



LDA plan to sell-off Crystal Palace Parkland for private development

LDA re-define the boundaries of Crystal Palace Park

The LDA revealed the extent of their 'enabling development' for the first time at a stakeholder dialogue meeting of 19th July 05.

The LDA stated that selling tracts of Crystal Palace Park would raise £15 – 20 million and enable the construction of a six-storey residential building, retail premises and an hotel - extending from Crystal Palace Parade down Anerley Hill, the removal of the Camping and Caravan Site on which they propose to build housing, together with further villas on the Park's eastern boundary.

Historical Background

Plans for a massive multiplex on the top of Crystal Palace Park were finally abandoned in May 2001 after years of campaigning against inappropriate commercial development on a public park.

In June 02 a dialogue began between Bromley and representatives of stakeholder groups to establish consensus and cohesion on the future of this historic Grade II * registered Park.

A month later, Bromley's solution to incursion by 'travellers' onto the Park was the erection of a costly

eight foot high solid fence patrolled by security guards with dogs, closing the hilltop to the public. This was against the recommendations of the dialogue and all stakeholder feedback.

The ugly fence was removed after the threat of legal action, withdrawal from the dialogue by the CPCA and other groups and the intervention of Bromley's new leader. These groups then rejoined the process.

A year later Bromley proposed removal of the protective Metropolitan Open Land status (MOL) from the hilltop in its draft Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and to reclassify it as 'disused land suitable for development'.

Overwhelming public support against this blatant attempt to turn parkland into potential building land enabled the CPCA to raise funds for a powerful objection, successfully argued by Robert McCracken QC at a Public Inquiry.

The government appointed Independent Inspector recognised CPCA concerns, as did London Mayor Ken Livingstone, MPs and Councillors, and the hilltop remains MOL.

GLA/LDA Involvement

The intervention in the future of Crystal Palace Park in late 2003 by the GLA's London Development Agency resulted from the Mayor's desire to win the 2012 Olympic Games for London. He knew this would be difficult, if not impossible, if the city was unable to host the July 2004 International Athletics Grand Prix at Crystal Palace.

Essential works at the Stadium were completed and the National Sports Centre's (NSC) short-term future was assured. Bromley and the London Mayor agreed that the LDA would assume ownership and management of the NSC, the Stadium and the whole Park by a lease, expected to be signed in February 2006.

Stakeholder Dialogue

The LDA agreed to join and fund the existing 'Stakeholder Dialogue Process' in March 2004 as part of their commitment to wider public consultation on the future of Crystal Palace Park.

Their intervention was particularly welcomed because of assurances that their intention was "...to increase the quality and quantity of parkland". (LDA Park Vision Statement)

In June 2004 the LDA's landscape consultant, J & L Gibbons, produced plans including housing development around the perimeter of the Park but to which they drew no attention. When the CPCA questioned the housing, the LDA said it was nothing more than an idea and, following strong opposition from others present, agreed to drop it.

Concerns on the *'White Knight'* status of the LDA were further fuelled when at a stakeholder meeting of 10th July 04 it was stated "...the LDA were not in the business of subsidising parks" and their consultants stated ominously that "*difficult decisions and trade-offs*" would have to be made concerning the Park.

To repeated questions on future intentions for the Park, Derek Newman LDA Park Project Director said, "...it is not the intention of the LDA to put housing on the Park ..." and "...it was not the intention for the Park to subsidise the sports centre."

LDA 'Consultation'

In October 04, the LDA staged a poorly advertised 'Public Consultation' event at the lower end of the Park where visitors were invited to choose between one of four levels of LDA intervention: Keeping the Status quo; A Basic Tidy-up; Moderate Improvements or Extensive Improvements.

As no costings for these four alternatives were available, the public were unable to take them into consideration and, after failure of previous schemes, predictably favoured Extensive Improvements.

The findings of this consultation attended by just 2,500 visitors from the 2.6 million stakeholders within 30 minutes drive time of the Park, were interpreted to justify Extensive Improvements. This 2,500 equates to a 0.09% turnout and not the 156,000 which would have been expected under the 6 % industry norm.

Obstruction of Democracy

As the dialogue evolved, new restrictions were imposed on the stakeholders by the facilitator. Community representatives were told they could not represent those who had appointed them, could only attend in a personal capacity, could not take notes and could not report back to their respective committees, or discuss matters outside the dialogue.

Having been appointed as representatives of their organisations, now being told they represented nobody, was a fundamental contradiction of the terms of the dialogue process.

The CPCA stated they were unable to 'sign up' to these conditions and gave only the assurance that "The CPCA would respect confidentiality".

Following legal advice that acceptance of such restrictions would be incompatible with its charity status and breach of its constitution, the CPCA had no choice but to withdraw from the dialogue.

Enabling development

For three years the CPCA, whilst exercising vigilance, made every effort to contribute to effective stakeholder dialogue. This now seems futile in light of the LDA's intention to fund Park improvements by selling-off tracts of precious parkland.

In May 05, it became clear that 'enabling' or 'supporting' development was the LDA's strategy for funding Park improvements. These terms were used during meetings with local residents groups, but their import was never explained and went unnoticed and unchallenged.

Not only does such 'enabling development' conflict with previous LDA assurances that no parkland would be sold off for private housing, commercial or retail development, but would set a precedent for all public parks and public open spaces throughout the country.

English Heritage – Statutory Consultees

In response to our recent letter to English Heritage asking if they were aware of LDA intentions for ‘enabling development’ they replied, *“that a presentation had been made by the LDA but no mention was made of any enabling development”*.

Criteria List

In July 2003 Park stakeholders agreed a list of criteria which all proposals for the Park would need to meet.

The Dialogue Process encouraged serious proposals for the Park to be made and these were all measured against the criteria list. As yet, the LDA’s ‘ideas’ have not been available for detailed scrutiny.

New Stakeholder Dialogue

On 14th September 05 the CPCA held direct talks with the LDA, when the latest LDA proposals to sell-off areas of the Park for private housing, commercial and retail development were discussed.

When reminded of previous LDA undertakings that there would be no housing on the Park, Derek Newman said, *“That was absolutely true at the time ... things move on”*.

The LDA confirmed they would apply for further Heritage Lottery funding for the Park through the ‘Big Lottery Fund’. This requires, in this instance, ‘match-funding’ to be achieved by selling parkland. No other funding strategy was mentioned.

Note: The HLF has already awarded £6 million for Kathryn Gustafson’s unsatisfactory and much criticised contemporary landscaping schemes, some of which the LDA plan to remove for housing.

Paradoxically, the LDA, who recognise that they have to overcome ‘a number of statutory hurdles’ to enable sell-off of Crystal Palace Parkland, may themselves resort to restrictive covenants to prevent future sell-off of parkland.

91 year old Act

Perversely, instead of recognising current legislation that protects parkland and open spaces, the LDA have been scouring the various Crystal Palace Acts, one of which pre-dates World War I, to justify building on the Park.

Details of LDA proposed sell-off

Rockhills International Camping and Caravan Site, situated on the northern corner of Crystal Palace Park and the only such site in London, contributes unobtrusively to the economy of the area.

The LDA plan to close this caravan site and establish two others, one near Stratford to benefit from the Olympic Games in 2012.

The LDA describe it as a ‘car park’ that they will restore to parkland, but instead propose to sell one-third for ‘park-style’ villas and apartments, expected to raise £5 million. The remaining two-thirds would become a Park Rangers HQ, public glasshouse and gardens for children and the disabled.

The ease with which a temporary feature like a caravan park can be removed, contrasts with the permanency of built development resulting in permanent and irreversible loss of parkland.

No details are available on vehicular access to this area, or on car parking issues, which is of particular concern as this location already suffers heavy traffic movement and congestion.

More ‘Park-style’ villas

There are proposals to demolish the new Heritage Lottery funded maintenance building on Crystal Palace Park Road and relocate the One O’Clock Club to the Dinosaur Area. In their place would be an unspecified number of ‘park-style’ villas.

Major development at Anerley Hill

The LDA plan to build a large multi-storey private development for housing, offices, retail and a ‘piazza’ with a £3 million underground car park for 120 - 150 cars. This would extend from Crystal Palace Parade near the Subway, continue behind the bus terminus, replace the present ornamental gardens and continue to the base of Brunel’s old south tower on Anerley Hill.

The spurious justification for this loss of green space with its mature trees on the edge of this busy urban landscape is that a ‘gateway’ is needed to *“connect the Norwood Triangle with the Park”*. The LDA have acknowledged that significant traffic problems in this area would have to be solved.

This would be just one of the ‘gateways’ to the Park envisaged by the LDA to make it more accessible.

Hotel near re-located NSC

The LDA now state that the only hotel they propose to build on the Park will be for NSC students and athletes, although some housing may also be included.

LDA claim benefits of 2,000 extra jobs and reclaimed Parkland

LDA claims that huge areas of parkland will be “gained” from their proposals is unsustainable. Crystal Palace Park is defined by its boundaries. If private housing or other commercial development is built within those boundaries, that parkland will be lost forever.

The UDP Inquiry Inspector upheld that if the present NSC building was relocated nearer Crystal Palace railway station, the land it currently occupies should revert to parkland and there should be no increase in the built footprint. Relocation of the NSC would not result in any net gain in parkland.

The LDA claim their proposals would create two thousand jobs. Some of these might depend on Capel Manor, the country’s leading horticultural educational institute operating the farm, South Bank University transferring their Science Department to the Park, and the resumption of boating on the lake.

There is of course no guarantee that any jobs created would be filled by local people.

New LDA consultation event

Visit the Consultation Event marquees in Crystal Palace Park: 20-25 October inclusive at the Penge end and 27 October -1 November inclusive on the hill-top, adjacent to the ornamental gardens. This will be followed by 5 road-shows in the Triangle, Penge, Sydenham, West Norwood and Elmers End.

Conclusions

The CPCA would welcome the prospect of a rejuvenated and enhanced Crystal Palace Park and the creation of local jobs, but not at the cost of selling-off public parkland for commercial and private residential development. The magnificent makeovers of many London parks in recent years were not funded by selling-off our national heritage to the highest bidder.

The CPCA objects in principle to the sale of Grade II * registered parkland, some within a Conservation Area and all within MOL. This would create a precedent threatening all public parkland and public open spaces.

The LDA have said that their proposals are not finalised and would not go ahead if there was strong public objection.

Given increasing population and housing density in the South East and the Mayor’s London Plan recognising that parks and urban green spaces should be protected, urban public parks are more vital than ever to the nation’s health and well-being.

We can do little to resist much of the urbanisation of Crystal Palace and Upper Norwood (even if we would), but our local public park must be protected from sell-off for private housing and commercial development.

If we fail, future generations looking at photographs and records of what Crystal Palace Park once was will ask “Who were these people who allowed this to happen?”

We are those people and it must not happen.

The CPCA would like to receive your views on these important Park issues.

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