



Friends of Wimbledon Park

Jill Hopper

Speech to Merton Council's Planning Committee on 10/10/13

I am speaking on behalf of the Friends of Wimbledon Park. Our members oppose the scheme before you, as do many hundreds of other local residents.

We were hugely encouraged last month when many of you spoke up in defence of this beautiful Grade II* listed park. Clearly lots of members of this committee have had happy times there.

There was outspoken criticism from you about the proposal. "Ill thought out", and "half baked" were two of the comments you may recall. "Should never have come before the committee in the form that it has" was another.

You quite rightly deferred making a decision and sent your planning officers off to do some more work. Well, I'm sorry to say that none of your points have been taken seriously.

For example:

- You raised concerns about the damage to the green space and its historic views – their response: "We'll plant a hedge". That's just not good enough.
- You raised concerns about the lack of credible research into who exactly is using the car park, and what proportion are commuters, builders and other non-park users. Their response – to carry out one more count of cars on 28 September at 11.15am. This was a Saturday, so obviously commuters and contractors wouldn't have been present then. Frankly, it's shocking. A group of primary schoolkids could do a better job.

There are other problems with the revised application.

It concedes, in paragraph 7.29, that:

"there are plans under consideration to introduce parking fees in the park but this is separate to this proposal."



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The Friends of Wimbledon Park, plus lots of other local residents, have been calling for this measure for some time. Surely it makes sense to see what effect charging for parking has on demand before rushing to extend the car park.

Lastly, the revised proposal once again dismisses safety concerns. The entrance to the park has been dangerous throughout the summer. Word has spread that you can park inside for free, and there was constant traffic queuing to get in and out, along what is a narrow, single-lane road. Entering the park has become an unpleasant and hazardous experience for pedestrians, joggers, cyclists, disabled people and families with young children. It's only a matter of time before there is an accident. Allowing this volume of traffic into the park is madness.

Since the stories in the local press, even more people have rallied to our cause and there are now hundreds vehemently opposed to the plan. If it goes ahead, visitors to the park will be greeted not by open space but by a mini roundabout, an expanse of parked cars and a traffic jam. Do you really want this to be your legacy?

We believe Wimbledon Park deserves better. Please, please, continue to defend our park, and see off this ill-conceived scheme once and for all.



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