

The Friends of Kennington Park (FoKP)

Lambeth's Capital Development Programme Update

Introduction

At last year's meeting, the planned work programme for the Capital Development Programme was explained. This report provides an update on developments.

Programme Planning

The council has nominated a single Project Manager for all the projects, an approach which is fully supported by FoKP as there are overlaps and dependencies between the various elements of the programme.

The main development projects were identified as:

- Restoration and access enhancement to the Skatebowl
- Development and extension of the children's play area
- Creation of a youth leisure and activity area
- Improvement of core facilities eg toilets and infrastructure, primarily pathways.

Each project element has a dedicated Steering Group, which include Council and FoKP representatives in addition to specialist advisers where needed. The exception is that the infrastructure projects are being managed directly by the Programme Delivery Group which oversees the full programme and includes a local councillor.

Restoration of the 1970s Skatebowl

The Kennington Skatebowl is much loved among the skateboard community and recognised by the 20th Century Society as an important feature to be retained. Restoring and improving the bowl has been a priority for FoKP for some years and the recent release of funding by Lambeth Council has allowed us to begin the journey to deliver this aim. The Friends had made many useful contacts prior to the project being incorporated into the council's plans and this allowed us to make early progress in establishing a diverse and expert Steering Group, appointing a structural engineer and getting condition surveys done, including tree and topographical surveys. Through the procurement arrangements of the council and following the initial assessment of the engineer, work was done to take off the additional surface, laid some years ago as part of a partial repair. Removing this layer gave access to the original slabs and, in turn, to the adjustment mechanisms which sit beneath them.

Sadly, although not surprisingly, the mechanisms were found to be completely jammed and so our hoped-for speedy repair was not possible. Instead plans were drawn up to remove the slabs which form the base of the bowl and for a complex underpinning process to take place. Removing the slabs and keeping them whole is a significant challenge which would require heavy lifting equipment which, in turn, would jeopardise the adjacent trees. The Steering Group therefore agreed that the slabs could be broken up on site and new ones constructed once the underpinning work was done. Unfortunately, despite 2 procurement processes and despite some interest from various contractors, no formal bid has been received for the work. It has therefore been agreed that the engineer will make direct contact with small number of companies and discuss approaches and options with them.

Unfortunately these delays mean that the skatebowl is very unlikely to be open again this year as originally planned.

Children's Play Area

FoKP has two representatives on this group as it is such an important project.

Our original aspiration was to extend the children's play area into the space currently occupied by the picnic tables and, as part of this plan, to also remove the toilet block creating an exciting new play space that was over twice the size of the existing area. Again, a tree survey was necessary, and it soon became clear that these aspirations could not be realised because of the potential damage to the large trees which have extensive and vulnerable root systems. As a result, plans have been significantly scaled back and the current proposal is to use the existing play space incorporating the small semi-circular area in the front of the current gate. Using clever design it will be possible to maximise the use of the space and so still extend the facilities. This work is likely to result in some minor structural changes.

The new design will feature additional equipment but some of the existing equipment will be retained and refreshed to reduce environmental impact and to manage costs. The council have reinvigorated several parks play areas in the last 2 to 3 years so have good experience of what works. The procurement process for a new contractor will start in September. This is being done as a dual tender also featuring a similar project in Ruskin Park. It is hoped that a company will be signed up within a few weeks and will start to prepare initial designs and costings. Any specific proposals will be considered by the Steering Group. Following their deliberations we anticipate that there will be a consultation process with park and play area users about some aspects of the design. This will probably take the form of an exhibition in the park. It will not be possible to consult on all aspects of the design as much of this will be limited by what is technically possible within the constraints of the area and the trees.

The work on the children's play area is unlikely to start before Spring 2023.

As part of this development, the old toilet block will be removed and replaced with a new facility.

Youth Leisure and Activity Zone

This project will be completed after other major works have been done, but ideas for design and features are already being explored.

The aim is to create a space primarily aimed at young people which will offer both fitness/leisure facilities and space to 'hang out'. Currently the location frequently used for this is the picnic area and/or parts of the children's play area.

Ideas for suitable equipment are currently being sought. All ideas gratefully received. The table tennis tables will remain as these are popular with all ages, indeed we may increase the number. As the start of this project approaches we will hold consultation sessions with relevant groups.

These 3 projects will help provide a wide range of fitness and leisure facilities within the main park.

Toilets and Infrastructure

The project to replace the toilets and to improve the pathways will run alongside work on the other projects to help minimise disruption. The design for the toilets will feature individual cubicles which can be locked electronically at defined times, preventing access. It is hoped that this will reduce the considerable amount of anti-social behaviour which we know to be occurring in the current toilet blocks. The plan is to design the toilet facility in such a way that it sits on the footprint of the current

block in the children's area. Some toilets will face into the children's area and other into the park/picnic area. The block will feature a disabled access/baby changing toilet.

It hasn't yet been decided what will happen to the adult toilet block near the fitness area, but it is expected that this will be removed as it has no specific architectural value and re-purposing it will be difficult and expensive. FoKP did ask the council to consider whether it could be re-purposed as a storage/office space for our use, but the cost is prohibitive because of the work required to sanitise, secure and refit the building.

Financing

Although a sizeable budget has been made available by the Council, funded from the sale of the park-keeper's lodge and surrounding area to TfL some years ago, it will not be sufficient to undertake all the planned work. FoKP have been exploring other funding sources, but the Pandemic has significantly altered and reduced the sources of available funds. It has also caused a significant increase in the cost of materials and building works. As the Capital Development Programme moves forward, we will be exploring all options for securing additional funding.

All suggestions gratefully received.

Marietta Crichton Stuart & Rita Sammons

FoKP Chair & Secretary

August 2022