**FRIENDS OF RICHMOND GREEN (FoRG) – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2021**

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

Date: **Wednesday 14 April 2021**

Note: Because of the Coronavirus pandemic, no AGM was held in 2020 and because of continuing government health advice and social restrictions this AGM was held ONLINE via ZOOM at 7:30pm on Wednesday 14April 2021.

Attendance: attendees names and email addresses were collected by David McKenzie in advance of the meeting so they could be provided with the Zoom link to join the meeting and afterwards receive the minutes. The attendance count was **31** individuals, including 7 committee members: Vivien Harris (VH), Peter Willian (PW), Peter Griffiths (PG), Anna Newton Dun (AND), Diana Billingham (DB), David MacKenzie (DM) and Gemma Warrilow (GW).

**AGENDA**

1. **Apologies**
2. **Minutes of last meeting (10 April 2019)**
3. **Matters arising**
4. **Report of the Executive**
5. **Financial report and adoption of Accounts 2019 and 2020**
6. **Election of Officers for 2020-21**
7. **Any Other Business (general discussion)**

**MINUTES of the FoRG AGM**

The meeting began at 7.40pm

VH: Welcome & Intro, and then outlined a few ground rules for zoom management during the meeting.

**1. Apologies**

Those who sent their apologies for not being able to attend: Richard & Vicky Peirson; Sir Brian Fall

**2. Minutes of last AGM (10 April 2019)**

The Minutes of the 2019 FoRG AGM were agreed (there was no AGM held in 2020 because of Covid-19, and therefore no 2020 minutes to approve):

Proposed: Anna Newton Dunn

Seconded: Gemma Warrilow

**3. Matters arising**

* VH: these items will be picked up in general discussion later in the meeting.

**4. Report of the Executive**

A detailed report on key issues and on-going activities is contained in the recent FoRG Newsletter for March 2021, but in summary the chair noted the following points all dominated by serious concerns over ASB and crime on and around The Green:-

* **Crime and ASB –** VH: unacceptable levels were experienced last summer on The Green. Meetings about it were held and there’s been much dialogue with the council about disturbance and rising crime on our doorsteps. Park Guard hours were increased but police were distracted by their wider London responsibilities so they were unable to be ‘on the beat’ as much as residents would have liked.
* **South Richmond Liaison Group –** VH: the Richmond Green Working Group (RGWG) was set up to focus on the problems experienced on The Green and the related area of Richmond Riverside. It meets regularly and two FoRG members are on it (we had three but one has since moved away). The results of a survey sent out by RGWG showed that 84% of respondents felt crime and ASB was much more of a problem than in previous years. The main concerns included drugs (dealing as well as use), speeding, criminal damage, general anti-social behaviour, litter, late night noise, urination and defecation in public areas and on private premises. We would welcome ideas from residents over what additional measures could be taken to mitigate these problems.
* **Another summer coming –** VH: we want more targeted police operations, more use of fines, more Park Guard resources, more use of CCTV, etc., because residents are fearful of another summer that could be even worse than the last as we emerge from lockdown restrictions.
* **Portaloos on The Green –** VH: though these have been provided by the council in response to the serious hygiene problems experienced last summer, the portaloo units are not sited where we’d wanted them – FoRG would have preferred them to be located over the railway bridge in the ODP car park; however, the corner of The Green corner had emerged as the best for operational reasons because of the ready power source and ease of management. While they may have been a help with daytime visitors to The Green, their daily closure at 8pm does little to help with ASB in the evenings or late at night.
* **Greater sense of community** – VH: one outcome of the stresses and strains of last summer and autumn has been the emergence of stronger Neighbourhood Watch groups and a sense of residents working together.

VH then moved on to cover other issues and activities

* **Heathrow –** VH thanked PW for the considerable work he does in this area as Chair of RHC; there have been lots of meetings and consultation responses (13 consultations over the past year); what looks certain is that the 3rd runway will effectively be deferred for at least ten years, although the fight must go on. However, the more pressing problem now is the airspace modernisation plan that’s been developed; this will result in more planes overhead even without the additional runway.
* **Old Deer Park –** VH: work on the next phase of improving access to the Thames from the ODP car park – is awaited; the provision includes a new pathway from the car park to the towpath end of ODP and decking built over the boggy ground at that corner of the park.
* **Planning, Licensing, Traffic –** VH: we’re directly impacted by the evening economy; PW is on the working group to monitor oversight of this evening economy and its impact on the town and residents. Significant alterations are already occurring in the town with Planning “changes of use” being sought.
* **Town Centre –** VH: we’re all aware of the growing retail crisis in the town centre, with more and more empty shops; this effect has been accelerated by lockdown and is a cause of increasing concern for the town; a number of licensing issues are always emerging and we’re working on keep track of them.
* **Phone boxes on the corner of the Green** – VH: the pair of listed phone kiosks have been saved; the box nearest Paved Court has been acquired by a local resident, and we’re attempting to acquire the other one from the Council. We are opposed to their use for commercial purposes. And we hope to come up with alternative and more appropriate uses – suggestions are welcome.

Other ongoing issues to note…

* **Fountain** – VH: restoration of the Drinking Fountain is finished; it has been fully restored together with the water supply; we did actually have running water and then lockdown hit us; as soon as we can we’ll get it back working and open officially the fountain when the time is right.
* **Old Palace Yard resurfacing** – VH: basically, we’re still waiting; AND has been working on this and will keep track of progress.
* **Telecomms mast** – VH: two applications last year went in for a huge high mast to be placed close to the ODP car park; both were turned down owing in no small part to objections from residents; thanks to everyone who lodged an objection.
* **Benches on The Green** – VH: many of the surrounds have been worn away leaving bare earth and various dips and holes; we are working with the council to extend the paved surrounds to counter wear and tear.
* **Bollards around The Green** – VH: Good Gym have done good work in cleaning the bollards.
* **Filming** – VH: because of lockdown there was very little filming activity around The Green in 2020, but a flurry of activity has resumed in the early months of 2021 (eg. ‘Ted Lasso’)

There have been three significant issues that arose since the March Newsletter went to print…

* **Street lighting around The Green –** VH: the council sprang a surprise on us when they recently announced, with little notice, their plan to replace all the heritage lamp-posts around The Green as part of a Borough-wide scheme to get rid of old and infirm cast-iron posts with newer steel alternatives while, at the same time, changing to very bright white intensity lights; FoRG challenged their choice of replacements but failed in a bid to keep the REVO lamp-posts and instead we got the higher Oxford white lights; on the issue of their brightness – we’re told that the lamps around the Green can be computer-controlled centrally by the council: they are currently at 80% of intensity and after 11pm are dimmed to 70%. Residents who are concerned by intrusive light pollution into their homes can request shields to be attached to the side facing their windows.
* **E-bikes and scooters** – VH: the proposal to locate points for collection and return of e-bikes and e-scooter on The Green has been opposed by FoRG, and the Council has offered to meet with us to discuss this further. The Green has been dropped from phase 1.
* **Friars Lane car park** – this car park is not going to be developed as residential (there were plans some time ago), but it will be re-furbished as a car park and a budget has been set aside for this purpose. A group of residents have met to discuss various options/requests prior to the formal consultation which has not started yet.

**5. Financial Report and adoption of Accounts 2019 & 2020**

VH: because no AGM was possible in 2020, FoRG Treasurer Diana Billingham would present in summary the accounts for both 2019 and 2020 (with summary figures displayed using Zoom’s screenshare function).

Beginning with 2019…

* DB: looking at 2019… it was a busy period with filming companies using The Green fairly regularly and paying for the privilege: eg. ‘Peter Rabbit’, ‘Ted Lasso’, and other Four Weddings Productions Ltd projects etc; this kept FoRG’s regular source of income buoyant;
* DB: we worked with the council’s film office to develop a set of guidelines to facilitate this activity while protecting residents from unnecessary disruption (see FoRG website for details);
* DB: donations to the restoration of the drinking fountain were received, amounting to £12k;
* DB: expenditure included AGM costs, some RHC costs that are essential to keep RHC as an important voice in fighting Heathrow expansion;
* DB: all that resulted in a surplus of approx. £25k, with a balance of around £9k.

2020 provided a very different tale…

DB: because of the pandemic, FoRG’s regular income was hit hard – filming activity fell away sharply; there was just one main filming job (‘Ted Lasso’) that brought in £1200. In addition, two further donations were received for the Drinking Fountain project, amounting to £7k.

DB: expenditure included some further RHC costs; also a major payment was made of £29,789 for the fountain project – a sum we knew about for which we had budgeted. So there was heavy expenditure of around £30k for that year.

DB: this resulted in a surplus of £21k, leaving a balance of approx. £13k

DB: FoRG is always keen for ideas about how this money is spent in the future on local projects. We still owe one plan on the Fountain which has now been paid.

There were no questions from the meeting so the FoRG Accounts for 2019 and 2020 as presented were agreed and adopted:

Proposed: Gemma Warrilow

Seconded: Peter Griffiths

**6. Election of Officers**

VH: the current Officers of the FoRG Executive Committee remained in post through 2020 as there was no AGM re-election last year. They have all agreed to stand for re-election for the coming year 2021-22.

Firstly the Chair and Treasurer positions:-

* **Vivien Harris** (8 Pembroke Villas) – as Chair
* **Diana Billingham** (21a The Green ) – as Treasurer

Proposed: David MacKenzie

Seconded: John Lee

Consequently, in the absence of other nominations, Vivien Harris was duly re-elected to continue serving as FoRG’s Chair and Diana Billingham was re-elected as FoRG’s Treasurer for the coming twelve months.

Secondly, other committee members:-

VH: thanked three residents who had been co-opted to work with us in recent months: Nick Saunders, Lisa Marlow and Gemma Warrilow. Of those, Gemma is standing for election (see below), as is David MacKenzie whose confirmation as a committee member could not happen in 2020 as there was no AGM held.

Those standing therefore are:-

* **Peter Willan** (7 The Green)
* **Peter Griffiths** (26 The Retreat)
* **Anna Newton Dunn** (29 Old Palace Lane)
* **David MacKenzie**  (4 Pembroke Villas, The Green)
* **Gemma Warrilow** (Old Friars, Old Palace Place)

Proposed: John Lee

Seconded: Martin Anderson

Therefore, in the absence of other nominations, Peter Willan, Peter Griffiths, Anna Newton Dunn, David McKenzie and Gemma Warrilow were duly elected to serve as members of the FoRG Executive Committee for the coming year 2021-22.

*NB. the formal position of FoRG Secretary remains vacant for the time being.*

VH: with the formal part of the meeting thus concluded, there’s time for questions/comments from ‘the floor’ / zoom-room under general AOB…

**7. Any Other Business**

**Q. ASB & Crime – Lord (John) Lee** thanked FoRG for all the work that’s gone into organizing the meeting. Moving to ASB, he said that whatever progress had been made shouldn’t stop us from pressing hard for the restoration of some permanent police presence in Richmond; there should, he said, be a national policy for towns of a certain size, such as Richmond; Richmond has historically become a soft touch with no permanent police presence. But the size of population and footfall makes the absence of police regularly on the scene a nonsense; relatively minor ASB has become as big a problem as the major crime issues; he gave one simple example of finding a set of discarded or dropped keys – what is one supposed to do? You can’t hand them into a police station as you might have in the past. A stronger police presence would have an immediate effect – on reassuring residents and on deterring criminals.

VH: we’ve regularly made this case, but the Met have consistently said ‘no’ in response. Perhaps you’re right, it needs to be a national policy created around towns of a certain size and with certain characteristics. Our nearest police station now is Twickenham – and while that one was being refurbished, police had to come all the way from Teddington, much further away; the RGWP believes there should be a local police station, but the Met have consistently said no.

PW: research monitoring incidents, hundreds of them, was done in recent years – 10% were crimes and 90% were not ‘crimes’ (ie. alcohol-related ASB) so police couldn’t get involved and with ‘crime’ figures therefore low Richmond continues to have this Met police status as a relatively low-crime area. Therefore, despite the amount of low-level ASB we’re subjected to here, the police and council continue to say it’s not their priority. It is a problem, and I support what JL is saying.

AND: but gangs have moved in recently also, bringing violence to our town with gangs fighting each other (eg. on the Riverside terraces); this is not ‘low-level’ ASB; the police are aware but we need more targeted action – so often they seem to be just observing

VH: Hounslow gangs caused a confrontation and some brawling a few days ago on The Green, riverside and in Duke Street; we’ve met with MP Sarah Olney, but so far little of substance has resulted.

Martin A: the working group needs to work with police to bring in policies to prevent the same predictable problems recurring this year. So far, apart from incredibly bright street lights around The Green, what results have there been?

VH: in truth, very little has resulted; there’s been lots of talk and planning, but no firm commitments from the Council or police. We’ve asked for more Park Guards – this company is employed by the council to act in open spaces and they have certain delegated powers (eg. related to public space protection rules, fines issued for ASB, etc) but they have no police powers; if the Park Guards are good ones, they can help but there weren’t enough last year; council says it doesn’t have the cash and Richmond needs to take its turn against borough-wide needs, but the Council has committed to deploying more this year; promises have been made, but will we actually get more than last year? Maybe not; the police are concerned about the situation, but they have wider calls on their time and resources

PW: one tactic has proved been effective in past years, and that’s to have a real blitz at the start of the season to send out signals; this didn’t happen last year, although the police fully support that approach;

MA: on that ‘Terrible Tuesday’ when mayhem broke loose near The Green there was an accident on the A316; was that why the police couldn’t respond to the violence? Were they at full stretch?

VH: not sure; we’ve asked for Transport police to help; they stopped the planned rave by outnumbering would-be rave attendees and issuing fines, but we need more evidence of action; our 3 councillors have been very supportive throughout, but there’s been little action from elsewhere; so there’s not much cheering news for this coming summer.

Gemma F (NW co-ord for Pembroke Villas): I’ve been sending reports through David Noakes who reports our views to the police and Council weekly; the high visibility of ‘Ted Lasso’ filming crews occasionally helps, but the lack of visible police presence is worrying; there are several weekends when there are none allocated to Richmond town; but the power of statistics is important to recognise – reporting every crime each morning on 101 – it’s really important to build the stats that would make the police respond; Gemma pleaded for everyone to please report even the most minor offences – eg. drugs. Use the online reporting system, get a crime reference number – it all builds up; if we don’t report things, we can say there’s a problem but the police spreadsheets won’t show evidence of it; we need to encourage people to report regularly.

VH: agree we need to support the statistical base in the way Gemma has been mobilised to do; thanks to Gemma for her engagement.

John Lee: what is the position in terms of the residents organising camera surveillance of the Green and surrounds? From individual houses that overlook the green? Could we assemble the resource to produce continuous evidence?

PW: we can’t legally do this – private cameras can’t be used to monitor the public; it would be better to get hold of the mobile CCTV camera the police have and get use of that; there are different views about having cameras around the green installed – there’s the invasion of privacy issue and the problem of who’s going to monitor them? In the past we’ve had great support from the Transport police and it is possible they can help again this year; one other potential resource is the Special Constables – in the past we’ve had 5 or 6 in the town and they have helped.

VH: our local Sgt is trying to pull in the Transport police and Special Constables, as well as the drug squad with dogs, etc. Putting a speed camera on Portland Terrace also a possibility, because the 20mph limit is often ignored. Should we have more ‘sleeping policemen’ speed bumps? Again, contrasting views about this. Most prefer the chicanes to bumps in the road.

Tony W: the principal ‘boy-racers’ track is the length of Portland Terrace; they are slowed down going round The Green and then when they come round the corner into the Portland Terrace stretch they’ve got a straight run and inevitably they speed up; I do share concerns about ‘sleeping policeman’; are there other means of slowing people down? Speed cameras? Speed traps?

VH: we can flag it up, but further suggestions are welcome.

PW: the Council is proposing to reduce through-traffic – by monitoring with cameras, number plate checks, etc; and the idea of charging people – a trial run is going to happen and we must be vigilant about the possible result being more traffic going round the green.

David MacK: speed cameras is the obvious way – and it could raise revenue at the same time.

**Q. Provision of public toilets – Graham Nugent (aka “Santa”)**: an essential addition but could they not be located somewhere more discreet?

VH: unfortunately the need for a convenient power source determines the most practical location, and there’s not much we can do about that; the loos are temporary and, when pubs open up again, they may get removed – but they’re probably with us till September; they cost money to run, but at least the Council has made a welcome effort to deal with a real problem; and the Riverside loos are much more unsightly; so although the location is not ideal, we’ll need to live with it for this summer;

GN: I can see the toilets from my window and the one thing that is plain to observe is that there’s an enormous demand for a public toilet; the sheer number of people wanting to use them, sometimes around 40 waiting in line; the wider issue is that there’s a real need for public loos in Richmond town and there just aren’t any! It’s “misery”; so shouldn’t we propose more public toilets to be provided, regardless of costs?

VH: there is a Council initiative to investigate the need for public loos – the need is recognised and a committee is tasked with finding more permanent solutions; one might be the old shut A316 car park toilet block – why not reopen them?

GN: even if we can’t get onto that committee we can still make noise – a public toilet is an essential social facility close to The Green

**Q. Benches, public amenity, state of the town – Graham Nugent (“Santa”):** it’s becoming increasingly hard to find anywhere to sit now – there seems to be an acute shortage of public benches; surely The Green could take another ten benches?

VH: that might not be a popular move – many residents say they have enough benches and they don’t want any more; there are a few vacant spaces that could be filled, but no available spaces left on Little Green; there are apparently 3 spaces left on The Green.

GN: I find it incomprehensible when the council say there’s no space for more benches – there is ample space to improve the amenities for all; hundreds of people come here and basic facilities are just missing – FoRG should take a hand.

VH: we’ve got the message from residents that they don’t want to see considerably more benches, but we will discuss it further.

Tony W: there’s also the danger of a daytime amenity becoming a night-time problem – with benches providing congregating points for revellers at night; I wouldn’t welcome more benches.

**Q. The Riverside – Frances Bouchier**: FoRG does a good job for The Green, but why could FoRG not take on the Riverside as well? The Riverside looks very unloved as a result of outrageous neglect; it needs much better care.

VH: you may be right about the problem but we at FoRG are not looking for *more* work; we want less. It falls to all of us to pester the Council and encourage them to do something; the paths are going to be redone (they are in a very poor state), but lawns and benches are in more need; perhaps we could we get Richmond BID to help smarten the place up? The Council is looking into an effective watering system for the grass banks.

PW: the Council is soon coming up with plan to improve the town and there’ll be a consultation we can engage in – we will all have the opportunity to comment and get involved.

FB: they’ve already had a hundred comments about the poor state of the Riverside so I don’t think another consultation will do any good – having been on the Council I’m cynical about the value of ‘consultations’.

PW: the Council group discusses all this stuff, but the accumulation of problems has almost become too big; we have major issues – eg. retail loss, where’s the town going? etc. There’s the ongoing threat of Licensing changes – eg. the bid by Pizza Express in Red Lion Street to become a bar that could hold 700-800 customers; we had a Cumulative Impact Policy (CIP) which was very helpful in keeping the balance, but there is real concern that we may lose it – that would be the start of a slippery slope; the future of the town is uncertain.

VH: everyone should get involved where they can; we need to restore life to our town centre.

**Q. Tourism in Richmond – John Lee:** everyone tells me there’s been an obvious increase in tourism, footfall into Richmond; are there any statistics to show this? The Riverside is so busy now, and The Green; given all the issue arising from this, it would be good to know what the statistics on footfall show.

PW: we used to have a ‘health check’ process looking at premises and footfall – but the last one done was in 2015 and we really need another; I was told there had been a recent survey – using mobile phone data from O2 by agreement with Council – but the numbers may not have actually gone up; we used to get 10,000 people of an evening.

FB: numbers have gone up; the Council’s tourist officer (Angela) should know.

VH: we’ll look into it; there must be stats; I think the numbers are definitely up.

AND: I agree that numbers are up; but perhaps some of the pressure will go once everything opens up again in May-June; although we know that Richmond BID loves more visitors because it helps businesses – there’s a tension there for residents.

**Q. e-bikes on the Green – Peter W**: what are people’s views? The Council has offered a discussion about it; personally I’m against them parking on The Green

AND: I’m against also – it’s a horrendous idea – we don’t need more things parked on The Green; if we need an e-bike station surely it can be put somewhere else; The Green is to be loved and preserved;

Tony W: we don’t want more bikes parked; e-bikes to rent will encourage speed merchants around the Green; and also the law is confused on this.

Gemma F: we used to have them where I lived before; they get abandoned all the time; drug dealers use them to get easily from A to B so they can deal, mug, and then abandon the bikes and get away untraceably; if an e-bike station appears on The Green it won’t be policed.

VH: they’re just abandoned everywhere already; and there’s a new major cycle hub planned at back of station – why not have it there? it definitely should not be on The Green.

Diana B: what are our options?

PW: a letter was sent round; FoRG wrote raising a host of questions; the Richmond Society supports us; dialogue is possible, and we’re not yet in the first stage of this project so we may have time to discuss with the Council.

*Discussion ended*

VH: Concluded the meeting, and hoped for better circumstances next year.

The zoom meeting ended at 9.11pm.

**END of FoRG AGM 2021**