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RFU DUMPING ON COMMUNITY AGAIN

Sir,

The RFU is continuing to trash its frontage onto the Duke of Northumberland's River, ravaging a historic natural asset to the local community while protecting its commercial interests and its transient fanbase.

A couple of years ago it chose to locate its heating equipment as far away from its stadium as possible, and stuck it right by the DNR footpath, making an ugly, noisy and polluting permanent prospect for local residents. Now it has decided to locate all the heating equipment from its temporary World Cup facilities right up against the DNR footpath as well. Yet at the same time, the RFU claims to be so concerned about security that it has applied to install more robust fencing and to close the DNR footpath on match days.

Local resident groups in Twickenham and Isleworth have worked hard for many years to improve the DNR and its open spaces. The GLA and the two local councils have recently endorsed the importance of this work to the community by awarding £400 000 for further improvements. The RFU has a 700-metre frontage onto the DNR. It should be engaging constructively with the community to support these initiatives and help improve this historic and attractive stream and footpath, which pass beneath the shadow of its stands, for the benefit of local residents.

But instead the RFU, whose events are having an increasingly negative impact on the quality of the local environment, seems to be working against these initiatives. The ugliness and pollution that the RFU is creating on the DNR footpath risks permanently discouraging local residents from enjoying this valuable community asset, and permanently damaging the environment.

Recent surveys of the DNR footpath show that the number of people choosing to walk the stretch in front of the RFU is the lowest along this entire length of the DNR and River Crane. It is a mere one-tenth of the number who choose to use the footpath through the adjacent Modgen Sewage Treatment Works, which is barely 200 metres away and is the second largest sewage works in the UK!

Is this really the level of community engagement to which the RFU aspires? And is it really the 2015 Rugby World Cup legacy of which the RFU will be proud?

Gary Backler
Planning Director, Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE)