

# WANDLE FORUM

## NEWS UPDATE

25 April 2011

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*A review for Wandle Forum members on topics arising since the last Forum meeting including issues raised by the Forum Chairman at the WVRP Management Board and other relevant meetings.*

*Although this looks like a 'newsletter' it has not included items from members except Merton Priory Trust and thus it is not a true editorially balanced newsletter. We might however discuss this option at the next Forum meeting. Such a publication would entail clarity about distinguishing objective news reporting from opinion and all the usual ethics of a publication. So for now these are just my briefing notes.*

***From Wandle Forum Chair***

### **Input to the Management Board**

There are a few critical issues that can be seen to erode the potential of the proposed Wandle Valley Regional Park (WVRP) (items 1-4 below). Some have come up recently and some have been simmering for a long time. Each one is a local issue but impacts the whole park concept and so is of concern at a regional level and Wandle Valley-wide level. My purpose in raising

them below is not to criticise the considerable efforts of individual councils and institutions but to encourage them to perceive and deal with them openly at a Valley wide/Regional/London GLA level rather than as single local authority issues, in the hope that doing so may help expedite their resolution to the benefit of all. I am pleased to say that some good progress has already been made on some of these issues.

### **1. The Dividing Railway Wall**

I attended a meeting of residents around BedZed concerned about termination of their access across three bridges over the Mitcham Junc-Hackbridge railway line. Looking at a map of the WVRP general area it is clear that this is very relevant to WVRP. The three existing bridges (of which two are under threat) are important in providing access between the two arguably loosely connected components of the WVRP.

Without the three bridges this one mile plus stretch of railway line becomes a barrier between these two main park components i.e. the Wandle riverside (the long green chain to the Thames ) and the unique continuum of Metropolitan Open Land (the big bump), between and including Mitcham Common and Beddington Park.

If this park is to be more than arbitrary lines on a map the two distinct areas need to be linked in several places at their interface. That access is not just important to local residents but to the wider community in SW London for whom this park is intended to be an important leisure amenity. There could also be a case for adding further access via the existing foot and/or road bridge at Hackbridge Station.

Network Rail has offered to transfer the bridge to Sutton Council but the cost of repair and maintenance is unsurprisingly making Sutton hesitant. However Sutton BC have agreed to survey the bridge and may accept it if costs are not prohibitive. Could regional funding be found for this? The northern most bridge is being replaced by a new footbridge which leaves the future of the middle bridge in some doubt and a

gap between the north and south bridges of over half a mile. So some progress but still awaiting a final answer.

I have said the BedZed group who called the meeting would be welcomed if they joined the Wandle Forum of which they had not heard.

## **2. Merton Priory - The Next Chapter**

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Many would agree that from an outsiders perspective the public profile of the hugely important heritage legacy of Merton Priory could be described in the words of the old blues song as 'almost level with the ground'. And that is in spite of the plaque opposite the entrance and years of work and lobbying from the Merton Priory Trust and Merton Council. However following an agreement with private land owners there is at last some very good news as Marcus Beale (MPT Chair) describes:

*After many years of delay the land transfer of the chapter house and surrounding site is due for imminent completion, and the Trust will lease the site from new owners London Borough of Merton to begin the implementation of the new education and information centre.*

*The Chapter house is being improved by redecorating the surrounding walls, reorganising the displays of archaeological finds and explanatory notice boards, improving lighting and signage. Shortly the sand laid between the foundations will be removed and the levels reduced to give a greater impression of the layout of the building.*

*The precise work will be confirmed following further study and consultation. It may include:*

- *opening up the enclosure to increase views from the surrounding areas*
- *further improvements to the chapter house interior*
- *planting a medieval garden in the area to the south of the chapter house*
- *improved exhibitions and displays*
- *improved web site and on-line historical resources relating to the priory.*

*The Trust will also be displaying facsimiles of two remarkable historical documents, the Magna Carta (1215) and Statute of Merton (1235), which are being reproduced by hand by the calligraphers of the Royal College of Arms. Special thanks to the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral, the House of Lords, the Museum of London, and City livery companies who have made these reproductions possible.*

*The Trust has also acquired original fabrics printed at Merton Abbey by Morris and Liberty, which will be conserved and displayed.*

Merton Priory is the heritage highlight of the WVRP. Without it and World Heritage recognition of the site it will be much harder to raise the parks broader profile to national or even regional status with the access to additional funding this could bring.

## **3. Wandle Delta future planning**

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Wandsworth Town Centre Partnership's aim has remained since its inception to grow the town centre towards the Thames. This effectively entitles Wandsworth to claim to be a "(northern) Gateway to the WVRP". However unless planning briefs for the Brewery site and the remaining council depots and brown field sites in the Delta area take this economically and

promotionally valuable opportunity into account it will not be a gateway but just another outflow. I know the desire and recognition exists in WBC Planning Dept but it may need that extra vision at planning level to fully realise this unique opportunity and build on the good tiered bank work already completed at the western river mouth into the Thames.

## **4. Hackbridge Master Plan**

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In principle it is good news that the first of the new Neighbourhood Development Orders (NDOs) is to be applied in Hackbridge. This means that local residents are to have a greater voice in defining exactly what they would like to see within Sutton council's Master Plan for Hackbridge. However their ideas might be assisted if there was greater understanding about the WVRP plans.

The lack of awareness of the Forum's existence and lack of information on the park apparent at the Railway Bridge meeting at BedZed is a concern and the many local people who did not

attend that meeting are unlikely to be better informed.

I hope that some of those I met at the BedZed meeting will raise this if they feel it is an issue and Sutton Council will, following its consultation period, publish its latest conclusions. The Forum has already expressed anxiety about the field to the north of BedZed which at one stage was to be completely built on although this may now be down to a school development with playing fields. Building on this field widens further the divide between the Wandle Trail and the Metropolitan Open Land and Common .

## **5. Forum communications**

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Following concerns that there was a lack of continuity of communication between the Forum's 6 monthly meetings in terms of news updates and working group reports the WF chair will now prepare a news update to be emailed to all Forum members (this is it!). This will ideally

follow shortly after the quarterly Management Board meetings and so act as a useful and timely update. The small contact group meeting may be held if required however the update is the essential thing so that members can keep informed of issues etc.

## **6. Friends Group**

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(From the Management Board Meeting) As a consequence of the WVRP governance proposals The Forum has been asked to respond to the idea that it should take on the role of a 'Friends' group. My initial reaction was that the role of Forum and Friends were quite distinct in that the former was a consultative body rather than the latter which focuses on fund raising. I suggested that a Friends group apart from fundraising would however be a

useful networking group that should be made up of volunteers from all the boards and committees in the WVRP structure including the Forum and beyond. Therefore at this stage a fund raising responsibility was not seen as ideal addition to the Forum's role but members views are welcome before a formal position is taken. The full governance proposal was approved in principle and copies should soon be available for download to those interested.

## **7. New section of Wandle Trail anticipated**

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Following a walk from King George's Park to Trewint St it is clear that there are several gaps in the riverside trail. However I have learned from Wandsworth BC officers that it is expected that the empty MoD warehouse next to KGP will

be sold in the near future, a condition on the purchasers will be to open the riverside path between KGP and Strathville Rd via Riverdale Drive thus extending access for thousands of local residents. Excellent News!

## **8. Seen in the River**

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A bright orange Koi approx 18 inches in length with a circumference of a rugby players calf.. It's

the biggest I've seen so far - is this rare?  
Location near Trewint St bridge, Wandsworth.

## **9. Dumping**

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Wandsworth Council has cleaned up the dumping next to the travellers' site in Earlsfield. Thanks WBC. I have asked WBC to liaise with Merton BC about preventing motor scooter

dumping in the Trewint St – Plough Lane stretch by access restraints which prevent them being ridden on the Trail here.

## **10. Next Forum meeting Wed 8<sup>th</sup> June 4.00-6.00pm Morden Hall Cottage.**

Some of the above items will be on the Forum agenda.

See you then

**Bruce**

### ***Bruce St. Julian-Bown***

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25 April 2011

### **NOTE**

The views expressed here are the chair's recollection of the views he expressed while representing the Forum. They are not a formal record of Forum policy. Your comments are welcome as is any other news you feel can't wait for the next Forum meeting.