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## *Southwark 2030*

### **Southwark Park and King's Stairs Gardens**



### **Southwark 2030 Consultation**

We are very pleased to be part of Southwark Council's Southwark 2030 consultation. As a fully constituted voluntary group, with an active social media presence, regular contact with around 400 people, and as organisers of numerous park-based activities, we believe we are well-placed to make a meaningful contribution to discussions about the future of Southwark Park and King's Stairs Gardens.

In November 2020 we engaged positively with Southwark Council's Southwark Park Vision consultation. Most of the ideas we proposed then remain relevant today, in particular our core principles and priorities, which we put forward once again. The full document is freely available to download from our website at <http://www.spa1869.org.uk/category/publications/>

In the few years since the Southwark Park Vision was undertaken we have continued to listen to the opinions of our members, supporters and the wider community at various forums, and their views given inform our thinking here.

Recently, on 15 March 2023, we held a public meeting specifically to consider this latest consultation, and were gratified that some fifty people attended. The comments made that evening, and related written communications, strengthen what follows and also raise a number of issues for debate.

We are confident that many of the suggested improvements to both parks can be made, ideally before 2030, if Southwark Council and key partners work together in a committed way.

The Management Committee  
Southwark Park Association 1869  
March 2023

**Core Principles: Southwark Park and King's Stairs Gardens must be places where:**

- The boundaries are unswervingly protected or enhanced, with no land sold-off or built upon for non-park purposes.
- The green and blue environment is protected and significantly enhanced, through investment and innovative measures which help wildlife flourish, improve public health and quality of life of the community, aid biodiversity and mitigate climate change.
- The cultural, sports, play and recreational facilities are protected and significantly enhanced.
- The infrastructure is improved and maintained to a level appropriate for English Heritage Grade 2 Listed and Queen Elizabeth Field in Trust facilities.
- Participation and community involvement in decision-making about the parks is made far more inclusive by Southwark Council listening, and responding to a wide range of people and organisations with their varied interests and enthusiasms.
- The staffing levels have improved so that the public can be confident of their security and safety at all times when using the parks, and that their information needs are met.
- Education and communications about the parks are improved so everyone can discover the rich variety of their natural and historic environment, and have the chance to value them as a source of local pride and identity.
- Sustainable development is seen in action.

**Southwark Park - Priorities**

**Protecting and enhancing the boundaries of the park by:**

- Retaining the whole of the Old Nursery site and upgrading it for managed community use, e.g. allotments, community tree nursery, community orchard. There are concerns about the future of the area which, in contradiction to earlier allocation of funding by the Council, is currently inaccessible to the public and overgrown.
- Boundary hedging and/or planting is needed to improve the visual amenity for users and environmental value for wildlife, most notably along St. Joseph's Primary School boundary; by The Lodge.Space; all of the south-west boundary from Hawkstone car park beyond Maydew House to Frankland Close; the boundary walls from the Moreton entrance to Millstream House and the boundary along Albin's Memorial Garden
- Quiet zones, with appropriate signage, close to neighbouring properties in order to respect people's privacy and their quality of life.

**Protecting and significantly enhancing the green and blue environment of the park by:**

- Retention of the whole of the Nature Area and upgrading and managing it for increased environmental education and community use.
- More sensitive care of trees, particularly the iconic Planes. An audit of the trees and a lifetime plan for each one should be in place. There are concerns that due to over-zealous health and safety, trees are being felled unnecessarily, and without adequate explanation.
- Creation of some fast-growing pocket forests to help combat air and noise pollution caused by the surrounding heavy traffic.
- Introducing a substantial wildlife meadow of flowers for pollinators, which is regularly re-sown and enhanced.
- Greening the Sports Centre fencing to soften the harsh visual impact.

- Reinstating formal flower beds, which seem to have been filled in without public consultation.
- Greater care for the Ada Salter Garden, including renovation of paving, some benches under the gazebos and enforcement of the no-dogs or other animals regulation, which is often flouted.
- Ensuring that proposed nearby building developments (e.g. Seven Islands Leisure Centre and Maydew House sites) do not have a negative impact on biodiversity by virtue of their scale, height and casting of shadow.

**Protecting and significantly enhancing the cultural, sports, play and recreational facilities of the park by:**

- Retention and continuous improvement of the two art galleries, the bowls green and pavilion, the tennis courts, the sports centre and the children's playground.
- Lake Gallery renovations and upgrading of defunct or inefficient utilities and solar panels on the roof to improve environmental efficiency and reduce overheads.
- Dilston Gallery repair of the concrete cracking and other works to take the building off the 'Buildings at Risk' register.
- The Oval - provision of high quality grass cricket square; a new all-weather cricket pitch and two grass football pitches.
- Investing in the bowls facility, in particular ditch coverings, maintenance of the green (in its worse condition for 15 years), maintenance of the artificial rink which is deteriorating, provision of proper mowers and re-installation of CCTV cameras, previously damaged in a break-in.
- Encouraging far greater access by children and youth to the sports centre, through affordable pricing and arrangements with local schools and youth clubs. Similarly, offering affordable access to runners who may wish to use the track to avoid dogs and cycles on the park paths.
- Installing an activity/skateboarding facility located within or by the sports centre, but away from the air-polluted Hawkstone Road.
- Providing informal children's play opportunities throughout the park to complement the fitted playground.
- Providing covered areas with permanent tables so that the public can still enjoy the park if the weather changes. Sited near to the pathways for disability access.
- Adding more seating for those who wish to rest or take in the views.

**Improving and maintaining the infrastructure by:**

- Upgrading the central drive fencing, repairing the roadway and pavement and solving the drainage problems by the former Park Lodge.

**Improving Community Involvement in the park by:**

- Southwark Council confirming that public engagement over the park is a good and effective way to build a sense of community and improve the quality of life of the people.
- Southwark Council committing to engage with many more local organisations and individuals on an equal and regular basis than is currently the case; and to do so in as many differing ways as possible. Our Association is ready to help facilitate this.
- Specifically engaging with more people over major future design, planning and management issues.
- Re-establishing a Young Friends of Southwark Park group.

- Encouraging greater collaboration with volunteers in productive ways so that there is a better understanding between management and the community.
- Encouraging greater use of the bandstand as a venue for community activities e.g. offering free use to local schools and music groups to busk on Saturday mornings – ‘Busking at the Bandstand’.

#### **Improving Staffing by:**

- Recognising that for a park of its importance it is seriously understaffed.
- Recognising that a permanent senior management presence is needed in the park most of the time.
- Employing staff with a strong community engagement remit.
- On maintenance, ensure that there are suitably experienced people in post who know exactly what they are doing.

#### **Improving Education and Communications about the park by:**

- Providing information in various forms including static boards, publications, events and a more dynamic social media presence – e.g. opening up a digital audio and image space on the Council’s website for park users to share recorded sounds and images.
- Making more use of local newspapers such as Southwark News and South London Press to regularly promote the park and thereby reflect people’s keen interest in what is going on there.
- Making publicly available any Council audits of the flora and fauna of the park, for free use by schools, community groups and organisations. Where audits do not exist, carry them out.
- More signage that promotes considerate use of the park e.g. dogs off leads, barbeques, and noise near neighbours.
- Better communication between departments within the Council.

#### **Sustainability**

- Utilising existing buildings such as the former café and the boat house for community benefit.
- Exploring wind power for lighting, etc.
- Ensure that capital projects are adequately funded long-term for repair and maintenance.

#### **King’s Stairs Gardens – Priorities**

Many of the general points made above are also applicable to KSG. More specifically, KSG needs:

- A cohesive tree planting plan which avoids trees being located inappropriately (e.g. too close to residences, under other trees, or in play spaces); and better tree maintenance, especially watering.
- An upgrading of the children’s playground.
- Replacing the boundary bollards in Fulford Street.
- Solving the long-running problem of dangerous or intrusive motorbikes and cycles within the park and by Cottle Way.
- Improved security by installation of CCTV
- An improved gateway entrance at the Jamaica Road/Rotherhithe roundabout to draw people in.

## **Up for Debate**

A number of other suggestions have been made. We ask the Council to consider the feasibility of each of the following:

### **Community Co- Management of Southwark Park?**

Throughout its long life the park has always been managed successfully by a local authority of one form or another. While there has been some welcome capital investment in recent times, regrettably there is a growing view that with all of the understandable pressures it faces, the Council seems to be reducing community involvement in the key areas of planning, and decision-making. The local management is stretched across too many parks leading to an inevitable distancing from the specific concerns of Southwark's oldest and we believe very important park. Is it now time for the Council to investigate the alternative of formal co-management with a federation of local groups and park users? This way could bring a sharper focus, fresh ideas and even capacity to bring in resources?

### **Physically linking Southwark Park and King's Stairs Gardens?**

As is well-known King's Stairs Gardens was originally intended to be an extension of the larger park, offering people access to the River Thames. The busy Jamaica Road has always been a significant barrier between the two parks, and while it is possible to cross the road safely, there is undoubtedly a real disconnect between the two places. A Green Bridge was once mooted. Are there other possibilities?

### **Part pedestrianise Southwark Park Central Drive?**

Ever since opening in 1869 the drive has divided the park in two. Generations have passed since it was a thoroughfare between Gomm Road and Southwark Park Road. Today it is essentially a car parking space, rather run down and of limited wider environmental or social value. Can we reimagine the drive by softening parts of it and making it much more pedestrian friendly? While retaining some necessary vehicle access for park users, can the balance between car, lorry, cycle and people be altered? Could the resulting space gained be put to new use – for instance a green corridor; a weekend market location; public art; seating and tables; the location for a fountain or some other feature? At the very least it would help bring together the two parts of the park.

### **Alternative car parking and depot in Southwark Park?**

In the course of discussing the Central Drive, it was suggested that the current depot could be used as a public car park, and that the operations taking place there might be transferred elsewhere in the park e.g. to the currently unused former Park office site.

### **Cycles and Scooters in the Parks?**

A contentious issue for park users who have experienced worrying incidents from dangerously fast cycles and electric scooters. There is a sense that in the laudable aim of encouraging climate-friendly transport, the needs of walkers are being marginalised. Our discussions show the dangers to people and animals are real, and are not being addressed seriously enough. Signage is one thing, but should there be a policy rethink? For instance, with a major new dedicated cycle lane so close by, could a ban on cycling in King's Stairs Gardens be perfectly reasonable? Or, if not that, the introduction "calming" measures such as chicanes and rumble strips? In Southwark Park, where the long, flat paths are used by some cyclists as raceways, similar modifications should be considered.

### **Lido in Southwark Park?**

For over seventy years the park had a popular outside swimming pool. Since its closure in the 1990s there have been consistent calls for a new facility. It would be a significant capital project, with ongoing revenue consequences, but with all of the major regeneration and investment going on around the park, is it too blue sky to be thinking of it?

### **Publicly Accessible Grounds Maintenance Documents?**

There is understandable frustration when trees are cut down, or planting schemes are altered in the parks with minimal public consultation or communication. Public access to detailed documentation on the various sites would help.

### **Licensing of Tennis or other Sports Coaches**

The Council's recent changes to limit tennis coaching arrangements in its parks is likely to lead to an unwanted consequence, namely lack of access to the courts by local coaches. Successful long-standing programmes are in danger of folding. We ask the Council to review the position to protect local coaches and their clients. Also to make it clear if the policy for tennis is to be applied to other sports in the future.