



# Wandle Valley Forum

## NEWS

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Wandle Valley Forum photo competition: Bill Mudge's winning image (see page 3).

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## Chair's Review

2015 was a busy year for the Wandle Valley as the rest of this Wandle News can testify. A highlight was the Wandle Futures workshop last autumn which brought 45 Wandle enthusiasts together to shape future priorities. We heard exciting plans for recognising London as a National Park City and for the growing role of the National Trust in the Wandle Valley along with an update on Wandle Valley Regional Park. This was followed by a lively workshop which identified some clear priorities for the future, including to:

- support the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust
- amplify and link the voices of local groups and people
- run a campaign to enlist all businesses along the river for funds and volunteering
- complete the Wandle Trail
- define the roles of the different Wandle organisations and integrate their activities
- encourage meaningful commitment and joined up approach by the four local authorities - Wandsworth, Merton, Sutton and Croydon

You can read the workshop report and see the presentations on [www.wandlevalleyforum.org.uk](http://www.wandlevalleyforum.org.uk).

We are building on the momentum from Wandle Futures to develop our priorities and speak out as the independent voice of those who care for the Wandle Valley. Look out for more on the Wandle Futures debate in the next few weeks and have your say.

*Tony Burton, Chair*

# The Forum Refocused

COMMENT: Bruce St Julian-Bown

If you thought the Wandle Valley Regional Park was a bit of a mouthful you'll be delighted to hear that the official name of the Park is now styled **Wandle Valley** as in 'Lee Valley' in north east London (unfortunately lacking the same style of financial support!!). The Park is managed by the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust (WVRPT) and the Forum and its supporters have a significant and 'official' influence on how it develops partly because, like the councils, the Forum has two trustees on its board. We are also the official consultee body, although by no means the only one.

Since Tony Burton has been at the helm the Forum has made huge strides in developing its role and presence but more important it has launched initiatives and connected with over 80 Wandle Valley community and voluntary groups, some for the first time and for others more frequently and effectively than before. It has also followed up its "How Green is our Valley" conference, effectively the launch of the Wandle Valley Regional Park, with the Wandle Futures workshop covered by Tony above.

We now have a website ([www.wandlevalleyforum.org.uk](http://www.wandlevalleyforum.org.uk)), e-Bulletin (sign up via the website) and active twitter feed, @WandleForum, and you can connect with us on Facebook ([wandlevalleyforum](https://www.facebook.com/wandlevalleyforum)).

All this comes at a time when a fresh appreciation of what the Valley has gained and consequently what we have to lose is most relevant. The mad London land grab by property developers, the accelerated growth in some communities, like Hackbridge, and the consequent need for more infrastructure all place pressure on the tranquil, natural rural environment of the Wandle Valley. This in turn places pressures on councils, the WVRP Trust and on the Forum and its supporters part of whose role it is to protect the integrity of the park landscape character from such issues as physical or visual incursions into the Park's perimeter and skyline.

But at least we have a regional park. It is here largely through the Forum and its supporters working with the GLA and the local authorities. So 'regional park' is no longer just a term denoting aspirational lines on a map around what's already there. The perception that this is more than a string of parks is starting to develop amongst some local communities. It is because the WVRP brings its authority to the table that the Park along with key members such as Wandle Trust can act as a 'vehicle' for project funding bids. This was part of the original concept - and it works.

Since its inception several million pounds has been bid for and won, largely due to the family of partners and the organisation set up to administer Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) fund awards, the Living Wandle Landscape Partnership or LWLP, a highly effective body in spite of its convoluted name. The result - a large number of clearly visible park enhancements, access improvement and cultural projects. Over the next few years all this will bear the Park's distinctive branding making it clear to all that the Wandle Valley is greater than the sum of its parks! Early glimpses of the rather elegant branding can be seen on signage at the Watermeads. The excellent design was done by a top studio - pro bono - but it is still a costly exercise to implement and will only be introduced gradually. Nevertheless it contributes to building awareness. The result - many local residents are becoming aware of projects that directly benefit their experience of this unique continuum of open spaces.

We should still not assume that even the majority of Park users have anything but a fleeting knowledge of the regional park as a concept, and how it might add a little more pleasure to their lives. That perception will take some years yet and require sustained building on the foundations already laid by the Park and its partners.

**BSJB**

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## Forum Photo Competition

Congratulations to the winners of the Forum's photo competition. As someone who has directed and commissioned a lot of photography I can say that the standard was exceptionally high and with over 200 entries it was a challenge for the judges to choose best in category let alone best overall winner.



Bill Mudge even managed to include pylon cables with his Misty Mitcham Common to get the winning vote (see front page), Lysanne Horrox (Wandle Wheel Chairs) was a landscape with a rare added dimension, whilst Andrew Turner's evocative image of The Farmlands did eerily reflect its mood. The digital age might have enabled everyone to take photos but a real winner still needs an eye and a soul to seek out and capture the beauty of the Park on our doorstep.

**BSJB**

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## Growing supporter pool

Over eighty community and voluntary groups are now supporters of Wandle Valley Forum – welcome to the latest, Wandle Runners. Not all are focused on the park but most are concerned with open space, local community, heritage and getting around. You can find out more using the links on the supporters section of our Wandle Valley Forum website [www.wandlevalleyforum.org.uk](http://www.wandlevalleyforum.org.uk)

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## WVRPT – Funding Crisis

It seems Sue Morgan CEO of the Regional Park Trust has been stretching her official two days a week to almost five as she presents her concern that the WVRP Trust's status will shortly become unsustainable. Her strategy is to step up from 'Transition' to 'Implementation' phase. She adds "...we can only find our way out of transition if the LAs are serious in their intent to allow us to develop the park and support the ideas that will attract the core funding we need for a team".

This situation has been created by:

- the tapered and diminishing financial support from the councils
- minimal basic funding from councils burdened as they are by the Lee Valley Precept.
- drop in the ocean rebates from Lee Valley
- a workload that needs a full time and fully supported CEO.

### What is at stake?

The very concept of a unified regional park and the substantial success it has had in supporting and making funding bids. The role of CEO itself and the reputation of 4 councils who have ticked the boxes of what is required but not thought about the long term.

The virtual collapse of the regional park might make it an overnight headline grabber and top agenda item at four town halls and the GLA. It would also risk the ridicule and dejection of many of the members of the 80+ community groups and voluntary organisations we communicate with and who support the Park.

Sue has provided all four local authorities with a detailed brief on the Trust's needs and the strategy rationale if it is to develop into a sustainable entity steering the Wandle Valley into the kind of open space that we all imagined in the original vision.

This requires a restructuring of the Park's management and ways of working. What is required ultimately is a sustainable income level to allow for more CEO time, essential but very limited support staff, a permanent and appropriate main office facility and an interface with a management structure that falls short of being a statutory body with for example planning powers, but has more effective sway within the key trustee bodies especially the councils, GLA and Environment Agency. How the Lee Valley precept issue is managed is also part of this negotiation.

The Forum has been consulted on the new structure and very much supports the initiative.

**BSJB**

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## Cycle paths in the Park

This is one subject for which funding rarely seems to be in short supply. We all agree the slaughter of cyclists on London's roads should be stopped sooner than asap! We also agree that cyclists produce no pollution which benefits us all. But everyone it seems has very entrenched views on cyclists. Love or hate but rarely in between – which is not helpful as there as many different breeds of cyclist as there are pedestrians or motorists!

Wisdom comes from all sides of this edgy debate. For example how often have you heard the comment: "Why not use your bell?" The answer: "Because it may be taken as aggressive"

Both have a point so here's one attempt at a solution. A permeable chip track surface so that bikes make just the right level of crunch to elicit the usually polite response from walkers and mobility ('moby'?) scooters. It works well in Poulter Park and is environmentally more acceptable than impermeable surfaces.

TfL's latest strategy is called 'Quietways' as opposed to 'Greenways' and 'Cycling Superhighways'. It routes cyclists through quite backroads and open spaces when possible. An excellent strategy but it has flaws.

### **A warning bell over Quietways**

Since the debacle of the Weir Rd impermeable mixed use cycle path, it is true that the now somewhat overgrown path looks less 'in-yer-face' than when new although still dominating the once rural landscape character. The forces that pushed it through still lurk and there is 'strong intel' that this mixed cycling highway may be upgraded further to 'Quietway' status. The term 'super-highway' tends to offend planners but at the standard 3m width it would be wider than a bus and half a metre wider than the aforementioned Weir Rd section of the Wandle Trail.

Saving the life or injury of a single cyclist makes the above worthwhile but the current upgrade does not seem to have attracted any more cyclists. And those who do use this stretch are simply enabled to travel faster. Yet a further widening only makes sense if there is an increase in cyclists and no one has seen any evidence of this with the current upgrade. Did anyone count? Well the Forum did some sample hours during rush hour and although it was early days then there were surprisingly few cyclists. Maybe an average gap of 250m between them say. So perhaps incorporating it into a more visible, longer and relevant route might at last attract more cyclists.

Of general concern is that the Quietways strategy for which there is no shortage of funding from Biker Boris's coffers, may yet carve a road sized border across parts of Mitcham Common and Wandle Trail with street lighting to boot – all we ask is that landscape character and wildlife is not slaughtered in the process. Careful location and flexible specification are essential to protecting the Park as well as cyclists. This remains a serious issue that we will monitor.



## ***Living with cyclists & pedestrians & motorists!***

We should make clear that the Forum is not and has never been anti-cycling - we are pro-cycling. We also believe there are good and bad cyclists as there are car drivers and walkers. All we are concerned with is that landscape character and wildlife are protected and taken as a serious parameter when specifying cycling routes, path size and the need for lighting.

### **Earlsfield Gap**

We are delighted to learn that after several false starts the **Earlsfield Gap** may once again become the focus of attention for council officers and engineers perhaps using funding from the coffers mentioned above alongside the planning gain from the new development at Haslemere Industrial Estate. This would make the cycling route even more relevant and useful.

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## **Enhancing Wandle Valley - Project highlights:**

The recently opened **Watermeads** restoration (by the KNK Stadium) has become one of the Wandle Valley highlights. This historic part of the Wandle included dangerous channels and other hazards and has been closed remarkably for over a century. Largely through the efforts of the Wandle Valley Regional Park's CEO with local community and Forum support nearly half a million pounds was won from the Mayor's Big Green Fund not only for the National Trust to open up Watermeads and make it safe but also to improve the Wandle Trail. There are three new bridges, restored riverbanks and further changes along the rest of Poulter Park's riverfront although some of the new path has been constructed more widely than necessary.

There is now a GLA funded Pocket Park at newly spruced up **Hackbridge Village**. It enables the Mile Road Bridge over the railway to become an attractive gateway to Beddington Farmlands. The bridge itself was initially under threat of demolition until the Forum and local residents alerted the council and campaigned successfully to keep it open and restore 100 acre footbridge link to Mitcham Common.

**Waddon Ponds** is well into the enhancement project for its Ponds making it a far more attractive place and an ideal starting point for Wandle walkers who trek the 10 miles along the river to the Thames. A walk I can highly recommend.

**Merton Priory Trust** was tipped off by Forum members about the HLF opportunity and went on to win funding which when added to its frozen Section 106 pot of gold from the Savacentre provides enough for a proper architect designed museum, work on which will begin in the spring.

The infamous **Bridge to Nowhere** (Colliers Wood) has finally become more than an obscure viewing platform and is now a substantial wooden gateway to Wandle Meadows Nature Park and consequently a useful new route for local people through the meadows.

**Wandle riverside in Colliers Wood** centre is benefitting from new railings treatment along the riverbank opposite Colliers Wood Bus Depot. This is a noticeable improvement and although some might say the lighting looks a tad twee it is a big improvement over the old railings. Together with the relaying of new pavement and traffic lane signage and the prospect of the tombstone block being reborn in humane cladding this previously scruffy corner of the Valley now looks tastefully presented. And talking of taste the ever changing one time pub by the river has now evolved from Indian to Turkish restaurant.

## The Impact of Development.

But there are also threats to the Park and it is one of the Forum's roles to monitor plans and alert supporters if they are considered detrimental although some projects provide both threat and opportunity.

One such is **Feathers Wharf** which runs along the Wandle for nearly 200yds to the Thames. Once promised as open land by the council it has remained on short term lease for about twenty years now which was frustrating as one could see the Wandle Trail/Thames Path all neatly fenced off. Now the adjacent Waste Transfer Station (WTS) needs more space it has offered to deliver a properly surfaced path and even to reopen the high level walkway across the facility to link with the Thames Path towards Wandsworth Bridge. The Forum along with local supporter the Wandsworth Society is pleased that finally these concessions have been made, but remains insistent that having campaigned long and hard for at least part of the site to be open space there should be a piazza area or pocket park at the river mouth.

This is a key location for waterfront walks connecting Wandsworth town centre to the Thames and should be a truly special leisure site and nature reserve observatory. There is a possibility that this aspiration may yet be met in our lifetime!



**Photo: Feathers Wharf looking west towards Putney and Showing safeguarded Wandle Trail / Thames Path that it is hoped will be expanded significantly.**

**Ram Brewery:** This huge development will transform Wandsworth town centre and in spite of its excessive scale, open up Wandle riverbanks and allow paths along both sides. We have requested a comprehensive network of riverside walks to ensure that shoppers, walkers, cyclists and café clientele have room to co-exist harmoniously. Although no plan as such has been presented it is possible that there will be enough room to accommodate all branches of the local community.

**Haslemere Industrial Estate, Earlsfield (Gap!):** Yet another industrial estate is about to bite the dust. However the developers here seem keen to bring local people on board and links and improvements to the Wandle Trail by the main line railway bridge are being explored with key stakeholders. The development itself looks easy on the eye and could also yet provide the long sought after access linking Durnsford Road Recreation Ground to the river. The Forum is campaigning alongside local groups Wimbledon Park Residents Assoc and Wandsworth Society and local councillors and MP to bring this long held aspiration to become reality. There is also serious renewed interest in bridging the infamous **Earlsfield Gap** (Trewint Street weir – King George's Park) in coordination with this development. Watch out for Forum Bulletins in 2016.

**Culvers Lodge:** Finally, a glimmer of light for this charming yet threatened cottage. The Trust's CEO Sue Morgan has confirmed that £10k funding has been received to take this project forward. A Steering Group has been requested to progress this to a tangible and viable proposal that can secure the building's future. Well done all those locals and BedZedians who helped energise this project. This was another project the Forum firmly supported.

# Major threats around the Park

**The Beddington Incinerator.** There remains a very active group of campaigners whom we have supported, fighting a rear guard action over what will be a devastatingly large incinerator and all that goes with it. Built as a result of EU legislation to clean up our environment, the landfill site at Beddington Farmlands, (now 'terraformed' into a long hill approx. 700m and 7 floors high, with teeming wildlife lakes) is almost complete. The delicate irony here is that Viridor, the owners, provide the largest share of funding to the Wandle Valley or at least for Beddington Farmlands. There may be lessons here on how to better to assess planning submissions on such a huge facility rather than just letting the utility choose its own site - based on cost and convenience? The technology for a cleaner and less controversial waste management process is probably already here but it seems too new for Sutton council to risk adopting.

Local hero Sasha Khan has lost his Judicial Review hearing and Sutton Council demand that he pays capped fees of £5400 including interest. Voluntary contributions have (as reported on the > **stoptheincinerator** < website) reached £1800, softening the pain slightly, so further contributions will be probably be welcomed.

The other question this project raises: are local councils or even the Environment Agency (EA) sufficiently up to date and competent to be more prescriptive in their briefing for such projects or do they leave it to the utility owner with, and who can blame them, their obvious self-interest. The same applies to the safety report about which there is an interesting critique on the above website. The issue of a safety report being commissioned and presented by an operating company poses questions of self-interest and objectivity along with the question of competence of the receiving body to act on it objectively.

**Hackbridge Primary School / Felnax site.** This looks like a classic case of the local authority conceding all to the developer of this major site (approx. 700 new homes), then later declaring that there will be a surprise increase in demand for primary school places! And the only possible site for the school is on the field north of BedZed - the Park's Metropolitan Open Land.

Now either the local authority forgot to insist as part of CIL / S106 agreements that additional primary capacity was needed over and above that provided in the expansion of the existing school or the developer refused to accommodate it quoting viability criteria. The Forum alerted the Mayor of London to its strategic impact and helped secure some improvements but this is another piecemeal loss of precious Metropolitan Open Land.

**Crossrail 2 & Weir Road** If you thought that deciding between a Crossrail 2 station at Balham or Tooting Broadway as next stop south after Clapham Junction, was the only remaining issue bar a couple of monstrous air shafts, you'd be wrong. They have to park the trains (nearly 200m long) somewhere and Weir Rd Industrial Estate which runs alongside the Wandle Trail has been identified as a contender. It's possible then that train sheds could replace industrial units along the river and nature reserve. It might tidy up the perimeter but until detailed plans are submitted for consultation we and especially the WPRA will monitor this proposal.

**Greyhound Stadium, Plough Lane** Wimbledon Park Residents objections to the development plan for the Greyhound Stadium did not persuade Merton Council which has given consent. The plan comprising 1500 additional residents and a 20,000 seat football stadium on the banks of the Wandle will have a major impact not just on this stretch of the Wandle Valley Regional Park but for a couple of miles in all directions. The AFC football stadium will generate a spectator parking problem that could stretch across Garratt Lane and up Burntwood Lane especially if the club does well – which is what we would wish for. But a parking problem on top of the existing traffic chaos in the area is likely to inhibit those aspirations. The football pitch may be liable to flooding and as the Wandle flooded in 1958, 1968, and 2007, it could be an issue. Alternative plans for a more modest development have fallen off the agenda. I wonder how the new residents might react to the possibility of train sheds across the river? (See previous item).

# *King John was in the room!*

As was John Hawks and colleagues who put on a splendid commemoration of Magna Carta's signing and the role of Merton Priory Chapter House in September. His team of professional thespians enacted accurately researched, historically critical conversations that all took place in the Chapter House and illuminate the birth pangs of English Law embodied in the Statutes of Merton. What could put Merton on the map better than the events depicted and the caste of original players, King John, Thomas a Becket, the Dauphin of France and certainly a King Henry or two.

One quite quickly forgot the more typical educational outreach scenarios for children and slowly you realised that the conversations you were hearing had already been spoken not 5 yards away a mere 800 years ago. And from that moment one could experience a son & lumiere of the mind and feel English history being made around you. A splendid spectacle and the last before work starts on converting the site to a museum-proper. Well done to all to the Priory players and the bard who wrote and researched it.

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## Growing support

We have secured funding support from both **Merton Partnership** and housing association **L&Q** for our work. This follows discussion with Forum Chair Tony Burton and is to help with the Wandle Futures process and follow through.

L&Q is keen to develop links between its tenants and the Wandle and it isn't the only housing association wanting to do this. Wandle Housing also offers grants for this kind of work and is in discussion with Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust.

If we think that more people should be connected to Wandle Valley and the river then this is a route which could deliver this (especially for housing association tenants) and funding would be available.

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## Here's a thought!

### **Forum executive member Gideon Reeve**

At the excellent Wandle Futures event at the Vestry Hall we did a workshop on the next priorities for the WVF. I believe one of the most popular priorities voted for was to get back the money from the Lea Valley precept. Sue Morgan suggested this was highly unlikely to happen. So if this is the case. How about instead of that we campaign for a new precept for the National Park City ([www.nationalparkcity.london](http://www.nationalparkcity.london))? This concept of London as one of the National Parks was presented at the event by Daniel Raven-Ellison. It was an inspirational presentation. If all Londoners paid £1 a year that would be £8 million and the whole of London and the national economy would benefit.

**Gideon Reeve**

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## About Wandle Valley Forum

Wandle Valley Forum provides support and an independent voice for over 80 community groups & voluntary organisations and for everyone who shares a passion for the Wandle. Our campaigning was instrumental in establishing the Wandle Valley Regional Park and we are integral to its future development. Support us by offering your time or giving a donation.

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