 FoHRGE

Friends of Heathfield Recreation Ground and Environs

Minutes of AGM held on 26 Nov 8pm - virtually

Present for the Committee: Joan (Chair), Manju (Secretary), Alex, Holger, Jon (Vice-Chair), Sally Paverley, Rory (Treasurer)

Residents and other interested parties: Katie Allen (Food for Thought), John Evans (resident and chair of Whitton and Heathfield police liaison group), Jackie Davidson, Paul Hughes, Conny von Saalfeld, Ranald Philips, Jan Kilsby, Philip Moshi

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Item 1: Chair’s Report

1. Joan shared the following report

Friends of Heathfield Recreation Ground and Environs were formed in February 2019.

It is always difficult for groups to find their way forward when starting from scratch but from starting small by asking for bins, bin lids and chairs to be reinstated at the Rec we have now established ourselves and have many exciting plans.

Covid affected everyone’s ability to get things done in 2020. However, we are very pleased to have had a new trim trail installed by Richmond Council and receive the accolade of being one of the best and most well-run parks in the country by being awarded our first Green Flag.

Our congratulations and thanks go to Richmond’s Parks team on managing to win the green flag award in what has been a particularly difficult year.

Going forward key priorities for FoHRGE are:

* Environment
* Increasing use of the rec to bring about benefits to our community
* Increasing sports use of the rec to help tackle such issues as childhood obesity
* Improvements to the wider Heathfield ward which is where the Environs in our title comes from

Environment

The Heathfield ward is home to thriving families of a number of species which are listed on Richmond Biodiversity Action Plan.

These include the humble sparrow and starling which are in decline nationally, but doing very well in Heathfield, bats and stag beetles.

We are focusing our environment work to support these species as well as the more Nationally common wildlife we host.

At the recreation ground we are developing habitat and food using the borders. Here we have two native wildflower meadows in development, have installed three stag beetle loggeries, an extra urban flower bed will be planted up in spring 2021, three trees have been planted with more to come, and extra hedges have been agreed with Parks.

These enhancements should mean an increase in insects which sparrows need in abundance throughout the spring and summer whilst they fledge up to three broods, starlings eat in grub form and bats catch on the wing.

To link up with the Rec we have also submitted an environs bid to Richmond’s local grant to enhance a green at the end of Gostling Road and one at the start of Ellerman avenue. The enhancements include flowers, herbs (as requested in the resident survey), hedges and some extra trees, all providing more wildlife habitat and food in addition to air quality and climate change improvements.

Responses to our survey have already listed other greens for re-wilding. We will work with residents to bid for more grants and move on to rollout these sorts of enhancements further. The Conservation Volunteers have also suggested a partnership with us to work on other green spaces. These discussions are in their infancy, but would (if approved) mean TCV applying for sizeable grants to re-wild the Heathfield Ward.

Heathfield school invited us to help them with what is a hedge in poor condition along the Cobbett road side of the school. Many of you know the sparrows love this hedge. We have worked with the school and TCV to identify why the hedge is dying, and the fixes to the hedge environment with a new sparrow friendly mature hedge will be planted early 2021. The Hedge will contain privet, Hornbeam, field maple and Photinia red robin. Not only do we think this will replace sparrow habitat, but it will also provide a beautiful and interesting hedge for our community.

Increasing use of the rec

There are a number of things we can do with the rec to increase its attraction and use but the key one is a Pavilion with a café and toilets. This is also the request that comes out loud and clear from survey’s, work with charities for the disabled, and elderly. We like you think a Pavilion working as a community hub with access to food and toilets will be a game changer for the rec.

This is a large project, a secure, attractive brick-built Pavilion will cost in the area of £300,000.

We will need to prove need and support for the Pavilion so we can apply for grants.

We knew we did not have the skills and time needed to run this project so put out an appeal for volunteer skills to help us, and I am pleased to say Ranald Phillips agreed to join us with his long history of working with councils on builds.

After just about a month Ranald has managed to not only get to know and understand the often-conflicting requirements of many council departments and support groups, as well as ourselves, but has is also progressing funding for an Architect to create initial plans. We will use these plans to consult with the community and stakeholders on consultations and reviews before starting the process of getting planning permission.

Our thanks go to Ranald for this work.

The FF inspected the Rec at the request of Richmond council and identified improvements needed to the current temporary Pavilion, MUGA and playing pitches.

Work is already in progress by the Parks department to improve the playing pitches and will continue throughout 2021.

We plan to replace the Pavilion.

We are working with Chris Jones – Sports officer at Richmond council on improvements to the MUGA. These range from complete replacement part funded by the FF to improvements for the current MUGA. Replacement appears attractive, but any funding from the FF would require floodlights which could well not receive planning permission due to our bat population and possible noise nuisance caused by longer hours of use.

We would like to add other improvements such as a circuit training route and equipment, something for our canine friends, possible toddler cycle obstacle route, some toddler play equipment, senior school equipment and so on. This work has been started by our vice-chair Jon Rowles who is working with Richmond community support teams on what and how we can raise funds for these items.

Environs

The environs in our title was our wish to also work with local councilors, Richmond council and local residents to bring about improvements to the wider Heathfield Ward.

Examples of this work are the greens surrounding the Rec, and hedges for Heathfield school.

Other projects we have initiated are:

Restoration of the historic road signs in the ward which the council is now carrying out.

Whitton is famous for trees and shrubs that the Duke of Argyll introduced to the UK at his Whitton Park Estate. We have been looking to see how we can protect our existing trees and have more planted across the ward as we are aware that tree cover has declined significantly over the past twenty years. A recent success has been saving an oak tree from being cut down on Nelson Road as we believed it to be of historical and ecological importance. The tree department carried investigated and confirmed the tree was indeed a survivor from rural Whitton and was displaying veteran characteristics. Rather than felling, the tree will now have work to reduce the crown in an attempt to manage and save it.

Chair and reporting nuisances

Over the last 10 years or so our ASB, vandalism and problems have reduced at the rec. We tend now to be more peaceful and relaxed than our closely located partner green spaces at Murray Park and Kneller Gardens.

We of course want to keep it this way and also make sure our community fully enjoy having a green space on their doorstep.

We therefore lobbied Parks to work on the chair art installation to reduce the excessive noise nuisance it caused. This work has been carried out and local residents report it is much better.

We have also had discussions with out SNT around issues with information about problems not getting to them.

In both cases it has taken longer to get issues resolved because people are reluctant to complain about them. Parks for instance thought we were just making up the issue with the chair because they had only received one complaint when we were receiving many.

So, we have agreed with SNT and Parks on email addresses people can quickly report all issues on – ASB and drug dealing (along with 999), noise, mess, and general nuisances.

We have published this on our social media and will run a more detailed information campaign to ask people to report issues, as the 2021 season of ASB begins in spring.

I think this is enough of me so last but not least we are very pleased to introduce Katie Allen of Food for Thought Heathfield

Item 2: Food for Thought 

ii. Katie Allen shared details of this initiative. Food for Thought (FfT) enables the sharing of surplus food, designated to landfill, with a community. Surplus food is sourced from various places such as supermarkets, over-production of food and food that do not meet its criteria to be sold in supermarkets (such as bananas are too straight). Katie would like to offer this service for all residents living in Heathfield. It will particularly benefit the cohort of people who are sitting just above the poverty line and are not eligible for benefits - which Heathfield has a good proportion of. The service would operate on the concrete part of the Pavilion, two days a week (Thursday during school pick-up and on a Saturday morning when clubs run on the Rec). In terms of referral to the service, Heathfield School are aware of this initiative and have informed their parent community; The Real Junk Food cafe (running gout of ETNA center in St Margaret’s) will advertise the service; Heathfield Children’s Service Centre will refer and the Council will advertise this too. The aim is to start this in around 2 weeks’ time. This is a worthy and much needed service (both from an environmental/food wastage perspective and supporting those who that extra help). FoHRGE thanks Katie Allen for presenting this to us and are looking forward to liaising with FfT and supporting this initiative at the Rec. Kate Allen can be reached at fftheathfield@gmail.com

Item 3: Election of Committee Members

iii. The following current Committee members - Alex and Rory (Treasurer) are continuing to in their roles.

iv. The following co-opted members, Sally and Holger moved to become full committee members.

v. Ranald was co-opted for the Pavilion Committee

Item 4: Questions and close

vi. John Evans asked what the 1.8 hectares of open land next to the Turing House School site will be used for and whether it will be open to the public. Joan shared that this land will be part of the Rec with an ambition to create a wildlife rich arboretum open to the public. The school plan is for wire mesh fence so the openness of MOL will remain.

Rory asked if FoHRGE had any contacts or connections with Whitton Wanderers – we do it is Huw Griffiths (club secretary) and Lynda Hance (club treasurer and treasurer Friends Murray Park).

Paul Hughes suggested that FoHRGE should consider diversifying the sports offering on the Rec which increases use and reduces incidents of anti-social behavior as the Rec would be used widely. FoHRGE agreed.

Rory asked if FoHRGE had the contact details of all AGM attendees for future events. **Action:** Manju confirmed she did – need to check we have permission to contact them.

Item 5: Expected Date of Next AGM

October 28 2021 - 7.30pm - 8.15pm