

SUTHERLAND GROVE CONSERVATION AREA RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

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A Potted Guide to the AELTC (All England Lawn Tennis Club) Proposals & Application for its Wimbledon Park land

- Wimbledon Park started life in the 18thC as a Capability Brown landscape. A huge area – extending right up to Parkside, next to Wimbledon Common.
- Sections gradually sold off, eg to create the large villas east of Parkside.
- The **Wimbledon Club** bought their site late 19thC. **AELTC** bought their current site (west of Church Rd) early 20thC. LBM (**London Borough of Merton**) came by the rest of the remaining park. Part of this was leased to become (WPGC) **Wimbledon Park Golf Club**, the remainder being the public park we now enjoy. WPGC site is 2-3 times larger than the public park.
- Merton decided to sell the WPGC land in 1993. AELTC bought it, amidst huge public opposition & outcry, taking on the WPGC Lease. The price was reputedly low because AELTC signed Covenants with LBM, agreeing not to 'develop' the land & also to create a lakeside walkway once golf ceased on the site, (ie when the WPGC Lease was due to end – 2041).
- The whole park area is MOL (Metropolitan Open Land – Urban 'Green Belt').
- 2018(ish) AELTC made moves to persuade WPGC Members vote to allow the Lease to be terminated early. The pay-off to each member to vote for this was reputedly £85,000.
- The Wimbledon Championships 'Qualies' (Qualifying rounds) had been held at the prestigious BofE (**Bank of England**) Sports Ground. 2018(ish) BofE decided to sell this land. AELTC were rumoured to be the preferred bidders. The Covid Pandemic put a stop to the sale-plans. Rumours began to emerge that AELTC wished to move the 'Qualies' to its Wimbledon Park (WPGC) site.
- 2021 there were 3 'Consultations' on their proposals. In reality these appeared to be just a gradual unveiling of already-firm proposals. The plans, incl. no. of courts, expanded in each. The 3rd 'Consultation' unveiled plans for an 8000-seater 100' high tennis stadium + 38 grass courts – all to be squeezed on the WPGC site. A 'public' (in reality just 'permissive') park was proposed at the southern end of the site, where much of the land is too hilly for flattening for tennis courts. This permissive park would house a huge maintenance hub for the *whole* site, contain a substantial car-park (for the Championships), 9km of hard-surfaces roads for maintenance-vehicles etc.
- AELTC proposed a 'boardwalk' round (within) much of the lake, with little of the *lakeside* walk required in the Covenants. Having a boardwalk over the *water* instead of over *land* would allow AELTC more land to pack in its proposed 38 tennis courts.

- Much of the land would require levelling for the 38 courts + stadium. AELTC also proposed removing *all* topsoil. They also proposed de-silting the lake. A complex & problematic project with many uncertainties. All this would require substantial movement of HGVs & LGVs – with attendant Air Quality & Noise issues. A huge number of trees would be removed to accommodate tennis courts. More trees planted. However the CGIs used in the ‘Consultations’ & AELTC leaflets & newsletters since then are now acknowledged by AELTC to represent how the site *might* look 25 years after completion.
- Summer 2021 AELTC’s PA (**Planning Application**) was ‘live’ – both to LBM & LBW (**London Borough of Wandsworth**). AELTC appeared taken aback by the rapidly-rising no. of Objections – citing loss of MOL, visual blight, environmental degradation, loss of bio-diversity etc. AELTC employed a PR firm & began a ‘Charm Offensive’. This included a plethora of ‘site tours’, ‘Community Newsletters’ & ‘Nature w/es’.

All these offered information highly-contested, eg by local lawyers & environmentalists such as respected Ecologist Dr Dave Dawson. AELTC’s PR staff (with seemingly little knowledge of the project-details & the same contested information) began to ‘collar’ commuters at stations, to gain signatures on template-letters of Support for the Applications. These were uploaded in batches to the planning sites.

- Lawyers discovered the existence of the 1993 Covenants. (Was AELTC hoping these would remain ‘buried’?) Doubt now also cast over the legality of the sale-process by LBM in 1993, through a legal case known as ‘Day v Shropshire’.
- The Report of LBM’s own-appointed external Consultants (JAM Consult) was critical of much of the PA, incl methodology, lack of evidence for assertions, compliance-failures etc. Despite that Report, LBM finally Approved the PA in Oct 2023 (6-4) - the financial benefits to Merton facilities possibly too great to risk losing.
- LBW appeared to be able to assess the PA without that consideration & Refused it unanimously in Nov 2023.
- Nov 2023, the Leader of LBM wrote to AELTC to ask how they would ensure their (Approved) plans complied with the 1993 Covenants. AELTC has not as yet provided an answer. **Watch this space.**
- Jan 2024 GLA (**Greater London Authority**) have received all Application docs from LBM & LBW. They will decide by the end of Jan whether to Refuse it outright, or assess the Application again themselves from scratch. This process is separate from consideration of the 1993 Covenants or ‘Day v Shropshire’. **There is a long way to go.**