



# Friends of Northcote Nature Reserve

## MINUTES

**Meeting: AGM: Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> July, Isleworth Allotments hut, 7.30pm**

**Present:** Vanessa Smith, Hilary Thomson, Jean East, Andrew Micklewski, David Vroegindewej, Colin Cooper (SWELN), Karen Mann, Laurence Mann, Dean Griffiths, Surya Cooper, Patricia Morgan, Lyn Halstead, Alan Smith

**Apologies:** Ben Driver, Jo Bonner, Christine Diwell (Isleworth Soc), Paul Needham, Scott Doyle

(Printed copies of the new Constitution were provided and it is available on the FoNNR website.)

## **Introduction and Q and A with Colin Cooper of SWLEN**

Vanessa introduced Colin Cooper C.E.O. of the South West London Environmental Network. Colin explained how SWLEN supports many friends of parks/open spaces in Richmond and Hounslow, working together with these groups and councils, assisting them with communication, social media, funding bids, promoting what they do to public via social media, publicity for events etc.

He explained how FoNNR's new Constitution has been revised and fine-tuned over the years with other SWLEN groups. As a template it is designed to make friends groups transparent and democratic and to help ensure the smooth running of the group.

He gave more general background to situation regarding parks nationally. Local authorities have no statutory obligation to provide parks. Some local authorities are making disproportionate cuts: SWLEN feels by supporting local groups the cuts are less attractive to councils. They believe friends groups are the way to go, but they need to be supported with essential services such as tree management, cutting grass etc. Colin has worked in Richmond for 11 years – the groundswell of support from residents there has made the parks very successful.

Surya asked if Royal Parks are a separate category.

Colin: they are as they are directly funded by government. However they have had substantial cuts and 'because they are Royal parks they aren't able to make so much fuss about it'. They have recently become a charity. Hyde Park is used as a 'cash cow' with concerts and events helping to fund other parks in the group. In Richmond where there are friends groups, the parks in general receive better care and attention.

Vanessa said she feels LBH is not as attuned to working with friends groups as LBRUT.

Colin said by working collectively with SWLEN we can hopefully improve this situation. He said attempts by LBRUT to sell off park land has met with strong opposition from residents. To be effective, the approach when interacting with local authorities should be polite, not lobbying.

The friends group movement is becoming very significant across London and is reaching into all kinds of areas eg education. Frances Bennett (also of FORCE) is a director of ['Let's Go Outside and Learn'](#), a community interest company working with Richmond and Hounslow, engaging the community with nature through events such as walks, outdoor classrooms.

Colin is a trustee of Parks For London – this works with friends groups, contractors, councils etc. They are currently concerned about the 'drain' of ability leaving London as park and open spaces employees find they can enjoy a better standard of living outside London.

Dean asked if Colin is there to support, answer questions etc.

Colin: yes. The Friends Forum (which FoNNR attends) is a particularly good place for this. You can ask questions, air issues and raise concerns 'off the record' if you wish. It is also a way of sharing information about good practice etc.

### **FoNNR membership – why and how**

Hilary gave some background re SWLEN and the Constitution. Colin elaborated on this: it is there to demonstrate value to community and local authority especially if the friends group has a good is a good number of members. All the members can vote and the membership provides a useful database and source for people to promote and champion causes.

Vanessa said there was no intention of charging in the foreseeable future as collecting the subscriptions is too time-consuming.

Laurence said NSMRA (North St Margarets Residents' Association) originally charged but it was difficult to collect the money so they stopped member costs. They have a database and use an e-newsletter as the main membership communication. People can sign up for this via a web link. It has limitations however: people who don't use email etc. He recommends

Mailchimp: this helps avoid your group email being junked. He uses it for all bulk emails.

Vanessa: we email but offer hard copies for anyone who requires them.

Hilary explained that to comply with Data Protection we would need to explain how we were intending to use the contact details, eg for sending out notice of meetings etc. It was agreed that we probably only need a name and email address in each case.

Colin said existing contacts could be directed to a link with sign-up to new system/form.

He confirmed that SWLEN have some examples of membership forms which we could look at and adapt as needed.

Hilary said FoNNR will circulate a wording for everyone to look at/comment.

### **Vote for committee members**

Aside from the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, who remain in post, all other committee members stood down and their re-election was approved, there being no offers to take on committee roles from other residents. Hilary said there is space for up to 5 more committee members and it might be sensible to create new roles for these, once the Nature Reserve starts taking shape and there is more to do.

### **General discussion – A.O.B.**

Vanessa gave out printouts of initiative from Mayor of London's office [Trees for Sacred Spaces](#). We have been offered free trees through this scheme. Dean has looked at some of smaller trees eg Strawberry Tree as a possibility. This might work well with pear/apple orchard as it is bird and bee-friendly and also fairly compact. Some of the other trees would be too big for the space. Deadline at end of month for applications.

Colin said he can put Dean in touch with the [Richmond Environment Trust](#) who ran the 'Feeding London' exhibition about local market gardens at the Richmond Museum in 2015 and also the [Urban Orchard Project](#). Also we could maybe be 'twinned' with [Friends of Schoolhouse Lane Orchard](#) in Teddington who could be useful connection for us as they are also dealing with a small space.

Dean said we are particularly interested in heritage varieties of fruit trees originally grown in this area when it was market gardens.

He said we will have an additional opportunity for planting where we are greening the walls of adjacent building etc.

Vanessa mentioned also FoNNR's visit to [Wildflower Turf](#) which all found very interesting. Greening the roof of the Furniture Project is something they can help with and have experience of. WT worked on the Olympic site.

Dean: the idea is to disguise the Furniture Project with green/wildflower roof.

Hilary: we have list of wild flowers found along the Tidal Crane which helped earn its Site of Metropolitan Importance designation. Dean: you can establish your own mix with WT so could ask to include some of these.

Pat Morgan has aquatic plants she could donate, some full sized.

Vanessa said Paul Bassi has confirmed paths will be strimmed this week – she will chase if not.

Also that the procurement document is going out next week.

Paul has also confirmed that a temporary noticeboard should arrive soon – we don't know what sort (signage, or a board we can put notices on) or what it will say on it.

A dog bin + general rubbish bin has also been ordered.

Hilary said this was a very basic need and we seem to have been waiting a ridiculous length of time for this.

Pat Morgan said she had reservations about rubbish bins because they can encourage dumping of rubbish.

Dean said once a lead consultant is appointed things will start moving fairly quickly.

Pat said the Pit Park is currently a dog's lavatory and dogs off leads are bad for wildflower meadows and also water fowl.

Colin has said Dog Clubs have worked in some places, encouraging dog owners to act responsibly. Some parks hold dog shows to encourage dog owners to get to know each other. Generally other places don't have a problem. It is best if dog owners police each other.

Laurence: dog owners are becoming more responsible.

Andrew: we have to be positive about this.

Dean: we are also trying to create barriers within the vegetation to control dogs and protect nesting/wildfowl areas.

Hilary said in the original survey, dog walkers were pretty much the only users and we need to retain them to encourage as much footfall in the park as possible and that this will help with security.

Vanessa said some of dog walkers at Brent Lea only see each other and don't have any other human contact all day. Lyn said this is particularly true at Redlees Park.

Andrew asked about the electricity Substation: how is this incorporated in plan? Dean said signage/screen is designed to be partly positioned in front of the Substation fence. Paul Bassi has had as an action point to find out whether the utility company want get involved/contribute. Andrew: will the sign narrow the entrance? Dean: no, it will be on road side. But he feels a conversation needs to be had with Paul to chase this up.

David: are the furniture project people supportive of greening of building?  
Dean: yes, they are very enthusiastic not least because vandalism and graffiti has been a problem and greenery growing up the walls/on the roof makes this less attractive.

MEETING ENDED