

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our Summer 2020 Newsletter. This is the 66th newsletter we have produced over the last 17 years, all designed primarily for print production. The number of people who request a print copy has reduced to very few however and we are now proposing to do a digital version only. This will allow us to create a much more flexible document, with easier embedded links, and more compatible with mobile devices. It will also save a significant expenditure on print and postage.

We appreciate that some people may not be able to receive a digital version. If so, let us know, and we will continue postal communications with you.

Lockdown Update

For several months over lockdown all of our normal activities went online. We also started weekly visits to the parks and open spaces of the lower Crane valley and reported our findings to the parks departments. in Hounslow and Richmond councils.

In recent weeks we have been working with partners, such as TCV and Richmond Green Gym, to re-start volunteering activities – with initial events in July. All are limited to six people at present and require pre-booking.



TCV litter picking event in Crane Park

We are now planning our own volunteer events, but these will also be limited in number and require pre-registration for the time being. If you are a regular volunteer and would like to join us, then please email volunteering@froce.org.uk for more information.

Usage Surveys

On Sunday 12th July we carried out our regular six-monthly public use survey. Between 6am and 8pm, volunteers counted over 2500 people using the Meadway entrance to Crane Park and over 1700 people using Twickenham Rough and Marsh Farm Lane.

These are by far the highest numbers counted in either location over the last seven years and reinforce our observations over the last few months that parks and open spaces are being much more heavily used during lockdown.

We are currently compiling a report on user numbers over this period which we hope will help to ensure that these essential assets continue to be properly supported by local decision makers.

Litter

Litter has been a major issue over the last few months. The two parks departments have been great, with daily litter collections introduced at most sites. Many local people have also been taking their litter home, and even picking up other peoples' litter, so we have seen a gradual reduction in sights like this.



"Tidy littering" – piled on or around a bin and then blowing around the park

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Litter has been the initial target for the groups of volunteers returning to activities over the last month or so. TCV for example ran three days in Crane Park in late July and pulled several hundred drinks cans out of the river.

Elsewhere in the Crane valley (and even more so in other parts of London) there have been huge amounts of litter and lots of fly tipping reported. Please do your bit where you can – including reporting any major problems via the appropriate council website.

Citizen Crane and Pollution Incidents

Our Citizen Crane volunteers have returned to their monthly data collection duties following a three-month break. We have now seen three potentially major pollution events in the upper and middle catchment, and most recently in Crane Park. Volunteers were involved in reporting both incidents and may have stopped them being yet more damaging.

The large numbers of children seen playing in the river over the last few months underline the importance of reporting and resolving pollution problems asap. If you see any pollution in the river, please call the Environment Agency on 0800 807060 and also let us know through social media.

The Crane Park pollution incident turned several km of the river a milky white colour on two occasions in early August. This looked terrible, though subsequent field tests indicate the river ecology may not have suffered immediate damage. The pollution may well have been due to the disposal of liquids into a road drain. Please be aware that the road drainage system links directly to the river, not the sewage works.



River pollution plume in Crane Park in August

Outdoor Education

We have been promoting the value of outdoor education for many years and created our first outdoor classroom in Mereway Nature Park in 2005. Lockdown and home schooling have meant many more people have been using our outdoor learning materials when out and about with their families. Why not try some of the materials and take part in the FORCE Family Challenge

<https://www.force.org.uk/discover/family-challenge/>

Cranford Park Funding

Cranford Park is a large and historic area of parkland in the middle Crane valley. It is an amazing resource, with a dedicated Friends group, but has been under-resourced for many years. Now, after a seven-year campaign, the Friends have been awarded a £2.28m Lottery grant to enhance the park, its buildings and relationship with the River Crane. We are very excited to see a major new visitor hub created in the middle of the Crane valley and hope this will also encourage investment in the linkages between this site and the lower Crane.

Greggs Development

We have been following the development proposals for the Greggs site, in the lower Crane adjacent to Mereway Nature Park, for many years. FORCE has engaged with the developer and the council and sought protection and enhancement of the river corridor and further provision of open space associated with the development. The council planning committee refused the latest application in early August. Our submissions to the council can be seen in the planning pages of our website.

Regards,



Rob Gray,

Chair of FORCE

