

## **FORCE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2013 REPORT FROM THE CHAIR**

Welcome and thank you for coming to our tenth Annual General Meeting. Our tenth anniversary has been an opportunity for celebration, for reflection on how far we have come, review of our objectives and structure, and to scope out our plans for the next five years.

The structure of tonight's meeting is slightly different from usual – following formal business, instead of an outside speaker, Trustees will say a few words about their experiences with FORCE; and given it's our tenth anniversary, we have fancier nibbles and more wine than usual! We have also set out our new FORCE boards; these have been designed to showcase our work over the last ten years and identify the priorities for the future. We would be grateful for ideas as to where we could display these boards over the coming year.

I think that we can be proud of the progress we have made over the last ten years. The River Crane is a better known resource in both Richmond and Hounslow boroughs, it is better looked after and more appreciated by local communities, with many more people using it for leisure and for access than ten years ago. For example, our surveys indicate that around 100,000 visitors go in or out of the Meadway entrance of Crane Park every year, several times more than visited ten years ago. FORCE itself has grown steadily over this period and we now have over 500 members. One indicator of satisfaction from our members has been the consistent membership renewal rate at around 90 per cent each year.

Our approach has been consistent throughout this period- we have sought to work with the local authorities, landowners, developers and other interested parties, with the overall objective of enhancing the environmental and community value of the Crane corridor. The creation, five years ago, of the Crane Valley Partnership, has greatly helped in this process. The partnership brings together all five Crane catchment boroughs alongside the GLA, Environment Agency, Thames Water, Heathrow Airport Limited and many other interested parties, over 25 members in total. This has instilled a catchment wide approach to river management, and led among other things to the production of the Crane Catchment Management Plan, copies of which are available tonight.

The Partnership has also been invaluable in the response to the recent major pollution events (a separate report on which will follow); they have a project officer, Ilse Steyl, in post and the Thames Water Fund is now open for proposals. We have also worked closely with the Partnership in securing a £150,000 grant for the River Crane through the GLA's Big Green Fund. This will support the development of new wetland areas at Donkey Wood, Pevensey Road and at Mill Road in Crane Park; as well as the creation of a native species nursery at a new site near Heathrow.

We have also been working closely with Richmond Council on their Parks Improvement Project. This has led to the opening of a new community orchard at Meadway and the creation of a new open space at Mill Road. Further works are proposed in the next year to open up new green spaces adjacent to Crane Park. The Conservation Volunteers are key partners in this process and, for the next three months at least, they will be doing at least two work days every week in the Crane valley; creating new wetlands, laying hedgerows and planting woodland flowers for example.

We have made progress this year in the review of our Objects and in the Incorporation of the Charity. The new company is now set up and the application for new Charity will be submitted in the next week or so. The work to develop our new Objects is not yet complete – and we shall ensure that Members have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft proposals before they are finalised.

We attended the inaugural Crane Valley Conference last month. This was well attended and provided much food for thought – not least as the latest major pollution incident was identified on the same day. FORCE presented a vision to the Conference of how the Crane might look in five years time – as a productive and high value landscape, managed coherently as a 1200 hectare regional park; providing employment for 50 people, training for 500 people, education resources for 5000 students and a green corridor and leisure space for half a million residents living within a short walk.

I believe this vision is deliverable but it will take a considerable effort to make it happen, from FORCE and a wide range of partners. We also recognise that our own support structures need strengthening, to deliver our existing workload as well as this broader vision. We have taken the strategic decision not to employ staff. We are therefore actively recruiting for new Trustees, co-opted members and active supporters to help us progress. Our first port of call is our existing membership and therefore we would welcome any direct offers of help or enquiries around this request from our members.

Finally, I would like to thank all our Trustees, members and partners for all their work and support over the last year and decade.

Rob Gray  
Chair of FORCE  
November 2013