
The NEWS UPDATE for WANDLE FORUM members and for email circulation to all interested bodies, LAs and institutions.

Wandle Forum - the next generation

Now that the Forum has been reshaped to provide a clearer voice focussing on the aspirations of the community groups that live in the Wandle Valley, and for whom the river and its open spaces are an important feature of their locality, I hope we will feel more directly that we are making a difference.

We are well represented with two trustees on the WVRP Board although we have made clear that this in itself does not constitute full consultation. So we will welcome previews, planning and project presentations from the local authorities, developers and national institutions that relate to the area bounded by, and in close proximity to the WVRP.

We welcome Peter Wilkinson as WVRP CEO. He in his temp' capacity, has already shown he can listen to, and understand, the reality of community groups aspirations and our practical limitations. His knowledge and inclusive approach to his team and all related bodies bodes well for a future where every pound has to be painstakingly extracted from a complex bureaucracy.

Our response must start by improving our performance so we can better reflect our members views and make use of our new higher level of contact with decision makers. That is why the agenda for our forthcoming meeting below, is quite detailed even if we don't cover every point at the meeting. We would appreciate as many members of the Forum as possible to attend.

Draft AGENDA with commentary

Tues July 3rd 5.00-7.00pm

Upstairs at William Morris pub Merton Abbey Mills (the original date July 2 was already booked).

The comments below are not intended to influence debate, just to speed it up. So please tell us your views.

- 1. Operational requirements:** venue/minutes taking/treasurer/etc. We have agreed on quarterly meetings but the venue is not yet set on a regular basis and we may need to rotate around the four boroughs.
- 2. Costs** we need to assess our operating costs and see how they can be met in cash or in kind by either a modest member subscription fee, fund raising, or contributions from the LAs and/or WVRP
- 3. Recruitment :** area gaps & sports sector. Our membership does have some gaps in area and activity coverage. What with having shed our LA colleagues we need to ensure that we are representative of the broad local community we represent.
- 4. Revised constitution & mission statement.** Some minor changes are needed but we need to ensure that the decisions regarding points above are covered. In terms of our role and aims. These have not changed in principle but we may need to specify the broader interests of the regional park rather than only the river and environs alone.
- 5. Charitable status or not?** The emerging view is that there is little reason for us to register as a charity because of the red tape that would involve plus annual audits and the other admin burden in addition to that which our members already bear with their own voluntary organisations.
- 6. Executive committee:** Having 3 or 4 more members on an exec committee would split the work.

Members who are willing to meet as and when necessary to help resolve the more complex issues will spread the load which can sometimes be quite weighty for Angela and myself.

7 Agenda Priorities External & Internal: lobbying issues / working groups / Festival / Conference / local issues. We will need to address, some or all of these points at some time.

8. Area representatives and area priorities. Hackbridge, Wimbledon Park, Wandsworth, Carshalton, Beddington Farmlands, Morden Hall and Abbey Mills are covered but some gaps still remain. Biodiversity and heritage are well covered but sport and recreation are not.

9. Website. Ideally we need a website clearly distinct from the WVRP's. This is one of the few projects that may need funding or professional help. Angela and I can contribute to the content but tech input will be required to get it up and running.

10. Name and corporate identity. This is not a top priority and shouldn't cost significant money but will help our presentation, credibility and effectiveness. It will be important that we demonstrate that whilst we are represented on the WVRP board we are nevertheless an independent group.

11. Agenda for WF & partners conference. The WVRP is keen that this event should be continued and is hosted by the Forum possibly with assistance from Groundwork. It will in effect be a sort of grander version of our previous meetings with all parties present including LAs and institutions, possibly with a couple of relevant speakers.

12. Promoting volunteering: Consistent with our aims for enhancing the Wandle and supporting the Wandle Trust. The Project Dirt website may help in addition to word of mouth and this news update.

13. Local issues: At every meeting there should be the opportunity for one or more members to present the issues on their patch or ideas for the whole river and regional park.

Incinerators and the Precautionary Principle

Viridor have been consulting local people about their proposed incinerator adjacent to the regional park. Our reorganisation is the only excuse for not picking this up sooner but a planning application has not yet been made. A response was sent in the following context.

Ultimately it must be more persuasive to consider both sides of controversial issues before arriving at conclusions because a. you learn more from looking at the broad facts, b. your conclusions are more objective and therefore carry more weight than knee jerk reactions. In this case

reducing landfill and harvesting energy that could reportedly power 30,000 homes, are clearly worthy aims when weighing up the options but what is the downside?

The letter below, sent to Sutton Council Planning Dept on behalf the Forum sums up what I found by spending a day trawling the internet on the subject. The gist can be summed up in very few words. While doubt remains apply the Precautionary Principle. Thanks to those who offered their views, any further comments will be welcomed.

Objection to Proposed Viridor Incinerator adjacent to Wandle Valley Regional Park

This letter voices the concerns of Wandle Forum member groups regarding the proposed Viridor Incinerator which has recently been out for consultation (*and is due for submission to Sutton Council shortly*).

As it is right in the middle of Wandle Forum (and WVRP) territory it is appropriate that the Forum and its members take a view on this issue. Balancing the pros and cons may not be a straightforward task but that does not mean that a position can't be taken based on current knowledge.

These comments are based on several academic studies on the health impact of Municipal Waste Incinerators (MWIs) as published on the web. I attempt to be as objective as possible and acknowledge that this is in no way a meta-analysis on the risks of incinerators. As this information is freely and easily available on the internet I have not listed the source of each point.

1. Studying the human health impact of incinerators is notoriously difficult partly because the choice of criteria for the studies can be so varied and many questions still remain to be answered.
2. Older incinerators were less efficient than the latest types and health effects can take a long time to manifest thus hampering clear conclusions as to the safety of the proposed Viridor incinerator.
3. Some studies have found adverse impacts on human health including sarcomas and birth defects, others have proved 'inconclusive' and some have shown no adverse impacts.
4. In most regulation against toxin exposure, (chemical or radioactive), safety thresholds have consistently been tightened as new evidence becomes available of health risks at ever **lower** exposure. This absence of the 'precautionary principle' has cost many lives.
5. No matter how new the incinerator or how efficient the process human error in maintenance or operation will occur at some point and will increase the risk of toxin release.
6. The impact of 'ultrafine' particulates on health still requires a lot more research before conclusions can be made about their impact - probably the biggest unresolved safety issue as symptoms may take over a decade to present. .
7. I have not seen any statement that dioxins, one of the most dangerous toxins, have ever been totally eliminated from Incinerators. That they are released by other sources of combustion doesn't make release by incinerators any the more acceptable.
8. The HPA (Health Protection Agency) whilst it currently believes that well run modern MWIs pose insignificant threats to health has nevertheless launched a new study in April 2012. Clearly they accept there is more to learn.
9. The inevitability of bringing in waste from further afield by lorry if locally available feed in waste availability declines through better recycling, will be a commercial imperative for the contractor, if not the initial business aim.

These findings prompt the following conclusions:

- a. To approve an MWI planning application before the new HPA study is published would be highly irresponsible bearing in mind the lack of consistency in the results of other studies.
- b. The area although partly surrounded by open or industrial land is still within 2km of thousands of family homes. We all know the prevailing winds will carry the toxic dust much further than that, usually across parts of Croydon.
- c. The WVRP as public open space would be greatly undermined by the presence of the proposed incinerator on the actual boundary of its largest open space.
- d. The integrity and security of the critically important Beddington Farmland bird sanctuary will be put at risk.

The Green Valley concept

There is also a major economic opportunity that would be undermined before it is even fully developed if the incinerator goes ahead: The concept of the Wandle Valley as a focus of Green Technology. This concept is based on the projects that already exist on the ground, those planned and those at concept stage. This idea has many economic and environmental benefits for the riparian councils and London as a whole, as well as local people and the WVRP. Building a controversial Incinerator adjacent to the park will completely undermine this initiative as an inward investment marketing strategy and the WVRP itself in its aims of creating health led leisure activity open space programme. Whereas if it was based on latest green waste reduction and energy-from-waste technology it would boost the 'Green Valley' concept and bring credit and publicity to Sutton council and ironically also the contractor.

Summary

In summary it would be a disaster to approve a planning application for such a still controversial, technology, especially at the proposed location and especially as alternative green processes such as pyrolysis have been successfully demonstrated in the area.

Incinerator technology in spite of its value in minimising landfill, still has many safety issues unresolved such as ultrafine particles which with such a large potential impact, real and perceived, on so many people and public open space initiatives it simply would be irresponsible to approve an application for this incinerator until there is clearer understanding and more convincing evidence of its safety. The precautionary principle must be the final influence at this stage of incomplete understanding of the health impact of MWIs even if there is a margin of cost disadvantage.

Access Survey - a useful tool for Forum

As a volunteer on the WVRP Communications and Engagement group I naively volunteered for what I thought was a walk through the regional park with a camera only to realise what a huge undertaking doing an access survey actually is.

The purpose is to produce a visual record of all access points to the WVRP. What with the weather and working out how to present it on the computer and realising how many access points the whole WVRP might include I should have remembered the old forces motto 'never

volunteer'. But then that is a 'mistake' we have all made and why most of you are reading this!

However there are some serious benefits for the Forum and the WVRP who identified the need for this key archive information in order to identify opportunities for upgrading gateways and identifying gaps in access provision. It will also serve the needs of the Forum in helping each locally based group with identifying its aspirational projects and access shortcomings.

Wandle Catchment Plan Consultation

Many readers will already have taken part in the novel consultation process that the Wandle Trust has commissioned to help them understand what local people and community groups relationship with the river is, and how it could be better. It is an interesting method for collecting ideas and concerns around a particular topic. Having commissioned a lot of research professionally in the past I was a little sceptical about the technique but it really threw up ideas that might not have come out in the normal dialogue based

focus groups qualitative results. The fuzzy-felt cloths on which ideas, threats and opportunities were grouped acted as a useful temporary record of a group's response. The eventual report which I hope will be freely circulated should make interesting reading and provide useful input into helping the Wandle Trust, Wandle Forum and the WVRP in prioritising and archiving ideas and issues. The Plan itself will of course help to coordinate partnership initiatives aimed at restoration improvements.

The Wandle on your coffee table

Local South London-based author Bob Steel, assisted by wildlife expert Derek Coleman, has announced the publication of his new book on the River Wandle. Entitled '**River Wandle Companion**' the 250-page full-colour book looks at many aspects of the life of the river from the river's illustrious industrial past to the big houses which once dotted the river's banks, and the increasingly diverse wildlife of the Wandle Valley. There's also a chapter on the regeneration of the river in the past fifty years, from a low point in the 1960's when the river was officially an open sewer! The book carries a detailed guide to the

Wandle Trail, the path which follows the river from Croydon and Carshalton to its confluence with the Thames in Wandsworth. Illustrated with nearly 200 photographs and some 40 maps, the book is, according to Theo Pike, Chairman of Trustees of the Wandle Trust, "essential reading for anyone who has ever wandered along the Wandle's banks, remembered this famous little river's hard-working history, or wondered about its future". The book can be ordered online at a price of £15 but if you would like to purchase the book for just £12 please email to reserve a copy.
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