

**FRIENDS OF THE RIVER CRANE ENVIRONMENT  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2011  
REPORT FROM THE CHAIR**

Welcome and thank you for coming to our eighth Annual General Meeting. This AGM is somewhat overshadowed by the major pollution incident the weekend before last in the River Crane. You will I hope excuse me for not addressing this incident in my presentation, which necessarily considers the year from April 2010 to March 2011, but I will be giving a full briefing to members later in proceedings.

The year ending in April 2011 was another good one for FORCE. Our membership rose to over 450 and our finances remained in good order. I would like to give a big thank you to our Trustees for continuing to manage the organisation so well and to our members for their ongoing support.

This year we are saying goodbye to Trudi Morgan who is stepping down after eight years as a Trustee. I, along with all the Trustees, am very grateful for all Trudi's hard work on behalf of FORCE over the years, in particular her expert knowledge on educational and horticultural matters, as well as her unrivalled ability to persuade anyone who expressed a passing interest in the river to sign up as a member. Thank you Trudi; our loss is only tempered by the knowledge you will be continuing as first aider on our volunteering events.

Thanks also to Ian Taylor who is standing down as a co-opted member as he is currently spending much of his time in northern England. Ian has supported our volunteer days for many years now and for the last few years has taken on the co-ordinating role. We hope he'll be back with us before too long.

At this meeting we will be formally welcoming Gary Backler and Martin O'Gara into the fold. Both Gary and Martin have been regulars at our volunteer days and in recent months have also been attending our Trustee meetings on an advisory basis. We are pleased to say that Gary is now standing as a Trustee whilst Martin will be formally engaged as a co-opted member. The final proposed change is that David Trigg is standing in a new role as Deputy Chair. This role was instigated this year in order to provide a more robust management structure throughout the year.

The main work in the lower Crane valley this year has been with the London Mayor's "Priority Parks" project. At the AGM last year we expressed some concern regarding the direction of the project, following initial major trees work on the Hounslow side of Crane Park. I am pleased to say that this year the project has been brought largely back on track, due in no small part to the efforts of Yvonne Kelleher, Richmond council's project manager. The quality of the work has been sensitive and well considered and resulted in major benefits to the park, particularly on the Hounslow side. We hope to see further benefits as the project completes over the next six months.

There have been a number of other major projects initiated in the lower Crane, including a new cycle path through the Hounslow side of Crane Park, with plans for this to be extended upstream in the coming year. Andy will tell us later about the work he has been doing to develop new community links to the river in Richmond, Hounslow, Hillingdon and Harrow boroughs. We have also seen large steps forward in the production, for the first time, of a management plan for the entire Crane valley, under the GLA's All London Green Grid project. FORCE has been very active in tracking and supporting all these projects.

Nearer to home, we have submitted detailed responses to the council's proposals for a Twickenham Area Action Plan and the development proposals at Twickenham Station. In both cases our focus has been on mitigating any negative impacts and developing the potential for community links and environmental improvements along the Crane. Both projects are currently at an interesting stage and we remain hopeful that both will include real benefits for the Crane corridor.

We have also been undertaking our own projects. The "My River Crane" exhibition toured throughout the year and appeared at over 20 libraries, community centres, fairs and galleries. We created six new wetland features in areas of Crane Park grassland prone to flooding. We shall be out this Sunday on the next stage of planting up these wetland areas – everyone of course is welcome to join us. We have also overseen the installation of three new carved benches, bringing the total along the Crane valley to seven. We are hopeful that at least two further benches will be added next year, along with a walking guide to finding them.

The outdoor classroom project has been largely completed; lesson plans for all parts of the curriculum are available for local schools using Mereway Nature Park and Kneller Gardens. These lesson plans are also being adapted and used for a new outdoor classroom currently being constructed at the Hanworth Road end of Crane Park.

We anticipate that the year to come will also be very busy and we therefore greatly appreciate the enthusiastic help and support of all our members through the year. Whilst our immediate thoughts are necessarily on the aftermath of the recent pollution, we remain hopeful that improvements in the wider green corridor will continue apace next year and that the longer term outcome of the pollution incident may be an improved river environment.

Rob Gray  
Chair of FORCE  
November 2011