



Friends of Wormwood Scrubs

Newsletter No 1 February 2017

A belated Happy New Year to all our members of the *Friends of Wormwood Scrubs*, and a welcome to the first of a series of regular newsletters on developments and events concerning Wormwood Scrubs – our beloved Common. The aim of the Friends is to conserve the Common as ‘more wild than tamed’, while staving off the worst imprecations of developers, and also encouraging the advancement of well-managed sports facilities and leisure amenities.

We – the Friends management committee, that is – have not been as frequent, as we used to be in communicating with you as members. This is partly because on many issues we have now moved into an intensely technical phase in discussions with various bodies whose activities affect the Scrubs in some way. These bodies include the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC), the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (LBH&F), HS2 and Transport for London (TFL). It is also because we are all busy and it takes time. However, we are intent on doing better.

Events in January

January 2017 was a busy time for the committee and members, and culminated in a spate of meetings involving a number of bodies, both official and voluntary. These all have varying agendas for the momentous task of regenerating the area around the Scrubs, which could impact the Common in various ways.

Tunnel *versus* bridge

Last year, there had been considerable discussion about building a tunnel from the putative Old Oak rail terminus on the north side of the Scrubs to Victoria Road in North Acton. Early in the month, there was talk that TFL, the department responsible for this, had changed its mind. Rumour had it that the plan now might be to build a bridge instead. None of the local resident associations, nor your committee, feel that this would be a good idea.

We have been unable to obtain any further clarity, possibly because there has been a changing of the guard at TFL. However, a meeting has been arranged for the end of February with the new TFL officials. Our committee members, David Jeffreys and Miriam Shea, hope to attend, so we should know more then.

A possible Neighbourhood Plan

On 26 January, we had a meeting about a new Neighbourhood Plan, which covers residential areas close to and possibly including the Scrubs. It has been put together by Henry Peterson – a former Director of Policy and Administration of LBH&F and thus extremely knowledgeable. The aim is to allow local residents to have a say in the development of various areas affected by the proposed Old Oak development north of the Scrubs, for which the planning authority is the OPDC. Henry has set up an interim Old Oak Neighbourhood Forum (OONF) whose purpose is to draw up the Plan. A neighbourhood plan aims not necessarily to contest or frustrate the goals of the local authority planners (in this case, the OPDC), but to run alongside it and constructively input the views of the area's residents and workforce.

The Friends are not currently members of OONF – although our members agreed more than a year ago that we should be. The question of membership has been re-visited, partly because of the possibility that the Scrubs will come out of the OPDC (see below). Two members of the Friends, Stewart Dalby and Nina Hall, live in the area covered and attend Interim Forum meetings. Henry expressed his earnest wish that the Friends would confirm their membership of OONF. He stressed that it would allow us to reach out

not only to the existing communities around the Scrubs but also to workers and employees who would come to live in the area; this would expand our membership – something that we are keen to do.

Henry asked the Friends committee for a decision on membership before he presented the Plan to the OPDC Planning Committee in an informal session on 1 February. We agreed unanimously to confirm membership, and to inform our governing body, the Charitable Trust at the LBH&F, of our decision. Discussions with OPDC are ongoing.

Planting trees for pigs?

A lady from an outfit called pannage.eu contacted us with a curious plan. She explained that the goal of pannage.eu was to re-instate rights on common land as a way to promote British pannage pork, and export it as a traditional product to EU markets. To this end, the group intended to ‘guerrilla’ plant 80 to 100 mulberry trees, 80 to 100 apple trees and 20 to 30 pear trees in Wormwood Scrubs for the purpose of ecological enhancement. On the Friends behalf, one of our committee members, David Jeffreys, replied. He pointed out that the idea was counter-productive regarding the protected ground-nesting birds and also many Scrubs users (and as far as we know, there are no pig farmers in North Kensington!). In any case, the Charitable Trust would have to give permission for any tree planting – and, indeed, the LBH&F has already agreed an extensive ecological development plan to be funded by HS2. The lady has confirmed that her group would not go ahead with the planting.

Rubbish and dumping

There is an issue concerning all members of the committee, but particularly Friends’ members who live on the southern boundary of the Scrubs, in Braybrook Street. This is the poor maintenance of the Common in terms of appalling littering, lack of rubbish bins and rubbish collection, the dumping of large items like fridges and sofas, and anti-social behaviour. It was decided that we should raise the issue as soon as practicable with the Trust, and possibly the contractor responsible for maintenance of the Common.

Interactions with the OPDC

On the final day of the month, 31 January, committee members (Nina Hall and Stewart Dalby) attended an OPDC forum at Cumberland House on Scrubs Lane. Victoria Hills (the CEO of the OPDC) was the main presenter, and it was good to get information from the horse’s mouth for a change.

During question-time, we were able to address two issues that are important to the Friends:

- *Two-stations concept for the Overground*

The first was the ‘two-stations’ solution to Overground routes across/around the Scrubs, proposed a few years ago by TFL. Members may recall that TFL favoured a viaduct, which would have effectively chopped off the north-west corner of the Scrubs and then gone across it. That idea was fortunately knocked on the head (a Friends-organised petition played an important part here), and committee members were involved in talks that arrived at a two-stations solution, thus avoiding the viaduct proposal. One benefit of two stations is that it could help discussions on the sensitive question of northern access to the Scrubs.

There had been talk of a plan to revert to having just one station, however. Hills confirmed that it was not the case (as did Tom Cardis, the Head of Planning at the OPDC): the two-stations option remained policy. Cardis also reiterated that some EU funding had already been received for the preliminaries to any building.

- *Leaving the OPDC?*

The second concern was the question of whether the Scrubs should remain within the OPDC (as it is now). In his November review of the OPDC, the Mayor had indicated that he was minded to place the Scrubs outside the OPDC’s remit. Hills confirmed this, and added that the recommendation would be taken before the OPDC Board and its imminent new Chair. She also emphasised that it would take time for the exit to happen: first, there would be a public consultation; then the matter might go before the London Assembly; and finally, there would have to be a Statutory Order under the Localism Act 2011. New boundaries would have to be drawn.

Building around the Scrubs boundaries

One concern of committee members (and indeed OONF) is the extent and quality of the development of building within the OPDC area that might affect the visual amenity of the Common. We all enjoy its rural tranquility, unusual in such a central part of London (Zone 2).

- *HS2 station development*

Of particular interest and concern is the OPDC proposal to build a tall tower block above the HS2 station (this will be immediately along the northern edge of the Scrubs to the west). The station will be constructed over the

next 10 years. (Incidentally, no construction materials are to be stored on the Scrubs as originally planned). Official HS2 plans show no such over-building, but deep-piling will be in place to allow it to happen at a later date. Committee members have questioned various HS2 and OPDC officials about this prospect, and it appears that no decisions have yet been taken. Our impression is that HS2 is not keen on the idea and wants a simple station layout – unlike the more grandiose scheme desired by the OPDC.

- *The Crossrail cock-up*

Another issue of interest is the construction of the Crossrail depot and its numerous sidings to the east of the HS2 station. This is of essential importance to the running of Crossrail (now the Elizabeth Line). They take up a large area of land along the northern edge of the Common.

Now, the nub is that the OPDC was planning to build luxury flats (probably high-rise) on this land. However, Crossrail has gone ahead and put in piling for the depot and the sidings that are unsuitable for over-building. Politics demands that the Crossrail operation cannot be delayed to make changes. The result is that there will be no tower-block building on this site for between 20 and 30 years – if ever, since estimates suggest that it would cost half a billion to move the depot and sidings or build a some kind of support decking. Andy Slaughter, the H&F MP, reports that the Mayor is “livid” – but we agree that it is rather good news for Scrubs lovers.

Developing news

Queens Park Rangers Stadium on the Scrubs?

We are aware of the recent announcement (*Evening Standard*) by Queens Park Rangers management regarding an option that the Linford Christie Stadium (which occupies the south-east corner of the Scrubs) will be knocked down to make way for the new QPR stadium.

The Friends committee is monitoring the situation closely; we are likely to be strongly opposed to such a proposal that will be an enormous development hosting very large crowds – and actually on property that is owned by the Charitable Trust, and designated as Metropolitan Open Land. We hope to be able to tell you more in the next newsletter. We can also discuss the matter at the Next AGM in April (see below).

A 10-year vision for the Scrubs – a volunteer needed

Here is something that you might not know. Wormwood Scrubs is not only our favourite managed-wilderness and sports-pitch area in west London; it is also big business – and getting bigger. The Scrubs has an income of about £600,000 a year from its lease of a car-park to the adjoining Hammersmith Hospital. It also is about to be in receipt of a large sum of money from HS2 for ecological enhancement. Now, this is not free money to spend, but it does mean that the Friends must get serious about forming a view of how those resources should be spent.

This is why we are looking for a volunteer to work on a 10-year vision for the Scrubs. This person has probably been involved in strategy and planning work in some professional capacity. Maybe they are going to be retiring soon or have retired. Or they may have time on their hands for other reasons. Anyway – for the right person – this is a really exciting job: how to organise a huge community asset (with a potential income stream) to deliver a mission set by the Charitable Act of 1879. If you know of anyone that this would suit, please ask them to email committee member, Tony Curzon (<mailto:tony@curzon.com>).

Date of Annual General Meeting:

3 April at 6.30pm in the Pavilion pub, Wood Lane, W12 0HQ

Please put this date in your diary and – if you can – encourage like-minded friends/neighbours to join us.

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 (<mailto:dalbygray@aol.com>)

Secretary: Miriam Shea (<mailto:miriamshea@btinternet.com>)

Treasurer: Tony Curzon Price (<mailto:tony@curzon.com>)

David Jeffreys (<mailto:david.jeffreys4@btinternet.com>)
Stephen Waley-Cohen (<mailto:stephen@swc-office.co.uk>)
Smita Davé (<mailto:eynham@gmail.com>)
David Lindo (dartfordwarbler@gmail.com)
Nina Hall (<mailto:nina@ninahall.org>)

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham are the Trustees of the Charitable Trust that owns the Scrubs, and the Friends nominate two of our committee members to be co-opted onto the Trust Committee, with three Councillors supported by the relevant Council Officers. This arrangement – which we fought hard to achieve – has been a great success and gives us all real clout in all the complicated conversations happening around the Scrubs and its future.

Join us and have a say!

The more Friends we have, the more effective and influential we can be, so please do ask anyone that you think ought to be a Friend to sign up (no charge!) on: www.friendsofwormwoodscrubs.org.uk/join. We will soon be printing small cards giving joining information, so that anyone wanting them can carry them onto the Scrubs and hand them out.

We welcome your views at all times, and are pleased to receive any useful relevant information you might have. You can send information and participate in discussions via <mailto:fowws@googlegroups.com>.

We hope to send out a newsletter between four and eight times a year, depending on what is going on. You can also look at the website at <http://www.friendsofwormwoodscrubs.org.uk>.