

Update from the Chairman

As you will see from the latest updates on the website, there was a great flurry of activity to get additional objections in to Merton Planning by the deadline of the 24th October and prior to the AELTC planning meeting on the evening of the 26th. My grateful thanks to the indefatigable Christopher Coombe and the prodigious productivity of Dave Dawson – our expert on so many aspects of the history and biodiversity of the Heritage Wimbledon Park and understanding of how the impact of planning proposals are measured.

There was an impressive gathering of Save Wimbledon Park (SWP) supporters outside the Civic Centre from 5pm on Thursday the 26th October from both Wimbledon and Southfields with an impressive array of excellent and thoughtfully devised placards. They were extremely orderly and in good voice with the various appropriate chants. Most of us who queued up for tickets to get into the planning meeting were successful and managed to get into the meeting, but not before many were interviewed by the BBC who had been secured by the able and very proactive SWP PR group.

Regrettably after nearly five hours after sitting through the strangest and most manufactured planning meeting I have ever experienced, the vote was finally taken and the result was a pass for the application on a vote of six to four. As indicated in our Press Release which was published afterwards, the result was very disappointing but not entirely unexpected.

There was plenty of interest from the press and TV and the post meeting coverage was impressive.

Very impressive and encouraging also has been the post meeting activity on the Petition which has leapt from around 13,100 at the time of the meeting to 13,839 as I write. Clearly many more residents have been stirred into action by the shocking planning result and are determined to show their disgust at Merton's treachery.

Many of you will be wondering whether it is all over or what is the next step. Obtaining planning approval from Merton is only the first stage in the process. The application has now to be decided by Wandsworth which we think will be on the 21st November. From there it will be passed up to the GLA who will then determine the next step. There is also the possibility that it may be 'called in' by the Secretary of State.

It is interesting to note that the Council wrote to the AELTC immediately after the planning decision, asking them to advise the Council as to how they were going to deal with the issue of the Covenants – as clearly this matter has to be resolved before the AELTC can move further. A copy of this letter is on our website.

Clearly the impediments which we and others have raised as objections, namely the Covenants agreed to by the AELTC in 1993 and the issue of 'Public Trust' attaching to the golf course land have not disappeared.

The SWP group will be considering next steps in the light of any decision to be taken by Wandsworth. There are so many issues, from judicial review of the planning decision by Merton (and maybe Wandsworth and the GLA), to the enforcement of the 1993 Covenants and the Public Trust, with many strong arguments on our side. It is now becoming a more serious and lengthy process for which we are prepared. We have already received eager promises of "pump-priming" support towards litigation. At this stage we are not contemplating any major Crowdfunding but in the interim we will need to test our own opinions with specialist legal advice.

If you are part of the growing group of supporters who have recently made pledges of funds, we are most grateful. If you feel strongly that, despite the recent planning decision, we should continue the campaign to save our park from the massive overdevelopment proposed by the AELTC, I would be pleased to hear from you.

Kind regards
Iain

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