

Friends of Palewell Common & Fields
Open Meeting & Annual General Meeting
Thursday 16th May 2013 All Saints Church Hall

Welcome and Chairman's Annual Report:

The Chairman, Andy Sutch welcomed everybody to the Meeting and particularly welcomed David Allister (Head of Parks LBRuT), and representatives from the new contractors, Howard Morris (Continental Landscapes) and Steve Riley and Nigel Mardon (Will to Win).

Councillor Lord True and the Ward Councillors sent their apologies as the meeting clashed with a Council Meeting taking place that evening.

The Chairman said that this had been a challenging year as Richmond Borough Council had introduced fundamental changes in the management of all parks and open spaces in the borough. He thanked Peter Dunning and Etienne for all they had done over the past years to improve the golf facilities and the golf of many players.

He thanked Mark Chase for his contribution to the provision of tennis at Palewell. He also thanked Janusch for all he had done to improve the common and for the time and effort he had given. He also urged local residents to support Pistachios as a new and welcome facility on the Common.

The Chairman commented on other issues. 1) Planning applications by the Nursery School. The first to increase the age limit to sixteen and the hours to 8.00 p.m. has the potential to be a significant change and the Friends Committee had objected to this. The second, to increase the numbers of nursery age children from fifty to sixty was acceptable. These applications are being decided next Thursday 23rd May and FoPC has asked to speak at the meeting.

Another very significant issue is the change of the course of Beverley Brook which would have meant removing trees east of the common and would have an impact on the football pitches. The Committee support works in Richmond Park but do not support radical works on Palewell Common. The Chairman thanked David Evans for representing the Friends in discussion with Thames 21 - a charity involved in improving rivers in London – but it now appeared that the Government had cut the budget for such improvements.

He thanked Rikki Marks and BTCV for the huge amount of work done. Jacqui Pattison will speak about this later in the meeting.

Sport on the fields continued to flourish with very active football competitions and training at the weekends. The Committee had organised a very successful Join in Day in August and hopes to do something similar this year.

Boules has had a successful year and demand looked as though it could exceed supply.

The Chairman thanked all committee members for their work and support. He announced that he will be standing down as Chairman as he is taking over as Chairman of a large national Sports Charity.

There are, he said, two or three new potential members but we need more local people to come forward, Palewell Common is a very important and valued local asset. He asked if there were any questions members would like to raise. A member asked if there was any way to improve the area at the back of Enmore Gardens on the edge of the common. Another member, Tony Checketts, said that this land was privately owned having been part of a garden which was retained when the house was sold some thirty years ago, Angela Howorth said that the owners had applied for planning permission which had been refused.

The Chairman thanked David Evans for managing the FoPC Accounts and thanked Ken Cook for auditing them.

Annual Accounts:

David Evans, Treasurer, said that it had been a successful year helped by the event in August. Income for the year was £890, expenditure £203, leaving a surplus of £687. We had started the year with £1,040 in the bank and ended with £1,727 in the bank. He was keen that it is used rather than sit in the bank, and later in the meeting there would be an opportunity to hear about plans for improvements to both Boules and cricket facilities.

The Treasurer formally presented the accounts and Mr. O'Neill, a member, seconded the accounts - which were approved by the meeting.

Membership:

Dhun Kenny, Membership Secretary, (*need to check with Dhun*) said that Membership in 2007 was 107 but had been in decline, last year there were 63 members, we raised more income from events than membership. She asked that people encourage neighbours to become members and to support the protection of Palewell Common. The Chairman supported this, he had been at a Friends' meeting in Carlisle Park last weekend where plans for the Park had galvanised local people to get involved, however sustaining interest is the problem.

Election of Committee:

The Chairman said that usually Lord True proposed the Committee nominees but, in his absence and as he was standing down, he asked that the members agree that he be allowed to propose the nominees. This was agreed.

Chairman: Nomination: David Evans proposed by the Committee
No additional nominations were received and David Evans was duly elected as Chair.

David then conducted the following elections -

Treasurer: Nomination: Andy Sutch proposed by the committee and elected by the meeting.

Deputy Chairman: Jacqui Pattison is standing down due to pressure of work but is willing to remain on the committee. Andy Sutch invited any members to put themselves forward: Jessica Rettie volunteered to join the Committee in that role and was duly elected.

Membership Secretary: Nomination: Dhun Kenny

Secretary: Nomination: Angela Howorth

Committee Members: Jacqui Pattison Rikki Marks, Bernard Adams, Janet Bostock, Theresa Pa, All these members were duly elected.

Client and Contractor Presentation:

David Evans, the newly elected Chairman, informed the meeting that the meeting now had the opportunity to hear from Richmond Council and the new contractors. The Chairman invited David Allister, Head of Parks LBRuT to inform and update the meeting.

David Allister said he had spoken last year about the changes which were to take place and these changes can cause difficulties in the early stages. We are he said 'in the future'. The Council wanted to engage specialists to do specific jobs so had developed a framework of eleven contracts namely: play areas; horticulture; sports; small works; trees; OPM; events; Conservation; Tennis; Golf and wardening. All contracts have now been let bar golf – which is on hold as there is a legal issue at present although the council is committed to maintaining golf on site - and wardening which went through a very long tender process and was dropped as the Council was not happy, it is being rethought and will tender again. He was pleased to see that representatives from Continental Landscapes - responsible for contracts 1-4 - and Will to Win – responsible for tennis – were present.

David Allister said it had been a successful year for Richmond parks with fourteen Green flag awards, they had won London in Bloom for the first time and were now entered into Britain in Bloom in July. The new contracts began on 1st April, Easter Monday and David Allister said that he drove around 15/20 parks, he said that his children's favourite one was Palewell.

The Chairman invited Howard Morris of Continental Landscapes to speak: Howard Morris said that the company had been street cleansing for Richmond for two and a half years and this gave them the opportunity to tender for grounds maintenance. They were smaller than other contractors and had been in business since the late 1980's, they are owned by a Belgian group. They were specific about projects and targeted Richmond. The majority of their contracts were very specific Richmond were different and had proposed an innovative approach securing specialists for specialist work, horticulture, sports maintenance etc. The current contract provided the resources needed to deliver a quality service but was flexible enough to change with needs – and is based on 'trust' between the contractor and Richmond.

Duhn Kenny asked whom we should contact if there were problems. David Allister said we should speak to the Council and they will go to the appropriate contractor. David Allister said most contracts are judged normally on price, Richmond on Thames evaluated on high quality 60% and price 40%.

The Chairman invited Steve Riley of Will to Win to speak: Steve Riley said that he had founded and run Will to Win for 17/18 years since they started in Twickenham, moving on to Hounslow and

Ealing then leased land in Chiswick. So they know the area well. For public tennis courts they can be contacted directly at their office in Cambridge Gardens or via the website. There are 48 courts in the borough and they work with the coaching teams who are all self employed. Nigel Mardon is the contracts manager. They do community tennis, they run tennis in the Royal Parks and work with existing coaches, there are social sessions, lessons and public access. The Council sets the court fee rate. There was no membership fee, but they do operate a smart card system to enable on line bookings.

He said it is a family business run by Steve and his wife and they would welcome any ideas or suggestions. They want to be involved in the area and want to develop it as a facility for the community.

Robin Laidlaw said that individuals on the sport side in the area who have worked really hard wanted assurance that people like Mark Chase would be supported. Steve Riley confirmed there would be no changes other than improvements.

Bernard Adams asked about the condition of the two poor back courts, Nigel Mardon said one court is almost a landslip and they would like to bring it back to high quality use. David Allister felt the new arrangement gives a sustainable approach to managing the courts. The current contract is for 4 years to test the arrangements but the next contract could be for 15 years. Will to Win is responsible for maintenance but reconstruction is down to the Council which is responsible for capital expenditure.

A member commented Of the 48 sites Palewell is the worst and yet Mark Chase is the most successful coach. Another member commented that cracks and moss were a real problem. David Allister agreed that major work was needed and a solution needed to be found.

David Evans (FoPC Chairman) said that this was one of the issues The Friends should be pressing and helping with.

Etienne the golf coach wanted to know where he stands re the tennis court fees. David Allister commented that first those employed should speak to their employer - but secondly he was confident that transition problem will get a solution.

The Chairman thanked all the speakers and commented on the positive approach taken by the new contractors.

Sports Facilities & Plans:

Andy Sutch wanted to touch on cricket and referred to Vinny Coddington's speech at the 2012 AGM. There existing square is used on occasionally an ad hoc basis. It is not perfect and he had had a number of discussions with Richmond CC, Sheen CC and Richmond Park Academy about improvements. The FoPC committee was keen to see more cricket at Palewell and Middlesex CC will advise us on the possible changes to improve the quality of the wicket. He thought there were possible Sheen CC would like to use Palewell if it could be improved, and the committee would continue looking the options for developing cricket on Palewell Common.

Andy Sutch commented that he was pleased that golf has continued to be popular which is a credit to all who are making it work.

Andy Sutch thanked Bernard Adams for all his work and invited him to give an update on Boules. Bernard Adams said that Boules has taken off in Twickenham, Teddington, Putney and Barnes, although very few players were from Sheen. Earlier the committee had decided to support the development of one or more new pitches, however with expansion in Twickenham he had decided that five would be too many. The aim was now to add one pitch to the existing two. We had raised £450 from MESS and U3A and hope therefore to build a third pitch – which would enable the existing team to compete with others. As incoming Treasurer Andy Sutch noted that the Committee had decided that expenditure on boules from Friends funds should be capped at £400 alongside that from MESS and U3A.

The Chairman asked if the Council needed to approve such work. David Allister said yes and invited the Committee to write to him setting out their plans. He would then consider and if appropriate approve them.

Bernard said we need to see more people playing, perhaps need local tournaments. Bernard pointed out that the facility is free and equipment is available. He also thanked the golf staff for supporting it.

2013 Activities & Plans:

Jacqui Pattison, retiring Deputy Chairman, thanked all the volunteers who came at the end of the year and worked with BTCV and cleared the path around the old pond. She commented that we will need to have future conversations with Glendale – the new environmental contractor. The volunteers have also done a lot of work on the woodland. BTCV provided the help and the tools. Bluebells have been planted and the orchard is also maturing. The Friends work closely with David Allister and colleagues and she thanked them for their support.

Jacqui Pattison said there will be a further environmental day/event in September/October. She invited members to come and spend an hour or so helping with this important work. A member asked about badgers. Jacqui Pattison said that a major concern was to ensure safety.

Q and A:

The Chairman invited questions:

Etienne said that security was not as good as in the past, since nobody is around in early evening and asked if there was a reason why there was no Park Manager.

David Allister said that the Council was managing parks in a different way. He commented that Janusch was the exception - of 163 Parks only 6 had permanent staff on them – so there was not always a positive presence. As regards anti-social behaviour the council was guided by the number of police reports – so David Allister encouraged residents to report incidents. He also said that it was early days so there had not been enough time to see a trend. Nevertheless David Allister said

the Council are going to review and increase security particularly for April to September. The Chairman said that past experience on Palewill had been very good thanks to the good work of Janusch. A member said that proactive presence is essential, we need a visible presence. David Allister said the Council will want a proactive service.

A member asked about the presence of more commercial dogwalkers. David Allister said that an order limiting dogwalkers to 6 dogs had been introduced. Richmond Park has limited them to 4 dogs and increased charges. The Chairman recommended members to note if there were any problems with professional dog walkers and report them to the Council. Another member commented that there are responsible dog walkers.

The Chairman thanked the Council and the Contractors for attending and thanked all those present for their questions.

The Chairman closed the Meeting at 21.00.