

Friends of Richmond Green (FoRG)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

(contact details: Chairman – tel: 020 8948 3384 / email: mail@FoRG.org.uk)

Date: **Wednesday 23 April 2025 at 7.30pm**

Venue: **The Cricketers pub** (upstairs room), Richmond Green

Attendance: The total attendance was **35** individuals (according to several head-counts by PG). This total comprised **7** committee members in the room (chair Vivien Harris [VH], treasurer Diana Billingham [DB], Peter Willan [PW], Peter Griffiths [PG], Gemma Fumagalli [GF], Juliet Bramwell [JB], David McKenzie [DM], and Gemma Warrillow [GW]; plus **28** other residents who were observed to have attended (some arriving after the meeting had started, etc). (A further two people were observed by Bob Harris coming up to the top of the stairs but then, seeing the room packed, went back down again.)

NB. An attendance sheet was circulated on the night and, of the total people in the room, 22 names were collected on it: Diana Billingham (committee), E. Lanyon, M. Leach, Karineh Grigorian, G. Bradley, Brian Palin, A. (Tony) Winslade, Grant Reid, Brian Fall, Martin Sargeant, Graham Stewart, Jenny Rees, Neil Monnery, Steve Smith, Maggie Smith, Colman McCarthy, Laurence Monnery, Elizabeth Pryce, Bobbie Kalsi, Julian Paxton, Laurence Fumagalli, Petina Hauptfuhrer. Among those who attended but did not sign the sheet were Frances Bouchier, Maeve Willan, Bob Harris and Harmet Kalsi.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies**
2. **Minutes of last AGM (17 April 2024)**
3. **Matters arising**
4. **Report of the Executive**
5. **Financial Report and adoption of FoRG Accounts for 2024**
6. **Election of Officers for 2025-26**
7. **Any Other Business (general discussion)**

MINUTES of the FoRG AGM 2025

Meeting began at **7.31pm**

VH: Welcomed everyone and introduced the committee members present, thanking each them for their contribution over the past year.

1. Apologies

Apologies in advance of the meeting were received from: Deirdre Hennessy; Anne Sebba; Carolin Lennertz; Lord Lee.

2. Minutes of last AGM (17 April 2024)

VH: Copies of the 2024 AGM minutes have been made available on the FoRG website; any comments? None.
VH asked for approval...

Proposer: Karineh Grigorian
Seconder: Maeve Willan

The FoRG 2024 AGM Minutes were agreed.

3. Matters arising

VH: there's very little that won't be covered later in this meeting, but just one specific item to highlight:

- **Trees on The Green** – VH: at last year's AGM a question arose about the London Plane trees on Greenside and whether anything could be done to mitigate the effects of their ageing and causing a reduction in grass growth around them; we said then that we'd talk to the council's tree officer and about what their plan might be, despite previous attempts suggesting change having been met with fierce resistance and Tree Preservation Orders, etc.; this approach hasn't happened yet, but we haven't forgotten and we'll begin that dialogue soon.

4. Report of the FoRG Executive

VH gave a detailed report on key issues and on-going activities as reflected in the recent FoRG Newsletter for April 2025. Highlights were summarised as follows...

- **May Fair & Ball** – VH: the May Fair is back (Saturday 10 May) and is the town's biggest community event; and it promises to be bigger and better than ever this year. Tickets for the May Ball (Friday 9 May) are sold out, benefiting local charities. And this year there's to be a special Orange Tree Theatre event on the Sunday 11 May (details on the OT website: "Live on Richmond Green: *Desert Island Drama*, 11 May 2025, hosted by Anthony Horowitz: What would you take to your cultural desert island?" – panel including Jane Asher, Fay Ripley, James Lance, etc.)
- **Twinning celebrations** – VH: celebrations coming up on the weekend of 6-8 June to mark the twinning of Richmond with Fontainebleau in France and Konstanz in Germany; Richmond in Virginia, USA, is also twinned with our town, although they are not part of this particular celebration;
- **Heathrow** – VH: for many years Peter Willan has chaired Richmond Heathrow Campaign (RHC), and works very hard to represent us all in efforts to oppose the negative effects of plans to expand the airport, especially as the possibility of a third runway has re-merged in recent months; this has entailed much research, many meetings and responses to consultations; PW's work is a 'magnus opus' and our thanks go to him for all his efforts;
- **Potholes** – VH: we're delighted to have the worst potholes now mended, at least on the Pembroke Villas side where they were particularly bad; so far, the results of the council's excellent job are holding up well;
- **Crime and Policing** – VH: on our behalf, Gemma Fumagalli attended last night's Police Liaison Group (PLG) meeting at Kings House school; it was a timely meeting as there have been developments since our FoRG newsletter was issued; a little later on, GF will update us on what's been happening and the police's most recent response, etc.;
- **Planning and Licensing** – VH: again, PW's sterling work in tracking and responding on our behalf to numerous applications is much appreciated; the council have issued their strategy for the town and for the night-time economy and we're keeping close track of all that;
- **Friars Lane Car Park** – VH: the council's upgrade of the Friars Lane car park has been completed, and has been generally well received;
- **Old Deer Park** – VH: FoRG is part of the Old Deer Park Working Group, overseeing developments such as the Link Path project and the planting of trees, etc.

That concluded the report of the FoRG Executive – any of these issues can be discussed in more depth later if people want to.

5. Financial Report and adoption of FoRG Accounts for 2024

FoRG Treasurer Diana Billingham summarised FoRG's accounts (1st Jan to 31st Dec 2024) as follows:-

- **Filming income** – DB: after a quieter 2023, the number of filming production company visits to Richmond (and specifically The Green) increased in 2024, bringing a subsequent increase in donations to FoRG to offset inconvenience to residents (historically demand does vary from year to year). In 2024, this resulted in a FoRG receiving a total of filming income payments of £2,725.
- **Planning application (Onslow Hall) costs** – DB: earlier last year, FoRG sought legal professional services to support an objection to City Pub Group's unsuitable plan to turn Onslow Hall into a pub/hotel that, in FoRG's view, threatened unwelcome commercial activity and nuisance to The Green area. The legal advice cost £1,800 (Kings Chamber) but it helped us reach a successful outcome. This was just one of 5 planning application objections lodged by FoRG during 2024 and reflects the uncertainty over Richmond's commercial future.
- **Profit in 2024** – DB: after a deficit of £6,472 in 2023, during which time FoRG made a final contribution to the completion of the Drinking Fountain refurbishment as well as tree planning in Old Deer Park, we ended 2024 with a small profit of £808.
- **Adjustment relating to 2023 costs** – DB: a small adjustment was made to the accounts to reflect costs incurred at the Jubilee Celebrations paid in 2023, ending the year with a balance of £10,256.45
- **Surplus** – DB: As always, FoRG continues to actively seek practical suggestions from residents about how we best use FoRG's cash; ideas for future projects and good use of funds are always welcome.

There were no questions offered from the floor on FoRG's finances. Therefore, FoRG's Accounts for 2024, as presented, were agreed and adopted:

Proposed: Peter Willan
 Seconded: Tony Winslade

6. Election of Officers for 2025-26

VH: the members of the FoRG Executive Committee have agreed to stand for re-election for the coming year 2025-26. Vacancy for Sec role still persists.

Firstly the positions of Chair and Treasurer:-

- **Vivien Harris** – as Chair
- **Diana Billingham** – as Treasurer

Rather than take more than a single vote, no objections were raised in the room to the proposal to re-elect all Executive officers and committee members together. Other Executive Committee members also standing for a further year were:-

- **Peter Willan**
- **Peter Griffiths**
- **David MacKenzie**
- **Gemma Warrillow**
- **Gemma Fumagalli**
- **Juliet Bramwell**

VH asked for approval for this whole group to continue.

Proposed: Brian Palin
 Seconded: Frances Bouchier

In the absence of other nominations, therefore,

Vivien Harris (as Chair), Diana Billingham (as Treasurer), Peter Willan, Peter Griffiths, David McKenzie, Gemma Warrillow, Gemma Fumagalli and Juliet Bramwell were duly re-elected to serve as members of the FoRG Executive Committee for the coming year, and were duly elected to serve on the committee for the year 2025-26.

VH: that concludes the formal business of the AGM.

7. Any Other Business (general discussion)

VH: questions from the floor on any topic are welcome, but before we start I assume recent crimes around the Green are on everyone's mind, so let's hear from Gemma Fumagalli an update on how the police response is developing....

Crime and policing – Gemma F gave a report following her attendance at the latest Police Liaison Group (PLG) meeting held on the previous evening at King's House School:

GF: it was a very good turnout last night, with around 80 people attending. I go to all the quarterly meetings. They are attended by varying numbers of the police team, and not always the key people. But the recent spate of burglaries has raised the temperature a bit, so last night there was a stronger police showing, with representatives from the burglary squad and the Safe Neighbourhood team, also the new Inspector and Sgt Jackson, and from the council Gareth Roberts.

To begin with, the Police fully accept that their handling of the recent spate of burglaries has been poor; there were lots of apologies at the meeting, and they have all accepted responsibility for lack of communication. They admit that they took their eye off the ball. There were mitigating factors, of course – eg. the 'burglary squad' had not really been formed when the trouble started. But now we do have people dedicated and taking responsibility.

I can personally see a difference now in the level and co-ordination of policing compared to January. There is more attention to detail, different departments are talking to each other in a way they weren't before, and reporting has improved as has communication outwardly.

As for incidents themselves, there have been 17 serious burglaries here in South Richmond since last October, with 11 having occurred since January.

Police believe that 10 of them are linked to the same gang. In their assessment, the burglaries are the work of an organised crime group (OCG) – ie. professional career criminal gangs. And because these gangs seem to be operating in other bits of London, and maybe nationwide, the Met Police have now taken an interest. The Specialist Crime Squad is working on these crimes along with the Burglary Squad.

The criminal activity is being run by a relatively small group that brings in criminals from abroad on short 3-month visas, who are then deployed and leave again. This explains the number of varying descriptions that have been reported, and also explains why detection is proving to be so hard: the gangs' personnel cannot be pinned down easily, because they come, commit crimes and then leave again.

One of the gang's skills is a forensic awareness of how to avoid leaving incriminating traces. Police have managed to find the DNA of one of them, but they just don't know where they are. They are now liaising with policing in other countries because this group works outside the UK also. They're also looking for patterns of activity in other boroughs.

As for modus operandi, the crimes are mostly committed shortly after dark. Houses are being carefully watched beforehand. Their favoured access is by a side or back entrance. They are often able to jam alarm

systems, and they tend to target bedrooms and studies, often removing safes. They assailants wear gloves and balaclavas or other face coverings to conceal their identity.

In the past 12 months, the detection rate for burglaries across Richmond borough has been just 5.4%. So what can we do?

The most likely way the Police will catch these criminals, is in the act of a burglary or whilst scoping one out. This is where we can help: the police urge residents to **call 999** whenever they see someone or something suspicious. If someone is wearing a balaclava, gloves on a sunny day, acting in a suspicious manner or watching houses or cars, **call 999** and tell them you're calling in connection to the high value burglaries in Richmond. If a house alarm is going off, **call 999**. Only if it's safe for you to do so, take a photo of the suspect from a distance and photograph or write down vehicle reg plates/descriptions.

The police have quite a lot of evidence gathered which could fall into place any time with some new clues, so they need as much data as they can get from the public. Therefore, they have asked everyone to call 999 as much as we need to – don't hesitate. We can play our part... trust your gut – if it feels wrong, call 999. The police would much rather a false alarm than someone not reporting something suspicious, no matter how slight. The police are best placed to judge the priority of a report, and don't want to miss any opportunity to catch these criminals. And please note that because of the high value crimes that have been committed in Richmond in recent months, the police will give priority to anyone calling them in connection with those or similar crimes.

There is also the additional benefit of a blue light call-out: response teams arriving are an added deterrent, and the more we call-out Police and notify them of crime, the bigger the justification for more resources for Sgt Wright in Richmond.

In terms of police resources to help us, Sgt Rich Wright is great but numbers in the police team are still relatively small and they are constantly being drawn away into central London to deal with an increasing number of public protests. Knock-on effects include what looks like a downgrading of the 'Safe Space' deployment at Richmond station. It will now only be on Saturdays, despite Friday evenings being, if anything, the worse night for worrying behaviours and trends. We have complained about this, and the police have promised that they will be active in the town even if they are not visibly present at the railway station. An overtime budget is in play for patrols (some of it plain clothes), so there is some reassurance there.

One thing is clear... we definitely will not be getting a police station reinstated in Richmond town. But there are ongoing discussions about the disbandment of the Richmond Parks Police, and whether or not the police could use their base in Richmond Park.

On CCTV – the police want access to more of it. For example, they don't have ready access to the town's ULEZ cameras. Town Centre CCTV has been upgraded: picture quality is improved and it is been monitored more than it was. If, as residents, we want a camera installed locally, the police will back a residents' request – eg. one in the corner of The Green by the path to the railway bridge to watch comings and goings.

On the hiring of private security issue – the police are not in favour of residents taking this step. There are pros and cons: the upside is that their presence could offer the deterrent of extra visible security, and can make people feel safer. But the downside is that private security is very expensive and can be counter-productive; for example, the individuals the companies employ are often unvetted and unchecked, no matter how many badges they can show you. Police have no idea who these people are, so they really don't recommend this course. We have asked cllr Gareth Roberts if we could have more recourse to the deployment of Park Guards as an additional visible presence; we'll press for an answer on this.

GF handed around a summary of the above briefing that contains reminders of how to help as follows:

- Notify neighbours, and use the Whatsapp groups (including the existing 'FoRG community' group);
- TRUST YOUR GUT;
- Communicate with the Police and your neighbours;
- If someone is watching your or a neighbour's house when you leave home, go back in and **call 999**;
- Follow the South Richmond and Richmond Met Whatsapp Channels for updates;
- If you have any questions, you can email Sgt Rich Wright and the team at SouthRichmond@met.police.uk
- Also do message GF with any crime or ASB reports you've made and they'll be included on her weekly report to the Council Community Safety Officer (to be sent in each Monday);
- Neighbourhood Watch stickers are on order, let me know if you'd like one to display at your home.

VH: thanked Gemma for her briefing and asked for any questions from the floor.

Q. CCTV – VH: asked who in the room was supportive of new CCTV being installed on that far corner of the Green? Some hands went up.

Neil Monnery: asked if we could have more than one? Eg. another on Parkshot, to amplify the deterrent effect of visible cameras?

Elizabeth Pryce: has her own CCTV on the corner of Friars Lane but explained that although the police had asked for access, the law prevents her from giving them the access they want.

PW: police used to have a CCTV camera on a vehicle that moved from place to place; GF: they only have one now and it's a borough-wide resource and has to be requested, so it's actually of limited use to us.

Laurence Monnery: asked what are the disadvantages of CCTV? PW: invasion of privacy, its expensive to install and run, and who actually monitors it? GF: the cameras are now being monitored so it's a good time to make a request.

Colman McCarthy: and who would pay for the installation and running of new CCTV cameras? GF: Cllr Gareth Roberts last night said the council budget could cover it, though I've no idea what budget they've got. VH: FoRG has some funds and this may be a very good use of them when we know what the cost is.

PW: cameras in George Street were installed by Highways/TfL, but there needs to be a special agreement for police to have access. GF: police are very restricted from access... they have to go through a lengthy process to gain it.

VH: we'll look more into it and report back.

Frances Bouchier: what does a Neighbourhood Watch (NW) sticker do for you? Does it make any difference?

GF: it's arguable, but it does send a sign of watchfulness and residents being organised. FB: we had NW people in most areas in Richmond. GF: I'm the co-ordinator in Pembroke Villas; as for comms, emails can get missed so I tend to use the WhatsApp group as it's instant and reaches more people.

VH: there are in fact four NW people active in this area – ie. John Coates, Patrick Eager, Nick Coleman, and Gemma F – their efforts are fantastic and serve a purpose; a co-ordinated response is a good thing, stickers or not.

Colman McCarthy: are the council any use on the policing issue? GF: David Noakes has been very good, but he seems to be a bit of a lone voice, and on the burglaries episode we've had little tangible support from the council. VH: Park Guards are privately employed by the council as a security contractor, and we do have regular summer patrols. PW: Transport police used to provide some effort on the weekends; GF: but cuts have reduced availability of that support.

Neil Monnery: could we create our own patrols through Neighbourhood Watch? GF: it hasn't been suggested, but we as a group are already the eyes and ears of local residents and are best placed to spot unusual activity; we all need to be alert when we leave our houses.

Harmet Kalsi: I'm concerned about the impact of all the publicity on insurance premiums; the media hype around the burglaries challenges our insurance status; insurers always want to pick on bad news in order to escalate prices premiums; with concerns over media coverage, what do we do? VH: in January the advice we shared was to avoid speaking to the press, even when they are knocking on your door; once you give them

something, you're no longer in control of the message and the risk of sensationalist reporting rises accordingly.

VH: any questions on other topics?

Q. Licensing – Jenny Rees: late hours pub/bar activity is becoming more intrusive; in late January the Princes Head pub held a Superbowl final event and the council allowed them to be open until 4am; with all the noise outside the pub it was hard to sleep; it's also been mentioned that the Popeyes chain has been open till late on the High Street, and the council doesn't seem to be that concerned about the negative impact on residents. PW: under the Licensing Act, premises can apply for a Temporary Event Notice (TEN) to vary their hours and there's very little people can do about it, apart from the police responding to object to individual applications. A granted TEN (up to 10 per annum) basically has the effect of sweeping aside other conditions attached to a licence. JR: the Princes Head governor was good enough to warn me it was happening, but it was still annoying. PW: there are currently 89 pubs, bars and restaurants in the town and it's a real problem, with many of them wanting to extend their hours; we try and maintain a firm line on it and bring objections and conditions where we can; for example, we've recently reached a decent accommodation with Sticks N Sushi at 80 George Street, and also with the Tapas bar about to open there, holding them back to 11.30pm closing rather than a later hour. Regarding Popeyes and their proposed late 2am closing, there's a hearing coming up in May and we'll do as much as we can to bring common sense to bear.

Q. Effects of Film Tourism – Bobbie Kalsi: film tourism has amplified the problems just described; the litter around Paved Court at 6.30am in the morning is appalling, etc. DB: the Ted Lasso series has sparked heightened activity centred on the Green and the Princes Head; BK: and there's another series on the way, so this is going to continue.

VH: one bit of good news is that there's no longer going to be a restaurant on the top floor(s) of 80 George Street – the Lindt chocolate company is to take over the space as offices.

PW: we will take this up again with the council, because the amount of traffic generated in small streets by additional deliveries/waste collections has been the subject of quite a lot of dialogue over the past year; we've argued for a proper considered regime and yet it is still to be developed properly; councillors are engaged in trying to coordinate this activity, but until they do, it presents a potentially big problem.

Jenny Rees: the Ted Lasso tours don't help; is the council aware? They are intrusive; VH: they're privately organised and not council run, but we will take it up with our councillors because of the nuisance factor with amplified sound.

Bobbie Kalsi: an added factor is the fact that the tours can be overheard telling people about the value of the houses around The Green!! This just plays in to the threat of burglaries such as we've recently experienced.

Onlsow Hall – update from PW: after much local opposition, the City Pub Group has not pursued their application to turn the building and its forecourt into a pub/hotel, so that prospect has now gone away. BUT there's now a live application to house a Nursery there. We don't yet know fully what it involves, but we have objected because there were significant holes in the application regarding noise, traffic congestion, etc. There needs to be a much better plan and many questions remain. FoRG's view is that the site should be and remain a cultural zone; for example, we've discussed this with the Richmond Theatre; there must be a better use than as a Nursery; it would be a missed opportunity. VH: we think there are alternative and better uses for the site. Brian Palin: how many objections have been submitted? PW: about 10, but anybody can comment.

Harmet Kalsi: the site has been empty for so long and we are lucky those gates are there because that's at least held back bad activity in that space; but whoever develops that site will need to generate traffic, parking, etc.; there's bound to be more traffic and as residents we need to accept the inevitable; PW: but there are limitations that are not reflected in the application – for example, the escape route for the Duke Street church runs around the back of that site and cannot be impeded, so they'll have to have a plan to keep that access open.

Q. Drinking fountain – Gill Bromley: it's lovely to have the fountain looking good again, and working (when it has been), but wouldn't it be nice if that area around it could be made more attractive? It's not actually a very attractive feature as it stands; VH: we have put in a plea for a spring clean; Jenny Rees: they did it three weeks back; VH: it is a very plain fountain but it is important, but aside from pleading with the council to maintain it I'm not sure what else we can do. Julian Paxton: last month they came twice and power-washed it, but what's needed is a professional stone mason to clean off the green algae that grows. VH: we'll look into it.

Q. Defibrillator on the green – DB: we've discussed the idea of getting a defibrillator installed somewhere on the Green; VH: the groundsman's Hut at the Friars Lane corner would be an obvious site, if a power source can be confirmed; we've made initial enquiries but Parks moved me on to Highways and I've not yet had any response. Cllr Chris Varley says he'll try and progress this and is supposed to be coming back to me on what, where and how much; I assume funding of one by FoRG would be a popular move? (Generally positive noises made)

Q. Sculpture display – Maggie Smith: very happy that the "gorillas" (ie. chimps) are going, but fear the arrival of other "inappropriate" displays; for example, there's a current "animals with human heads" set of sculptures in Kingston town – they are "hideous", so would we/residents know in advance if the council was planning to bring them here? VH: the chimps were only supposed to be in Richmond for six weeks, but they've been here a year; I will go back and ask; Jenny Rees: but we don't get any say, it just seems to happen with no warning. VH: we'll register that feeling to the council.

The point was raised regarding who's paying for something we don't want?

Elizabeth Pryce: I contacted Be Richmond to ask about the chimps and they told me that the chimps exhibition was a "huge success" and drove visitor traffic to Richmond; I said I'd like to see the evidence for that view.

General discussion ended

VH thanked everyone for coming and concluded the meeting.

Meeting ended at **8.40pm**

END

(wine was served)