

# **South Park Users' Group Consultation - Summer 2006**

## **Background**

The Peterborough Road and Area Residents' Association (PRARA) represents the roads that surround South Park. Since its inception some five years ago, PRARA has campaigned for better maintenance of the park and a major improvement programme.

PRARA has a vision for the park, which was opened in 1904, which would restore it to the standard it originally was, so that it is a fit place for the very many people who use it, often on a very regular basis. The vision seeks a restoration inspired by the park's Victorian beginnings but addressing current needs by adding an educational element so that it better serves the eight surrounding schools, most of which have limited or no sports and recreation facilities of their own.

This vision is slowly being progressed in close consultation with the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham. This progress requires the development of a conservation plan and a master plan. In order to inform these plans and support a planned Lottery bid, PRARA has established a Users' Group by means of a public consultation so that the views of local people who are not in the PRARA area are taken into account.

This report provides details of the consultation and the outcomes it provided.

## **Consultation Timing and Methodology**

The main consultation period was for five weeks from mid-August until 18th September 2006.

- Notices were posted at all the park entrances, on the Clancarty Road fencing and on the tennis courts within the park. Notices that disappeared were replaced.
- A copy of the notice was posted on the PRARA web site, [www.prara.org.uk](http://www.prara.org.uk)
- Letters were sent to the forty cricket teams and forty football teams who were listed by the Council as booking time on the sports pitches within the park.
- The eight schools that either surround the park or are very close to it were contacted by e-mail by local councillor Jane Law.

The text of the notice was:

# **South Park Users' Group Consultation - Summer 2006**

PRARA, the Peterborough Road and Area Residents' Association, is establishing a Users Group for South Park.

We are working with the Borough towards a major improvement scheme for the Park and need to know what you think and would like to see done. Please tell us:

- Who you are, when you use the park and what for (exercise, walking the dog, the Childrens' Play Area, play tennis and so on)
- What deters you from using the park?
- What would encourage you to make more use of the park?
- What you think is best / worst about the park as it is?
- How you would like to see the park improved (such as adding a cafe)?
- Any other comments you may like to make

## **Responses**

60 e-mail responses and 11 letters were received from residents and sports groups, ranging from single paragraph comments up to four pages of thoughtful, observant and detailed suggestions, but disappointingly only two from schools. As a structured questionnaire was not used, it is not possible to provide a statistical analysis as such, but it has produced a much wider range of observations, opinions, comments and suggestions than a questionnaire would have allowed.

There were a number of common themes which can be categorised as follows; the percentage of responses which mentioned them is shown by each one:

- Complaints about the general condition and maintenance - 66%
- A cafe and toilets needed - 62%
- Concerns over safety, the Parks Police and the need for Park-keepers - 38%
- Concerns over dog owners - 27%
- Childrens' Play Area improvements - 21%
- Better sports facilities - 16%
- The Aviary - 19%

# **South Park Users' Group Consultation - Summer 2006**

## **A selection of comments**

- ❖ The facilities in the park have declined markedly since we moved here eleven years ago. We now only used the park occasionally and are deterred by the poor state of much of the park.
- ❖ I have been living in Peterborough Road for 20 years and the park has simply become more and more shabby as the years have gone by. A little TLC would go a long way.
- ❖ My wife and I moved back to London 6 months ago and specifically chose a house in Dymock Street due to its proximity to the park. South Park is held in great affection by those that use it.
- ❖ I would suggest that the single greatest improvement that the Council can now make is to show that it is once more in management control of the Park and its employees.
- ❖ Park gardeners seem to know little (or care) about how to prune roses or bushes, weed control, etc.etc. Are they ever trained for the job? Weeding is never done by hand but they hoe and remove all the new expensive top soil.
- ❖ The council seems to make an effort to maintain the place - the grass is cut, the leaves swept, the sports areas marked out properly and many flower beds tended to.
- ❖ We are not happy using the park in late afternoon and early dusk as it seems to be a gathering place for teenagers, which can be quite intimidating if I'm in the park on my own with my young children. Also, there is \*always\* some sort of rubbish in the childrens' playground. This morning alone under the wendy house there were empty crisp packets, glass bottles and sweet packets. I have even seen used condoms and a used hypodermic needle.
- ❖ I think South Park is a lovely space. I am glad the council is paying more attention to it. Teams or leagues booking the pitches should be held responsible for the behaviour of their players and spectators.
- ❖ We are frequent users of the playground and the two things we have missed over the years are clean toilets and a cafe. The biggest problem for children using the park is the dog poo that is everywhere.
- ❖ We are lucky to have South Park and it is a shame it is not to put to its full potential. Most parents at present regard it as unsafe and unsavoury - Head of Puffins Nursery School.
- ❖ More park patrols are needed and ways of making people pick up their dog mess.

## **South Park Users' Group Consultation - Summer 2006**

- ❖ As a sports facilities user, I use the park probably three times each summer. I have played sports at both Battersea Park (facilities are exceptional and only slightly more expensive) and Bishops Park (facilities are also better.)
- ❖ I moved to Dymock Street in December 2005 and have found that South Park is very much the heart of the community.
- ❖ I would rather pay considerably more money if the standard of the pitches and the changing room could be raised.
- ❖ Until the end of the 2003 season we played four or five cricket games per season for many years ... but moved because the condition of the square and outfield had deteriorated to a quite deplorable and potentially dangerous state.
- ❖ The changing room facilities are awful, especially the showers which are boiling hot in summer and freezing cold in the winter.
- ❖ My boys were mugged for their bicycles while on the basketball court
- ❖ In the four years that I have used the park I have yet to see a gardener actually working. They are either chatting, driving the Council owned vehicles at speed (across the grass rather than down the concrete paths), on their mobiles ..... or - as sighted by myself on several occasion - sauntering off en masse (3 of them) down Hugon Road and returning (at 9.45 am) with carrier bags from Sainsburys.
- ❖ Our cricket team uses the park 8 - 10 times we year..... The changing rooms are dire .... We have often been unable to use the changing rooms as they have been locked.... The cricket pitches are in poor condition and under maintained.

### **Overview of the responses**

Although there was some praise for the park, most of the responses involved criticisms and specific requests for improvements. A major theme - often provided with a resigned anger and frustration - was the lack of, or poor, maintenance of the infrastructure and the generally poor standard of basic maintenance and tidiness, with the result that the state of the park had steadily declined. In spite of this, it was clear that the park is a very important and much appreciated local facility and the open space it provides is greatly valued, particularly by dog owners and parents of young children. There are many of both in the area.

Various conversations with park users reflected and endorsed all the written submissions.

Some of the key points that were made were:

# **South Park Users' Group Consultation - Summer 2006**

- The need for park wardens to improve security, keep the park tidy, ensure the pitches are left in good condition and target dog owners who do not clean up after their animals;
- The very poor state of the South Lodge and its garden and the attitude of park workers generally;
- The shelter at the south end of the park being used by groups of youths, often with dogs, with suspected drug dealing;
- Hugon Road residents adversely affected by the misuse of the basketball court and adjacent areas;
- The pitches and other grass areas being fouled by dog excrement, due to a minority of anti-social owners;
- The poor condition of the pitches;
- The very poor condition of the changing rooms;
- The need to extend the play facilities to cater for more age groups;
- The need for toilets and a good quality cafe.

## **General conclusions and design brief requirements**

Apart from the maintenance issue and lack of toilets, users did not report any fundamental concerns about the location of the park or its general layout. Indeed the open spaces were considered a positive feature.

The responses, pleasingly, confirmed and supported PRARA's vision for the park.

Of over-riding concern is the need for better and proper maintenance and supervision. This is seen both as important now and in the future for an improved park. A better maintained park with the full time presence of park keepers or wardens is also likely to reduce vandalism which is a serious problem, as well as making park users more relaxed and making their visits to the park a more enjoyable experiences. This is an annual budget issue.

**For the essential capital spend, PRARA recommends that the design brief for the landscape architect who is commissioned to produce the master plan should include:**

- No change to the basic structure or layout

## **South Park Users' Group Consultation - Summer 2006**

- Complete restoration of the exterior wall and fencing to their original Victorian condition and colour, and of the two lodges
- Complete replanting to be inspired by the original Victorian design but to take account of contemporary maintenance needs and climate change, and possibly including an enclosed quiet space (such as a Japanese style garden) near to the cafe with controlled access to ensure it remains a peaceful area.
- All sports playing areas, especially the pitches and tennis courts, to be upgraded
- Facilities for schools to be provided so that the sports areas can be used during term time by the surrounding schools, especially Hurlingham & Chelsea
- All 1950's buildings, and other additions not in keeping with the basic Victorian theme, to be demolished and replaced by more sympathetic structures where necessary
- Decent changing rooms for sports teams, and potentially schools as well.
- Extend age range of childrens' play areas and include features such as a sand pit.
- Complete re-think of the south end of the park to improve use of the enclosed court, deal with anti-social issues including the problems experienced by the houses in Hugon Road and create an educational zone in the south east corner with a horticultural area which contrasts Fulham's original role as London's market garden with contemporary urban gardens and also features ecological and natural spaces such a wild life / meadow area
- Better and larger aviary which will provide a high quality environment for the birds
- New toilets
- Restoration and upgrade of the terrace area to include new railings of artistic merit
- Re-establishment of a - high quality - cafe in the location of the original refreshment room adjacent to the North Lodge, with outside seating on the terrace area. This should feature wholesome whole food and should be priced accordingly to prevent it becoming a teenage hangout without it becoming inaccessible to older, retired people many of whom are single and value the social aspect of park life. (Holland Park, Hyde Park and Chiswick House and Common Ground cafe on Wandsworth Common were all suggested by respondents as good examples although these have not been investigated by PRARA.)

Anthony Williams, PRARA South Park Campaign Chairman, on behalf of PRARA and Councillor Jane Law.

7th October, 2006