

Friends of Palewell Common & Fields

Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 3 June 2019 7.30 p.m. at All Saints Church Hall

1. **Welcome:** The Chair, Jessica Rettie, welcomed all those present (about 25 people attended).

2. **Chair's Report for 2018/19**

2.1 Jessica said that it has been a busy and largely positive year on the Common. It continues to be a valuable local resource for sports and recreation across the local community, and a home for a diverse selection of wildlife. Jessica then gave the following report on the year's activities -

Sports

- Our boules pitch remains popular both with the Boules club, visiting teams and local residents. As a reminder, throughout the summer there are sessions on every second Sunday and Friday at 2pm. John Hockley from Boules is here tonight so can give further reports in due course. The Friends are looking into dates for an "inter-street" boules tournament to be held over the summer holidays - we have a team from Hertford Avenue- looking for volunteers from Sunbury, Park Avenue, Park Road, Clare Lawn etc who might be interested!
- Football has continued to grow for a wide range of ages covered by both Kidsworks and Sheen Lions.
- Cricket – Kieron Pearce is here to give an update on the year but just to say that the Friends have been very pleased with the sight of cricket being played on the Common and we understand that there will be some evening fixtures being played over the summer.
- Tennis – now in the second year of operation by Sheen Parks Tennis and it's lovely to see so much activity on the courts. The closer relationship with the LTA has meant more opportunities for collaboration and courses- including a junior introduction programme supported by the LTA offering coaching and kit to youngsters starting tennis at very affordable rates. Kate and her team are also running courses for adults interested in getting fit through interval training and half term and holiday camps. The Friends were very pleased to have the opportunity to support a programme offering coaching to young people with special needs - which we did with a £100 donation.
- The use of the Common by keep fit classes and personal trainers has continued to grow. The outdoor gym equipment seems to be reasonably well used despite some parts being out of action at times. Blitz fitness are celebrating their 10th anniversary this week. Having started with 2 sessions/week on a trial basis back in June 2009, they now run 9 sessions/week for approx. 250 clients predominantly during the school term periods and have created a really friendly fitness

community. At this time of year with the longer light, they offer 2 sessions in the evenings at Palewell, so a total of 7 sessions/week at Palewell, with another at Barnes and their latest venue of Pembroke Lodge in Richmond Park. A reminder that Karen and team offer a free trial session to all Friends!

- Golf - we remain concerned by the physical state of the pitch and putt (although there have been improvements recently) but more so by what appears to be a low engagement with users. One of the Committee (James Thornton) has taken this up with Continental and with Richmond but we have not seen great improvements. We will continue to monitor and ensure that golf remains an important part of Palewell.
- Hockey - an exciting new development at Palewell that Sheen Hockey club will be starting to play at Palewell. They are focusing on getting girls into hockey. The Friends were pleased to give a donation of £100 to the club for start-up kit.

Physical environment of the Common

- Last year I reported on the start of work on the boggy area at the foot of the tennis courts. As a reminder, that area was plagued with wetness, coming from some underground streams. It was fenced off for some time, which was pretty unsightly, so last year, Richmond agreed to do a “scrape” to see if we could identify how much water there is, with a view to creating a wetland area. The scrape was done and we discovered a lot of very soggy clay. Over the last year, with great efforts from the council’s contractor volunteers, TCV, the area has been dug, and mounds created, and a natural fence, and water loving plants planted. A new fence around the area, that looks much nicer, is protecting it while it becomes established. We plan to give it this season to see what happens there and then look at more planting and landscaping and some seating. If anyone wants to be involved or has ideas, please let us know.
- We have generally been happy with the physical maintenance of the common by Continental. Rubbish continues to be an issue after sunny days but bins are emptied often.

Conservation issues

- Richmond’s contract with Nature’s Gym ended and they are now working with a charity called TCV. We have been delighted with the numbers of volunteers that TCV have been able to bring to volunteer days which have taken place quarterly. The main focus for work was the wetland area, but volunteers have also spread woodchip all through the paths in the woods (many dog walkers have thanked me for that!) and cleared the frog pond. A further conservation day is being planned for mid July and we would love to see people there.
- The frog pond is well established and there was an abundance of frog spawn there in early Spring. I am yet to see any baby frogs however,

perhaps due to the presence of a heron who has been spotted guzzling frog spawn.

- ZSL Hedgehog Survey, who had done a hedgehog survey on Barnes common last year, wanted to expand it to include Palewell. Will (Barnes Common manager) was hoping to be here this evening to give an update but can't make it. Essentially they put cameras over the site and do a survey of what wildlife it picks up. They are focusing on hedgehogs but Will pointed out that it's also an interesting general survey of what wildlife there is on the Common. If anyone is interested in helping do let us know.

Activities of Friends

- The Friends held a successful Halloween event in October- hunt the pumpkin continues to be popular with the kids due to the large amount of chocolate on offer! On Easter Sunday the fourth annual Easter Egg hunt was held in the dog free area and was a roaring success- a lot of kids, not enough chocolate eggs and lots of fun. Many thanks to Waitrose for their sponsorship and to Bernard Adams for organising.
- In April we participated in the Great British Spring clean and did a litter pick on the Common with around 15 volunteers. We were actually pleased to note that we didn't find all that much litter - apart from a large collection of empty champagne bottles in the woods! We did though pick up a significant amount of dog poo - which continues to be a problem for users of the Common.
- We have listed Palewell Common on the "Big Green London Map" created by London Friends of Green Spaces Network and CPRE London. The project will improve the listings in the www.goparks.london map. They are also working on combining the listings with other organisations' listings so there is just one 'big green London map' and they will then promote the parks listed in the big map, their friends groups and their work much more.
- We've continued to work with Richmond on general maintenance issues and representing the views of the Common users to Richmond.
- We continue to work closely with the sports providers- promoting their activities wherever we can and helping with issues that arise in so far as we are able to. We have been able to give small donations to the tennis and hockey clubs for programmes geared to reaching new groups of users (one of our key goals). We would be happy to consider any other such requests.
- Our website www.palewellcommon.org.uk and blog have continued to be regularly updated with news about activities thanks to the work of our Committee member Justine Nagaur. Minutes of meetings are on there as well.

The Future

- Currently we do not have any specific new projects planned for next year and will continue to work on the wetland area, to support current and new users of the Common to improve access to the space from a

diverse group of people and to help where we can to facilitate between users, clubs and Richmond. We are very aware that local authority funding is stressed and parks are under pressure, but we will do everything we can to ensure that Palewell continues to be supported as the essential local resource it represents.

2.2 Jessica thanked retiring committee members on behalf of all members - Antony Hunt who had already resigned - and Dhun Kenny who was stepping down as membership secretary but was willing to continue as an ordinary member subject to the elections later in the meeting.

2.3 The secretary (David Evans) drew attention to the copies of the minutes of the previous year's AGM available on the chairs . These were approved.

3 Accounts for 2018/19

3.1 Andy Sutch (Treasurer) said that copies of the accounts were available on the chairs. He reported that the Friends were in good financial shape with a closing balance of £2719. The income for the year of £560 included both member subscriptions and donations. The year's expenditures had been relatively light and hence the balance had grown. The Friends were therefore able to consider supporting more activities on the Common to the benefit of users. The accounts were approved by the meeting.

3.2 There being no questions, the Treasurer invited the meeting to thank the scrutineer of the accounts Ken Cook and to agree to his appointment for the coming year. This was agreed.

4 Membership report

4.1 Dhun Kenny reported that there were currently 45 members who had renewed either in person or online. She asked existing members to encourage local friends and neighbours to join and thanked John Hockley in particular for encouraging the boules players to renew their membership. She thanked James Thornton for volunteering to take over as membership secretary and had discussed with him a hand over of the records etc.

4.2 Jessica asked the meeting to thank Dhun for all her hard work.

5 Election of Committee

5.1 The Chair Jessica Rettie invited the meeting to move on to the elections for members of the Committee. As she was standing for Chair again she invited a member, Antony Bromfield, to assume the chairmanship temporarily.

5.2 Antony said that Jessica had been nominated as Chair by the present Committee. No other nominations were made and she was elected by acclamation of all those present.

5.3 Jessica re-assumed the Chair and invited members to consider the nominations for the officers made by the Committee which were indicated on the Agenda as follows

Deputy Chair	Robyn Phillips
Treasurer	Andy Sutch
Secretary	David Evans
Membership Secretary	James Thornton

5.4 No other nominations were made and she invited those present to support these nominations. They were all elected by acclamation of those present.

5.5 Jessica said there had been 4 nominations for the 5 slots available as ordinary members as follows

	Proposer	Seconder
Bernard Adams	Jessica Rettie	Robyn Phillips
Rikki Marks	James Thornton	David Evans
Dhun Kenny	James Thornton	David Evans
Justine Nagaur	Andy Sutch	Rikki Marks

She asked if there were any other nominations from those present. There being none she asked those present to elect those nominated which was done by acclamation.

6 Sports update

6.1 Andy Sutch said that it was great to see so many representatives from the sports organisations and that he would invite them to comment on their activities.

6.2 Andy said that an important issue for the Common was the poor state of the back tennis courts. A survey had identified that it would be very expensive to improve them but that he hoped that it might be possible to bring together a consortium involving the LTA, Richmond and a private sponsor to fund the work. He suggested that funding from a private company for a permanent roof block of around £20k could unlock future investment from the others. He invited Kate Maurici from Sheen Park Tennis to speak about what they had been doing.

6.3 Kate said that she agreed that improvements were needed on the back courts whose surface had become very poor. She hoped that Richmond would be able to give a higher priority to investing in the Palewell courts and said they needed a volunteer to look for the private funding suggested by Andy. She noted Jessica's positive comments on the work they were doing with young people with disabilities as part of their work to widen access to tennis - it had proved to be a very rewarding activity for both young people and coaches. They had also established a link with Brentford Community Sports Trust which would hold a summer camp on Palewell.

6.4 She said usage of the Common courts was continuing to grow and that 453 children had experience tennis through their activities in the last year. The

numbers of sessions for both children and adults was continuing to increase. They had participated in the LTA ‘tennis for kids’ programme which provided subsidised access to tennis for young people - the courses they had run had all been full. They had been particularly pleased with the encouragement they had given to girls to increase their skills and qualifications and provide role models as leaders for younger girls. She also noted that the membership numbers had increased to 83 and that this year 6 people had been successful in getting tickets in the Wimbledon ballot.

6.5 Kieron Pearce said that cricket was continuing to flourish on the Common. They had arranged a series of regular fixtures for juniors on Saturdays and Sundays and they hoped there would be a total of 25-30 games over the season. The square was improving through the regular maintenance work being done by club volunteers. Having a second ground had proved to be invaluable.

6.6 A member asked if the potential closure of the Bank of England Sports Club would affect cricket or other sports and asked if there were opportunities for more schools to use the Common. Andy, declaring his interest as a Governor at Tower House School, said that the local schools were exploring with the Local Authorities the options for future sport locations. There was a need to find sustainable solutions for school sport. He suggested that information about this could in future be posted on the Friends website. Another member asked if local schools could use the Common for other sports – RPA for example sent children to the Barn Elms sports ground. The Chair said that it was important to balance the interests of different users.

6.7 John Hockey reported on boules. He said that the club now had about 50 members and between 12 and 15 turned up for matches on a regular basis. A local charity FISH had arranged a session for about 10 boys from a local School (Kings College Wimbledon) to meet older people and play a game. He had been grateful for the support of Richmond in procuring a ton of new gravel which the club would spread to improve the playing surface.

6.8 James Thornton described the unsatisfactory position on the golf course. Recently there had been some improvement in the state of the course – particularly the front holes since the watering system had been repaired. But there was a continuing problem caused by the irregular times of opening and the overall use was down. The contract in place did not provide sufficient incentive for Continental Landscapes to build usage. Kate Maurici noted that one person had to do both the maintenance and look after the kiosk – they did not have enough time to do both. Following the example of tennis professional golf coaching was needed if numbers were to grow. A member asked if a more voluntary effort could help attract players from the local schools and if there was scope for cooperation between tennis and golf.

6.9 Matt Almond from Richmond was invited to comment. He said that he accepted the course needed further improvement. Richmond had invested significant sums in getting the watering system to work and other equipment and while the grass on the holes improving it was still not yet good. The recent dry

weather had not helped but he believed the contractor would be able get it into a good state. Savings had been made in parks funding which meant that resources were now spread thinly across the Council's 164 green spaces. He was also concerned at the potential loss of revenue from unpaid use of the course. He wondered if controlled access gates like those in use for tennis across the Borough would help increase revenue and enable those who had paid to enter without the need for an attendant to be there.

6.10 Jessica welcomed these comments and said that the Friends remained concerned about the position on golf and would be keen to support a solution which improved the physical state of the course and promoted more usage including by schools and young people.

7 Other comments from Richmond

7.1 Jessica invited Councillor Joyce to add any further comments. He said that he was a regular visitor with his dog and thought the Common was in good shape. He thought that it should be possible to resolve the issues with golf – perhaps by more cooperation between golf, tennis and the café. He had been following the discussions on a revised contract for the café - he thought the issues had been resolved well. He said there had been some recent examples of graffiti about which he had notified the Council and it had been rapidly removed. He encouraged others to do likewise if they saw graffiti – it was important to maintain a good environment overall. Jessica thanked him for his comments and attendance

8 Any other Business.

8.1 Jessica asked if there was any other business. There being none she closed the meeting at 20.35 and invited those present to continue informal discussions with Committee members over a drink.