

Workshop on the Mansfield Bowling Club green space

On December 14 the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Forum (DPNF) held a Zoom workshop on the future of the green space at the former Mansfield Bowling Club. There were 13 attendees, mostly local residents plus members of the Kenlyn Tennis Club, which formerly had use of the site. Paul Farrow of the DPNF chaired a good-humoured and detailed discussion of the issues.

There is a full audio recording of the event on the DPNF website. Below is a short summary of the main points.

Background

It was explained that the green space on the Mansfield site (i.e. the former tennis courts and the outdoor bowls area) is designated as Local Green Space under the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Plan. Development is therefore not allowed on the green space other than in very special circumstances.

Overall conclusion

The conclusion of the discussion was that the use of the green space for tennis facilities remains suitable, provided much wider access is given to non-club members. The installation of a children's play area in the rest of the space was thought to be an appropriate use.

The main points of the discussion

General attitude – the green space on the site should be preserved and any attempt to extend the footprint of the new development into the green space should be resisted firmly. This is an asset of community value that should be protected as such for ever.

Sports use – sports and recreational use was the intention of the Burdett-Coutts bequest, and there has been tennis on the site for many decades in the form of the Kenlyn tennis club. Several local residents whose properties back onto the site liked (indeed missed!) the tennis. According to the plans developed by the tennis club there could be three full-size courts and a small clubhouse, together occupying perhaps 60% of the green space. There was doubt that the site was useful for any other organised sport e.g. football, cricket or rugby, based on its shape and overall size, the undesirability of floodlights etc.

Access – there was comment that historically the tennis club had been perceived as cliquey and excluded learners and weaker players. Richard Ault, speaking on behalf of the club, said that the club's business plan for the site included much more public access, e.g. through cooperation with Highgate New Town Community Centre. He also mentioned the possibility of some sort of 'pay to play' arrangement for public access.

Security – this was a concern for residents of Regency Lawn, whose gardens back onto the site. In particular they were worried about unrestricted public access to the site. The means of access to any future sports facilities and/or a playground would need to be negotiated with the developer. However, there is an existing gate at the northwest corner that could be an appropriate access point.

Maintenance – any public space would need to be maintained, and there were suggestions that Camden Council might not want to adopt any new park on the site. The developer would also be very unlikely to enter into any open-ended commitment to maintain any public space, which makes it preferable for such responsibility to be assumed by other bodies e.g. the tennis club or the Council.

Other uses – there was interest in the idea of a children's play area on that part of the green space not occupied by the tennis facilities. There was no significant discussion of other possible uses such as a nursery, café, or allotments.

Engagement with the developer – the DPNF has had some discussion with the current developer and, although he has held meetings with some local residents, has encouraged him to engage with the wider community. The DPNF plans to renew those attempts following this workshop.

Next steps

Paul Farrow, who chaired the workshop, will relay these conclusions to the DPNF committee. The intention is then to work with the Council and the developer on the lines outlined.

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