

Gunnersbury Park Stakeholder Group meeting 25 October 2008

Meeting held in the Terrace Room of the Small Mansion at 10.30. 46 adults and 5 children attended during the morning. Most left their contact details. Richard Gill (RG) chaired the meeting; with a loose agenda based upon responses to an email request for issues that people felt should be covered.

1.0 Constitution

Most felt the group should continue on an informal basis defining objectives as we begin to get to know each other.

- Any agenda items for the next meeting should be sent to RG.
- Minutes may help new members and reduce the need to recover discussion previously held.

2.0 Park Rumours

RG reported that the leader of Hounslow Council, Peter Thompson, had issued a formal statement. This said

- There is no secretly adopted plan to sell off any part of the park
- No decision on the future would be made without consultation.
- Representatives of both councils had been meeting informally, as the Regeneration Board, to consider the future of Gunnersbury
- The board now holds its meetings in public
 - Dates of future meetings are
 - 27 November,
 - 5 January 2009,
 - 26 February
 - 2 April 2009, at 7pm in the Terrace Room.

3.0 Heritage issues

A Conservation Management Plan CMP has been commissioned by the board and adopted by both councils. It can be found on the web site. This sets out the national significance of the park and the fact that something needs to be done to halt its decline without changing its character.

- Importance of preserving the parks heritage including the historic buildings is embedded in the conservation plan. This means this group does not have to revisit what inappropriate suggestions.

An Options Appraisal is the next step. Consultants will explore all possible options for the future before making recommendations for the park.

- Any bid to a grant awarding body such as HLF will need to demonstrate that we have looked at appropriate and realistic options in the construction of our business plan.
- An appointment of experts is imminent for this piece of work. English Heritage is part-funding this work and the outcome should be available in the first quarter of 2009. It was expected that there would be some consultation with stakeholders as part of this process.

4.0 Funding

Most people recognised that the two local authorities could not find the kind of money required to restore the estate. Gunnersbury is in serious trouble as a result of long-term under-funding and something had to happen.

4.1 The Heritage Lottery Fund may assist. It is still the largest grant giving body for heritage projects, including parks and museums although its budget has been significantly cut to enable money to be transferred to the Olympics. There is only £20m annually for large-scale projects such as Gunnersbury and applications will have to be of high quality to compete with others. Preparing a bid requires a lot of careful planning and thorough paperwork to demonstrate the scheme to be funded alongside a strong long-term business plan. Even after the options appraisal has been completed the bid preparation will take some time, while getting a decision would take some months extra.

It is anticipated that a grant from the HLF alone will be insufficient to restore the park. Partners will in any event be required to match fund any offer that is made by the HLF and the total restoration package is likely to be a cocktail of funding from several different sources.

4.2 Several people recognised the importance of finding commercial partners who would bring additional money to invest in the park and of identifying the ways in which the park and its buildings could earn an income. They talked about the need to find ways of working with such partners that would enable the public still to have access to whatever was created with their investment. This is the aim of the Options Appraisal

4.3 All major parks have to face up to the needs of generating revenue through commercial activity although they may receive their core funding from another source than a local authority

- Osterley Park, owned by National Trust raises money from membership and endowments.
- Hyde Park managed by Royal Parks is funded by central government.

5.0 Current Park Management

The park is currently managed by 'John Laing Integrated Services' (JLIS) who are the Managing Agents for Hounslow Parks. (They took over from CIP in June 2008) They have appointed 'Continental Landscapes' to carry out grounds maintenance.

- Management is within the current budget and opportunities to increase revenue are limited.
- Currently the number of events in the Park is very limited. The largest of these, the London Mela is free and subsidised by the Mayor of London and Ealing Council. The charge for car parking helps to cover the cost.
- Capital sums to carry out works occasionally become available. There is a current proposal to rebuild toilets near to the café that we hope to complete by Spring 2009.

- The last major capital improvement was at least eight years ago when works were carried out to the playground the Bathhouse, Temple near the round pond and lights on the main drive.
- RG will liaise with JLIS to make them aware that there were some potential volunteers in the group who might support their work in future.

6.0 Future Park Management

Without a much-improved governance/management structure the whole project was likely to fail.

- The example of Chiswick House Gardens was raised by way of comparison. After the restoration the Park will be managed by a Trust composed of councillors, members of the Public and representatives of English Heritage.
- The option of selling to National Trust had been explored previously they would require a significant endowment to manage the estate and may have led to selling off of land for development to provide this. This option was not viewed favourably.
- The Regeneration board backed by the executive of the two councils will have some important decisions to make before any new management structure is in place.

7.0 Community Workshops

Some people expressed a desire to present proposals for the estate.

RG suggested a Community Workshop at which ideas can be generated for consideration by the consultants. It was suggested that once this date was known people should contact RG if they had an idea they wished to present and that this should be no longer than 2 minutes.

8.0 Next Meeting

10.30 Saturday 24 Jan 2009 in the Small Mansion Terrace Room.