

ST HELENS RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

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Cllr Nick Paget-Brown
Leader of the Council
RB Kensington & Chelsea
Town Hall
Hornton Street W8

January 13th 2017

Dear Cllr Paget-Brown,

Kensington Memorial Park

Thank you for your email response of 6th January to the Association's letter of November 30th. We note that the results of the second phase of the consultation survey on potential projects in the park will be published later this month. In the meantime, your reply leaves a number of our questions hanging in the air.

You say that there is no 'developed plan' to install an artificial pitch with floodlighting at Memorial Park, and that officers are looking at a number of options *including installing a woven product of artificial grass that sits alongside the natural grass.*

This is not an option that features in the two phase consultation exercise, which included questions on an artificial pitch with fencing and floodlighting. Would such a mixed artificial/natural surface be left open to all park users, or have fencing?

Your email does not address the point that, if a fenced artificial pitch is installed, it would in effect render that part of the park unavailable to non-footballers all year round. This would be a serious loss to an already small park.

Looking at the pitches in mid-winter, and even without works to restore the drainage system, it is mainly the goal mouth areas which are in poor condition.

Annual replacement of turf and maintenance in these areas surely cannot be beyond the means of the Council? And if these areas with high wear were to be replaced by a mixed natural and woven surface, with no fencing nor lighting, then this is a very different proposition from that suggested to date, and not one included in the consultation exercise.

It has never been made clear in any publicly available document that a variety of options are being actively considered for Memorial Park, nor what those options are nor where the

'other sites' are which are being examined. Nor have the criteria by which the options are to be judged ever been made known.

There has been a basic problem from the start with the consultation in that it was launched with no explanation or context as to what the Council is trying to achieve. It would have helped residents to understand the whole exercise if it had been preceded by a publicly available report, and/or discussion at Scrutiny Committee, which defined the primary aim of the consultation.

The 2017-25 Strategic Plan for Parks singularly failed to provide any such context. As detailed in previous email exchanges with Sue Harris, the wording of the brief bullet points in the Strategic Plan section on Memorial Park changed three times in versions considered by PRSC, Cabinet and the final version as published. Residents living around the park therefore remain dubious as to the Council's real aims.

Your email does not make clear whether the primary objective is

- to make long-term savings on unsustainable maintenance costs of a grass pitch (as referred to in your email)
- to create a revenue-generating artificial pitch that can be managed by a commercial provider and provide a new income stream to RBKC?
- to replace all-weather pitches being removed elsewhere in the Borough?
- to respond to expressed demand from schools, as referred to in your email? In which case are these state or private schools, and which schools? If private schools, why should their needs lead to the fencing off of parts of a public park?

Coupled with the fact that there was no information in the consultation survey as to the size and exact location of a potential all-weather pitch, the consultation survey and its final results will need to be treated with caution. The survey questions were asked in a context in which little information had been provided to respondents. What had been made public at the time proved confusing (the first draft 2017-25 Parks Strategy listed as an objective for Memorial Park the words '*create sports hub in the borough*'. What was this ever intended to mean?)

Your latest email also says in paragraph 3 that alongside other options the 2005 consultation on an artificial pitch is being 'revisited'. That consultation resulted in strong opposition to an artificial pitch, and hence our members will wish to know why the Council has chosen to re-visit it?

Since 2005, the Council has granted planning permission for a substantial development of private and social housing (Argyll Place) immediately adjacent to the existing pitch. This could only be expected to make that location even less acceptable than it was in 2005 for a fenced and floodlit artificial pitch.

Your email does not address the various planning issues raised in our November 30th letter. including the relevance and priority that the Council should give to the grass pitch refurbishment specified in the S106 Agreement on Argyll Place. These issues will of course

surface again were the Council to choose to go ahead with any form of development in Memorial Park.

We were provided some weeks ago with the results of the Phase 1 survey responses. While it is important that the Phase 2 results should also be made public as soon as possible, their publication alone will not reassure local residents that the Council has handled this whole matter in a considered, open, and cost-effective manner - as we would have hoped and expected.

Had there been an initial discussion, involving ward councillors and the residents association, at which the Council explained the rationale for its actions, Council expenditure and officer time on a flawed and protracted consultation exercise could have been much reduced. Those residents directly affected by a form of planning blight could also have been spared significant anxiety.

We requested in our last letter that the Council should make clear as soon as possible that it has dropped the idea of an all-weather pitch with fencing and flood-lighting, in order to concentrate on options for improvements to Memorial Park that command local support. We still feel that this would be the most sensible course of action.

As before, I am copying this letter to Cllr Ahern and Cllr Coleridge, to Dalgarno ward councillors, and to Sue Harris and Derek Taylor.

Yours sincerely,

Henry Peterson
Chair, St Helens Residents Association
cc Cllr Tim Ahern, Cllr Tim Coleridge, Cllr Healy, Cllr Thompson, Sue Harris RBKC, Derek Taylor RBKC.