



Friends of Wimbledon Park

Sport, Assets, Wellbeing and Communities

The Friends of Wimbledon Park (FOWP) is a voluntary umbrella organization that aims to give a voice to local people, community groups and other interested parties, to protect and enhance this well-loved heritage landscape, Heritage Wimbledon Park, for future generations. This is our second response to the Local Plan.

1) Preamble

- a) In January 2017 the Friends of Wimbledon Park submitted a Neighbourhood planning application. This included details of our Forum, the defined area, and Statement of Justification. We met with planners from Merton and Wandsworth but after discussion it was clear the application failed on the grounds that no one lived in the defined area (not literally true as a few live in the Heritage Park).
- b) Further discussion with the planners resulted in:
 - a. *From what you told us at the meeting and from the information below, it is clear that the collaborative approach you are proposing to undertake with the three owners / leaseholders will be the most effective way to take things forward. Currently the neighbourhood planning legislation is not applicable to this project.*
 - b. *However most, if not all, of the actions you suggest below can be substantially progressed without any neighbourhood plan or Local Plan. For issues where ultimately you may be recommending changes to planning designations, we'd continue to encourage you to get involved in council consultations. Both Wandsworth and Merton Council will be carrying out a full borough-wide Local Plan review during the next two years with first consultations starting in the autumn. The Mayor of London has also signalled that the new London Plan will be published for consultation around the same time. We will let you know when the Wimbledon Park report is published, which will probably be after 8th June at this stage.*
- c) The Friends have taken this approach and developed it further below. Landscape, biodiversity, and habitat are mentioned but not fully covered in this submission.

2) Introduction

- a) Grade II* Heritage Wimbledon Park (61ha) is shared between 3 owners¹, AELTC, The Wimbledon Club (TWC) and LB Merton (LBM). It needs a holistic approach to improvements particularly as it is on Historic England's 'At Risk Register'. A joint agreement on retaining and improving vistas and a biodiversity strategy are two examples of what could be achieved.

2) Heritage at Risk Register

- a) Briefly Capability Brown designed this landscape between 1765 and 1783. Only 61ha of the original 374ha remain and is now in three ownerships. In 1899 The Wimbledon Club bought the freehold (4 hectares) followed in 1915 by The Municipal Borough of Wimbledon who purchased the rest of today's heritage land.
- b) On October 1st, 1987, Wimbledon Park was included in Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade II* List Entry Number: 1000852.
- c) In June 2016 the 3 owners were advised that The Grade II* Registered Park and Garden (RPG) has been included in the Heritage at Risk (HAR) Register for London due to the following issues:
 - i. Uncertainty around the future of the entire historic landscape:
 - ii. The impacts of divided ownership on landscape management:
 - iii. Obscured designed views: and
 - iv. The deteriorating condition of the Lake.
- d) A piecemeal approach to structures has led to obscured vistas. Examples are the 5 blots around the lakeside landscape. These are the Watersports building, the boat store, the green sports hall, the 6 monthly tennis dome and the AELTC Greenspaces compound.
- e) Vistas are a very important part of landscaping and that provided by Capability Brown here is of national standard. They have been neglected and need restoration.

3) Lancelot Brown

- a) Lancelot Brown landscaped Wimbledon Park. His great skill was in seeing the potential of an estate, describing its great 'capability' for improvement. Hence his nickname 'Capability' Brown.
- b) We have a remnant of the original 374ha estate and the remaining 61ha of the original estate and the vistas should be preserved and improved for the benefit of nature our grandchildren!



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- c) What are the 'capabilities' for improving conditions for nature and the community?
- d) An appropriate question to ask is 'What matters and Why?'
- e) Prioritising 'landscapes, biodiversity and habitat' and then identifying the 'capabilities' of this shared landscape for visitor enjoyment of the facilities.
- f) A holistic approach rather than a piecemeal approach for the 61ha park will lead to a better deal for the owners; that is 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'.
- g) The owners' objectives can be briefly described:
 - 1. LBM – income to help cover their costs of maintaining their portfolio of greenspaces.
 - 2. TWC – provision of participation sports facilities for their members and their significant outreach programme.
 - 3. AELTC – using the park to help maintain The Championships as the premier tennis tournament in the world.
 - 4. TfL² – to keep the railway bridge in good condition and to prevent trespassing onto the railway tracks.
- h) Input from the Community is also required, and this could be via the FOWP Forum. It should be noted that the Friends approached each of the 3 owners in early 2018 to ask them to work together for the benefits described above. We understand that there is a 'Memorandum of Understanding' between the 3 owners, but this remains a secret document.

4) Sport

- a) Participating in sport has been an important activity in Wimbledon Park since 1890. Reports of polo and ice skating on the frozen lake can be readily found. Currently there are more than eight organised sports played in Wimbledon Park and run by different groups. Some for over 100 years and many of these operate at a national standard. Those for more than 50 years:
 - a. The Wimbledon Club³ (1890)
 - a. Cricket – Hockey – Tennis - Squash
 - b. Junior Sports
 - b. Wimbledon Park Golf Club⁴ (1898-2022)
 - c. Hercules Wimbledon Athletic Club⁵ (1967)
 - d. Wimbledon Park Bowls Club⁶ (1909)
 - e. Wimbledon Park Angling Club⁷ (1948)
- b) Comments worthy of mention include:
- c) Wimbledon Hockey club is one of the largest hockey clubs in the UK with 850 juniors and 15 Adult teams. With over 20 Olympians and International players, Wimbledon are one of the top performing clubs in the UK. Both the Men's and Women's 1st teams play in the National Premiership and the Women's 2nd team play one league below in the South National League. In 2017, Wimbledon's Men were the first UK team in 7 years to reach the final 4 of the coveted European Championships. With 15 adult teams and over 800 juniors Wimbledon is one of the largest and most successful clubs in English Hockey, offering high-performance, club and community hockey to players from 4 years to much older!
- d) Wimbledon Park Golf Club finishes at the end of this year 2022. However, there should be a place for their Junior Academy⁸ which has over 200 participants and requires a relatively small area.
- e) Hercules Wimbledon AC is a thriving community athletics club based at Wimbledon Park. We welcome new members of all ages and abilities and provide coaching geared towards competition in track and field, cross country and road racing. We compete in a variety of leagues at youth, senior and masters level, as well as county, regional, and national championships. The track at Wimbledon Park is the only one in the Borough, and a key London venue, attracting athletes and clubs from all over the country to compete. However it is now over 30 years old, is being undermined by the roots of the surrounding poplar trees and the surface is deteriorating.
- f) Wimbledon Park Bowls Club has achieved much recognition over the past one hundred years. Chief among its successes have been its England international players, Mrs Wolsey-Smith in 1952 and 1953, Mrs Jackson from 1954 through to 1963 and Mrs Linney in 1957, 1958 and 1959. More recently, in 2010 and 2013, Rachel Winter reached the quarter-finals of the National Under-25 singles and in 2011 and 2013 went one better reaching the semi-finals of the National Under-25 pairs.
- g) Wimbledon Park Angling Club is strictly limited to 150 members, the Club is a private not-for-profit organisation, run by a committee of volunteers elected annually by the membership.



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The Club is entirely self-funding and receives no monies from any other organisation. It has no associations or links with any public or commercial body but acts strictly in accordance with the demands and legal requirements of the Environmental Agency.

- a. The objectives of the Club include the improvement of the fishing in the waters of Wimbledon Park Lake, and to this end the Club takes whatever opportunities are allowed to re-stock the Lake with native British species of fish. Additionally, and in accordance with the European Water Framework Directive, the Club is concerned to improve and maintain the overall ecological welfare of the Lake, including the re-establishment of native plants, such as water lilies, and the reduction of invasive species.
- b. The Lake offers a mix of general coarse fishing for species such as **roach, perch, rudd, tench and bream**, and more specialist pursuits such as **carp fishing**.
- c. Because of the limitation on membership numbers, prospective members can only join via a waiting list, having first been proposed and seconded by two existing Club members.
- h) Wimbledon Park Watersports⁹ provide sailing and paddle sport activities for school, groups, adults and children of all abilities in the stunning Wimbledon Park. The LBM Masterplan 2018¹⁰ says:
 - a. It is an unattractive, obtrusive building in a conspicuous location, providing a poor level of facilities despite recent expenditure. Its inadequate storage area impacts on other spaces, both within the Centre and in the Bowls Pavilion. Changing provision is inadequate: reported use of 250 people per day at peak times is enabled only by staggering times onto and off the water, existing changing room capacity is around 70 persons, excluding staff changing provision. It should be noted that the size of the lake is a limiting factor for watersports numbers and is probably already at a maximum. However, the Centre is significantly underused for 8-9 months of the year, peaking from June-August with school events and children's holiday courses. There is reportedly limited scope for expanding adult courses as the lake is unsuitable for advanced ability levels.

5) Assets

- a) As a shared Grade II* registered park and garden all the structural assets need to be considered in a holistic approach to avoid the piecemeal approach which has damaged the park particularly the vistas and improve the decision making and management of the whole 61ha site.
- b) The main ones can be listed:
- c) Owned by LBM and further comments in LBM Masterplan 2018
 - 1. White Pavilion rented by Metropolitan Police
 - 2. Wimbledon Park café which LBM Masterplan suggested enlarging with relocated playground toilets.
 - 3. Bowling Pavilion can be enhanced at rear with space for activities once the watersports and greenspace equipment are relocated.
 - 4. Watersports should be relocated to the arena. This will free up space for primary use activities.
 - 5. Arena needs a radical improvement.
- d) Owned by AELTC
 - 1. Golf club house is in good condition.
- e) Owned by TWC
 - 1. The Wimbledon Club house is in good condition.

6) Land swaps

- a) These should be beneficial to all 3 owners and result in great benefits to the community in the activities provided.
- b) For example in the LBM Masterplan 2018 two deals¹¹ with AELTC were suggested.
 - i. **5.5. Possible future land purchase/acquisition**
 - ii. *5.5.1. Two land purchases would greatly assist the functioning and aesthetics of the park and lake, and as small wedges of land, are currently not especially usable by AELTC who owns them.*
 - iii. *5.5.2. Section of Ashen Grove Wood adjacent to the lake. This acquisition would enable better public access to the lake and any future lakeside path.*
 - iv. *5.5.3. Access around the existing Athletics compound. This access would be much improved if this land was in public ownership. Similarly, access and the setting of the*



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proposed Watersports and Outdoor centre would be better placed with more space around it, while not compromising the potential access to the proposed lakeside access path

7) Wellbeing

- a) Both LBM & LBW declared a climate emergency in July 2019.
- b) The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Feb 28¹² report goes on to say “The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future,”
- c) The Space to Thrive report¹³ is a rapid evidence review of the benefits parks and green spaces have for people and communities. Comments include:
 1. Access to and use of parks and green spaces enhance physical health, mental wellbeing, and life satisfaction
 2. People need parks and green spaces nearby, but they need to be of a sufficient quality to encourage regular visits. The quality of green spaces has a stronger bearing on health outcomes than quantity.
 3. Visiting parks can help reduce obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Visits to green spaces support mental wellbeing and stress relief.
- d) Satisfying wellbeing isn't a commercial activity but failure to look after this need will incur costs due to the deterioration of mental and physical health of individuals. These costs will be borne by the NHS, Councils and Government. It will also lead to reduced productivity in the workforce.
- e) In Wimbledon Park wellbeing can be improved by providing entrances that give an uplift, great walks that include the restored vistas and to see and learn from and about nature.
- f) Decent facilities should be made available for community activities such as:
 1. Junior parkrun¹⁴ (2km)
 2. Walk and talk¹⁵
 3. Parkrun (5km) not available but it should be available in a 61ha park!
- g) Although primary use facilities are provided free at the point of usage it must be funded. One source of income are events which usually take place on the areas provided for wellbeing. Many events damage the grass and as a result are out of use until the area is returned to grass. This takes months. One solution is to hold events on artificial surfaces so the area can be returned to its previous state immediately.
- h) LBM Wimbledon Park & Lake Masterplan page 34 2.9.6. ‘The Park hosts numerous regular and one-off events throughout the year, including an annual fireworks display and The Queue during Wimbledon Fortnight. These are popular and valuable for income generation, but place specific pressures on the Park’s infrastructure, character and management’.
- i) Discussions between the three owners can mitigate the loss of wellbeing space to events.

8) Communities

- a) The big change announced in the WP Project is the move from participation sports to spectator sport and that for a period of just 3 weeks per year.
- b) Formal participation sports require a fee to enjoy the facilities. Golf will cease at the end of 2022. TWC and about 56% of the public park provide fee paying participation sports.
- c) The community consists of individuals and groups particularly those involved in sport. Sport is part of the heritage of the 61ha park. For example, a positive impact could be provided by helping to find space for a hockey pitch, space for rugby for St Cecilia’s School & others, junior golf, and assistance in revamping the athletics track and surrounding area.
- d) Walking is the most important activity and linked with water and nature assists wellbeing¹⁶ which is an important consideration. A public lakeside walk in a nature reserve fits well with core objective of a positive impact for our local community.
 1. Agreement should be reached between the owners for a 5ha nature reserve around the lake with access for visitors and a public path through to Church Road. This can be overseen by a Community Trust.

9) Conclusion

- a) Grade II* Heritage Wimbledon Park is on the ‘At Risk Register’ partly because it is in divided ownership, so the onus is on the 3 owners to work together so that the whole park is considered. Further thought should be given to land swaps and other co-operation, as these can provide the opportunity to agree a biodiversity strategy, remove blots on the landscape, restore vistas, improve wellbeing by providing great walks, meet the requirements of all 3 owners and provide for the benefit of nature, heritage, health, and the Community.



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- b) The IPCC report is a wake-up call and Heritage Wimbledon Park should do all it can to improve things for nature. Many species need help.
- c) The Community and participation sport need consideration so that facilities can be improved. Also, how events in the public park can be provided with existing hard surfaces so that many months of repairing damaged grassland is avoided and wellbeing is enhanced.
- d) The local plan does not provide a strategy which meets the needs described above.
- e) It ignores the change of use from participation sports to a spectator sport in 30ha owned by AELTC. It lists the area for development disregarding it's Listed Grade II*, Heritage at Risk, MOL (i.e. Green Belt), Conservation Area, Site of importance for Nature Conservation.
- f) The plan is unsound.

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Chair Friends of Wimbledon Park

¹ TfL own the land under Revelstoke Road railway bridge which is very important for the entry to the park but minor in terms of ownership.

² TfL own the land under Revelstoke Road railway bridge

³ <https://www.twcsport.co.uk/>

⁴ <https://www.wpgc.co.uk/>

⁵ <https://www.herculeswimbledonac.org.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.wimbledonparkbowlsclub.co.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.wpac.org.uk/>

⁸ https://www.wpgc.co.uk/junior_membership_and_academy

⁹ <https://www.merton.gov.uk/leisure-recreation-and-culture/wimbledon-park-watersports-centre>

¹⁰ LBM Wimbledon Park & Lake Masterplan page 42; 2.10.25

¹¹ Wimbledon Park & Lake Masterplan 2018 page 74.

¹² https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg2/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGII_PressRelease-English.pdf

¹³ <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/insight/research/space-thrive>

¹⁴ ¹⁴ <https://www.parkrun.org.uk/wimbledonpark-juniors/>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/wimbledonparkwalkandtalk>

¹⁶ Green And Blue Infrastructure, Biodiversity And Open Space Study London Borough Of Merton Summary Report August 2020.