expenditure had also been reduced, however, dropping from approx. £1,300 to £485 in 2016. FoRG’s contribution to the town’s Xmas lights was reduced in 2016, and will disappear altogether this coming year as responsibility for the lights passes to the new Richmond BID ; the cost of the AGM also fell, there was no corresponding public lecture cost; and RHC costs were minimal. A small surplus has resulted. There was however a one-off £250 contribution to the cost of the bench installed in memory of Graham Walker.
- The current balance of the FoRG account is approx. £7,300. We are looking at other ways to spend FoRG’s funds on local projects, but otherwise we are husbanding our resources sensibly.

Question from the floor: the expenditure on RHC seems remarkably small compared to the size of the concerns over Heathrow expansion; is it in keeping with the amounts spent by other societies that are backing RHC? PW: yes, the other societies share costs at the same level. VH: while there may be some additional costs this year (eg. hall hire), it is worth acknowledging that our costs are kept remarkably low largely as a result of the phenomenal amount of work that Peter Willan does for no personal reward and at no cost to us. His efforts are very much appreciated.

The Accounts were agreed and adopted – proposed by Bob Harris; seconded: John Lee

### **6. Election of Officers**

Charles Clarke proposed that the six current committee members be re-elected en bloc. This proposal was seconded by John Lee.

Therefore, the FoRG Executive Committee duly elected for the coming year 2017-18 is as follows:-

- Vivien Harris (8 Pembroke Villas) – Chair
- Mark Sebba (9 Pembroke Villas) – Treasurer
- Peter Willan (7 The Green)
- Peter Griffiths (26 The Retreat)
- Anna Newton Dunn (29 Old Palace Lane)

- Linda Christmas (16 Queensberry House)

The vacant position of FoRG Secretary will be announced when the vacancy is filled.

## **7. Any Other Business**

**Heathrow.** Adrian Parsons: has anyone thought of changing the height of passing airplanes in order to reduce noise? PW: Yes, the height and flight-paths of airplanes are already tightly regulated. Heathrow had, however, proposed changing the angle of descent, by a margin of between 3 and 3.5 degrees, and this will come into operation despite the fact that pilots seem opposed to it. But these issues are very much under discussion.

**Plane Trees.** Julian Paxton: the council still seems negligent about the large plane trees on Greenside, especially with their density and their negative impact on the state of the ground beneath with grass unable to grow. Could they be trimmed back and, perhaps, could we have fewer of them? VH: the council has been very reluctant to engage on this, and it's still a tricky issue, but we are pursuing further meetings with them and trying to work with their Tree Plan. It seems obvious that the trees are much bigger than they should be and too dense. PW: indeed there was talk that when the trees were originally planted, they were put in a double the density intended. But some pruning was done two years ago, and a new Tree Policy at the council may present a possible opportunity for progress.

**Telephone boxes.** Julian Paxton: what is to happen with the dilapidated twin telephone boxes in the corner of the Green? PW: councillor Buckwell is actually making some progress here, with a plan to buy them, one from BT (for a peppercorn sum) and the other from the Brighton charity that bought the other one a few years ago. The charity is about to lodge a planning application to convert its box into a mobile phone repair 'shop' and FoRG and the Richmond Society will object. A previous application from the same company for a café kiosk was rejected. The best outcome is probably a joint community/FoRG collaboration to acquire the two boxes, renovate and maintain them, although they would need to be sealed. VH: the boxes are listed as classic examples of the iconic Sir Gilbert Scott red telephone box; they are a unique pair in the borough, so a plan for the council to own both but with FoRG and Richmond Society supporting their maintenance (together with other funding that could be secured) as a Greenside feature seems an attractive solution. Charles Clarke: could they not be restored as working telephones? VH: BT just won't do it, as usage these days is so very low. Their future value is as cultural icons, not as working telephones.

**Council resources.** Martin Anderson: looking at repeated problems with litter collection and other services that should be routinely provided by the council – problems are getting worse, things are just not getting done – is the bigger reality now that the council is so strapped for cash these days it just can't fulfil its proper function? PW: Yes, there is no doubt that the council is seriously struggling to keep up. With the recent good weather, for example, they were caught napping with the amount of litter that needed to be taken in hand. It's also become noticeably more difficult chasing the council over licensing applications – the council now has only one officer dealing with licensing and they're swamped; the police are under-resourced, and with only one officer dealing with this they are "totally overwhelmed". And the cuts continue; there are very few police in Richmond town now and the situation could soon become "critical". VH: at least there is still a dedicated Parks team in place in Richmond, and the Continental litter collectors will come out when prompted, but there is no doubt that the Green is under pressure when it comes to litter being dropped and collected. PW: through consultation, we need to work with the council to express the special character of Richmond town and Green and to help them target their slim resources to best effect. Fred Hauptfuhrer: one problem with litter is that the bins on The Green are the wrong design, they're not covered so spillage is inevitable, whether by over-filling or foxes or under-utilising with the wind lifting the bag and loose rubbish tumbling out as a result. VH: we'll look into alternatives.

**Rough-sleepers.** A comment from the floor raised the issue of the number of rough-sleepers now in Richmond, and the fact that she was told, when she phoned the police, that it was “not a matter for the police”. PW: police are aware of the issue and we will continue to take it up with them. VH: the SPEAR organisation does help with homeless in Richmond. PW: the Police Liaison Group needs our help, so anyone who wants to attend should do so (next meeting date to be put on FoRG website). VH: a related issue is that the area under the Railway Arches at Old Deer Park is the responsibility of Railtrack and not of the Council; also, many of those who had taken up residence in Buccleugh Gardens have now moved to new locations, including Old Deer Park, following the recent sealing-up with new railings and gates of the covered space under the Buccleugh and Terrace Gardens arches. Charles Clarke noted on rugby days there were considerably more beggars in Richmond.

**Old Palace Yard.** Charles Clarke: the surface of Old Palace Yard desperately needs resurfacing, but one reason action has stalled is that local residents there are not happy about footing the cost. Anna ND: the new agents (Saville) acting for the Crown Estate have promised a meeting in May (date TBC) to discuss this issue; some residents are indeed unhappy about being liable for costs although their leases do require them to fund this work. Fred H: the poor surface is “a disgrace” for this heritage centre of the borough. The council doesn’t want to know, the Crown Estate doesn’t want to pay, and it seems unjust to burden the residents with the whole costs of reparation. There should be a sensible tri-partite sharing of costs, but the lack of a “strong and reliable compass to do the right thing” is holding us back. AND: we need to get the leaseholders together to have another go at this.

**Holes in The Green.** Adrian Parsons: holes in the surface of The Green, when obscured by leaves for example, are dangerous. He once fell into one because the hazard was not visible. VH: we would always report anything like that to make sure the Parks team comes to make the surface safe again.

**Traffic-calming.** Tony Winslade: is there any discussion about traffic-calming measures around the Green? Drivers often speed up as they pass Pembroke Villas and turn past Portland Terrace. PW: traffic-calming was discussed about four or five years ago when The Green was included in re-thinking traffic controls in George Street. The idea of a 20mph limit around The Green was raised, although it couldn’t be enforced at that time. Around The Green the council generally favours re-shaping the car parking zones rather than installing humps in the road. VH: there was no local support for ‘sleeping policemen’ on the road around The Green. PW: traffic movements through the town are now being revisited and if there is renewed support in the room for a 20mph limit around the Green, we will check if this can now be enforced and then we can take it up with the council and police and report back.

**Changing character of the town:** Maggie Wood – Collins: can anything be done about the pattern of small retailers being replaced by even more food & drink outlets

Mark S: its partly explained by the growth of business conducted online... this has affected margins but not done anything to reduce landlord’s rates. Therefore its harder and harder for local small businesses to survive, whereas the bigger and more flexible profit margins of coffee chains and juice bars, for example, allow them to cope better. PW: in truth, the council has failed to prevent the march of food & drink-led businesses and bars in many parts of the town; planning law handicaps them and the council’s lack of resources is becoming a very big issue. Martin Anderson: Has the Cumulative Impact Policy now been abandoned? PW: officially it is being revised under consultation, but the impression is that the council is even wobbling on this now; the CIP was very hard fought for, it was one of the first to be put in place and was effective; if we lose that controlling measure now, we’re in trouble. MA: suggested we convene a meeting and get a councillor to come and hear residents’ growing concerns. PW: there are two Richmond Society forums each year to focus on issues of particular concern. VH: FoRG will look to set something up if one or more of our Councillors agree to meet us

**Alternative venues.** Adrian Parsons confirmed that the White Swan was only available at commercial hire rates. We are grateful to The Cricketers for allowing us to use the upstairs room at no charge.

The meeting ended at 8.57pm.

**END OF AGM**