

# **Friends of Palewell Common and Fields**

## **Annual General Meeting**

April 30th 2009, 7.30 pm, All Saints Church Hall, East Sheen

Apologies for absence were received from Bernard Adams, Dhun Kenny, Rikki Marks and from Councillor Nicola Urquhart.

Councillor True opened the meeting and particularly welcomed Susan Kramer, MP to this the first AGM of the Friends which he hoped would be the first of many. This is an opportunity to review the achievements of the past year, to hear what people want in the future and to focus on those objectives. Cllr True thanked Francis Rowland and the committee for their work over the year. He also thanked the officers in the Parks Department, in particular John Holroyd and Gaye Galvin, for their help and support and thanked their boss David Allister for attending this AGM. Thank you to Susan Kramer and Zac Goldsmith for supporting the Friends. Thank you to Peter Dunning of GolfWise who has been very supportive and to Jackie Upton from East Sheen Business & Retailers Association for attending the AGM and to Martin Moody from the East Sheen Safer Neighbourhood Team who have done so much to help.

Councillor True introduced the Chairman, Francis Rowland.

The Chairman thanked Councillor True for his welcome and for opening the meeting. He added his thanks to everyone who had contributed to the achievements of the Friends in the past year.

### **1. Annual Report**

The Chairman briefly outlined the objectives of the Friends:

- Improve community involvement
- Liaise with Richmond Council & support initiatives & improvements e.g. The Pavilion
- Look at fund raising possibilities (do not have charitable status)
- Organise events

The Chairman listed the achievements of the past year, immediate successes were:

- Kiosk & Pavilion painted, graffiti was removed
- Toilets refurbished and now open 7 days a week
- Built a relationship with the safer neighbourhood team
- With help from Peter Dunning and GolfWise offered discounts on Pitch & Putt & tennis to Friends
- Created a website, the Chairman expressed thanks to Tony Dowson for achieving this

Working with the Parks Department a number of problems were addressed and resolved:

- The path from Clare Lawn Avenue to the woodland was resurfaced
- With the support of Simon Hawkins and BTCV paths and woodland have been cleared
- Removal of rubbish and dumped bikes. With the help of Janos, who is the Veolia representative on site, this happens quickly now.
- Improved signage re safety, dog mess and other matters.

The Friends had encouraged additional sports activities and walking on the Common:

- Volley Ball equipment has been donated by the Sports Council and is available from the Kiosk
- Boules - the 'terrains' have been refurbished and loan Boules are available from the Kiosk
- Propose to add Softball. Sheen Sports had kindly agreed to donate the Soft Ball kit and Nick ?? kindly presented it to the Chairman who thanked him for his generous support..
- Nature Walks led by Tasha Hunter had been a great success

Community Involvement:

- With Gaye Galvin's help, Palewell Common and Fields had won the coveted Green Flag award
- Events took place in Love Parks Week in June 2008 and in September a day was set aside for Autumn in The Park
- BTCV days had been very successful and volunteers had been enormously helpful
- Links had been established with Mortlake with East Sheen Society and Friends of Richmond Park and various media web sites
- Friends had distributed over 1200 leaflets giving information to local residents

The Chairman again expressed his thanks to all who had made the achievements to date possible. He then introduced Andy Sutch the Treasurer of The Friends.

## 2. Annual Accounts

The Treasurer reported the Accounts to 31st March 2009

### **Income:**

Subscriptions and donations	£550.00
Interest	4.11
Grant from Sport Richmond	143.83
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	£672.94

### **Expenditure:**

Payment for volleyball equipment	£143.83
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**Balance:** £529.11

The Treasurer reported new membership fees this year of £10.00. No expenditure as yet from that budget but some will occur should we replace the table and benches, begin replanting of the flower beds and possible other areas and provide new furniture for the Pavilion Club Room if it is opened for this summer.

### **3. Nominations & Election of Committee**

Councillor True informed the meeting that all existing members of the Committee had stood for re-election in their current roles and were unopposed, the re-election of the Committee was therefore approved.

### **4. Plans for 2009/2010 - enhancing the environment**

The Committee proposed the following ideas for Palewell Common which would enhance but not change the existing nature of the Common.

- With the help of the Council they proposed creating a fruit orchard in the corner by the allotments, planting fruit and nut trees, allowing the grass to grow and planting wild flowers to give colour. Planting was planned for October. A member asked whether the area would be fenced off, the Chairman said that had not been planned but he would take the suggestion on board.

- The Committee had recommended that the Friends adopt the flower beds near the pavilion and the Pitch & Putt and improve their structure. They would incorporate the existing roses and add scented plants, spring bulbs, lavender etc., planting to take place in late summer. He would welcome thoughts and ideas.

- Working with Gaye Galvin and the Council it was proposed that Bat & Bird boxes be put up along Beverley Brook.

- The Committee has agreed to work with Tasha Hunter to create a leaflet setting out a nature walk across Palewell Common and into Richmond Park. The trees in the woodland area are all indigenous and it would encourage people to identify with this and to keep it very much an English woodland.

- Replace the Table and Bench in the dog free area - try to find a local sponsor e.g. Waitrose. Also ask Waitrose if the FoPC could be one of the local organisations they might consider adopting.

Sporting activities:

- Soft Ball equipment, as mentioned earlier, is now available from the Kiosk

- Volleyball: it is proposed that the volley ball court be marked out for the summer and the net left up for the weekend to encourage its use, the danger is it might be stolen.

- Boules : propose regular alternate Sunday sessions from 4 to 7 pm, the charge will be £5 to contribute to refreshments. The Friends are keen to see it used more often as it is one of the good ones in the area. The first Palewell Petanque (Boules) day is 10th May.

Woodland Management:

- The Friends will: work with Gaye Galvin and the team on woodland management, a 10 year plan is being conducted.
- work with BCTV to prioritise work needed.
- Look for volunteers to help BCTV on the days they work at Palewell Common. The next date is 6th May when they will be putting down wood chippings and clearing nettles etc. Encourage people to come along.

A member asked about the Japanese knotweed, Gaye confirmed that it is currently being treated. Any new outbreaks to reported to the parks department

Keith Hutchison, suggested that the Friends consider involving elderly residents in the area to help in growing plants for the new beds. He offered to give advice on suitable plants.

The Chairman then opened the meeting to general discussion and invited comments and views.

Nancy Safford said that the Children's playground is one of the nicest in the area. Gaye said that, subject to the weather, the paddling pool will be cleaned and opened this weekend it will be filled up to the first step. Another member queried the safety issue. Gaye confirmed that there will be a notice saying that children are the responsibility of the adult accompanying them.

Another member raised the issue of cleanliness Gaye said that if there was any debris speak to Janos or to the attendant at the kiosk.

Another member commented that she had been on one of the Nature Walk's last year and that it was really good, she was delighted that there will be a leaflet.

Another member asked about the outdoor gym/fitness equipment that had been near the Pavilion last year but had been removed. Gaye confirmed that the Council had originally bought two to test the interest in this outside fitness equipment and these were currently at other sites. The Council had subsequently bought two more. There were no current plans to bring one back to Palewell Common. The Chairman recommended that the Friends Committee make a note and consider whether there was sufficient interest to raise funds for such equipment.

Another member commented that the birds in the woodland are amazing, Gaye suggested that the Friends might like to arrange a Dawn Chorus event.

Tony Checketts raised the difference between The Common and The Fields and the use of the Common should be more restricted. The Chairman confirmed that the Committee is aware of the difference between the Common and the Fields.

## 5. Pavilion Feedback

The Chairman invited Robin Laidlaw to give an update on the Pavilion

Robin reported that after a hard battle we now have some much more encouraging news regarding the Pavilion.

He gave a brief recap of the Pavilion history for the benefit of anyone unaware of this ongoing issue.

To date, despite regular correspondence by the Friends to the Richmond Dept. of Environment no response had been forthcoming. To strengthen our plight during this time we had enlisted the help of Councillors True, Urquhart, Minister for Parliament Susan Krame and Zac Goldsmith in an attempt to achieve some sort of result. Robin thanked them all for their valuable and continuing support.

At the end of March, without any consultation with the Friends an initial refurbishment plan had been presented to the Richmond Cabinet for approval. This plan aimed to sell half of the Pavilion for private development and the remainder was to be converted in to no less than 9 changing rooms. No community space was given any consideration.

Fortunately, the Friends intercepted this plan and prevented it from being passed. The Cabinet agreed that a consultation process would immediately be entered in to with the Friends to develop a plan that would offer a range of facilities to satisfy the wishes and requirements of all regular users of the Common.

The first of these consultation meetings has now taken place, and a few points have been clarified.

- There are no public funds available to fund the refurbishment of this building.
- As a result, it is necessary to sell off the caretaker's part of the building to become a private residence.
- The proceeds of the sale of this asset will be used to fund the refurbishment plan for the remainder of the Pavilion for community use.
- Before a detailed plan can be put together it is important to agree what part of the building will be sold and which part will be refurbished for community use.
- The Council have had very fixed ideas about selling one half of the building, splitting it vertically, to include the caretakers house, the 'Club room' on the ground floor and the room above. Such a plan would result in the loss of an area of our community space and we were immediately opposed to this.
- The Friends have made an alternative suggestion to the Council - that the upper part of the building be sold for development in to one or two flats, and that the whole of the lower part of the building be refurbished for community facilities.
- The Friends pointed out that the Council's initial proposal had many limitations, was a poor use of the space and was far from ideal in providing changing rooms, disabled access and other community space for the users of the Common.

- This alternative suggestion is currently being considered by the Council. There are a variety of issues that require consideration. These include the following:
  - Structural problems that require expensive repair
  - Whether such a plan would yield sufficient funds
  - The Pavilion is situated partly on Metropolitan land and partly on Common Land. There is therefore a complication as to the allocation of funds raised from the sale of this asset.
- Nevertheless, the Friends proposal was one that had not been previously considered by the Council and already it is gaining increased support from consultation group members.

The first consultation meeting also identified some key needs and wishes that have been communicated to the Friends group by regular users of the Common. David Allister, Head of Parks & Open Spaces confirmed that he too had had many of the same requests, both at Palewell Common and other pavilions.

The following priorities have been established:

1. **Changing rooms.** It was agreed that the initial Council plan appeared to have too many, bearing in mind the actual usage of the football pitches, and that the balance of space did not reflect the community need.
2. **Public toilets and baby changing facilities.**
3. **Café.** This is seen as a high priority, both for casual users of the common and for the sports ground. The role of the kiosk and the nature of the café will be reviewed as part of this planning process and also in the lease renewal negotiations with Golfwise.
3. **Community Space.** This is more complex as the council's priority is to support the sports field rather than to create new space to be sub-let, e.g for playgroups or rentable room(s). The Council raised a number of concerns about feasibility of creating 'flexible space' but accepted that we would not attract a regular cricket team without a cricket pavilion. Managing rooms and club facilities for young people will also require consideration of the responsibilities for managing these facilities, CRB checks, Health & Safety etc.
4. **Stand alone kitchen** or a catering facility for use in co-ordination with the community space.
5. **The Pavilion and the Kiosk** (by the pitch & putt) will both be included in the ongoing planning process.

At the end of the first consultation meeting, we asked that, in the meantime, the 'Club' room be made available immediately as an interim solution, providing public space in the dry and that the Friends would work with Peter Dunning, of GolfWise, to provide some tables & chairs. We asked that we be allowed to open this every day and also have it available for events and for other sports users e.g. Boules or Cricket Clubs during this Summer. The council agreed that this was a reasonable request and, provided that there are no serious problems with the room or health & safety issues, then they will help us to make this happen.

Robin concluded that a constructive and objective dialogue had at last begun between the Council and the Friends and that whilst there are plenty of issues to be overcome, there is cause for optimism.

Robin then introduced David Allister, Head of Parks and Open Spaces, and invited all members present to make additional suggestions or ask further questions on the matter of the Pavilion.

Points discussed during the Question & Answer session:

- There is a need for changing rooms but not for 9 (3 for referees only).
- The community would like a flexible option.
- FoPC has requested that the clubroom be open this summer - if permitted volunteers will be needed to clean up the space.

David Allister agreed that Robin was right about the open space value but the basic problem is there is no money available therefore part of the property has to be sold.

- a member asked the cost of refurbishment: the estimate is £433,000
- it was suggested that the Pavilion be knocked down and replaced. DA said that had been considered and rejected.
- members argued that a decision should be taken on the actual use of the Pavilion, DA replied that had been done and the primary function is changing rooms.
- members generally want a community space, DA replied that there were practical issues mainly in the management of the space. He added that if it is run as a business it is not a community space.
- Jackie Upton said that a commercial alternative for the site should be considered provided it fitted with the community aspect. DA said planning would probably not be granted as residential use was unlikely to be changed.

Francis Rowland invited people with strong views to please come and help move the matter forward.

- Veronica Congdon, who is an Architect, volunteered to help and felt very strongly that an emphasis on sports facilities, particularly for the young, was important.
- DA gave a rough outline of the procedures and suggested it could go out to tender in the first quarter of 2010.

Members present were all in agreement that the preferred option would be to sell the upper floor of the building, leaving the ground floor for community use.

In addition, it was generally understood that until this issue was finalised no detailed discussions should be entered into regarding the refurbishment and layout of future facilities.

Another member raised the matter of proposed car parking charges in Richmond Park which will lead many people to park in nearby roads and increase the number of people walking dogs on the common. Susan Kramer and Nicolas True are opposed to charges. Nick True was also concerned that parking charges in Richmond Park could lead to controlled parking zones to which he was opposed.

## **6. Summer Event**

This will take place on June 14th and various activities are being organised. In addition Medivet will be there to advise on dog health.

A number of other events are taking place. The committee will finalise programme at their next meeting.

## **7. Any Other Business**

A member raised the issue of commercial dog walkers and the number of dogs they have at one time. David Allister said that there were Dog control orders and the capability to limit the number at any one time, Richmond on Thames chose not to put a limit on. This is being reviewed and a proposal to limit to 2 or 3 dogs is being considered.

Martin Moody of the Safer Neighbourhood Team said that they do have a dogwatch scheme, dog walkers tend to be regular and he invited residents to inform them of any particularly inappropriate numbers and behaviour. Forms are available please take one as you leave.

One resident commented that she thought that things had improved recently and that quite a few dog owners have contributed to this improvement. FR asked people to take copies of the Council's leaflet on Dog Ownership and distribute as appropriate. Gaye said that new signs are up.

Francis Rowland thanked Councillor Nicholas True for chairing the meeting and repeated this thanks to all who had supported the Friends over the past year and to everybody who had demonstrated their support and attended this evening's meeting.

The Meeting Closed at 9.00 p.m.