

The Friends of Kennington Park AGM - 7th July 2021

Overview of the Proposed Capital Development Programme

Introduction

The Friends have been in dialogue with Lambeth Council over many years trying to secure the promised investment in the park which was agreed as part of the sale of the Park Keepers Lodge and associated land to TfL. This sale, value £800k, was part of Northern Line Extension development, a project which is now reaching a conclusion. As regular park users will know, the work resulted in the loss of the previous dog walking area and the establishment of a temporary one. We hope that this will be restored, at least in part, later this year.

During 2020, the then Leader of the Council Cllr Jack Hopkins advised us that capital funding in excess of the purchase figure had been allocated to Kennington in the Parks Budget for the 2021/22 financial year onwards. Unfortunately, the Council have yet to determine the actual figure we will receive. We are in frequent contact with the relevant senior officer and were told very recently that it was unlikely that we would know more detail until the end of the Summer.

Programme Details

A formal review of the 2012 Council Masterplan for Kennington Park was undertaken in 2018. FoKP were consulted about the proposals and sought a number of changes which have subsequently been agreed. As discussions have continued and the likely investment identified, our priorities have been refined to:

- Restoration of the iconic 1970s skatebowl
- Improvement and extension of the children's play area
- Creation of a youth zone adjacent to the table tennis area
- Replacement of the toilets
- Improvements to drainage and pathways.

The estimated costs dating from 2018 will significantly exceed the likely budget and once started, development work will take 2-3 years for completion. Seeking additional funding through grants, corporate support, crowd funding etc will be an important part of FoKP's work over the next 2 years.

In addition to the Capital Development priorities, we want to create a permanent tribute in the park to the Chartist Rally of 1848, ideally in time for the 175th anniversary in 2023. Our aim is to create something that has a function, and we hope to be able to incorporate this into one or more of the priorities. One idea is to create a mosaic which could form part of a development of the skatebowl area or feature in the youth zone. Another is to have a Speakers' Corner.

Public Consultation

In preparation for the implementation of the programme, FoKP have undertaken some initial consultation, canvassing people's views of the park and their priorities for improving facilities. The development and improvement of the Children's play area and the improvement of toilet facilities were the leading issues. Other priorities related to the restoration of the dog walking area, the repair of the skatebowl and the provision of more picnic tables. More detailed consultation will take place as each element of the programme moves forward and as specific designs are considered. An overarching Steering Group for the park's Capital Programme will be set up and Marietta Crichton Stuart will represent the Friends.

Skatebowl Restoration

Work to restore and develop the skatebowl was initiated by FoKP in 2019. We made a number of useful contacts with expertise in the design and maintenance of skatebowls and, as a direct result, received a lot of support and enthusiasm from the skateboarding community including the creation of online petitions. As a result of these contacts, we were able to seek informal advice from a structural engineer and designer, which allowed us to draft and publish a brief for a structural survey. Once responses were received, we shared the information with the Lambeth Council, and they commissioned the structural survey work and established a Skatebowl Project Group which has now had 4 meetings. Rita Sammons is the FoKP representative, and the group is led by Lambeth Project Officer Caroline Streeks.

An initial survey of skatebowl 's structure was completed earlier this year (hence the hole in the concrete surface) and the results have been reviewed by the steering group. As a result, further work is being commissioned on issues which need detailed examination. These are the:

- Condition of the original concrete slabs which are currently covered by a superficial concrete layer added some years ago as part of a renovation. This upper layer has now badly deteriorated and is what has caused the bowl to be closed off for an extended period.
- Condition of the original adjustment mechanisms which sit below the slabs and allow minor changes to be made to the shape of the bowl
- Impact of the surrounding trees on the land and their condition.

These works are expected to be undertaken in the coming weeks and the Steering Group will then consider the next phase.

The project has two potential outcomes The first is a restoration of the bowl, returning it to its original condition, with possible modification to some of the additional skating elements (bumps and ledges) added during the renovation. The second is more ambitious and will include reshaping the area immediately surrounding the bowl to provide improved access, spectator space and better visibility. This will ideally include removing the metal barriers, while meeting the enhanced safety requirements.

Children's Play Area

The children's play area is now showing its age with various pieces of equipment having been decommissioned or under repair over extended periods in the last couple of years. The refurbished train which was once in Vauxhall Park is a good addition, although it was very disappointing that it was fenced off for such an extended period. The toilets in the play area are also in a poor state of repair and again have been closed for extended periods.

During the whole of March this year, FoKP undertook a survey of the playground's use. This involved daily monitoring of the number of children and adults using the play area at several times in the day. This showed that over 80 people were in the space on a number of occasions even though March is hardly high season for outdoor play.

The outline plans are based on increasing the footprint of the play area by demolishing the toilets and incorporating the picnic area. The picnic area will be moved to the other side of the café.

Over the last two years Lambeth Council have created and/or renovated a number of play facilities in other parks and so have excellent recent experience and relevant consultation data which we expect to access in addition to our own consultation outcomes.

This project is the most expensive of those on the priority list and we do not expect any work to take place until 2022. Nikki Smiton will represent us on the Steering Group when it is set up. One of our members has already asked to be involved.

Toilets, Pathways and Drains

The condition of the adult toilets is no better than that of the children's and these have also had extended period of closure. In addition, there have been several incidents of vandalism and illegal activities. The design of the toilets exacerbates some of the issues although the Council has tried to improve the situation with minor modifications. The design and location of all the park's toilets is under consideration.

Anybody using the park over the last few years during of following heavy rain will be only too familiar with the problems of flooding on the pathways and the grassed areas. Work has been undertaken by the Council to try to improve the situation including extensive exploration and cleaning of the drains. The scale of this work makes it the second most expensive item in the programme.

Youth Zone

The need to introduce facilities for teenagers and young people is something that the Committee considers to be important. Table tennis has proved to be a popular activity for all ages and is especially used by young people. Our aim is to develop the space between the tables and the Prince Consort Lodge pathway providing exercise and meeting facilities primarily aimed at young people. The proximity of the skatebowl, the children's area and the fitness area makes this an ideal location.

There are no detailed plans or funding for this project as yet, but we hope it can be prioritised and bring that area, which includes the old basketball court, into effective use. Rachel Williams will be our representative as this work progresses and will led the consultation activities.

Summary

The success of these projects will depend on collaboration with the council, effective consultation and planning with park users (children, young people and parents) and the wider local community. Equally important will be success in securing funding to supplement that provided by the council. Essential to all of this will be the ideas, backing and involvement of park users, if you are interested in being part of this, please get in touch

We hope to be advised of the detailed budget and spending timescale towards the end of the Summer.

Rita Sammons

FoKP Secretary