

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our Spring 2020 Newsletter. As I write the UK, along with much of the rest of the World, has been in lockdown for almost two months. Trustees continue to meet virtually to discuss and review the happenings in our parks and open spaces. This newsletter provides an opportunity to bring you up to date.

We hope that all members are safe and well. There are plenty of resources available locally for all who need help and support. If you have any particular concerns that are not being addressed then please contact us on info@force.org.uk

Activities during lockdown

We have cancelled all our regular volunteer days, walks and talks, and community engagement sessions – including all volunteer activities with partners such as TCV – until the end of May. We are reliant on permission from the local councils to undertake any activities in parks and open spaces and this has been withdrawn until further notice. Our activities for June onwards are still listed on our website but this may change in due course.

FORCE is providing regular reports on the parks and open spaces of the lower Crane valley to LB Richmond and LB Hounslow, based on information and observations from Trustees, members and social media.

We have increased our range of online activities for engaging with the outdoors. The FORCE Family Challenge is available on the [website](#) where you can also find new weekly learning based activity sheets, with ideas for children, families and anyone interested in engaging with nature and outdoor spaces.

Our social media is very busy – providing practical updates on local open space issues and sharing many images and videos of local natural features. These are proving very popular - please check out the links below for more details - and we would also welcome your photos and observations.

One thing to go ahead was the April meadow cut with Operation Centaur – part of our community learning programme - as the activity was classed as parks maintenance. Murdoch and Nobby mowed three meadows in Crane Park and the contractors returned several days later to rake up the arisings. The quality of these meadows has improved considerably over the course of three years and we have slowly extended the areas under horse based management. We have scheduled surveys of the invertebrate life on the meadows for late summer and hope this work can still go ahead.



Operation Centaur on Mill Road meadow

Observations from Parks and Open Spaces

Our observations show that parks and open spaces are being much more heavily used than before lockdown. Visitors on most days are the same or greater than during a sunny summer Sunday under normal conditions. Based on our long term survey data we believe this equates to 3000+ people every day using the open spaces of the lower Crane valley (20000+ per week) – around a three fold increase.

People are being very sensible though – not only practicing social distancing but also staggering their visits throughout the daylight hours and using all parts of our parks.

There are many more people in the woods, and other more secluded areas of Crane Park, and no more of the congregations we witnessed in Kneller Gardens during the first few days.

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People are exploring new areas. The numbers visiting Pevensey Nature Reserve, Brazil Mill and Donkey Woods have increased massively, though are still fewer than those in Crane Park.

There have been some problems reported – small groups of youngsters congregating and two small fires that were dealt with by the fire brigade for example. In general though people appear to be respecting both the parks and each other. The amount of litter seems to be reduced if anything and we are very grateful to the parks depts for more frequent litter bin emptying in response to the increased number of visitors.

Wider Perspective

FORCE are members of both the Crane Valley Partnership and the London Friends of Green Spaces Network. Their findings are also of increased park usage and considerate behaviour from most users. These findings were passed to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government as part of a major survey in April – when some 800 friends groups across the country responded in 48 hours – resulting in the edict from MHLG to keep parks open.

We hope that this crisis has emphasised to government the importance of parks and open spaces, and how much they are appreciated by the general public. There is still no statutory requirement for parks to be protected and maintained, and one outcome may be an increased demand for this to be rectified.



Wear and tear beside the path in Crane Park – one impact of social distancing

Other Updates

The new project to enhance Donkey Woods and Brazil Mill Wood was progressing really well before lockdown –with four well attended TCV volunteer days and lots of public interest. Our project has been extended to 2021, and a new proposal submitted to another funder for ecological surveys of the nineteen small ponds re-discovered during the TCV workdays.

LB Hounslow contractors, funded by TfL, installed a major new boardwalk and bridge in Brazil Mill in March which has much improved the pathway.



New bridge and boardwalk at Brazil Mill

The weir replacement at Mereway has been completed. This should help to reduce flood risk, and better control the flow distribution between the lower Crane and Lower Duke's rivers. The proposed fish pass may not now go ahead however, with a review expected later this year.

LB Richmond are planning a field trial of river restoration measures in the concrete lined lower Crane and we are supporting this. We hope to have more details in the next newsletter.

In the meantime keep safe and well – and keep in touch through our social media, website or email info@force.org.uk

Regards,



Rob Gray,

Chair of FORCE

