



## *Friends of Wormwood Scrubs*

Newsletter No. 3    October 2017

In September, British bird-watchers were excited to note a new visitor to Wormwood Scrubs – a female **red-backed shrike** (the above photo is of a male; females do not have the black eye-mask and are a duller brown). This is the first ever to be recorded on the Scrubs and was observed on 23–24 September. The bird is slightly larger than a house sparrow, and feeds on insects and other small creatures, which it impales on thorns and other sharp objects. Red-backed shrikes were once widespread in the UK but have now become virtually extinct. The last recorded observation of a breeding pair in London was more than 60 years ago. Today, they are very rare migratory visitors to our southern and eastern shores – so you can see why this sighting is exciting – and relevant as a measure of the environmental health of our city.

Such events show how important it is to protect the Scrubs as a Metropolitan wildlife habitat. The Committee of the Friends of Wormwood Scrubs works hard to ensure this future, by not only routinely interacting with the Wormwood Scrubs Charitable Trust, which is responsible for the Scrubs, but also with the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, in

which the Common sits, and other bodies whose activities could affect the future of this major green space.

The past few months have seen a great deal of activity in terms of our helping to formulate a viable future for the Scrubs. We all know that municipal budgets are tight and the pressure to develop every pocket of non-residential land is high. However, green spaces are essential for healthy living, and the Friends strongly believe that it is particularly important that tranquil, inner-London green spaces remain available for all to enjoy – rather than fettered to any one commercially-driven interest.

In this newsletter, we bring you up to speed on what's been happening recently regarding our beloved Scrubs.

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## **The future for the Linford Christie Stadium and the surrounding sports areas**

### **• *Queens Park Rangers plans***

As you know, Queens Park Rangers is planning a proposal to take over and develop the Linford Christie Stadium (LCS) as the Club's new stadium. Their argument is that they need a larger 30,000-seater stadium for when they ascend to the Premier League (at the moment they are number 16 out of 24 in the lower Championship League with average attendances of around 14,000).

While appreciating that QPR is a much-loved local football team, we have no doubt that its presence on the Scrubs would destroy the unique amenities that the Scrubs has to offer for all who those who currently benefit from it (including the red-backed shrike!). Attached to this newsletter is a list of all the reasons why QPR cannot be allowed to take over the LCS. Because there are as yet no concrete plans or firm proposals for the community to examine, we are not yet in a position to mount a full campaign aimed at preventing such proposals being taken further. In the meantime, please alert all your concerned friends and neighbours as to the current situation.

### **• *QPR residents' meeting***

QPR has expended much effort trying to woo local stake-holders by offering various, apparently beneficial 'add-ons' to their proposals. In our opinion, QPR offers nothing that could not be made available – without strings attached – through other means.

In the summer, the Club held a meeting for local residents at the LCS site to explain its plans. This would involve turning the stadium round by 90 degrees. The only way this can happen is if it juts right out into the Scrubs – out of the footprint of the LCS. (In other words, the LCS is not big enough on its own.) There would be new corporate facilities and a catering college that would be based around the kitchen facilities needed by the Club. Local residents vociferously expressed their opposition; the Pony Centre (which benefits disabled children) in particular voiced fears about its demise. Great anxiety was also expressed regarding access routes to and from the Stadium, which seemed inadequate for large football crowds.

We wish QPR every success in locating a site for a larger stadium – should it need one – but definitely not on the Scrubs.

- *An alternative strategy for the LCS*

The Friends Committee is well aware that the LCS needs to be upgraded significantly, as well as making improvements in its management. We recently met Kensington Dragons, the youth football club based at the LCS (and which plays an important role in the life of the Scrubs), who reinforced these concerns.

Over the summer, Committee members met with other stake-holders and potential investors who could help us develop a sound financial and planning strategy for improving the LCS site in a way that would benefit the whole of London, as well as the local community – rather than a football-based business. Through our nominees on the Charitable Trust Committee, we have been able to make some feasible, positive suggestions as to how this might be achieved, and we understand that Council Officers, on behalf of the Charitable Trust, are now exploring some of these ideas.

They involve talking to Kensington Dragons, Thames Valley Harriers (whose long-time home is the LCS), and other major local stakeholders, including Imperial College and the Hammersmith Hospital. We know that the Hammersmith Hospital, which is right next door to the LCS, is concerned about any potential risks to its provision of healthcare, whether resulting from excessive noise, reduced access due to crowds and high traffic congestion (du Cane Road could be closed before or after home games, as happens in South Africa Road for the present QPR stadium), or considerably less parking space for staff and patients.

Furthermore, Imperial Healthcare Trust, which runs the Hammersmith Hospital, has already indicated that it has its own, longer-term development goals to provide state-of-the-art medicine for a growing London population; we speculate that any much-needed improvements could be in conflict with the QPR vision. Good health for millions is certainly more important than football entertainment for a few thousand.

The rights and requirements of local residents will also be taken on-board. We are also aware that the Scrubs needs to provide more for our younger residents (see below).

Anyway, there is much to consider, and may include the use of specialist consultants. Developing the right strategic plan is unlikely to be a rapid process. We will continue with our discussions, and if any members of the Friends have constructive comments or information to offer, we would be happy to hear them. All suggestions are welcome.

### **A temporary home on the Scrubs for the Kensington Aldridge Academy**

The Grenfell Tower tragedy not only directly affected local residents on the surrounding Lancaster West Estate in W11, but also resulted in the closure of the Kensington Aldridge Academy (KAA) recently built just next door to Grenfell. Most of the pupils had to be moved immediately to Burlington Danes School just next to the Scrubs. A new site was then sought to house temporary buildings for the KAA, while the interior of the school is deep-cleaned after having become covered in soot, and the black skeletal remains of the Tower is covered up in preparation for demolition.

With some urgency, the Charitable Trust was able to approve the use of Red Gra, the MOD Parade Ground on the east side of the Scrubs, as such a site, and buildings were speedily erected over the summer to be ready for the Autumn term. It is likely that the school will remain on the Scrubs until at least the summer of 2018. There has been little disturbance to the Scrubs. The KAA headmaster gave assurances regarding pupil behaviour, and the school was pleased to be given use of the Scrubs sporting facilities including the Linford Christie Stadium (LCS), and access to the Pony Centre. However, we have noted an increase in litter in the surrounding area, which needs to be accommodated (see below)

- *Use by local schools*

The KAA move has again brought to light the fact that sports pitches and the LCS could be used more during the week. The Friends Committee is starting to explore how local schools could better benefit from not only these facilities but also the potential for nature/ecological studies in the western, wilderness area.

### **Maintenance of the Scrubs**

- Financial report from the Wormwood Scrubs Charitable Trust

The accounts for Wormwood Scrubs for the last year show a reduced loss, and should show a good surplus this year. This is due to two special factors – the payment of back rent, for some years, of Scrubs space occupied by UK Power Networks, and the rent being paid by the Department of Education for the temporary use of the parade ground for the KAA (see above). There are no major public events planned on the Scrubs until summer 2018, when there is a provisional booking by Secret Cinema, covering four weeks. This would bring in extra money.

- *A Development Officer for the Scrubs*

You may remember that recently a post was advertised for a Development Officer for the Scrubs. Interviews for the environmental manager, paid for by HS2 money, are imminent. The appointee may also undertake some other duties relating to the Scrubs, not yet finalised.

- *Litter and other matters*

Litter has been a serious problem on parts of the Scrubs, particularly along the southern border. It has now been cleared up, and the western and southern border areas, including the picnic area there, are now being maintained. There have been comments that bags containing dog-poo have been left in the grass near exits, and Old Oak Estate residents have commented that the wooden seats onto the south side of the Scrubs provide a focus for anti-social behaviour (drugs and drinking, see below). Clearly, we need to consider waste disposal more carefully, and the location of seating. We have also noted that schoolchildren are dropping a lot of rubbish along the nearby new cycle-path. We will talk to KAA about it. In general, there are still not enough bins on the Scrubs in key areas (near paths and exits).

- *Security and safety*

There have been a few issues recently:

1. Youths have been riding noisy motorbikes at speed around the Scrubs. Please contact the Parks Police (020 8753 5999) if you see them, and take note of number plates.
2. Model planes and drones have been seen flying too early in the morning, occasionally over residential property (which is illegal) and at dangerously low heights. The Trust has agreed to investigate setting out some of the more important rules and erecting a sign to remind fliers of the need to abide by them.
3. Another issue that has arisen again is the Scrubs being used as a cover for drug-taking and dealing. This seems to happen along the southern edge of the Scrubs, where there is often an overpowering smell of marijuana. Large cars park on Braybrook Street, north side, and are visited by motor scooters and bikes. This starts in the early evening and can continue until the early hours of the morning, with groups of men and youths spending a great deal of time standing around in the bushes there shouting and laughing. Local residents are regularly in contact with the police, and are passing on relevant information to them (eg number plates). If you see anything suspicious, or have further information, please contact the ward police.

PC Shawn ROSS 645FH, Dedicated Ward Officer (DWO)  
College Park & Old Oak SNT  
Shepherds Bush Police Station  
Email: [Shawn.Ross@met.pnn.police.uk](mailto:Shawn.Ross@met.pnn.police.uk)  
Twitter: @MPSOldOak ([www.twitter.com/mpsoldoak](http://www.twitter.com/mpsoldoak))  
[www.met.police.uk/your-area/hammersmith-and-fulham/college-park-and-old-oak](http://www.met.police.uk/your-area/hammersmith-and-fulham/college-park-and-old-oak)

For immediate action, phone 101.

## **News related to OPDC and HS2**

- *Response to OPDC Revised Local Plan*

You will remember that the Mayor's Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) is the planning body for the Old Oak area north of the Scrubs that is to be developed. The OPDC boundary also includes Wormwoods Scrubs for the time-being (see below). The OPDC draft Local Plan has just gone through its second, 'Regulation-19' consultation, and our response has been circulated to our full membership. There is much in it that could affect the Scrubs, largely dependent on the nature of development on Old Oak. We have been pleased to receive really useful comments. Please continue to keep in touch!

The next step is for the OPDC to submit their final draft for the examination in public by a planning inspector acting on behalf of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Those who have responded to the consultation must be given the opportunity to appear at the examination and we will certainly want to. It is likely to take place in early 2018.

- *Current status regarding removal of Scrubs from the OPDC area*

In November 2016, a review of the OPDC commissioned by the Mayor recommended that the feasibility of excluding the Scrubs from the boundary should be investigated. The Committee thinks it would be preferable for us to be excluded from the OPDC and returned to LBHF. Our most recent information regarding any such investigation is that OPDC and LBHF officers have noted: "Any future consultations related to boundary matters [in relation to Wormwood Scrubs] should wait until such time as both statutory bodies [for OPDC and LBHF] have been adopted". If it happened, the process of removing the Scrubs could take up to a year.

- *Ecological enhancement/sewer*

An unexpected benefit of HS2 was the proposed ecological enhancement of the Scrubs to compensate for loss of habitat elsewhere on the route (touched on in previous newsletters). A proposal has been agreed between

HS2 and LBHF, subject to some alteration of the detail. There is to be an environmental manager to oversee the work, as mentioned above.

We have no date at the moment for the commencement of work on the Stamford Brook sewer diversion on the northern edge of the Scrubs but test boreholes will soon be sunk.

### **FOWWS charitable status**

The Committee has been thinking, for some while, about registering the Friends of Wormwood Scrubs as a charity. There are considerable advantages in raising funds etc. Indeed, when our constitution was adopted in January 2005, we were unable to register our association with the Charity Commission because of insufficient income. The current minimum annual income for registration is £5000. We have no subscription and the income arising from our deposit account is tiny. We have, however, been recognised as a charity by HM Revenue and Customs since 2008. We could apply to the Charity Commission for registration as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), which requires no minimum income but does require a much more elaborate constitution with detailed provision for such things as the use of funds, employment of staff, different forms of election of trustees (committee), much of which we do not need. It would be a considerable (although not impossible) task to tailor such a constitution to our requirements. The Committee has considered whether, in order to enhance our status by becoming a registered charity, we should undertake such a task, but do not consider it to be necessary at present. It is something that will be kept under review.

### **Old Oak Neighbourhood Plan and other local news**

In the last newsletter, we mentioned proposals for a Neighbourhood Plan, covering a series of areas in and around the OPDC area. A neighbourhood plan is a set of policies developed by local people that guides development in their area, and is in principle a good idea. The Friends agreed to join the Forum proposing the Plan. However, the consultation over the summer revealed less support than expected. Several groups on the south, east and north side of the Scrubs asked to be taken out of the area covered by the Plan, including CarGiant, Burlington Danes School, Latymer Upper School (playing fields), the Linford Christie Stadium (via Hammersmith and Fulham Council) and the Old Oak Estate. As a result, the Friends Committee agreed that they could see no further advantage for the Scrubs to be part of this Plan.



The Old Oak Neighbourhood Plan still represents several areas on the far west side of the Scrubs in the Borough of Ealing. Residents there will doubtless remain in a strong position to challenge unsuitable local development, as well as influence HS2 and OPDC development. There are now several residential areas around the Scrubs with Neighbourhood Plans in place, including Brickfields covering the area around Scrubs Lane, and St Quintin going deeper into North Kensington. The Old Oak Estate, to the south of the Common, hopes to have its own Neighbourhood Plan in due course. There is no reason why all these groups, including the Friends, cannot work together to protect our local heritage and natural resources as and when necessary.

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### **About the Friends of Wormwood Scrubs**

All of you receiving this newsletter have signed up to be Friends of Wormwood Scrubs – an active lobbying and pressure group that aims to protect the unique nature of Wormwood Scrubs Common. You have appointed a Committee, which – as volunteers – does its best not only to track and influence any changes, activities or decisions concerning the Common and its environs, but also to monitor its maintenance.

### **Current committee members**

Chair: Stewart Dalby ([dalbygray@aol.com](mailto:dalbygray@aol.com))  
Secretary: Miriam Shea ([miriamshea@btinternet.com](mailto:miriamshea@btinternet.com))  
Treasurer: Tony Curzon Price ([tony@curzon.com](mailto:tony@curzon.com))  
David Jeffreys ([david\\_jeffreys2@hotmail.com](mailto:david_jeffreys2@hotmail.com))  
Stephen Waley-Cohen ([stephen@swc-office.co.uk](mailto:stephen@swc-office.co.uk))  
Smita Davé ([eynham@gmail.com](mailto:eynham@gmail.com))  
David Lindo ([dartfordwarbler@gmail.com](mailto:dartfordwarbler@gmail.com))  
Carmel McCoughlin ([ck.shirley@virgin.net](mailto:ck.shirley@virgin.net))

Newsletter editor: Nina Hall ([nina@ninahall.org](mailto:nina@ninahall.org))

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham are the Trustees of the Charitable Trust which owns the Scrubs, and the two committee members from the Friends sit on the Trust Committee, along with three Councillors supported by the relevant Council Officers.

**Join us and have a say!**

The more Friends we have, the more effective and influential we can be, so please do ask anyone whom you think ought to be a Friend to sign up on: [www.friendsofwormwoodscrubs.org.uk/join](http://www.friendsofwormwoodscrubs.org.uk/join).

The Friends welcome its members' views at all times, and are pleased to receive any useful relevant information regarding Scrubs issues. You can send information and participate in discussions via: [fowws@googlegroups.com](mailto:fowws@googlegroups.com).

You can also look at the website at: [www.friendsofwormwoodscrubs.org.uk](http://www.friendsofwormwoodscrubs.org.uk)