

Birchmere Campsite – Looking forward to a bright future!

Over the past years, Birchmere has had to navigate through some unexpected moments, from Covid to the major roadworks at Junction 10 of the M 25. However, we are excited that all these inconveniences will soon be the past and be history as the campsite moves forward to fulfil its aim to provide a first rate camping facility for scouts and other youth groups.

So last year was not going to be exempt, our campsite has had to work round the major roadworks of Junction 10 with the area being turned into a huge construction site. This major work caused the closure of the M 25 and A3 many times with compilations of minor and overnight closures frequently. This has caused much inconvenience to our visiting groups but we, together with the contractor, Balfour Beatty, have been able to work round most of the closures to allow successful camps to occur.

Birchmere is the campsite of Woking District Scouts and we are keen and proud to be able to offer our scouts the best outdoor experiences. For a nominal capitation fee every member of Woking Scouts can use the campsite for no individual charge. In return we ensure that this experience is carried out in a safe and secure environment. We find that other youth groups, when they visit us, are surprised how good the campsite is and the words “How come we never heard about this before” is a very frequent comment. Even though the road access is trying at times, the campsite has been busy with camps from Woking and further afield. The issues have been resolved by using other car parks etc. and over the year we have hosted small camps, Group family camps and even large District camps. Bookings are really busy with many bookings being made for many years to come.

After a long protracted conversation with our landlords, Surrey County Council, a new 25 year lease was completed. This will give us security for the future and allow for easier major grant applications. Birchmere would like to offer our appreciation to our solicitors, Morrisons, who supported us throughout the long lease renewal process.

It has been business as usual for campsite upgrades and improvements. Our recently erected commercial quality outdoor canopy has proved itself to be a great addition to the site with frequent positive feedback after its use. The campsite has accepted a quote to repair the leaking roof of Birch Lodge, one of our activity halls. Also the old fluorescent lights will be upgraded and the hall electric heating made more efficient. We are in the process of looking to change the way we maintain the grass field with the purchase of an efficient ride on specialised mower. Our old tractor will still be used for pulling trailers etc at Birchmere.

So, as you can see, the campsite has been busy and we haven't mentioned the 50 saplings and small trees that we've planted. Tree surgery that our landlords have done to reduce the large and potentially dangerous oaks just in front of the campsite. Redesigned steps that the work party have created at the entrance to reduce rain damage and make the descent to the site safer. Or the grass cutting that sometimes has to be done every week in peak growing seasons. General maintenance is required pretty well every week to repair or replace. Cleaning, weeding, ditch clearing, tidying the camp fire area. restocking the wood pile...the list goes on!

Birchmere would not be as successful as it is with out the amazing people who work to support it. Thanks go to our wardens, Steve and Katy, our booking team, Judi and Tracey, the Birchmere treasurer, Tracey and finally the Birchmere Management Committee and the weekly Wardens Work Party. This tremendous group of Scouters , both current and retired, repair, improve, remake or reinvent so much at the campsite. Here we especially mention, Terry, who maintains the grass, Alan who can fix almost anything and Ross for his skill and enthusiasm!

Finally, thank you to the scouts, guiders and their leaders who support the campsite and book visits or stays at Birchmere. It all goes to show that Birchmere is indeed....

“A Proper Little Campsite”.

Richard Mackie, Chair, Birchmere Campsite