

Addendum to Future of Beckenham Place Park Mayor and Cabinet Report. 17th February 2016

Officers have received the following 'Rebuttal paper' from 'Save the Beckenham18'. Comments of officers, where considered appropriate, have been provided in text boxes within the body of the paper for ease of reference.

A Rebuttal paper from 'Save the Beckenham 18' to the Officers 'Future of Beckenham Place Park' report produced for the Mayor and Cabinet meeting on 17th February 2016

Executive summary

On Wednesday 17th February at the Mayor and Cabinet meeting you are asked by the regeneration officers to close the hundred year old heritage golf course; the second request is to agree to press ahead with Round 2 of the HLF bid.

The Mayor and his Councillors need to give serious consideration to the comments and evidence presented in this rebuttal paper to the 'Future of Beckenham Place Park' report produced by the regeneration officers.

The rebuttal has addressed the key issues and presents serious concerns about aspects of the application the Officers have made to the Heritage Lottery Fund. We believe the bid has been awarded at the first round due to the application containing inaccurate information; in essence it's been awarded under '**false pretences**' on two counts which we explain in this rebuttal. Firstly, the claim that the golf course loses money and secondly, the flawed consultation process at round One concerning the closure of the golf course and misleading interpretation of the questionnaire results.

The Council does not consider that the award has been made under false pretences. The financial position of the golf course is set out in detail at section 5.4 of the report.

The account of the consultation which took place prior to the HLF bid submission is presented accurately within the bid.

We have been in contact with the HLF chief executive Ms Carole Souter and understand from Ms Souter that in respect of the HLF board " *It was noted by our board that Lewisham needed to carry out further work to help make decisions on the future of the golf course.*"

At a meeting of the Beckenham Place Park Working party (21st January) the conduit for park stakeholders with the LBC, Officer Alison Taylor advised the group present that no further consultations were due to be held in

respect of the closure of the golf course which contradicts what the HLF have advised and we seek the Mayor's view on this and the other serious issues raised?

The HLF did not advise that further consultation was required and there is no contradiction.

Usage and Movement study

In the application form to Heritage Lottery Fund it was stated that *“A 2013 Movement and Usage Survey found the park to be extremely underused, especially when compared to other parks in Lewisham.”* The Movement and Usage Survey only made a comparison with ONE other park. This is a deception.

The ONE other park that was used for comparison is Ladywell Fields. This is not a valid comparison for several reasons, not least because it adjoins Lewisham Hospital and staff, outpatients and visitors to the hospital have easy access for breaks and cut-through.

The comparison with Ladywell Fields was made because the Council had recently carried out a similar study at that park. The Council did not claim that Ladywell Fields is similar to Beckenham Place Park. All parks have their own unique characteristics and usage figures from other parks should therefore be used as broad comparison data only. Although the Movement and Usage Survey carried out in 2013 only compared the usage of Beckenham Place Park with Ladywell Fields, further comparisons are made in paragraph 5.1.4 of the report to other large urban parks.

The application form to Heritage Lottery Fund states *“It was reported that the concentration of users remains low and the atmosphere very quiet.”* The report based this assertion on *“The standing position J, overlooking most of the golf course from the Mansion terrace, is the second place from where a significant average amount of users is visible.”* This is untrue, you cannot see most of the golf course from the Mansion terrace. You can see less than half of the golf course. Therefore, a statement to Heritage Lottery Fund has been made based on fiction not fact.

It is accepted that the description of the view from standing position J was incorrect. However, this does not affect the findings of the survey, which took into consideration 15 vantage points and in particular covered other views of the golf course. The overall conclusion of the Survey is not affected.

The Movement and Usage Survey makes claims about the use of the Children Play Area, viewpoint N, which cannot be justified by reference to the timings contained in the Surveyors' log in the report of when they were at viewpoint N or other viewpoints close by.

The Movement and Usage Survey allege there were ten video cameras used as part of the survey. *“We fixed cameras on lamp columns or tree trunks at all of the 9 entrances from Thursday 15/8/13 to Sunday 18/8/13, with an addition (sic) camera on the bridge link across the railway. This recorded as a video all the movements in and out of the park. We then analysed these to obtain actual numbers over a key 6 hour period from 10am to 4pm on the 15/8/13 and 10am to 4pm on 18/8/13.”* We dispute that 10am to 4pm in August is a key period for Beckenham Place Park.

Beckenham Place Park is open for twelve and a half hours in August, yet this expensive survey only analysed 6 hours per day use, for only two of the four days they were in place, and cut out all early morning and late afternoon users including golfers, many of whom arrive through the designated entrance much earlier than 10am or later than 4pm in August. This applies to walkers as well. In addition, Mr Gavin Plaskitt’s email confirms that the cameras could not distinguish the number of occupants arriving by car to the two car parks.

This Movement and Usage Survey is incapable of proving that *“the park is extremely underused”* as claimed in the application form to Heritage Lottery Fund.

The report was carried out by an independent third party commissioned by the Council who assessed that this was the key period based on their experience in this field. The Council has since conducted a further study using a different methodology, as set out in paragraph 5.1.4 of the report. Officers will continue to monitor park usage. Both the Movement and Usage Study and the Lewisham Council study indicate approximately 200,000 visits per year.

Flawed consultation process

In the Officers report section 5.3.5 and 5.3.6 they refer to the Consultation process and advise they spoke to 300 people. Of that number 175 of them completed a questionnaire. Those who participated were given four choices of which three included golf, 18 hole golf, 9 hole golf, Par 3 golf course the fourth option was for no golf and so called “Heritage” landscape. The way the survey/questionnaire was set up it was bound to split the results for golf, which is the true public heritage.

Of the total 175 questionnaires 62 people opted for the “Heritage” option with the majority wishing to see golf retained. So the undeniable fact is 65% of the sample was in favour of golf being retained. We can’t understand how the officers were able to justify in the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund that *“It is clear from the results that there was general support for a radical reprioritisation of park use”*

Paragraphs 5.3.5 and 5.3.6 of the report set out the questionnaire findings. In particular, that 77% of respondents favoured the cessation of 18-hole golf. It is acknowledged at paragraph 5.3.6 of the report that the majority of respondents did not opt for no golf, but that it was clear from the consultation that respondents did favour a park which was much more substantially public park and less substantially golf course.

Please note, also, that of the 10 (non golf) features that people ranked in order of importance, seven are achievable with the golf course in place, one of them was “Introduction of grazing animals” and one of them refers to the “restoration of the designed landscape” which is the landscape of the privileged 18th Century landed gentry, which is not the public heritage of the park and which, incidentally, has a 19th Century railway line running through it.

The Conservation Management Plan will be published in due course. Paragraph 5.3.8 of the report sets out the findings to date which are relevant to the decision being made.

The data has been manipulated by the Officers to disguise the truth of the results; that said they do acknowledge in the first line of section 5.3.6 “*Although the majority of respondents did not opt for the ‘no golf’.* The operative words being ‘did not’.

The data has not been manipulated.

The research was not robust, comprehensive and by Market Research Society governance flawed and cannot be seen as representative of public opinion.

There is no public mandate for closing the course.

The research carried out in 2014 was proportionate and appropriate to support the Stage 1 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Details of the invitees and format can be found at Appendix 2 of the report. Further consultation has been carried out in relation to the design development. A wider public consultation is planned for the Heritage Lottery Fund Stage 2 bid, detailed in paragraph 5.6 of the report, should the Mayor decide to proceed with the recommendations contained within the report.

Considerable public opposition has been registered with the Mayor through the petition signed by over 5,700 people. In addition 890 protest letters and numerous objection letters and emails have been sent to the Mayor.

This is addressed in section 5.5 of the report.

The ‘*Friends of Beckenham Pace Park*’; a volunteer group who run the visitor centre at the Mansion is jointly chaired by Mal Mitchell. Mr Mitchell on behalf of the *Friends* ran their own survey in autumn 2015. The survey had 400 questionnaires’ returned, the findings confirming that 60% wished to see the retention of golf.

The updated version of the research has been recently made available to the Mayor and is attached for your information.

We have attached the time-line to the consultation process which explains in detail the genuine concerns about the approach, for the reasons explained we do not believe the Mayor can rely on this consultation to judge public opinion to close the golf course

Fact or fiction – golf course P&L transparency

In the report, section 5.4 covers the key topic of the golf course; the critical issue facing the Mayor and the cabinet is the proposal to close the golf course.

In the Officers application to the Heritage Lottery Fund the principal reason for closing the golf course is the suggestion that it loses money and LBC subsidise the course.

We challenge this view as do the group set up by the Council the **'Beckenham Place Park Working Party'** a long established forum for debate and discussion with stakeholders and Lewisham Council. Chaired by David Hanson they have been requesting the statistics on rounds played plus the financial income for the golf course broken down by type, including the ancillary revenues, since October 1st 2015. The Regeneration Officer (Gavin Plaskitt) despite agreeing to supply the data did not do so.

This information requested is commercially sensitive and confidential to Glendale Golf who are under no obligation to share the information with the Beckenham Place Park Working Party. Officers have provided information where they have been able to do so.

Officer Alison Taylor provided some data on 1st February after a request at the BPPWP on 21st January. The information supplied was out of date using price per round sterling figures from 2002/03. The information provided was misleading, it was provided this way to confuse. In the 'Future' report the data is equally misleading and we believe set out to be misleading and confusing.

Officers have attempted to present financial information as clearly as possible both to the BPPWP and in the report.

The use of 2002/03 figures in the response to Beckenham Place Park working party, in addition to more recent figures, was intended to illustrate the way in which income per round of golf played remained stable from 2002/03 to 2012/13.

The Mayor requested Kevin Sheehan 'Executive Director for Customer Services' at LBC to respond to the questions raised in a letter sent to the

Mayor on 27th January concerning 'false pretences' of the HLF application on two counts.

1. The golf course loses money
2. The flawed consultation process at the first round of the Heritage Lottery Fund application and misrepresentation of the findings.

This section of the rebuttal deals with the claim that the golf course loses money, the matter of the flawed consultation has been dealt with earlier in this document.

In the absence of up to date information on the golf course revenue streams it attracts, presented in conventional accounting terms, we have put together a P&L. The numbers are based on information taken from Lewisham's website and information included in the Officers documents.

The table below shows the detail of the revenue, the costs and lists the assumptions behind the P&L.

BBP Golf Course P&L			
	Income	Expenditure	Notes/Assumptions
Revenue	£	£	
Green fees	364,000*		Ave 52/ @ £18/20 x 20,000 Rounds
Golf Societies	tba		
Miscellaneous			
Revenue			
Ancillary rev			
Buggy & Trolley hire	50,000		£20 buggies, £10 trolleys
Accessories sales	tba		
Catering (@ 50% margin)	43,000		
Societies/matches	tba		
Costs			
Maintenance staff costs		158,000	LBC cost*
Maintenance equipment & materials		42,310	LBC cost*
Business rates		19,000	LBC cost*
Glendale staff costs shop/catering		140,000	Glendale cost**
Glendale fee payment to LBC		70,000	Glendale cost**
	457,000	429,310	
Margin/profit £27,690 -7%			

**The costs are taken from the figures contained in the 'Future of Beckenham Place Park' report for the Mayor and Cabinet. Added to this, Alison Taylor confirmed at the Beckenham Place Park Working Party meeting on the 21st January, that the*

maintenance costs included the wooded area on the western side of the railway, not just the golf course costs, which should not be forgotten..

*** The Glendale staff costs are estimated for 4 staff plus one manager on site at the golf course with an allowance of 20% for social costs.*

Please see table 2 within the report and note that the costs in this table relate specifically to the golf course and do not include any costs that do not directly relate to the golf operation. None of the staff costs have been provided by Glendale Golf

Assumptions to revenue numbers

1. The £364,000 green fees income is based on 20,000* rounds of golf at an average price of £18.20 allowing for the published Glendale prices.
2. The 2015/16 green fees are £27 for weekends and £20 for weekdays with concessions for seniors and juniors. We have allowed as best we can for the loyalty fee prices, but despite requesting that data it has not been forthcoming. The £364k could be an underestimate but until LBC provide the information in the detail requested this is the best interpretation we have.
3. In addition to the green fees we estimate buggy and trolley hire at £50,000 per annum with an average of six buggies per day at £20 cost and ten trolleys a day at £3 each.
4. Catering revenue is estimated at £43,000 operating at a 50% margin the sums could be greater.
5. We have made no allowance for income generated from Golf societies. Glendale will know what income the course has benefitted from in the past.
6. No revenue has been included for ancillary golf sales from golf products e.g. hats, golf gloves, balls etc. There will be some revenue and profit from these merchandise sales and Glendale will have a record of the income generated.

As stated at paragraph 5.4.16 of the Report, the income figure is not as high as the number of rounds of golf played may indicate for the reasons set out.

The assumptions in this profit and loss statement that do not match those contained within the main body of the Report have not been evidenced.

Based on the P&L the golf course is profitable and questions the Officers statement in the HLF application that the course loses money!

We are of the opinion that the reason the Officers expressed the view the golf course lost money and Lewisham subsidise the course was because of the '**Strange contract**' (Gavin Plaskitt's observation to the Sustainability Development Select Committee on 14th January). It is a strange contract

which allows Glendale to keep the largest proportion of the revenue generated by the course and pay a minimum fee to Lewisham. We estimate Glendale take gross revenue of £460,000 and pay a fee of £70,000 to Lewisham, we acknowledge Glendale fund the cost of staff to run the golf and the cafe at the Mansion and we have allowed for that in the P&L.

Lewisham pay the maintenance cost of the golf course advised to be £219,000. After allowing for a form of '*creative accounting*' the Officers declare the course loses £149,000. That way they justified the loss in the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Based on standard accounting methods the course even in its run-down state makes a profit of approx £30,000 around 7% margin, and could generate significantly more if it was marketed through inexpensive modern marketing techniques.

The financial position of the golf course is set out in detail at section 5.4 of the report.

It should be noted golf rounds have increased to 20,000 over the last two years from a base of 16,483 in 2013/14 that's an increase of 3,517 round or 21% over the last two years. With Golf returning to the Olympics this year and stabilisation in golf rounds across the UK according to the most recent research is this the time to close inner London's only 18 hole public course?

Appendix 5 of the report lists 18 golf courses which are within 30 minutes driving distance from Beckenham Place Park.

These are best estimates based on the data available, we urge the Mayor and the Councillors, given the core values of Lewisham Council, to provide the revenue details in a '*Open, honest and fair way*' allowing consideration by stakeholders before proceeding to make a decision on closing the 100 year golf course that generates tangible revenue to the Park now.

The principal members of the Save the Beckenham 18 are not employed in the golf business or the green industry so allowing us to see the golfing stats in the way we have asked should not represent any problem for Glendale. We are prepared to sign confidentiality agreements if Glendale require lets please get the facts on the table?

As above, Glendale Golf is not obliged to share this information with any third party, because it is commercially sensitive.

Inadequate answers to key questions put to the Mayor by the Save the Beckenham 18 group

Questions put by the Save the Beckenham 18 group were sent to the Mayor from the Sustainability Development Select Committee. The Regeneration

Officers answers to those questions were included in Appendix 6, we ask you to please look at the questions contained in the appendix rather than us adding that text to this document.

Q1) Allowing for the fact the golf course has been proven to be profitable question one answers from the Officers are not relevant. We are aware from attendance at two of the latest consultation sessions in February, that when the Officers are asked about new revenue streams to replace golf it is very sketchy and no real indications and commitments are advised to have been agreed with third parties.

Q2) For the reasons explained the officers are not able to comment on future maintenance costs at this time. Given that information is not yet available, how can any coherent business case be made for closure of the golf course at present to be replaced by a new, uncosted, scheme?

At sections 5.4.3-5.4.22, officers provide full details of the current financial position of golf at Beckenham Place Park. The income figure above is based on assumptions which lack evidence.

5.4.25-5.4.30 sets out some of the potential future revenue streams.

The report sets out in full the rationale for the recommendation to close the golf course.

Detailed maintenance costs will be developed in parallel with the detailed design work and will form part of the HLF Stage 2 bid, should the Mayor decide to proceed with the recommendations contained within the report

Q3) The answers provided by the Officers to the question about the Glendale contract are in doubt, based on the belief the course is profitable if the P&L is addressed in a conventional way.

Detailed financial information is included within the report at sections 5.4.3-4.4.22 and officers do not recognise the figures presented in the Profit and Loss table within this Addendum. The assumptions about golf income in the table are not based on evidence.

Q4) Whilst we understand the answers the Officers have given, the leap in faith required that new revenue streams will materialise and generate sufficient revenue **is just that a 'leap of faith'**. With no firm commitments made beyond the running of a café, is it the right time to close a profitable golf course (which also generates café income) that could further improve its performance with some TLC.

Q5) In their response, Officers have completely side-stepped most of the issues, including the fact that the Heritage Lottery Fund case paper to its Trustees refers to a sporting programme in partnership with Greenwich

Tritons Triathlon Club. Does this mean that Heritage Lottery Fund's Trustees have been misled?

Officers have not explained how the niche and expensive sport of Triathlon will be more accessible to local residents than public golf. Triathlon is not a free sport; it incurs costs in being a member of a club and having high specification equipment, clothing and accessories which cannot be hired.

Officers have not addressed the costs of maintenance of a lake to a high enough standard to accommodate the triathlon discipline of swimming, a sport they have quoted as wishing to provide in their Future of Beckenham Place Park paper to you and, indeed, has been advised to the Trustees of Heritage Lottery Fund.

It may be an aspiration to provide free sport (unlike, for example, charging for football pitches elsewhere in the borough) and therefore not accrue a revenue stream, but Officers have not explained how the costs to provide these activities will be addressed, including health and safety costs.

Within the original HLF Bid, Greenwich Tritons Triathlon Club was named as one potential future user group. The HLF understands that the specific activities which are proposed within the Stage 1 bid are subject to change through the Development Stage prior to a Stage 2 bid submission.

The Stage 2 bid submission will include a 10 year Management and Maintenance Plan which will detail all the costs associated with the proposals and how these costs will be met.

Q6) This question refers to the planned 'events space' in the West of the Park and the issue of viable access for equipment deliveries given the Mansion House has to be kept clear of vehicles in keeping with the 18 century setting.

The Officers answers have little substance and we would have thought that, given the two years they have been working on the plan, they could have adequately answered more of the questions.

The HLF is expecting that the Stage 2 Bid Submission will be submitted in August, 6 months from now. The design team has consulted with Lewisham's Event Managers who have provided comments on the masterplan which will be further developed over the next 6 months.

Q7) The only straightforward answer, as far as it goes. However, as Mal Mitchell, Friends of Beckenham Place Park, has pointed out to Alison Taylor the main opportunities for on-the-ground environmental education are provided by the ancient woodlands and the natural river, neither of which are impacted by existence of the golf course. The presence of the golf course close to the proposed visitor hub is an excuse, not a valid reason to close the golf course.

Q8) This is a meaningless, unquantifiable, unsupported response.

Q9) The Officer response refers to developing a holistic plan. There is no holistic plan for the park. There is one scheme to change landscape in the west of the park and bring some buildings into use. There is another proposed scheme for the east of the park which has not yet been signed off (as at 26/1/16) by Environment Agency Chief Executive and partnership funding is yet to be secured. Then there will be a future application for the Mansion House.

Compare this to the Mansion House (and Homesteads as per the tender) having already been restored (or close to) via Beckenham Place Community Trust and the opportunities for funding applications to Heritage Lottery Fund to secure smaller grants for other improvements.

The Council is working closely with the EA and other partners to ensure that the holistic vision referred to is delivered.

Conclusion

Allowing for the points presented in this rebuttal the fundamental issues for the Mayor, and the Councillors to decide on are two-fold. Firstly the profit and loss of the golf course and secondly the validity of consultation process and whether there is a mandate to close the golf course.

- ❖ **The status of the P&L is in dispute; we ask that the financial figures are made available in a traditional standard accounting form in the spirit of the core values of Lewisham Council *Open, honest and fair* way.**
- ❖ **Don't hide behind the Glendale contract. The principle individuals from Save the Beckenham 18 will sign confidentiality agreements if required by Glendale.**
- ❖ **The consultation process cannot be judged to be robust because the findings have been subject to a serious misrepresentation of the facts. These reasons alone should give a serious warning about using the results as they were wrongly included in the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund; there is no public mandate to close the golf course.**
- ❖ **We recommend to the Mayor and Cabinet to delay making a decision on the closure of the golf course until the facts are in the**

public domain and the golf course financial figures have been prepared in the way requested.

- ❖ **Secondly, we recommend further consultation is held in a structured and representative way to ensure the issues are properly put to the public, including all stakeholders. We would propose a professionally acknowledged market research company is engaged to carry out robust research that we will all agree to. We note the Heritage Lottery Fund have indicated that they expect Lewisham to carry out further consultation in respect of the possibility of closing the course.**

All of the points summarised in the conclusion have been addressed by comments above

Roger Eastoe, Carole Hope, Jenny Kay,

Elaine Storey, David Hansom and Andy Tonge

Representing the 'Save the Beckenham 18'