

Dear Friends,

By now you will hopefully have received a request for a new annual subscription or (if you pay by standing order) our thanks for renewing. FORCE membership at the end of last year stood at a new record of 476 and we have set ourselves a target of more than 500 members by the end of this, our tenth year. Our members are very important to us as a source of support and ideas, as well as providing a sense of legitimacy in our discussions and negotiations with councils and developers, and we greatly appreciate your renewed support.

Pollution Update

We continue to monitor river water quality every two to three months by sampling the number and variety of invertebrates found in the river at Crane Park Island. These samples had been recording a slow and steady recovery from the major pollution of October 2011, up until March this year when the river was hit by a second significant pollution event. The first thing we noticed was a green tinge to the river water and this was followed by a rapid growth of algae that covered the river bed. The invertebrate sampling in March showed a steep decline in the number and variety of invertebrates, no fish were recorded and the kingfishers, that had been investigating the island for nesting opportunities since January, had disappeared.

The pollution has been traced to the outfall from BAA Heathrow and is due to the use of de-icing agents on the runway and planes over the cold winter. This has been a problem in other years but it is only with the monitoring that we have been able to appreciate its impact on the river ecology. We met BAA for initial discussions in April and we are still assessing our response to the incident as we await answers to questions posed to the Environment Agency.

The most recent sampling, in the last couple of weeks, indicates that the pollution has been flushed through and the river is recovering again, although there is still doubt as to

whether kingfishers will breed at Crane Park Island this year. Our next survey will be on 27th June; this will be a public event so you are welcome to join us on the Island dipping platform from 7pm.

Meadway Orchard



Photo: Paul Smith

Better news this spring has come with the opening of a new fruit orchard on Meadway between Crane Park and Trafalgar Infants School. This piece of land, closed to the public for many years, has now been opened by the council and planted with help from FORCE, The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), local allotment holders and the children from Trafalgar School. Old varieties of apples and plums have been planted, interspersed with redcurrant bushes, and reminiscent of the orchard layouts that covered the local area in the late 19th century.

Work on site is ongoing, the open areas are regularly weeded, a woodchip path will be laid and wildflower areas planted. Any members who would like an involvement in the longer term management of the Orchard should contact info@force.org.uk

A planning application for a small community car park next to the orchard will come forward in the next couple of months. This will use the existing gated hard standing and will be available for use by the school, community centre and other community groups based locally.

Post Office Sorting Office

In our last newsletter we reported on our response to the planning application for the Twickenham Sorting Office site. We are pleased to see that Richmond council this month has submitted planning applications to

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bring Twickenham Junction Rough into public use and to install a dual cycle and walking route through this land, linking the post office development with Marsh Farm Lane.

We are aware that some residents local to the site are concerned about the implications of this scheme. Our view is that this proposal will ensure the long term protection of the land from development and, with careful planning and management, the Rough will become a major community and environmental asset for Twickenham. We will be involved in the details of this scheme if and when it moves forwards and we encourage all those with an interest to do likewise.

Craneford East Field Village Green Application

The council has announced that a local Inquiry will be held into our application for village green status for this field (also known as the College playing field), scheduled for the week commencing 15th July. Our application seeks to retain public use of the field and will not impact on any of the College's legitimate uses of the field. The status of the field has taken on a new significance with the College's new proposals for major re-development of their overall site. We have already collected 35 evidence forms from local people but would welcome any further evidences and information to take to the Inquiry.

Mill Road Improvements

The first stage of this work is now complete with the removal of the weir at Mill Road. FORCE is liaising with the council and the Environment Agency for further environmental and aesthetic improvements to the surrounding area over the next year.

Crane Valley Park User Surveys

We have been carrying out regular counts of visitors to Crane Park and other parts of the Crane valley over the last year or so and these are proving very helpful in appreciating the numbers and types of users. The data so far suggest that around 300,000 visitors a year use the Park's Meadway entrance, of whom nearly two-thirds are travelling further along the Crane to and from Kneller Gardens. These numbers are we suspect far in excess of the usage in other parts of the Crane valley and give some indication of Crane Park's value as a destination and green transport corridor. Our next survey is planned for Sunday 14th July.

We would be very grateful for support with this survey so please e-mail info@force.co.uk if you could help on the day.

Feltham Marshalling Yards

We have recently received details of a consultation which aims to limit the pedestrian route through the Marshalling Yards by closing off the tunnel under the railway and entrance from Godfrey way. If this was to take place it would restrict pedestrian access at a strategically important point up and down the Crane Valley. Closure of this route would mean a major detour on foot away from the river through Hounslow Heath, the Edgar Road estate and Hanworth Road. FORCE trustees will be responding to this consultation in detail but we should be grateful to members if they would also respond indicating their preference for continued pedestrian access along the Crane Valley.

Volunteer Days and other events



We have almost finished our season of volunteer days and our final event before the summer break will be "The big balsam bash" on Sunday 9th June, meeting from 10-30am.

This is our biggest event of the year and activities are planned at around half a dozen sites up and down the river, working with many other volunteer groups. Our focus will be in Crane Park around Hospital Bridge Road and, as well as removing the balsam, we shall be planting the newly bare ground with native wetland species. Everyone is welcome to join us for part or all of the day.

Other summer events include the kick sampling at Crane Park Island on 27th June from 7pm and the Bikefest at Kneller Gardens on 30th June. A Butts Farm Community Event - A celebration of Altruism in the age of Austerity - will be held on 31st August.

Our annual open day will be on 15th September based as usual at Kneller Gardens; and our new series of volunteer days will start every second Sunday from October - with the listing in our next newsletter.

Regards,

Rob Gray, Chair of FORCE