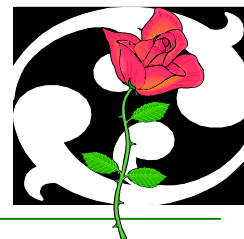


FRIENDS OF VAUXHALL PARK



St Anne and All Saints Church Hall, South Lambeth Road
Tuesday 22nd March at 8pm

Apologies: Teresa Clay (Chair), Ivan McCracken, Louise Norwood, Ross Davies (Chair Vauxhall Society), Cllr Ishbel Brown

In attendance

Alistair Johnstone, Interim Head of Parks for Lambeth Council (for items 1 and 4 only)

Liz Maffei - on behalf of Cllr Ishbel Brown

Michael Penney, Area Parks Officer for Lambeth Council (for items 1 and 4 only)

Meeting chaired by Polly Freeman (Membership Secretary)

Declarations of Interest

Item 4. Helen Monger (Secretary) declared an interest as an employee of the Heritage Lottery Fund and reminded Lambeth Council Officers she could not comment on the requirements of the HLF in her capacity as a volunteer for the Friends of Vauxhall Park.

1. Minutes of last meeting and any matters arising

All agreed minutes of last meeting.

2. Easter Egg Hunt 2011

Sophie Kotch (Treasurer), reminded those present that it would be on 9 April 2011 this year at 10.30am for children aged 2 to 10. Louise Norwood and Sophie Kotch were responsible for arranging the event and the Acting Chair thanked them for their efforts. Sophie Kotch would be circulating posters shortly for volunteers to put up nearer the time.

3. Summer Fair 2011

The Acting Chair explained she was coordinating events. There was a general call for volunteers to help run stalls and act as stewards on the day. The committee were arranging a number of activities on the day including go-karts, donkey rides, and bouncy castle. The Chair thanked Seth for agreeing to manage the overall layout on the day and dealing with licences. She also thanked Jill Gregson for coordinating the different stall holders. This year, the plant stall will be run based on donations as Meridy McCracken, who had run the plant stall for many years, was moving away from the area and could no longer grow and propagate plants for the Friends. The Acting Chair therefore asked members to save their bric-a-brac and donate a few plants for the plant stall this year. More details would be provided in the newsletter.

4. Maintenance Issues and update on Council Cuts

The Acting Chair welcomed Alistair Johnstone and Mickey Penney to the meeting. Alistair Johnstone gave a presentation about the difficulties facing Lambeth Council in the light of local authority cuts and answered questions from the floor.

Alistair Johnstone explained that Officers for Lambeth Council were charged with reducing expenditure by £79m over 3 years and they were seeking £49m in cuts in the first year. Lambeth Council were required to provide a number of statutory services but that Parks are not part of that statutory obligation. As a result Parks in Lambeth were scheduled for significant cuts and the Department were looking at a number of ways to achieve reductions.

They had so far identified three areas for cuts in the immediate term:

- a) Removing Park Rangers – this was already agreed and would happen from the 1st April 2011. A lot of their work – such as locking parks would be transferred to Veolia who have a contract for park maintenance.

- b) Reducing the existing Veolia contract by about £650k from an overall budget of £2.8m. They were in the process of negotiating with Veolia how this would affect the existing service levels within the contract but had found a number of areas where they could agree and this included:
- reduced annual football pitch maintenance;
 - reduced woodland maintenance;
 - reduced wetland maintenance; and
 - the possibility of removing the PIT team.
- With the removal of services, there would also be cut backs in staff. The contract at present involved 60 staff. Depending on TUPE commitments and severance packages negotiated, it is likely that the Veolia contract will end up with about 40 staff to cover 64 green spaces (of which 32 are parks) across Lambeth. The result was that gardeners that had previously been based in specific parks were no longer going to be based there but would form part of mobile teams. Myatts Field and Brockwell Park were the exceptions because of funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund resulting in contractual commitments to keep gardeners on site. The Veolia contract, although run on fewer staff, would maintain skilled horticulturalists rather than cutting wages by employing more people but without expertise. The revised service level agreement would set out a number of fixed duties and hours of work in each green space such as opening/closing parks, checking that play areas and equipment safe, emptying bins etc. that would happen every day.
- c) Restructuring the Parks department within Lambeth Council.

Alistair Johnstone noted that Lambeth Council had never tried to run parks on so few people so they were not sure yet how the final set up would work themselves. It was noted that Vauxhall Park had benefited from the PIT team to move the dog area and also two dedicated gardeners based at the park so this would present a big challenge. A resident was concerned at the timing of hedge trimming – last year the hedges had been trimmed the day before the summer fair and this had disturbed birds’ nests – he had tried to contact the Parks service but received no response. Others raised concerns about the possibility of increased unsociable behaviour likely in the park without the gardeners to offer security for young people and those on their own. Given that the park was to be run on fewer staff, it was important for biodiversity and for security within the park that the noticeboards clearly displayed an appropriate contact number and that there was a system in place for rapid response. Mickey Penney, advised that for an emergency the usual 999 number was always the main contact but for other problems it would be the Parks Officer. He agreed that he would check the noticeboards and amend as necessary. In addition, Mickey Penney explained that he had been working with Community Safety Police Officers to improve safety in the park and that this had already meant a reduction in the number of drinkers loitering and being a nuisance around the tennis courts.

Alistair Johnstone apologized that he had not had time to respond to Helen Monger’s email to him on behalf of the Friends about these sudden cuts. He added that he and Area Parks Officers were now going around to Friends groups to discuss the further cuts likely in future years and to discuss the renewal of Veolia’s contract which was due for re-tendering in 2012. Alistair Johnstone wanted Friends groups to be able to prioritize the works needed on their parks so that they could then have a clearer idea about the minimum works the council needed to commission for external and professional support. The Acting Chair confirmed that the Friends of Vauxhall Park would seek to work constructively with the Lambeth Officers and agree priorities over the coming months to put forward. A number of members and residents agreed that they would be willing to undertake some work in the park on a volunteer basis and the Friends agreed to look at how best to make these arrangements for volunteer working days to help maintain the park. Mickey Penney suggested that the Friends also contact Roots and Shoots for guidance and technical assistance – they were already helping elsewhere in the borough at Lambeth Walk and St John’s Church.

Helen Monger queried whether the Park would be able to secure another Green Flag and whether there was the possibility of any funding attached to that as in previous years. Alistair Johnstone said that as there was little if any cost attached to applying to Green Flag, which was a big commendation to external agencies about the quality of the Park, they would do so this year but that this would not lead to any additional support from the Council – it was more for the benefit of persuading external agencies of the quality of Vauxhall Park.

Helen Monger asked whether there was a known budget for each park. Alistair Johnstone explained that at present the budgets were calculated on the basis of tasks rather than by individual park. The Parks Department was now attempting to quantify all the tasks more precisely across the green spaces. Helen Monger sought clarity about how capital maintenance works, previously undertaken by the PIT team, would be funded - this included tasks such as re-laying the surface in the playground and repairs to the fountain, as opposed to the day to day maintenance for bedding plants, weeding, tree pruning which were part of the gardeners' and the Veolia contract. Lambeth Officers stated that they held a small central budget for infrastructure repair of about £400k-£500k for this year for all parks but that it would be allocated on the basis of most urgent need across the 64 green spaces.

Alistair Johnstone added that there was also a Cultural Development team. This team work on securing funding from other sources for significant new infrastructure and cited the example of a new skateboard park at Clapham Common, which was receiving grants from a number of trusts and foundations. He urged the Friends groups to review and keep their Management Plans up to date, as this would provide an essential guide to the works needed in the park in the future. The Management Plan would not only provide information for the Parks Department but would become an essential tool for Vauxhall Park to be able to claim S.106 funding from nearby developments and other sponsors.

A resident queried the move of the dog area and why it had been split in two making the areas smaller for dog exercising. The Acting Chair explained that there had been extensive consultation at open meetings and talking to individuals and dog owners about moving the dog area, that the overall area given to the dog run was far larger than the previous area and the split had been as a result of specific requests from dog owners. Mickey Penny said that following additional feedback, he had obtained some finer mesh fencing to prevent smaller dogs from escaping in the area. The Friends thanked Mickey for his huge efforts and agreed that this was a big improvement to the Park, helping to address a number of complaints previously received and responding to best practice for Green Flag parks by separating the dog area from the children's play area.

Mickey Penney also mentioned that he had been working to secure a contract for repair and restoration to the damaged historic gate on the western corner of Fentiman Road and South Lambeth Road. The normal service provider for Lambeth through their framework agreement for this type of work was Interserve, but their quote had been unable to respond to the complexity of this historic refurbishment. Mickey Penney had therefore been busy obtaining two further quotes and was about to appoint a specialist firm of restorers, who had previously done work on this gate prior to the damage. The insurers of the owner of the car that had crashed into the gate would pay for most of the work but the Friends of Vauxhall Park agreed to fund other additional associated work to make best use of the specialists on site so that the Gate would be fully restored.

5. Local developments affecting the park

Helen Monger reminded everyone that the Friends of Vauxhall Park had been represented at the Bondway Public Inquiry last summer and that the Secretary of State had supported the views that this development would be inappropriate for that site. Helen Monger pointed out that Vauxhall Park was part of the London Mayor's Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea Development Opportunity Area (VNEB) which plans to use Vauxhall as an area of high density high rise development to stimulate growth along the river to Battersea Power Station. As a result, Vauxhall Park and the Friends of Vauxhall Park would need to respond to many developments. Several new ones had recently emerged – Kylun Towers, Vauxhall Square, Covent Garden Market redevelopment, and Sainsbury's. The Friends of Vauxhall Park re-iterated the previously agreed principle that they would only comment on projects which directly impinged upon the park and as a result would not be commenting on the Sainsbury's proposals. Additionally, the Friends of Vauxhall Park had been involved in comments on the overarching principles of the VNEB and would be commenting on the consultation of the changes to S.106 to fund the Northern Line Extension.

Kylun Towers

Kylun Towers, also known as the twin towers, had been submitted to Lambeth Planning Department. The Acting Chair and Helen Monger had attended the steer meeting on 15th February to represent the Friends of Vauxhall Park. At the meeting, the main concern of the planning committee was to achieve an 'at grade' crossing i.e. a pedestrian crossing at street-level from the 'island site' across the Wandsworth Road to the riverside. The plans had been scheduled for a full

decision for 15th March with a site visit on 12th March. Helen Monger reported that she had attended the site visit on 12th March and led the party from the site to Vauxhall Park to show the successes of the Friends of Vauxhall Park and Parks Officers in managing the park to date but explaining the need for significant capital investment to achieve the masterplan set out in the Management Plan. She then explained how she had led the party to Spring Gardens as there had been nobody to represent the Friends for that Park – this demonstrated that not only was Vauxhall Park closest in distance but in practical terms from the site. This was an important point as at present the majority of Open Space S.106 money is to be directed to Spring Gardens and Helen Monger wanted the planning committee to reconsider the needs of Vauxhall Park as a priority.

However, Helen Monger pointed out that overall, the Friends of Vauxhall Park were not supportive of this development as it was felt to be an over dense proposal by putting two very tall towers (41 storeys and 32 storeys) on this relatively small site. A positive outcome of the site visit, is that Helen Monger had been approached by the developer to provide ‘mood boards’ showing the proposed landscaping of the public space around the base of the towers. Helen Monger had hoped that they would be provided in time for this meeting but none were yet available. The Friends of Vauxhall Park aim to show these drawings to the members if and as soon as they become available for comment. Finally, the day before the site visit it emerged that there had been a delay and that the Kylon Towers proposals would no longer be considered on 15th March but instead some time later, probably April to allow further negotiations with TfL about the pedestrian crossing.

Vauxhall Square

Another development which directly affects the park, relates to proposals by CLS Holdings to redevelop the land currently occupied by Cap Gemini. The company had recently launched a public consultation exercise with proposals for sky walks. The Acting Chair and Helen Monger had both visited the displays they had provided and followed up by arranging to meet with the Chief Executive of CLS holdings to discuss their proposals and how it might affect Vauxhall Park shortly.

6. Any other business

Christina Burnett, kindly thanked the Committee for all their work, reminded those present to look out for the Digital Bazaar’s once a month at South Lambeth Library and the need to support it in the face of cuts too.

The Acting Chair, said that the Friends of Vauxhall Park would welcome new volunteers to join the Committee and help with arranging events and the many other activities, and in particular if as many people could step forward to help at the Summer Fair. The Acting Chair thanked those who had already stepped forward to help the Friends of Vauxhall Park (these included Veronica Porter who had put up some of the posters for this meeting, Martin Stanley for his efforts with the website and all the members of the Committee).

The next open meeting was Saturday 1st October at 10.30am at Ashmole Tenants Association Hall, 2 Meadow Road.

Helen Monger
Secretary
30th March 2011