

THE FRIENDS OF THE SCRUBS
Registered Charity Number 1187120

TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT
20 April 2021

Abbreviations used in this Report

"The Friends"	the Friends of the Scrubs
"HS2"	High Speed Rail Network 2
"LCS"	Linford Christie Stadium
"LBHF"	London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, also "the Council"
"OPDC"	Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation
"WSCT"	Wormwood Scrubs Charitable Trust

President

Stewart Dalby

The Trustees

Elected AGM 9 April 2019

Stephen Waley-Cohen , Chairman (SW-C)

Smita Dave, Treasurer

Carmel McLoughlin Secretary

Miriam Shea (MS)

David Jeffreys

Co-opted

Sarah Johnson (11 October 2019)

Faye Thomas (10 November 2020)

Resigned

Nina Hall (October 2020)

Eleanor Botwright (co-opted 11 October 2019 - November 2020)

Tony Curzon Price (September 2019)

Meetings

The Trustees (formerly the Committee) have met several times during the year to deal with a variety of issues, mostly summarised in this Report. With physical meetings not allowed for most of the year, our meetings have been 'virtual' via Zoom. In addition to the multiple submissions to OPDC, HS2, and LBHF, as well as participating in all WSCT meetings whether in person or remotely, the Trustees, especially SW-C and MS, have had multiple contacts with Councillors and Officers on behalf of FOWWS to help ensure the proper management and protection of the Scrubs

WSCT Committee

The WSCT exists to ensure that this much valued area of open space is used for the exercise and recreation of Londoners. The affairs of the Trust are managed by the WSCT Committee currently chaired by Councillor Alexandra Sanderson. There are 5 members of the WSCT Committee – 3 voting members and 2 non-voting members, SW-C and MS, who are both trustees of the Friends charity. One or both of our representatives have attended all meetings. Kensington Aldridge Academy (the School) which is situated in very close proximity to the Grenfell Tower have been in occupation of the temporary school buildings on the 'Redgra' area since September 2017. The School pays WSCT a suitable market rent which is greater than the income it would normally earn by renting out the area for short term uses, such as lorry parking for trade shows at Olympia. It is anticipated that the School will remain on the Scrubs in the short-term and planning permission and rental arrangements are being reviewed on a year-by-year basis.

The Trust reported a surplus of £147,205 in 2019/20. The main reason for this surplus is the continued income received from the School. The total income from the School lease in 2019/20 was £306,460 (following the signing of a new licence). The School are now expected to remain on site until at least August 2021. The School buildings are likely to be on site until 2024-25. The rent from the Academy has provided a considerable boost to the Trust's finances. The unaudited 2019/20 accounts state that the Trust's closing unrestricted funds total £889,392. Historically WSCT has operated with an annual deficit, given normal operations. The main item of expenditure is the Grounds Maintenance (GM) contract.

Grounds Maintenance (GM) contract

Grounds Maintenance (GM) is undertaken at the Scrubs under a LBHF borough wide contract for all its green spaces which was originally let in 2008. Id Verde are the current GM contractors. The contract expires on the 1st February 2022. LBHF procurement process for the new contract is underway. At the most recent meeting of the WSCT Committee on the 24th March 2021 it was reported that the first stage of the GM contract has been completed. This is an advertisement to see what suppliers are interested in completing bids. Five submissions were received for the Wormwood Scrubs Lot. Two of these submissions were failed as they did not demonstrate any experience in grounds maintenance beyond cutting road verges. The remaining three suppliers demonstrated that they are capable of completing the specification and will be invited to submit an initial tender by the end of April.

HS2 and Sewer Diversion

Most members are aware that the route of the sewer diversion authorised by the HS2 Act is along the north of the Scrubs and that the “default” route to the construction site under the Act was from Braybrook Street. An agreement between HS2 and LBHF of 16 October 2016 enabled LBHF to request access to the site via a route directly from Old Oak Common Lane. This was subject among other things to LBHF obtaining the necessary consents such as planning permission and doing so by a date that did not delay the carrying out of the work. There were also provisions concerning consultation on condition and ecological surveys (required under the Act), mitigating the impact of the works and compensation. It became clear in about October 2020 that HS2 were preparing for access from Braybrook Street, having received no request to do otherwise. Thanks to a concerted campaign by local residents and Friends, brilliantly led by Faye Thomas who had painstakingly researched the various surveys and other work that had to be undertaken by HS2, LBHF were made to sit up and take notice. This culminated in their planning application to the OPDC for access onto the Scrubs from Old Oak Common Lane which was heard on 23 February 2021. The application was eloquently supported by our Chair, Stephen Waley-Cohen, and granted without objection. Unfortunately, when preparatory work started, HS2’s contractors’ were driving off the matting paths laid to avoid damage and failed to stay within their set boundaries, giving rise to anger on the part of Scrubs users. After complaint by members of the Friends, LBHF intervened and had a council officer on site to monitor the contractors’ activities. Assistant Director of Environment Stephen Hollingworth (to whom Richard Gill reported until February when he ceased to have any responsibility for the Scrubs) took direct responsibility. The Chair of WSCT committee Councillor Alex Sanderson has been active in holding HS2 to account for their conduct of the sewer works.

Hedging

With the Covid-19 Pandemic and ‘lockdown’ effective from the 23rd of March 2020, we saw an increased usage of the Scrubs (as did all parks and open spaces in London) with hugely increased numbers of visitors from all over London. The problems concerning the meadow area began in the very wet winter of 2019-20 when, despite regular requests to LBHF to manage the paths they became so muddy that people created the alternative ‘desire line’ paths through the middle of the meadow. Prior to this, walkers had generally been very respectful of the signs requesting avoidance of the eastern section of the meadow most likely to be the site of ground-nesting birds..

With a repetition of the very wet conditions in 2020-21 the main paths were unusable and the unauthorised paths were frequently used. This was further exacerbated by

the HS2 works. LBHF had authorised a team of volunteers led by Emma Ranson to provide in-fill to the gaps in the hedges to the east and south of the meadow, and the volunteers had taken the initiative to extend the protection on the north side, while also creating boundary guidance by dead hedging along the north side and west end, and westwards beyond the hedging on the south side. These extensions were only approved by LBHF after they had been put in place, and it has now agreed that they will remain until July this year, with no additional hedging. A lack of clear leadership and communication by LBHF had led to some works which were not agreed in advance and perhaps it was this that was in large part the source of strife. It was noted that there was no prohibition on walking in this area, but users were encouraged to avoid the more sensitive parts where ground-nesting birds were most likely to be.

LBHF has made some additional appointments which should benefit the Scrubs. Heather Marsh had been appointed Development Manager for the Scrubs by LBHF (in succession to Richard Gill when his remit widened to all parks in LBHF control), and in January an ecology officer for LBHF was appointed: Sebastian Dunnett. On 4 February he hosted a well-attended Zoom meeting concerning the ecology of the Scrubs. We raised with him the issue of the central grassland (meadow) not being within the Scrubs LNR and later made a formal request for LBHF to pursue this. In his acknowledgement to our request of the 26th March, Seb Dunnett indicated that this is being actively looked at.

Wormwood Scrubs Ecological Masterplan

This is the plan for the immediate future of the Scrubs . Like the Wormwood Scrubs Conservation Management Plan (see below) it is funded by HS2 under their agreement with LBHF. We commented on the Masterplan over a year ago (see last year's Report). The trustees have met Richard Gill on at least three occasions for walks round the Scrubs since his original appointment as Scrubs Development Manager in 2018 to enable him to understand the many precious aspects the Friends enjoy – the “more wild than tamed” theme, the absolute need for maintenance of the paths over winter. We have been instrumental in ensuring the biodiversity interventions initially proposed by consultants LUC were revised to ensure that the Scrubs was not “parkified”, that unwelcome features such as a pond (being both inappropriate and costly due to much maintenance needed) were not pursued, the planting of woods did not obscure the sunsets and sunrises that people enjoy. We ensured they understood that while woods were important so were open spaces that people enjoyed and that the Scrubs should not be carved up. Our Chair and Treasurer led the talks on proposals in the Masterplan and prevented the original plans from being implemented last year without these revisions.

Wormwood Scrubs Conservation Management Plan

This is the policy document for the management of the Scrubs for the long term. Although it has been in draft since November 2019 it informed the Masterplan (above). We commented in detail on it (circulated in January of this year). Our themes have been much as they were in relation to the Masterplan, with several positive proposals relating for example to children's play areas and paths.

Linford Christie Stadium

Everyone will be aware of the three major options for the redevelopment of the stadium: (1) athletics and sports centre including pitches (essentially substantial enhancement of existing facilities with some new building) (2) athletics and major indoor arena including entertainment venue for 20,000 people (3) athletics and professional sport stadium with capacity for some 30,000 people. Last year LBHF published an Outline Business Case for development of the stadium (available on WSCT website) with the three options to become the subject of the first stage of a competitive procurement process to take into account factors such as the impact on the open areas of the Scrubs, management of crowds, local transport and access, noise, community benefits, planning and legal issues. LBHF expected to be able to go out to tender by March 2021. The process has been delayed, largely because of council officers' preoccupation with HS2 issues. Your trustees remain committed to vigorous opposition to options (2) and (3) should either be favoured by LBHF. This is likely to be our major challenge for the foreseeable future. We are taking legal advice in connection with the options.

OPDC Local Plan

This long-running saga is not yet over. The first draft local plan was published for consultation in February 2016, followed by revised drafts in June 2017 and 2018. We commented in detail on all three. The examination in public ("EIP") held by the planning inspector who has to approve the plan before it can be adopted began in April 2019. We attended the session on the Scrubs. The last session was in July 2019. There was however a serious obstacle in the way of the plan's adoption: the loss of the Car Giant site north east of the Scrubs for development which meant a major reduction in the numbers of homes and jobs the plan was supposed to create. In the result the EIP remained adjourned, pending the submission by OPDC of "Major Modifications" (and Minor Modifications). It was only in February of this year that OPDC published their "Post Submission Modified Draft Local Plan" ("PSMDLP"). The modifications it contains have to be approved by the inspector before this version of the plan can go forward for consultation and then for the EIP to be resumed. They include the proposed development of the "Western Lands" to replace the Car Giant site – an area to the north west of the Scrubs. The PSMDLP tells consultees that they may only comment on modifications as opposed to those parts of the document that repeat previous proposals. However, we and the Old Oak Neighbourhood Forum, Grand Union Alliance and St Quintin and Woodlands

Neighbourhood Forum dispute that the PSMDLP consists of mere modifications; we claim that the changes are so major that the “old” proposals need to be reconsidered. We are submitting that the consultation process needs to be started again with a fresh draft plan on the whole of which there may be comment. OPDC have now formally rejected this argument, but with the other organisations we continue to ask that this be reviewed by the Inspector.

What however emerges from the modifications (and as a consequence of the loss of Car Giant) is that the proposed bridge to the Scrubs from the north which would probably have joined the Scrubs north of Chats Paddock is no longer proposed as part of the existing plan. The PSMDLP still clings to the idea of such a bridge, calling it a “potential walking and cycling route”. Just as important, there is now no proposal for entry to the Scrubs from Old Oak Station (the major HS2 terminus). The reason for this is the existence of the IEP (Intercity Express Programme) depot (the long shed above the northern boundary of the Scrubs) the lease of which will not expire until after the life of the local plan (about 18 years from now). Again, the plan seeks to keep this alive by saying ““Old Oak Common Station should not preclude a connection to Wormwood Scrubs””.

There are aspects of the PSMDLP which we will have to scrutinise, in particular Mitre Way Cluster and its proposed tall buildings. Last September, with others, we opposed the planning application for tall buildings part of the North Kensington Gate site off Scrubs Lane – regrettably but unsurprisingly the application was granted.

Old Oak Common Station

Planning permission was granted for the HS2 terminus and Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) station last May and the design has been published.

Overground stations on Old Oak

Another consequence of the loss of the Car Giant site has been the abandonment of the proposed Overground Station at Hythe Road. The Old Oak Common Lane Station on which there was prolonged consultation seems almost certainly not to be built.

Finances

To date we have needed minimal funds to maintain our objective of protection of the Scrubs. This is likely to change significantly if challenges continue at pace especially in connection with options being pursued by LBHF re LCS. We will need to raise campaign funds and to this end a Just Giving page has been set up:

<https://www.justgiving.com/friendsofthescrubs>

The Friends is now registered as a charity with HMRC which will allow tax on donations to be claimed back through gift aid.

The Charity currently has funds in the order of £1600. Outgoings are some £550, these include web hosting, plus £3600 legal fees for advice concerning LCS, an amount that has been lent to us.

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature

Name

Secretary/Chair

Date