

Consultation on the development of the sports facility on Cobourg Road, Burgess Park

First of all, Friends of Burgess Park ask that the consultation period be extended. A number of groups have not heard about the proposal and will not have had a chance to comment, many people are on holiday and Cobourg School has broken up so parents may not be aware of these plans. The consultation period has been very short.

Friends of Burgess Park support the provision of improved sporting facilities in the park. We are aware that residents on Cobourg Road do not like living on a rat run and the sporting community would like to remove the road between the sports centre and the current sports field. However, there are many problems with the current proposal.

1. Parking

According to the plans there will be a c.50% reduction in available parking (due to roads being removed), but a 50% rise in sports provision, and therefore a potential 50% rise in traffic/parking requirements. There is nothing in the plans that describes how this will be managed.

At one of the consultations the council representatives said that they were under no obligation to provide designs for parking/Cobourg Rd as part of the scheme although parking in the evenings, weekends and on Fridays is already hugely under pressure.

At the BMX track, parkland is used to provide parking space during special events -- not an ideal solution.

At another consultation, it was suggested that Waite St could be turned into a coach park to make up for loss of parking on Neate St. At the moment, coaches on Neate Street regularly park and leave their engines running. The proposal would mean that the pollution and the potential hazard would be moved nearer to homes and to a currently traffic free route heavily used by parents and children going to Cobourg School.

The possibility was also raised at a further consultation that a through road along Waite Street could still be introduced. As mentioned, this is currently a traffic free route and this would also negate the idea of a cul de sac on Cobourg Road as well as bringing traffic into a quiet area of the park used by families, picnickers, walkers and for impromptu sports activities.

2. Parkland

Which brings us to the proposal to surround the pitches with 10 foot high fences. This would effectively remove the ability for park users to use these areas unless they are part of formal sports activities. It has been suggested that the fences are a condition of the funding but they mean that those areas will stop being parkland.

If grassed areas in the park were improved there would be plenty of room for team sports. Many other parks in Southwark have open sports pitches (e.g. Peckham Rye and Southwark Park).

John Wade commented that access to all pitches would eventually be only through the Sports Centre. It would seem that the pitches are a way of generating income at the cost of a loss of open park space and connectivity in the park – the *raison d'être* of the original master plan.

3. Access

The fencing effectively cages off the whole rectangle from Trafalgar Avenue to the old R Whites wall, with the only through-route being a long narrow, north-south footpath sandwiched between two 10 foot high security fences.

The result will be an eyesore by day, and more or less a no-go route by night. We are concerned that the north-south path could later disappear entirely, under the justification of further securing the entire compound, or removing the problem alley.

This path is planned to be 2.5 m wide and, due to the configuration of the pitches, will no longer follow the route of Cobourg Road. This decision makes no sense from the view of providing access through this area. This is a heavily used route by pedestrians and cyclists. Once more the needs of parents and children going to Cobourg Road School have been ignored. Pedestrians will be in conflict with commuter cyclists who regularly use this route to cycle through the park or up Cobourg Road to the Old Kent Road. The access should be significantly wider to allow for safe and relaxed movement through this area, and there must be separate paths for cyclists and pedestrians. Considering the concerns that have been raised previously about pedestrian/cycling conflict in the park this is an extraordinary oversight.

3. Layout and Sports Centre design

The current configuration at the Community Sports Centre allows for casual sports activities to occur next to the formal pitches, and there is room for parents to gather and chat and other children to play. This contributes to a congenial environment which benefits the sporting area and the local community. It is not clear that this aspect has been properly considered for the new development.

The proposed plaza is basically some green space next to the road turning circle and as such will not adequately provide for a safe and relaxed environment.

There will be more floodlighting affecting wildlife areas.

The Sports Centre apparently requires some remedial work. However, the extension shown in the proposal seems to be speculative, without much careful thought about actual future use. Will the kitchen be improved? Are viewing areas provided facing the pitches? Could a cricket pavilion be included?

4. Tree loss

The configuration of the sports pitches would mean the removal of a number of mature trees. They are London planes (*Platanus x hispanicus*), and beautiful specimens (and very large for the park).

The trees store carbon, remove air pollution, hold rainwater (allowing it to be re-evaporated by the sun rather than disappearing into drains and sewers) and ameliorate extreme temperatures.

“Urban forests are threatened by development and complacency ... Keith Sacre of Barcham Trees, the largest container tree nursery in Europe, supplying more than 60,000 each year, says the standard street trees they sell to London boroughs are 3.5m high with a 14cm girth. He calculates that to replicate the leaf area of just one mature plane tree on the Embankment, 60 new trees would have to be planted. ... ‘There has to be a long-term commitment to recognising trees as the asset that they are.’ ” *The Guardian*, 15 Aug 2015

As well as having enormous environmental value, these trees create a park atmosphere in this section of Burgess Park. The new planting would not adequately compensate for their loss. The nature of the park is being threatened as this part of the park is being turned into a sports ground for a very limited range of formal sports rather than a park where a variety of activities is possible.

5. Sympathetic integration

The sporting development needs to be sympathetically integrated into the local community with careful consideration of the results, as they will have long-standing effects.

The impression given is that the prime consideration is to squeeze in sporting pitches without much thought about other park users, local residents and environmental outcomes.

6. Conclusion

Friends of Burgess Park do not feel that the guiding principles of the 2010 masterplan have been honoured in the current proposal. The aims were:

‘Opening Up Views’ – creating better visual and physical connectivity throughout the park.

‘Creating Meaningful Spaces – forming spaces that not only have a clear function but that also combine to create a park with a strong identity.

‘Adding Richness to the Park’ – acknowledging the existing diversity and richness of the different areas of the park, the varied user groups and the unique history of the site and reflecting and enhancing all of these elements throughout the park.

We ask that all of the concerns we have raised are addressed and that a new configuration of the site is presented for consultation. Thank you.