**FRIENDS OF
VAUXHALL PARK**

**From:**

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**Lambeth Borough Council ‘Masterplan’**

**Vauxhall Park**

**Introduction** During the last three years Lambeth Borough Council (LBC) has initiated at least three consultations with a view to identifying appropriate enhancements to Vauxhall Park, enhancements which are needed to cater for the greatly increased usage which will arise as a consequence of the developments which are taking place in the area. Last month LBC published its recommendations; and over the last three weeks has undertaken extensive consultations within the community to gather reactions. Individual Friends of Vauxhall Park (FOVP) as well, of course, as many others have commented on the suggestions. This paper represents the consolidated opinions of FOVP; they are not comprehensive, but rather a general distillation of the overall concerns.

**Background** The Friends are very grateful for the hard work, the funding, and the understanding which LBC has devoted to the Park; and they welcome the overall approach which LBC is taking to its management and improvement. These comments should be viewed in that context.

**Principle** We believe that the Parks in north Lambeth should be addressed as a whole, and not individually. Each will have its character and its potential, and each, according to its character and its potential, will be able to host and to accommodate different capabilities and different facilities; it is thus unnecessary to replicate in each Park in north Lambeth the same capability. We believe that the essence of Vauxhall Park is its tranquillity; it is not, and should not be an activity-based Park. We recognize the need for the promotion of ‘health and wellbeing for both its existing and its future users’; but we would emphasize the need for the promotion of mental wellbeing as much as for physical – and we would argue that any emphasis on further physical activities in the Park will inevitably jeopardize, if not damage its unique peaceful environment which does so much to enhance its value to so many in the community. There are parks in north Lambeth which are currently better suited to the hosting of fitness regimes and the associated equipments.

**Proposal Plan**

1. **Circular Route** We recognise the benefits of the circular route which LBC recommend, but we believe that its downsides are greater. One of the charms of the Park, and one which promotes its tranquillity is that it has areas which are secluded and not obvious; a new walkway round the Park will open it up, and very likely become used as a jogging/cycling track. Its suggested alignment will impact adversely on the seclusion and tranquillity of the Lavender Garden; and any ‘new garden path to connect to the rose garden and improve accessibility’ risks creating another short cut to Vauxhall Cross. Most particularly a path open to general use should not be inserted between the new Playground and the eastern boundary. All paths should be re-surfaced, preferably with more modern treatments than tarmac; and steps should be taken to discourage cyclists from using the central diagonal path. On no account should any of the paths be widened. The ‘crazy paving’ path is of no historical significance and represents an unnecessary H&S hazard; it should be re-surfaced with the others.
2. **Activity Areas** We have already noted that the introduction of more physical fitness equipment risks damaging the peaceful environment of the Park; and with the advent of larger numbers of young students there is a real danger of any equipments being used by fitness instructors on a professional and regular basis. Furthermore it should be recognised that the Downing Students’ development will have a gym and swimming pool available for general use; and that the Rudolf Place Student Building made provision for a basket ball court in their planning submission. If it is judged necessary to introduce an Activity Area, it should be done near the Tennis Courts and Parco where the noise would be largely buffered by the traffic along Fentiman Road; it would restrict such activity to a small area and so insulate the remainder of the Park from the noise and commotion. Currently fixed tables have allowed anti-social behaviour near the MUGA; locating them near Parco will make them more visible and deter such activities. Furthermore games of ping-pong can be overseen from the Parco terrace, and the bats kept in Parco itself. Any new fitness equipment should take into consideration likely usage by older generations and be made of natural materials. Another Basketball Court, full size or not, is unnecessary and will inevitably become used for other purposes. The tennis courts, whether or not they are re-aligned, do need re-surfacing; and they do need the introduction of a robust and easily understood system for booking.
3. **Heritage Boundary etc** We are delighted that the Plan recommends the replacement of the mesh fence along South Lambeth Road with railings similar to those along Fentiman Road, and at the same height; and we would welcome the planting of ‘new trees’ with the proviso that further consultation be undertaken to determine exactly what trees and where. We would not, however, endorse the aspiration to open ‘up sightlines in to the Park’; we have already noted our belief that one of the charms of the Park is its hidden aspects – which should not be jeopardised.
4. **Railings and Park Character Management** We do not believe that more internal fencing is required; indeed we have recently been attempting to reduce the amount of such fencing– and have succeeded. The Park has developed organically in such a way that distinct areas have created themselves; separating them physically would reduce the overall coherence of the Park. Furthermore there is no requirement to increase ‘light levels’; there are shaded areas and there are more open areas – they do not need to be one and the same. The issue of ‘new pocket gardens’ is particularly contentious; maintainability is of increasing significance. At the moment it is only with the help of the Friends that the current flower beds and borders are maintained; any increase in their number must be accompanied by some consideration of their maintenance.
5. **South Lambeth Road/Dog Area** FOVP is convinced that a Dog Area is required. If a ‘meadow planting’ alongside is to be considered, consideration must also be given to its maintenance. We would resist the location of ‘bike racks’ within the Park, particularly by the entrances which are of historical and architectural significance; they should be located, as others are, outside the Park along Fentiman Road and on the pavements of South Lambeth Road.
6. **Play Area** We appreciate that the commitment to a renewed ‘play area’ is a commitment in principle which requires further definition. We would ask that a Working Group be established, based perhaps on personnel from the local schools – Ashmole, St Stephen’s, and the Montessori school within the Park - which would advise on the lay-out and content of the new ‘play area’ which should reflect the overall concept of the Park.
7. **Tree and Planting Strategy** FOVP cannot endorse the recommendation to remove and re-site the orchard trees along Lawn Lane; professional advice is that they are too mature to be uprooted – and anyway we now hope that LBC will have abandoned the aspiration for the new Baseball Court and Exercise Area which would have necessitated their removal. The LBC paper identifies no policy for the removal of trees and the planting of new ones; while some are old and in need of attention, few actually require removal. FOVP would nonetheless recommend the removal of the palm trees and the overgrown dwarf conifers near the fountain; and a radical re-assessment of the plantings along the eastern boundary. There are existing plans to re-arrange the ‘model village’ so as to make it easier to maintain and more consistent with the original lay-out; the inclusion of model skyscrapers would be an unacceptable intrusion. However FOVP would strongly support the other recommendations for the restoration of heritage assets, especially the human sun dial and the brick labyrinth – and, most particularly, the fountain; its continuing failure to operate has caused more adverse comment than any other element in the Park. It is perhaps worth pointing out that the ‘rose pergolas’ by the existing play area are in a dangerous condition and require complete replacement; furthermore they are set in concrete bases which make it impossible to grow anything up them!
8. **Additional Concerns** There remain three issues which we would like to see addressed: the green pavilion building, commonly known as the One O’Clock Club; the concrete steps by the MUGA; and the redundant brick British Gas structure by the Fentiman Road entrance. As far as the One O’Clock Club is concerned we were assured at the preliminary LBC meetings with Adams and Sutherland that its future would be addressed, and that a business case for a community building would be produced. The current building is in a terminal state of decline, and its maintenance is an onerous, expensive, and unnecessary addition to LBC’s responsibilities; its reprovision must be a high priority. The concrete steps by the MUGA are a legacy absurdity of no conceivable value, and should be removed at the same time as the adjacent walls. Finally, LBC has undertaken on numerous occasions to remove the redundant British Gas structure; we would be grateful if its destruction could be included in the final plan.

**Conclusion** The Friends of Vauxhall Park aredelighted, and much reassured that Lambeth Borough Council, after over three years of consultancies, has been able to come up with such a series of practical, sympathetic, and well-considered proposals for the enhancement of the Park; and in this regard FOVP and, I’m sure, the community in general, are very grateful for the clarity and understanding which Charlotte Glazier has shown during this consultation phase. There remains the need for further discussion of the detail and of the implementation timetable - and, of course, of the funding. It is encouraging that Charlotte was able to state that the final plans will be ready by the end of the summer, and execution complete by the end of 2018. These comments are by no means comprehensive, but they will, I hope, give the LBC authorities some indication of where FOVP believe that their proposals can be given further practical expression and in a more coherent manner.

Charles Vyvyan July 2017

Chairman, Friends of Vauxhall Park