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Member of Parliament for Putney, Roehampton and Southfields
Shadow Cabinet Office Minister
House of Commons
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SB/awuh

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Dear Fleur

The AELTC Wimbledon Park Project

Thank you for your detailed feedback and response to the third consultation for the AELTC Wimbledon Park Project. I'm glad to hear that there are some key aspects of the proposals that you welcome and support. The 23 acre new park with permissive access for the public and the suggested walkway around the lake have also been supported by many of the residents and local groups we have spoken to about our plans.

I appreciate that aspects of the plan are of concern to you, to our neighbours and the wider local community in Southfields. I hope I can address those concerns and give a clear outline and explanation of our thinking behind the plans. We firmly believe this is a once in more than a generation opportunity to be able to secure the long-term future of The Championships as the pinnacle of tennis and one of the most premier international sporting events in the world, and therefore also secure the future of British tennis, whilst at the same time providing long term positive benefits to our neighbours, the local community and further afield. Delivering our scheme in a Grade II listed landscape, drawing on and enhancing the important features that still remain from the time that Capability Brown put his vision into practice will be a priority, unlike the previous Victorian-era development which saw significant levels of housing built on the site.

For ease, I have addressed your concerns under key headings and sought to answer the specific questions you have raised under each.

Consultation approach

I am sorry to hear that the local community in Southfields do not feel as engaged as we would have hoped, or as aware of the proposals as they could be. I would like to assure you that we have taken onboard your feedback on this issue.

As you know, the consultation phase has taken place during the third Government lockdown meaning that our previous approach of hosting drop-in days to see and discuss the proposals in person was unfortunately not possible.

You rightly talk about the importance of engaging with local Councillors and Residents Association networks. This has been a focus of our approach, and whilst we had previously relied on information being widely disseminated from these groups, we acknowledge that there have certainly been barriers to this happening as smoothly as anticipated over the past year.

On the other hand, having a virtual room where the information on the proposals could be read and digested over time has enabled us to receive a far greater amount of feedback than in a more 'normal', traditional consultation process. Over the past four months, we have had 812 comments and suggestions through our online feedback form and another 70 direct emails and letters from various groups. In addition, there are posters in the information displays in Wimbledon Park about the proposals and the consultation.

This feedback has been invaluable for us to receive, and we have worked hard to consider and integrate comments where possible. For example, some local residents highlighted that a link between Church Road and Wimbledon Park was a priority, which we have incorporated into our proposals for the new parkland. We have also answered a significant number of the questions raised and maintained ongoing dialogue with groups and individuals.

It is also worth noting that following on from the walk around the Wimbledon Park Golf Course with yourself, the Putney Environment Commission and the Friends of Wimbledon Park we ran a further eight walks over three days for local residents and are looking to continue to do so. We would be glad to share further details of who we are reaching out to and welcome any additional recommendations you may have.

Whilst we plan to submit the planning application to both Merton and Wandsworth Councils at the end of this month, I want to assure you that our local engagement will continue throughout this period and beyond. We will continue to actively engage and discuss both the proposals and the ongoing opportunities for local people to utilise and benefit from the Show Court and the park with the community networks across Southfields, Wimbledon Park, Wimbledon Village and beyond. Throughout the planning process both Boroughs will of course also be further consulting and scrutinising our proposals.

Parkland Show Court

On including the Show Court in the second consultation, it was clearly stated that the first consultation focused on the background, history and complexity of the site, with the second consultation focusing on the scheme. This is because we were keen to start the conversation with the community at an early stage and lay the foundations for further engagement, at which point specific details of the scheme were still being developed and not yet in a position to be shared. We had begun our process by understanding the history of the landscape, and we wanted to share that knowledge with our local community in the same way.

As to the Show Court placement, we considered several locations – the only two options on the existing site would be at the very north or south of our existing footprint – which means at an extremely close proximity to many neighbours that border on or face on to our main site. These locations also mean that the extended linear arrangement of the site as it currently is operated would continue with the dead-ends that lead to crowd control and safety issues. The process we went through to assess potential options for locating the new show court has been included within our third consultation and will be set out in detail within the forthcoming planning application.

By locating the court in the park we aim to provide a central focus to the event with a new heart between the new court, Centre Court and No.1 Court. In this location the new court will be far further away from local residents and have no impact on their properties. The location chosen is more suitable because as well as being embedded within the landscape itself it is nestled within a ring of veteran oak trees. The court is roughly as tall as the tree canopy (24 meters) and slightly lower than No1 Court.

Metropolitan Open Land is a designation that presumes against most forms of development other than where very special circumstances can be demonstrated in support the development. This can take the form of a national or international benefit or benefit to the land itself or to the community. In our case we are fully aware of the designation and our proposals, and our application will cover the socio-economic benefits of the scheme alongside the other important benefits we believe our development can deliver (particularly the new public park).

As regards the size of the new building, the court is the minimum size for the intended purpose. Its footprint is governed by the size of a tennis court and we have designed the tiered seating and outer shell to reflect and protect the neighbouring veteran trees. We have also undertaken an extensive visual impact assessment which has demonstrated that the new show court will be well screened from the surrounding area affording glimpsed views from outside the site.

It is also worth drawing your attention to the number of temporary buildings that are currently constructed every year at Qualifying as well as during The Championships. The Parkland Show Court will provide a permanent home and solution to this, therefore reducing the amount of traffic on a yearly basis needed to bring in and erect many of those structures, meaning a much more positive long term impact on the local community both from a traffic and environment point of view, something we hope neighbours will appreciate given their concerns about construction traffic.

In summary, the proposed Parkland Show Court is a critical component of the future of the Championships. As an un-ticketed court it will provide a unique opportunity to watch tennis for our Ground Pass spectators who would not need a Show Court ticket to enjoy tennis of the highest quality. This ensures that Wimbledon remains an affordable and accessible event and increases the amount of guaranteed tennis, with the roof providing protection from rain and scheduling flexibility. The building also provides space for all the different functions and groups necessary to stage a successful Qualifying event: dressing rooms, facilities and catering for players; officials, Ball Boys and Girls, IT and broadcast provision to name but a few.

Parkland Show Court and wider community benefit

As mentioned in the proposals and in the consultations to date, we are exploring opening the Show Court facilities year-round, when not needed by Qualifying or The Championships. Whilst our plans are still developing on this front, I would like to stress first of all that we want to work with residents and community groups in shaping that year-round use, curating a programme of community activities and making available space that the local community want and appreciate. Locating the Show Court in the park, further away from our year-round operations, will be advantageous to our ability to deliver on this aspiration.

At the end of last year, we spoke to over 35 different community groups – ranging from community embedded groups like Learn to Love to Read and Katherine Low Settlement, various Residents Associations, local councillors and interest groups like the Friends of Wimbledon Park and the Wimbledon Village Business Association to name but a few – to get a thorough understanding of what was lacking in terms of existing community infrastructure and what would be of benefit. The strong feedback was for flexible, affordable spaces to host meetings, workshops, light exercise classes etc and we believe that the Show Court can deliver on all of this for the local community and beyond. By cleverly designing the spaces needed for different tennis groups (players, officials and the like) we can then turn those spaces into community spaces outside of The Championships period and could host

anything from yoga classes to after school clubs and various meetings, all in cocreation with local groups to ensure that there is positive benefit to our neighbours coming from this offer.

There are two additional aspects to this to draw your attention to; whilst the delivery of the Show Court would be some time away, our intention is to use the Wimbledon Park Golf Club House in a very similar fashion in the intervening period, as you reference in your letter, establish an outdoor learning hub from where we can run nature related workshops and school visits drawing on our diverse landscape and biodiversity, as well as having a Capability Brown heritage exhibition. Similarly, at our Community Tennis Centre in Raynes Park, which is currently in its last phase of completion, the clubhouse will perform a very similar function to what I have outlined above, hosting community groups and talks to ensure that the facility is open to and can benefit everyone, not just those playing tennis.

We are in ongoing discussions with Merton Council as the manager of the public park regarding any potential investments into the public park that will help to enhance park users experience. The Friends of Wimbledon Park play an important role in bringing these issues to our attention and we continue to engage with the Friends on a number of areas.

As mentioned above, we would be very glad to continue to engage with you and take on any additional recommendations for other groups and local community champions that we should speak to and involve in developing our thoughts for longer term community uses.

Biodiversity and environmental impacts

Sustainability is at the core of the design for the whole scheme, including the new show court.

For the show court, we have developed a building that is inherently sustainable, where the drive to reduce embodied carbon and energy use, both in its construction and use, has directly informed the design vision. This has produced a building that consists largely of unconditioned passive spaces open to the external environment thus requiring no heating or cooling.

Design of the building's structure will be as efficient as possible to ensure no excessive use of materials, and opportunities for prefabrication of primary structural elements will be maximised. The use of timber is being explored along with other alternatives to concrete and the proposed green walls will improve the biodiversity of the site. Air, ground and water source solutions are being explored to provide a decarbonised heating and cooling solution for those parts of the building that will require it.

In terms of the new park, the full report (which will be submitted as part of the planning application) shows a biodiversity net gain. Given the topographical character of the parkland, it lends itself best to the open parkland that Brown designed, which will contribute invaluable health, recreation, biodiversity and environmental benefits. As custodians of the land, it is important to us that the very positive benefits from the newest park in London are sustainable and can be enjoyed for the long-term. The guarantees of such land will be formed within the planning permission if granted.

Far from harming biodiversity, the proposed boardwalk will play an important role in providing a buffer for aquatic and bird wildlife to thrive, preserving the wet woodland edges which have been untouched for a number of years and sport great ecological variety and habitats, therefore increasing and preserving biodiversity rather than reducing it. Delivering a walkway around the lake on dry land alone is very difficult for a number of reasons. In some places the land is so narrow that it would not be accessible and would greatly disturb the wet woodland edge and the habitats that we are keen to protect. Equally the boardwalk will open up the ability to see and experience the lake from completely different angles and ensure that

the whole walk, on land and on the boardwalk sections, is fully wheelchair accessible. Furthermore, if built on land in line with the original deeds, a large fence is specified to be erected separating the walk from the land. This has a detrimental effect which we wish to avoid.

We have had conversations with the water sport centre, run by Merton Council, and as a result of their feedback have changed the location of the proposed boardwalk sections to maximise quieter wind areas on the lake which is an important element for the centre running water sport sessions on a windy day. Equally, we are in ongoing dialogue with the Wimbledon Park Angling Club and the fishing pontoons have been designed taking onboard their suggestions and input.

The proposed desilting of the lake is a complex matter as you suggest and needs to be sensitively handled to ensure minimum disruption and impact. We are investigating a wide range of methods to minimise impact as much as possible. If agreed, the preferred desilting process will be confirmed with Merton Council, and we will continue to actively engage with lake user groups as we have been doing. Overall, desilting will be to the benefit of all lake users.

With any development project or work that we carry out, we always ensure the works are undertaken within any environmental or wildlife restrictions, for example adhering to and respecting the bird nesting season. These will all be conditions imposed via the permission if received.

Finally, to your point about the at-risk register; by desilting the lake, producing a complete landscape management plan, restoring and preserving the remnants of the Brownian landscape including key views, as well as working proactively and in partnership with the two other landowners (The Wimbledon Club and Merton Council) on a management plan for the whole site, as well as working with Historic England, our proposal addresses and ultimately aims to remove the at risk status, supporting it and keeping it safe for the future.

Construction traffic, impact on air quality, closure of Church Road

I understand local residents' concerns about construction traffic, and we will be working hard to reduce this as much as is possible. Things have moved on considerably since the construction of the new No.1 Court in the 1990s. A final arrangement and agreement on construction traffic will be reached with both councils as part of the planning permission negotiations, as has been the case for every development project we have delivered, which will include agreed routes for construction traffic. In fact, over the past decade traffic has been routed through Merton streets until it reaches Parkside or the A3 and not on Wimbledon Park Road. We are committing to reducing transport impact throughout the timeframe of the scheme looking to reduce material deliveries and onsite construction time. A further example is re-using the top soil of the golf course on site which also means a reduction in traffic.

By reducing the construction traffic as much as possible, we will reduce the impact on air quality. Wandsworth Council launched its air quality action plan earlier this month and amongst its efforts in improving air quality is protecting green spaces, planting trees and enhancing biodiversity, key elements of our proposals which we hope will contribute positively towards the council's action plan as well as its biodiversity strategy. We have seen from the Wimbledon Park Residents Associations data that the air quality in the area in question is very good. For all of our recent projects we have measured air quality and vibration and have not exceeded any conditioned targets.

I am sorry to hear that a local resident was asked to show her passport to gain access to her road during this year's Championships. Whilst a lot of the feedback we received about traffic

management was positive, we look to uphold the highest standards and ensure that no local residents have a similar negative experience. I have fed this back to our traffic management team and they will take this and all the other feedback into consideration when planning and improving on traffic management for future years. I would like to make clear that all local residents on neighbouring roads had access to their roads at all times. Signs for the road closure were displayed well in advance, starting at the A3, ensuring that traffic remained on designated main roads rather than trying to get near to The Championships. It is also worth noting that we have received a significant amount of positive feedback about the road closures positively contributing to reduced traffic around local roads.

The impact on the 493 bus route was, as I mentioned in my previous note to you, marginal and in terms of travel time with very few minutes added to its normal journey times outside of The Championships.

As for a tunnel underneath Church Road this has been explored and, I'm afraid, is not a viable option. There are a number of reasons for this, one of which is a prolonged construction phase which would add years to the scheme, increase construction traffic and impact on local residents, something that we would like to reduce as much as possible. Another is that such a plan would have a far greater physical impact on the landscape and veteran trees, which again we are seeking to minimise.

Wimbledon Park car parking

We are committed to becoming a primarily public and healthy transport event and to reduce our reliance on local car parking. The Somerset Road project, which Merton Council was referring to, will certainly help ease some of the parking challenges we face going forward, as will enhanced park and ride options. I have asked our Championships Operations team to review all car parking options and to see how we can start to reduce the footprint in the public park as soon as is feasibly possible.

Part of our agreement with Merton Council is to repair any damage caused over the two weeks when some of the grassy area is being used as a car park. The weather was not kind to the park this year and our contractor has penned off the areas needing work, prepared the ground and reseeded the affected areas. They will work with Idverde, Merton's park management partner, to make sure that the areas are being cared for correctly in relation to the weather.

Practice courts

In regard to the 39 grass courts (including the proposed Parkland Show Court), our proposals outline that the new grass courts will be without netting or lighting, which will maintain the open character of the site outside of the Championships period. We have calculated that this number is needed to support the ambitions of the All England Club to bring Qualifying on to the main site and deliver the best tennis opportunities possible on a local, national and global scale. We have 18 match courts and 8 practice courts at Roehampton where Qualifying is currently staged. We have another 6 temporary courts on our offshoot croquet site on Bathgate Road, which brings the total of relocated courts to 32. Adding a further six courts for practice means that we will be able to rest some courts from practice and play, as a natural surface it needs to recuperate every so often. It also means we are able to offer players a full court for practice, something that we cannot do at the moment (in fact, some Championships match courts are used for practice which puts added strain on an already heavily used court over a short period of time).

The small maintenance buildings have been kept to a minimum and to ensure that there is no unnecessary movement of equipment and machinery. It is key to note that these

maintenance buildings are not entirely for tennis uses but are also hugely important in maintaining the quality of the publicly accessible parkland. In addition, each hub structure contains an accessible WC for guests.

I sincerely hope that these responses address your concerns and explain the reasoning behind our thinking that has driven this scheme and its final shape. We have spent a considerable amount of time looking at all possibilities and options to arrive at the final version of our vision for how the current golf course can be transformed into tennis in an English parkland. We hope that these plans highlight that we seek not only to maintain Wimbledon as one of the world's most prestigious international sporting events and secure the future of the sport in this country, but also to deliver positive long-term benefits to the very local community around us, as well as further afield.

As I mentioned, we are looking into organising more walks over the next couple of months (and in accordance with any government restrictions that might be in place at the time) and when we have more information I will ask Ulrika to share that with you. We would be delighted to run another walk for members of the Putney Environment Commission who could not make it the first time around.

If there is any other information that would be helpful for you to have or a conversation at any point, then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sally Bolton', written in a cursive style.

Sally Bolton OBE
Chief Executive