

5th July 2021

THE CAPABILITY BROWN SOCIETY'S RESPONSE TO THE AELTC'S THIRD PUBLIC CONSULTATION.

AELTC's well presented third consultation document continues to limit proposals for the Wimbledon Park Grade II* registered landscape largely to AELTC's own land, except where incursion into the lake is proposed within Merton's ownership. There appears to be no engagement with the Wimbledon Club or any contribution to the conservation and enhancement of the public park. TCBS understand that there is a memorandum of understanding signed by all three owners of land in the Historic parkland that any new development proposals would consider the heritage parkland in its entirety to help remove the park from its at risk registration with Historic England. This appears to have been ignored by AELTC, concerned only with its own interests and contrary to the Vision set out by TCBS where it is suggested that benefit to all the landowners could reasonably be achieved including the majority of AELTC's own aspirations.

The most significant development in AELTC's masterplan following the earlier consultations is a commitment to providing 9.4ha of new public parkland extending from the golf club house to Church Road at the south of the site. This is welcomed and it acknowledges proposals that had been clearly set out in TCBS's Vision. AELTC state that "The park will open on a similar basis to that of the public park year-round". This needs to be clarified with a legal S106 agreement to ensure that public access to this land is never withdrawn or restricted by the landowner in the future.

The management of this new parkland largely as informal treed grassland is also welcomed although the extent of paths and paved areas is questioned. However the provision of a temporary car parking area on this grassland during the Championships compromises the management of the meadowland at what would be a critical time for grassland bio-diversity; this should not be allowed.



The prominence of the proposed earth sheltered central maintenance hub is also regretted in a very prominent hillside location that would command fine public views north across the lake; it is shown outside the public park but with no access to it except through the park. No details of this facility are provided other than an illustration of fenced separation and an unnecessarily prominent very visible glazed facade which compromises the openness of the parkland. Similarly the increased density of the woodland boundary to Home Park Road, despite welcome new boundary railings, will obscure lake views from the roadside where in the past there was greater openness and important vistas over the lake. Attention should be given to the enhancement of the Home Park Road boundary as recommended in TCBS's Vision. The golf club house is now shown as a "community learning hub" but without any further explanation or detail on its conversion and management. TCBS's Vision recommends a community theatre and performance hub associated with this building which would also be a significant opportunity for entertainment during the Championship, even as a new location for screen viewing of the tennis. No other public facilities are offered, not even a WC. WCs are deficient in the public park.

Extension of the lake to its historic southern extent and de-culverting of the two brooks is also welcomed although there is a lack of detail on how these streams will be designed and how essential silt traps are to be installed and serviced to reduce ingress of sediment and pollutants into the lake. There is also no detail on the proposed desilting of the lake. The impact of this is likely to have critical consequences. It is suggested to occur only in a central part of the lake where it is currently at its deepest. The reason for desilting in this area needs to be understood as does the impact on the lake's ecology and how silt is to be removed, dewatered, disposed and over what period.

The extremely intrusive public boardwalk within the lake remains and is out of character with the Brownian setting and threatens the ecology of the lake edge, while extended reed beds will reduce the apparent size of the lake. New fishing platforms extending much further into the lake may also clash with water sports activities. A proper perimeter walk around the entire lake is denied whilst a number of tennis courts continue to be shown too close to the lake,



some on land that is potentially subject to waterlogging with others close to the lake and where drainage may also prove difficult without the ground being raised and the lakeside landscape significantly modified. No surface water and land drainage details are provided for any proposals on the site nor how these feed into the lake such that any pollutants are ameliorated particularly from runoff from intensive management of the tennis courts. Short mown grass very close to the water's edge also presents an attractive habitat for Canada geese which may prove a serious nuisance. TCBS have shown in the Vision how a better lakeside walk might be constructed on dry land by engaging with the other landowners, reducing direct lake edge access, having no tennis courts near the lake, and removing inappropriate and unsightly buildings close to the lake particularly at the Wimbledon Club and public park promenade.

None of this has been considered or offered by AELTC as a contribution to the enhancement of the critical landscape heritage at the lake. To maintain openness, and to comply with National Planning policy guidance, new built facilities should be balanced by the removal of other buildings.

Additional proposals in this third consultation show ten ancillary buildings and compounds about which there is very limited design detail (eight high fenced maintenance hubs, some with public WCs and two "players hubs", one a reconstructed boathouse). Two substantial paved "plazas" are shown at new formal north and south public entrances within the parkland to gain access to a secured events "precinct" that embraces all sides of The Wimbledon Club's land. With temporary tennis court paraphernalia, and entrance area canopies in place from May until September this "precinct" will be more cluttered by "development" with a loss of openness throughout the summer months and beyond the normal 28 day period when temporary structures are permitted.

More detail is provided on the proposed Show Court confirming it to be a significant structure of a scale not dissimilar to the very imposing volumes and heights of the Centre and Number One Courts and creating a massive new visual intrusion in the parkland, interrupting historic views and compromising the openness of a very prominent and important part of the parkland adjoining the historic estate driveway (Church Road) where lake views might be



considered particularly important to reinstate. The Show Court is roofed and shown as an attractive latticed structure with green concave walls but it is not an open outdoor recreational facility per se, so not an accepted development permitted in the Metropolitan Green Belt. It appears to be raised out of the ground to house a basement. No further information is provided on what is housed within the structure and no details of the basement are provided where previously an energy centre was proposed to service the entire AELTC estate, and again not a permitted use in the Green Belt where it would service indoor built facilities. The building is offered as a community facility outside the Championships but how and what is not explained in any detail, yet this is given as the primary reason it could not be constructed within the main AELTC grounds which is (apparently) restricted to members only. This is an unacceptable reason for choosing this location as it is quite possible to have a “community facility” accessed directly within the main AELTC grounds.

Of the other 38 tennis courts 26 are shown to be essentially for practice, which surely raises the question why they need to be so widely spread throughout this historic parkland. The answer given by AELTC is that this saves loss of historic trees, but it ignores the fact that were the entire heritage parkland to have been considered holistically in this application with proper engagement with all the landowners an alternative and more viable compact location for the tennis courts might have been agreed on Wimbledon Club land with minimal loss of trees and with a land swap that might well be considered very beneficial to both owners. This has been recommended in TCBS’s Vision and should have been explored by AELTC as an alternative masterplan option.

The Championship Queue is shown to continue within the most desultory part of the public park with no improvement. In TCBS’s vision re-landscaping of this area with a multi-purpose “Bowl” offers a much improved and better drained point of public assembly for the Queue, and would provide a far more attractive entry area for large numbers of visitors. With the welcome enlargement of the public park any vehicle parking during the championship could be restricted just to the Great Field in the Public Park, where Merton would continue to receive revenue, and avoiding unnecessary damage to the new meadowlands close to the lake.



For much of the year two thirds of the application site will have no public access. With far fewer members of the AELTC than there were members of the golf club there would be greatly reduced recreational use of this land. The question then arises as to who ultimately gains benefit from these proposals. The AELTC stand to raise considerably greater revenues from an extension and enlargement of the Championship hosted only on their own land but the AELTC has very few members. Given that the Wimbledon Championships is already generally acknowledged as the leading tennis Championship in the world is it genuinely in the public and national interest to further enlarge its presence in the manner that is being proposed? Might it be considered too grandiose? Are there alternative options within the wider land ownerships of the AELTC, particularly for practice courts, that do not endanger heritage assets? Why hasn't the entire heritage parkland still not been considered in this submission to determine the least impactful locations for the AELTC proposals, given that the proposed application area is currently not restricted just to AELTC land? There are critical unanswered questions in this consultation.

There is considerable impact on the openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt and on the conservation of the historic landscape that is clearly contrary to policies in the National Planning Policy Framework guidance in paragraphs 144, 145 and 195 and which TCBS previously referred to in the second consultation. So are there now, in this presentation, "very special circumstances" that outweigh the harm caused to the heritage landscape and openness of the land? TCBS think not.

A strong case in favour of this development against the harm caused is not set out in these proposals and there are many elements in these proposals that remain unresolved and with inadequate detail.