



Friends of Wormwood Scrubs

Newsletter No. 2 June 2017

The dog rose is in bloom on the Scrubs and plants are growing furiously. It's a great time of the year to enjoy the tranquil beauty of the wilderness, or take advantage of the community sports areas. Worryingly, all this could be threatened by certain proposals (see last section on QPR, page 4), so it's a busy time for the Friends Committee in raising awareness about preserving the special nature of our favourite green space in west London. Here's all the latest news.

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News about the Scrubs

- *Litter clearance*

The Friends were concerned about the amount of litter that had collected on the Scrubs, particularly along the woodland edges. We can report that most of it has now been cleared, but work is still ongoing. More needs to be done along the western edge. We have asked the Charitable Trust and the Council to look at providing more bins in key locations.

- *New cycle quiet-way*

Last year, it was agreed to construct a new cycle 'quiet-way' essentially linking Scrubs Lane to Acton. The Friends had input in ensuring that a tarmacked cycle route did not damage the integrity of the Scrubs. It starts just north of the car-park next to Scrubs Lane and goes around the south side of the Scrubs to Braybrook St. Construction has started, with clearance going on at the northern starting point.

- *Café on the Scrubs*

There is a new, much-needed community-run café by the outdoor gym next to the Stadium, which is operating at weekends over the summer. Martin Murphy who runs it assures us that the espresso coffee machines will use only "the finest Fairtrade coffee from the Agust Roastery in Brescia Italy". Please support it. Martin adds: "More volunteer help is needed and a trained *Barista* would not go amiss."

- *Events to raise money*

The Wormwood Scrubs Charitable Trust is considering how best to bolster its reserves for the upkeep of the Scrubs. Reserves run out in roughly two-to-three years' time. Concerns have been raised on whether maintenance funds are spent to best advantage for the benefit of the Scrubs. The current maintenance contractor is Idverde (formerly Quadron) whose contract runs out in 2021. As we mentioned in the last newsletter, two fund-raising event types are being considered: Secret Cinema, which will not happen this year, but could provide some much-needed income; and a possible Winter Event, which would certainly not happen until October 2018 at the earliest.

News about the Friends

- *A well-attended AGM*

The Friends had its AGM on 3 April. It was well attended, and the main topic, inevitably, was the possible move of Queens Park Rangers Football Club (QPR) to the Linford Christie Stadium (which sits near the south-east corner of the Scrubs). In discussions, it became crystal clear that Friends' members (who are composed of regular Scrubs users and supporters from far and wide, as well as environmentally/community-conscious local residents) were strongly opposed to such a development. Preliminary discussions on actions to counter any such proposal were discussed enthusiastically (more below).

- *New committee member*

The current committee was re-elected and a new member has been co-opted – Carmel McCoughlin – whom we welcome!

Neighbourhood developments

- *Local Plan status*

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (LBHF) is in the process of preparing its Local Plan. This outlines the vision and preferred options for development in the Borough for the next 20 years. Under the Wormwood Scrubs Act 1879, LBHF is Trustee of Wormwood Scrubs Common including the Linford Christie Stadium for the benefit of the public. The Plan has just been through its second consultation (Regulation 19) and is approaching its Examination in Public. Although LBHF remains the planning authority for the stadium, it is no longer the planning authority for the rest of the Scrubs – the OPDC is – see below. Any changes in the Local Plan may be of interest to the Friends if proposals are made regarding development around the Scrubs, so we do scrutinise them. It should be noted, therefore, that there is no hint in the latest Plan of a slice of the Scrubs being surrendered to a private football club.

- *OPDC developments and Scrubs exclusion status*

The Friends continue to monitor developments north of the Scrubs that are under the planning aegis of the Mayor's Old Oak and Park Royal Development

Corporation (OPDC), and may affect the Scrubs as the largest and most important local green-space amenity. At the moment, the Scrubs is included in the OPDC area, but (possibly significantly) not the Linford Christie Stadium. However, an independent report prepared for the Mayor has recommended the exclusion of the Scrubs from within the OPDC boundary and its return to LBHF. The Friends' Committee broadly supports this move. Liz Peace CBE has just been appointed as the new Chair of the OPDC, and we await with interest as to what happens regarding the Scrubs' planning authority status.

The OPDC's Draft Local Plan is due to be published for its second (Regulation 19) consultation after the General Election. This is the Plan of most interest to the Friends because it covers the Scrubs and area to the north. We had concerns about the first Draft on which we commented extensively; the likelihood is we shall have quite a bit to say about the second.

- *The Old Oak Neighbourhood Forum consultation status*

In the last newsletter, we mentioned that proposals had been made for a Neighbourhood Plan, covering a series of areas around the OPDC (details, if you wish to get involved, are at oldoakneighbourhoodforum.org). A neighbourhood plan is a set of policies developed by local people that guides development in their area. The Friends were asked to join the Forum proposing the Plan, and we have done so. The Plan thus includes Wormwood Scrubs (with its Stadium). The proposal is in its consultation stage, so if you wish to respond on the Plan, go to: www.london.gov.uk/OldOakNF. The consultation runs until 17.00 on 15 June.

- *Nextdoor* (<https://oldoak.nextdoor.co.uk>)

Those of you who live within the West London neighbourhood might be interested in joining Nextdoor, which is a private social network for local communities. It's a good way to discuss and form a consensus on issues that affect local communities. At the moment, there is a lively thread regarding QPR and Linford Christie Stadium issue.

The QPR bid to put a commercial football stadium on the Scrubs

To get everyone up to speed, here is a summary of the status and some background information (not fake news we hope!), to help you decide on how we go forward.

Background

In February this year, press reports appeared announcing that QPR was exploring the possibility of developing a new 30,000-seater football stadium on the site of the Linford Christie Stadium (LCS) on Wormwood Scrubs Common. QPR says its current home in Loftus Road is not big enough to fulfill its ambitions.

We understand that years ago, QPR had the opportunity to acquire more land in Loftus Road but failed to do so. More recently, it tried and failed to acquire land owned by Cargiant north of the Scrubs to build an ambitious stadium complex and housing development. It had in fact acquired land interests within the OPDC, in partnership with Genesis Housing, to create a new housing development (the tower blocks in the plans are architecturally not to our taste, we might add) – so it seems to be as much a property developer as a football club.

Part of the LCS is currently leased to the athletics club, Thames Valley Harriers (TVH) – until next year at least. However, due to lack of Council investment, the Stadium is now somewhat dilapidated. TVH seem happy to go into partnership with QPR, whose proposal is to build both a football stadium and an athletic track, together with various other buildings such as offices, a school or catering college, and presumably a QPR retail outlet. In case you are wondering if there would be room; in fact, the site is somewhat bigger than that at Loftus Road. QPR claims it will be a community stadium. It has been contacting some local stake-holders in efforts to get support.

Huge obstacles in the way

- ***The legal obstacle***

The main obstacle to this ever happening is a legal one. The LCS, like the rest of the Scrubs, has Metropolitan Open Land Status (Green Belt), and can be built on *only* in very exceptional circumstances. Also, the consent of LBHF as Trustee under the 1879 Act (see above) to any new building would be required. The Ministry of Defence also has vestigial rights under the Act, in

particular the right to refuse permission for the construction of any building on the Scrubs.

LBHF could apply to revoke the MOL status of LCS, something it attempted in 2011 and failed to achieve. This was for some development around the Stadium, not the Stadium itself. So far, it has not made its position clear. One Council spokesman said: “The Council is keen for all three of the Borough’s football clubs [Fulham, Chelsea and QPR] to remain in the Borough. It is very early in the process, and to date officers say they have not seen any detailed proposals from QPR on which to comment.”

- *Major local opposition*

The second major obstacle is that it is now obvious, from many discussions, that there is likely to be strong opposition from many local stakeholders. Local residents have expressed their anxiety and depression on hearing of the idea.

- *The Friends opposition*

The Friends have been looking at the proposal, and what its effects would be on the Scrubs and the surrounding communities, with forensic scrutiny. We can now say that – despite assurances from QPR – we are strongly opposed to any such development because of the inevitable serious damage it would inflict on the Scrubs and also the unbearable disturbance it would cause to the lives of local residents.

Furthermore, a major concern would be the loss of LCS as a genuine community stadium, since any community benefits proffered by a private commercial organisation such as QPR would be completely under its control, and availability at key times such as Saturday afternoons necessarily limited.

- *Summary of objections*

(i) The stadium would reduce the amount of green space available to the community in an area of London already congested and lacking green space.

(ii) The noise from matches and other inevitable public events would ruin the tranquility of the Scrubs, particularly at weekends, which is the time when many working people use a recreational visit to the Scrubs to re-charge their batteries. It would also make the lives of the thousands of local residents miserable.

(iii) Even if the stadium were cut off from the Scrubs, football-goers would inevitably wander all over the Scrubs, damaging ecologically sensitive areas

and destroying habitat, spreading litter and obliterating the role the Scrubs as a quiet place to escape to. When the HS2 station is built, then large numbers of fans from elsewhere (who do not know and may not respect the Scrubs) will walk straight across the protected wilderness area to the stadium. In any case, access to the stadium area is rather poor (other than from the Scrubs side).

(iv) Inevitably, there will be unpleasant and severe parking problems all around the area, which would cause serious annoyance and frustration to residents.

(v) The traffic congestion, which is already bad on Scrubs Lane and Du Cane Road, will get worse.

In general, the disruption to this pleasant corner of west London will be considerable.

- *Actions*

The Friends are proposing forming a ‘**Stop QPR**’ group of stakeholders, which will campaign vigorously (something that we have considerable experience in).

We also want LCS to be a genuine community sports hub, free of immediate commercial interests, and feedback so far suggests that there is considerable enthusiasm for this approach. The Committee is currently assembling a series of interesting and potentially exciting solutions.

We will keep you informed about developments, both on the QPR proposal and Friends/ stakeholders alternative plans.

- *Some background information on QPR*

- (i) Football status

The current Loftus Road stadium holds 18,439 seats. It is apparently loved by many supporters as being very traditional, offering views close to the pitch.

QPR wants a new stadium that holds at least 30,000 seats, on the basis that it will undoubtedly be in the Premier league – soon.

QPR is not in the Premier league; this season it dropped to 18th position out of 24 in the Championship League.

Average attendance is 14,500. The highest recent attendance was when playing Newcastle, when it reached the dizzy heights of 17,400.

(ii) Financial status

QPR has large debts (a figure of £305M has been quoted). The operating loss for 2016 was £98M.

The club recently incurred a large fine of £60M because of an inappropriate debt write-off by its owner.

However, because land values have gone up so much in the White City area, the Loftus Road site is now worth a tidy sum. QPR is now a property developer in partnership with OPDC interests.

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

Wormwood Scrubs is not only our favourite managed wilderness and sports-pitch area in west London; it also generates income. The Scrubs receives 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.

We are looking for a volunteer to work on a 10-year vision for the Scrubs. This is an opportunity to organise a huge community asset 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>).

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>)
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Newsletter editor: Nina Hall (<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.

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 <mailto:fowws@googlegroups.com>.

You can also look at the website at <http://www.friendsofwormwoodscrubs.org.uk>.