

**FRIENDS OF THE RIVER CRANE ENVIRONMENT
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009
REPORT FROM THE CHAIR**

Welcome and thank you for coming to our sixth Annual General Meeting.

The foundation stones for any Charity are its Trustees and FORCE is very fortunate in this respect in having nine very skilled and dedicated Trustees who for the most part have been with the charity since its inception. FORCE is interested in finding new Trustees and to this end has instituted a system whereby anyone interested in becoming a Trustee can join the board for 12 months as a co-opted member to see how the system works and what their commitments are likely to be. We are very pleased to say that Ian Taylor, who is not here tonight but is a regular at our volunteer days, has agreed to join the board as a co-opted member this year with a view to being elected formally as a Trustee in 2010.

Second only to the Trustees are our members. We are very grateful to our members for their continued support as well as for their steadily increasing numbers, with more than 400 currently registered. Our members are the source of many of our project ideas and help to let us know what they want and what is happening on the ground. The number of members, as well as their active support, is also the source of a lot of our influence with councils and other statutory bodies.

Some of our most important work is in our regular monthly volunteer days – every second Sunday of the month from October to April. These days allow us to engage directly with sites of interest and achieve steady improvements through the effort of our own labour. Each year we hope to both manage the existing network of sites and potentially add another site to our list. We also hope, in time, to encourage other groups to be set up and take a direct responsibility for the management of their own local areas.

FORCE also responds to a significant number of planning applications every year. FORCE looks to work with the local council and the applicants to ensure that proposals do not adversely impact upon the Crane valley, and that benefits to the environment and the local community can be derived from any developments that are to go ahead. This is often a long and protracted process. The Crane valley park report identifies 19 actual and potential developments local to our area of interest (and two more have been identified since this report was published in July).

We also put together and find funding for our own projects to improve local areas and to engage schools and communities in using these spaces more. In the last year some of our key projects have been: a third carved bench – this time a kingfisher bench at Hospital Bridge Road in Crane Park; working with local schools to use Mereway Nature Park as an outdoor classroom - specifically, developing activities so that it can be used for all parts of the curriculum from mathematics and English, to history and drama; and planting some 650 metres of hedgerow along the Crane Park fence – alongside fruit trees and nut trees – with the remaining 350 metres to be done over the next 12 months.

FORCE has also developed its vision for Crane Valley Park – and the feasibility study report for Crane Valley Park was produced in July of this year. This vision involves the improvement of the existing Crane Park and its extension downstream to Twickenham Station and upstream to Hounslow Heath. This would create a park of three times its existing size and help to protect these important green spaces within a coherent management system supported by both Hounslow and Richmond councils.

The feasibility study was supported by funding from Hounslow and Richmond councils as well as Wates Foundation and Awards for All. The implementation of this vision took a major step forward with the announcement, this March, that Crane Valley Park was to be awarded £400,000 from the London Mayor. Crane valley park actually gained around 2000 more votes, at 6677, than any other park in London and it was for this reason that Boris Johnson came to our park to announce the results of the competition.

So what can we expect over the next 12 months?

We shall be working together with a newly appointed project manager and members of both Hounslow and Richmond councils to implement the Mayor's priority parks project. We were in the park with the rest of the steering group this morning, identifying the priorities for this spend, which will be undertaken over the next two years.

Early next year, Kneller Gardens pavilion will be open, complete with changing rooms, public toilets and a café run by Richmond Youth Partnership. We are delighted with this project, which will mean the first opportunity to buy a cup of tea and/or use a public loo in the Crane valley for many years. The link with the youth partnership also provides an exciting opportunity to develop more facilities and activities for young people in the park.

Finally, we expect to be heavily involved in the planning proposals for Feltham Marshalling Yards. BAA has proposed to build a major rail depot on this large nature site at the western end of Crane valley park as part of the Airtrack scheme. This development could have a major detrimental impact upon the River Crane corridor. However, FORCE remains hopeful that, subject to the support of a wide coalition of interested parties and a positive response from BAA, a solution can be reached which provides major long term benefits to the Crane valley as a whole.

In all this work we are very grateful to our members for their help and support – we couldn't do it without you.

Rob Gray
Chair of FORCE
October 2009