

Notes of Working Group Meeting

St Matthew Academy, 17 September 2013

Apologies: Councillors Maine and Bonavia

1. Welcome & Introductions

Councillor Amanda de Ryk opened the meeting and welcomed participants. She introduced Martin Hyde, the officer responsible for green spaces in the borough and two officers from the Lewisham Community Services – Nancy Stridgen and Andy Thomas..... (Approximately 32 people attended the meeting).

2. About this group

Councillor de Ryk explained that the meeting was convened to enable all interested parties who live, work and study in Blackheath as well as those who have an interest in the proposed play space, to engage in exploratory discussions and to air their views which could then reported back to the main meeting of the Blackheath Assembly, scheduled to take place at 7.30pm-9.30pm on 22 October at St Matthew Academy.

Councillor de Rik explained some of the history of the Blackheath Assembly and described it a service that the Council offers to local wards and residents. It is not a legally constituted body. The Assembly can make recommendations to the Mayor which may or may not be accepted. The Council awards a small amount of money annually to the Assembly and local people decide how to spend it. Last year the Assembly voted to allocate £12,500 to be used as seed funding to explore the feasibility of creating a play space for local children, in line with agreed priorities, and to attract additional funding. To date a small amount of the funds have been used to fund the ecological survey which recommended that Eliot Pits is not a suitable site.

It was obvious from the experience earlier in the year when the initial exploration of the space in Elliot Pits was carried out that much wider consultation would be required to ensure that all local views were taken into account in any future plans and to ensure transparency in process and decision making.

In response to a question about whether the minutes of this meeting would be recorded it was stated that unlike the Assembly meetings, this meeting is not part of the official funded Assembly process so formal minutes will not be taken although volunteers agreed to take notes which would be made publicly available.

Responding to a question about why this meeting was not announced on the Assembly website it was suggested that the website is not user friendly and that leaflets about the meeting were circulated to all households.

It was noted that this sub-group/working party was formed as a result of discussions at the Assembly and the meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee and that a similar approach is used by other Assemblies when dealing with specific issues.

Discussions within this group and at the Assembly will help to explore the extent of local commitment and impetus to the idea of creating a local play space. Attention would then need to be focused on developing a plan, considering locations, drawing up options, seeking planning permission etc. Local people will be involved at every stage.

3. Do we want a playspace for Blackheath ward?

The challenge of assessing need was noted. Suggestions included the use of petitions and questionnaires

It was confirmed that there are currently no public play facilities in Blackheath ward. Some estates have some very limited facilities and there are a couple of nearby parks which have some play equipment including Manor Park and The heath is the only real green space that is available in the ward.

It was acknowledged that there was a danger of polarising the discussion between those who were against any form of play space in any part of the heath and those who were absolutely committed to creating one and believed there was no other option than the heath.

There was a passionate plea about the importance of creating a space where children could express themselves safely and creatively without being overly organised and controlled.

It was noted that the concept of a playspace is not clearly defined and is deliberately ambiguous, as a result there is some confusion about what is actually being discussed. One suggestion was "something for children that is not tarmac and metal equipment." The wording of the Assembly action plan was said to be unhelpful. It was also noted that a playspace should meet both the creative needs of children as well as improving their health and fitness overall. It was suggested that some of the concern about the original ideas associated with Eliot Pits was the concern about a large adventure playground being created.

4. What age group are we thinking about?

There seemed to be broad agreement that the proposed playspace would not be aimed at meeting the needs of teenagers but might either focus on pre school or primary school age children.

5. Process for deciding on location

Suggestions for the way forward included:

- a group to be formed of those who are strongly in favour of the playspace and that they might develop the ideas and propose some options but concerns were raised about the inherent danger of polarising opinion;
- set up a group to identify 3 or 4 sites and 3 or 4 proposals for discussion
- consider establishing a mobile facility – some sort of pop-up playspace. This would require decisions about storage etc.
- consider a sympathetically constructed, appropriately landscaped space near the duck pond.

In response to a question it was stated that there are no plans currently to develop the almost derelict buildings in Talbot space and that the current facilities are not fit for purpose.

The area near the TA Centre was also suggested.

There was also discussion about the difficulties of using privately owned spaces such as that surrounding the Mormon Church at the top of the village and also existing school property such as St Matthew Academy

6. Funding

No discussion

7. Next steps

In concluding the meeting Councillor de Ryk emphasised the importance of ensuring that we only proceed if we can create something really worthwhile that children will love

David Webster and Tony Aldous agreed to report back on from this meeting to the Assembly meeting on 22 October.