

LONDON PLAYING FIELDS FOUNDATION

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Future Merton / Local Plan Team
London Borough of Merton
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Dear Future Merton / Local Plan Team,

London Borough of Merton: Consultation on Stage 2a Draft Local Plan

Prince George's Playing Field, Bushey Road

Introduction

Prince George's Playing Field has been owned by the London Playing Fields Foundation since 1898. In recent years the playing fields have not been operated by the Foundation and have been used, on an ad-hoc basis for a variety of uses, including boot sales, fairs as well as football and the "stadium pitch" used by Raynes Park Vale FC.

London Playing Fields Foundation is a Registered Charity whose primary aim is to safeguard the long term future of its oldest site. It believes that the best way to do this is by taking back operation of the playing field and revitalising it so that it significantly increases participation in sport and physical activity and thereby enhances the benefit to the local community.

Over the past three years the Foundation has met with the former Council Leader, members and officers on several occasions to share its vision and explore options for the future for a more accessible, affordable and attractive sporting and physical activity hub. In order to ensure that the proposals meet local needs, the Foundation has consulted closely with the current occupier of the stadium pitch, Raynes Park Vale FC to shape the thinking of what the new facility will look like. It has also taken account of the views of other stakeholders including Sport England, The Football Association, Surrey County FA and Surrey County Cricket Club.

The Foundation is therefore submitting comments to the Local Plan in its capacity as a land owner, and a representative organisation for the promotion of sports and community activities for Londoners.

PATRON: HRH The Duke of Gloucester *KG GCVO*
HONORARY PATRON: The Rt. Hon. the Lord Mayor of the City of London
PRESIDENT: Baroness Hoey
CHAIRMAN: The Hon. William Cadogan

FOUNDED 1890: Incorporated by Royal Charter and Registered as The London Playing Fields Society.

Charity No. 302925

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FOREVER**



The Foundation also wishes to set out a vision for the way in which these objectives might be delivered and encourage the Council to introduce flexibility and positive steps towards the delivery of these policies. The Foundation will also be working to promote these objectives in a collaborative and open partnership with other interested parties.

Outline proposals

Based on its experience of modernising and up-grading its other sites across London the Foundation's intention is to provide a new artificial pitch and changing pavilion in the north east part of the playing fields, including a new stadium pitch for RPFVFC, as part of overall improvements to the playing fields to the north of the public footpath which bisects the site.

The remainder of the northern part of the playing fields would undergo significant improvement to address the historic tendency for them to become waterlogged. As part of an ambition to create a net increase in sports pitches, two cricket squares will be installed alongside enhanced football pitch provision for youth and adult teams. It calculates that as a result of these improvements for organised sport and informal exercise, the numbers using the site will rise to 64,000 per year, hugely contributing to objectives at section "O".

In addition to team sports, accessibility would be improved, with potential for additional facilities for exercise and general well-being and fitness, so we see the opportunity to consider ideas for a wider range of activities, as well as controlled public access through permissive footpaths or cycle links, and options for enhancement or creation of natural habitats. This will deliver the objectives set out in N3.4, and IN6.2, T6 etc.

Clearly the scale of the proposals will require significant external funding and the Foundation has undertaken research on how much could realistically be sourced from the Football Foundation, Sport England and London Marathon Charitable Trust and found that the total amount is well below what will be needed. The Foundation is therefore proposing a limited amount of enabling development in the form of affordable residential housing on the part of the site to the south of the public footpath. This area currently consists of the existing facilities for RPFVFC, which are in poor condition and uneven rough ground.

The whole site is designated as MOL and, whilst the sporting facilities may be considered as appropriate development, it is recognised that residential development would be considered as inappropriate development and very special circumstances would be needed.



Very Special Circumstances

The Foundation is working closely with the current leaseholder on the overall plans and with major social housing providers to put together a co-ordinated plan for the whole site to bring to the Council.

The Foundation contends that the proposal would comply with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 in that *the loss of open space resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location*. It believes that any damage to the openness of the site is countered by the following community benefits.

- Contributing to the Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024 by widening and increasing opportunities to play sport and be more physically active.
- Implementing the LPFF's successful Green Hearts project at the ground as a means of encouraging regular informal physical exercise.
- Relocating and upgrading the Stadium Pitch for Raynes Park Vale FC so that the club has a home base from which to widen and increase members.
- Addressing the issues raised in LB Merton's 2019 PPS of an under provision of 3G artificial pitches and an inadequate number of 7v7 and 9v9 pitches by providing a net increase in sports pitches.
- Addressing the insufficient supply of cricket pitches as mentioned in LB Merton's 2019 PPS by installing two new cricket squares under the guidance of Surrey CCC.
- Providing a home base for matches and training for a range of local organisations such as the Morden Little League, AFC Wimbledon Ladies, Raynes Park Vale Youth FC Youth and Wanderers FC.
- Making the field a much more attractive place to visit by enhancing biodiversity and improving drainage across the site.
- Working with AFC Wimbledon Foundation to introduce projects that contribute to reducing anti-social behaviour and crime.
- Ensuring high quality onsite management and maintenance of the playing fields to enhance the MOL designation.
- Enabling residential development of the appropriate type to contribute to the London Borough of Merton's increased Objectively Assessed Housing Need.

In relation to the residential provision the Foundation is in the final stages of selecting a Registered Provider of affordable housing with the intention of bringing forward a sustainable, composite and coordinated plan for the whole of the playing fields and the associated land ownership, on a "not for profit basis", with another charity so that all revenues and capital receipts will be recycled within the site. The Foundation and its chosen social housing provider would work closely with the Council and the GLA to make a significant contribution to the provision of new housing including providing 100% affordable



housing with a range of tenures to meet existing identified needs and also emerging needs for affordable housing including NHS and key workers in the borough, in accordance with the objectives of H4.1-3, and “D” policies on high quality design which are appropriate to this part of the borough.

We look forward to working with you on the delivery of these shared objectives.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex Welsh".

Alex Welsh
Chief Executive