



Via email

21.02.23

Dear Fleur,

Thank you for your recent letter to Debbie Jevans regarding her election as the incoming Chair of the All England Club, and welcoming her to the position, which she will commence in July.

We wanted to take the opportunity to respond to the points you raise in relation to the AELTC Wimbledon Park Project and clarify some misconceptions on our proposals.

We are delighted to have spoken to more than 3,500 people at various consultation events about the proposals and hundreds of people, including many of the local residents across Southfields and Earlsfield, have felt compelled to write in support of these plans.

We would be most grateful if you could publish this response alongside your initial letter so that your constituents can see our replies to the points you have made.

1. It is massive over-development in a small residential area.

The only building of significant size is the Parkland Show Court which will occupy barely 2% of the overall footprint of the site. The grass courts will retain the look and feel of open green space – comparable to the existing golf course – and the new 23 acre publicly accessible park will greatly enhance the public green space in a residential area. This is not ‘massive over-development’.

The residential area around the land is part of the extensive London conurbation and one of the most densely populated parts of the UK. It has been developed extensively since the nineteenth century and continues to be a very busy and popular place to live and is synonymous nationally and internationally with The Championships.

Our application proposes 38 grass courts together with the Parkland Show Court. We need to provide an adequate number of courts to relocate the Qualifying Competition from Roehampton (both match and practice courts). Additional practice courts will alleviate current practice arrangements which see players sharing half a court each during peak times, rather than a whole court – arrangements which fall below the standards expected at Grand Slam level. The additional courts will allow us to double the size of the Wheelchair Competition draws, bring the 18&U Junior Championships Qualifying Competition on-site, and enlarge the 14&U Junior Championships Competition, all integral moves to support the growth of the game.

The site’s context has been carefully considered in the proposals, which are planned to preserve and improve on the remaining heritage features and ecology of the area.

2. The park half of the development is not the generous offer that it seems at first, as it could be built on at this scale in the future whenever AELTC might want to build the next Show Court. This land should be made over to a trust which would keep it in public control.

You may be aware that we recently wrote to local residents to confirm our offer to Merton Council that we will make the southern parkland available to the public on a permanent basis, to be guaranteed by a legally-binding undertaking, subject to planning approval being granted.

If we are able to carry out our proposals, there will be significantly more green open space available for the free use of residents than there has been at any time in the past century. This land was previously a private golf course available exclusively to its members or to local residents at a substantial fee per visit. The feedback we have received from very many local residents is that they are hugely excited about having access to this additional green space.

3. The 8,000 seater stadium and 38 pre-qualifier courts will involve huge building works and carbon footprint. This is not compatible with declaring a climate emergency.

We are a signatory to the United Nations' Sport for Climate Action Framework and have made a public commitment to be Environment Positive by 2030. This is important to us.

Our proposals are not as carbon intensive as you suggest. They follow the climate action principles set out by Wandsworth and Merton Councils and best practice from the London Plan and UK Green Building Council.

We have already started on our main site to carry out projects with reduced carbon in construction and operation through intelligent design, engineering and choice of materials. The Wimbledon Park Project includes measures to support water use reduction and Sustainable Urban Drainage features will minimise flood risk, manage attenuation needs, control pollution, help increase external thermal comfort and support biodiversity. The project features a heat pump network which can be extended to support further decarbonisation.

The statutory consultees for the Wimbledon Park Project application, such as Historic England, have recognised that our development is a significant step towards protecting the heritage of the park for the future and enhancing its biodiversity.

Regeneration of this site will not only help deliver on these objectives, but also ensure we are acting as a good steward of the environment and fostering future resilience to changing climate.

4. This creates a mainly un-used development on Metropolitan Open Land rather than opening up green spaces for all.
and

6. The new permissive area of Wimbledon Park is not public and will actually be closed for two summer months and longer should AELTC choose to do so.

As noted under point two, if we are granted planning permission, there will be more open space available for free use by all residents than there has been at any time in the past century.

Our proposals will open up 23-acres of land for public access all year-round including during The Championships. For clarity, closures of the parkland will be limited only to areas where they are unavoidable, for example during mowing or for The Championships build/derig. Even then, a full closure of the parkland will be avoided and access across it maintained.

After The Championships, courts will remain in continuous use until the end of the grass court season and seven will be set aside for our community programme. Our heritage tours and learning department activities will also be extended into the land outside of The Championships period. Through these initiatives alone we are offering free public usage that is far in excess of any recent use of the land.

5. I am concerned about the potential felling of mature trees. I understand significant and thoughtful environmental efforts have been made to consider the impact of the proposals, but it is simply not possible to account for the environmental cost of felling mature trees.

We are pleased that you recognise the significant levels of effort that have been invested in considering the impact of our proposals, which have been informed by in-depth consultation with a range of industry-leading experts.

The site is currently falling well short of reaching its potential ecological value. Our proposals seek to increase the extent and quality of the main habitat types on the land in order to deliver specific, measurable environmental net gain in excess of 10 per cent. This exceeds the requirements of the new Environment Act and the London Plan.

The golf course was previously intensively managed across most of its extent, with grasslands typically being regularly mown short and lacking in structure or species diversity. Likewise, the ecological value of the Wimbledon Park Lake is well below what could be achieved, largely as a result of extensive siltation which our application proposes to remedy.

A detailed tree strategy, with expert advice, has been developed to protect and enhance the quality and longevity of all the 41 veteran trees; remove a small number of poor quality and non-native tree species (planted to reinforce the golf course fairways) that disrupt the growth of the veteran trees and Capability Brown qualities of the parkland landscape; propagate new English oaks from the acorns harvested on site; and plant more than 1,500 new trees of varying age, size and species that are native and more climate resistant.

The Wimbledon Park Project will be delivered in a way that prioritises ecological and heritage safeguarding, as well as reuse of materials, such as rich topsoil and cut and fill, wherever possible.

7. There are no concrete plans for running the current golf clubhouse as a community centre so this community benefit is very likely not to be one and will be closed for the Championship months.

This is not correct. There are clear and advanced plans for running the golf clubhouse as a community facility with bookable space, should the planning application be successful. This will be a significant benefit to residents, societies and clubs locally.

8. The traffic movements will be very extensive through Merton and Wandsworth for 6.5 years (at least).

Should our plans be approved, a construction traffic management plan will be agreed with both Wandsworth and Merton Councils. It is worth noting that in the past decade nearly all construction traffic has been routed through Merton onto TfL routes and not via Wandsworth.

Our proposals reduce the amount of traffic by keeping a significant amount of material on-site and making many components (such as the court surrounds) elsewhere. As the majority of the works deal with landscape and the movement, distribution, and management of water, traffic outside the site will be low. For example, in the two years when courts are maturing, there will be little traffic associated with them when activities will be low impact and focused on court maintenance, such as mowing.

9. The Wimbledon Junior Golf Academy which is based here for the use of local schools and which successfully opens the sport up to disadvantaged children has had no re-provision.

When the members of the Wimbledon Park Golf Club voted by majority to accept our offer of an early surrender of the lease, one of the consequences of their decision was that the Wimbledon Junior Golf Academy would need to close.

Sport England, as a statutory consultee, did not identify an under-provision of golf in the locality and it is important to note that there are already a number of local programmes that provide this service.

Any re-provision of this facility in the parkland for a limited number would simply deny space and access to a significant area of public park now to be opened up freely to thousands of local residents.

10. Are there any guarantees that Church Road will not be permanently closed during the works and then in future during the Qualifiers as well as the Championships. This is already extremely disruptive during the Championships.

Church Road is owned and managed by Merton Council. In our planning application, we have not proposed to close Church Road during the year or during the construction works unless it is necessary for safety reasons, and then this will be minimised.

Risk assessments are presented for each Championships and any action required on Church Road is taken with safety – for both our local residents and our visiting guests – as a paramount concern. Increasingly, plans for The Championships are required to respond to lessons learned from tragic events elsewhere, such as the London Bridge and Manchester Arena attacks. The temporary road closure is an important part of our ability to comply with guidance from the National Counter Terrorism Security Office and the incoming Martyn's Law legislation designed to protect and safeguard both visitors and those passing by during The Championships.

We hope that the information above clarifies our proposals and gives you reassurance that through the AELTC Wimbledon Park Project we are firmly committed to providing year-round and permanent access to some transformational community benefits, while at the same time protecting Wimbledon's place at the pinnacle of tennis for the future.

As ever, please do let us know if you have any further questions.

Kind regards,



Ian Hewitt
Chair



Sally Bolton
Chief Executive