



WANDLE FUTURES

Workshop report – 17 October 2015

This is a report of the Wandle Futures workshop organised by Wandle Valley Forum in Mitcham's Vestry Hall on 17 October 2015 to help shape future priorities for the Wandle.

The workshop was attended by 45 people from across the area, including representatives from a large number of community groups and voluntary organisations which support Wandle Valley Forum¹. It followed a guided walk around the recently opened Watermeads, presentations by Daniel Raven-Ellison (London National Park City), Ed Ikin (National Trust) and Sue Morgan (Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust) and an introduction by Tony Burton (Wandle Valley Forum). The last two presentations are available on Wandle Valley Forum's website.

The workshop was set in the context of:

- previous thinking that has been done about the Wandle, including the Wandle Valley Regional Park Vision, Wandle Trust Vision, Catchment Plan and the All London Green Grid
- Wandle Valley Forum's distinct role vis-à-vis other Wandle organisations in providing support and an independent voice for over 80 community groups & voluntary organisations and others who share a passion for the Wandle.

Perceptions of the Wandle

We started by looking at how others think about the Wandle Valley and the words they use. People recorded these individually, both good and bad:

Positive	Negative
Secret Good accessibility to the Wandle Trail Hidden	Polluted Sewage overflows and misconnections = polluted

¹ Wandle Futures was attended by people who live and/or work in Wandsworth, Merton, Sutton and Croydon. Organisations and groups attending included: National Trust, Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust, Wandle Trust, London National Park City, Wimbledon Park Residents Association, Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage, Mitcham Society, Merton Priory Trust, Hackbridge & Beddington Corner Neighbourhood Development Group, Bioregional, Living Wandle Landscape Partnership, Sutton Ramblers, Merton Tree Wardens, Friends of Ravensbury Park, Sutton Council, Merton Council. Thanks are due to everyone who participated and to the Merton Partnership for its support.

<p>Rich in history A reminder we are connected to landscape and nature Historical Good cycle path Natural habitat – educational value for urban children Wandle Trail is a place to escape – accessible Somewhere to play All the organisations and communities looking after it Interesting walks along the Wandle The Wandle is nationally renowned for community led environmental improvement Loads of wildlife Natural green corridor Wandle Trail – heritage, sports, nature, outdoor exploration – all in one! A challenge to walk from one end to the other Amazing heritage – so interesting Commute to work Clear air along the river Variety of birds found on & near the Wandle Safe cycling off road way to get from south to north London Community / volunteer participation Bats Tucked away Potential Breeding water birds Need for a better understanding of the Wandle’s historic landscape heritage Need for a better understanding of the function of terrace gravel commons (especially the Tooting commons) in the context of the wider Wandle Valley Wildlife in the river Peaceful Living Wandle Partnership Kingfisher Good walks A fascinating place to see wildlife Hidden gem of nature Great wildlife Fishing</p>	<p>People in London know about Lee Valley but not the Wandle Never heard of it! Dead Are there too many organisations involved? Public awareness. Just arrived. No value Wimbledon Park is not in Regional Park The Wandle is a little river (much smaller than other London rivers) The what? Full of litter Worry about flooding Polluted Huh? Smelly Pollution and neglect It’s a bit smelly by some of the sewage outlets Not interesting It’s dirty Dreary industrial river Obstacle to getting around Smelly I don’t know what it is Lack of visibility, lack of facilities – WC, café – route and location not known What is the Wandle? Not well known outside the area Pollution / litter / filth Is it a place? Sad not better access in Earlsfield Council cut backs mean councils don’t care as much and don’t give us our promised Regional Park It’s hidden away people can’t access lots of it or don’t know it’s there Parts of it are litter strewn Dangerous footpaths / walks Too industrial Still waters dirty and full of litter Too hidden! Litter in and around the river Access often overgrown People dump rubbish Not enough people know about it</p>
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<p>Wildlife, kingfishers, fish, natural haven Huge potential Public awareness of value to society An escape from hustle and bustle Rich heritage Good natural environment separateness from urban life Beautiful in places. Much improved River above ground – visual and community resource Relaxing and calming Biodiversity Trail has improved and access opened</p>	
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Opportunities and Threats?

We then worked in small groups to discuss and agree the different opportunities and threats faced by the Wandle:

Opportunities	Threats
<p>Funding opportunities: crowdfunding / HLF / Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) Engagement and involvement from wider communities and local residents Partnership work Access to nature if people chose to take it For healthy walks, health – value of nature for health Section 106 money from building in the area Participate in National Park City Mayoral election – opportunity to make case for Regional Park An economic opportunity / growth Sporting opportunities Lots of people care about the river and the valley Volunteering Place where children can fall in, experience nature Employment Tourism from Londoners / local South East “Green” valley Ways to earn money activities in Regional Park, including renewable energy Getting children involved in pond-dipping Manufacturing – new ways of doing things Strategic approach to green infrastructure Development opportunity: S106, green</p>	<p>Wildlife under threat from disturbance / increased use Development pressures on open land Made too uniform through ‘text book’ improvements – loss of character Degeneration to scrub woodland – no variety Building on Metropolitan Open Land and all sorts of green space The Energy Recovery Facility and landfill has delayed opening up land Air pollution from Energy Recovery Facility Water pollution from sewage overflows and accidental spillages Reduction in public spending Population pressure Climate change – lack of resilience Abstraction of water, paving, flooding Fly tipping Illegal motorbike use on what is perceived as derelict land New government planning policy threat to s106 and Green Belt “Improved” within an inch of its life Too “civilised” for preserving nature Four borough participation to Regional Park – if they drop out will be too fragmented Intensification of housing may sacrifice green infrastructure</p>

<p>infrastructure, good quality design, cash, endowment, assets</p> <p>Green business forum: “Park Improvement District”, economic development, staff benefits</p> <p>Coherent approach to large area of green space from Beddington Park to Mitcham Common</p> <p>Localism and sub-regional partnerships</p> <p>Sadiq and Zac (Mayoral candidates) – hearts in the right place?</p> <p>Advertising on plastic bags used on reclaiming rubbish</p> <p>Environmental education</p> <p>Better publicity – make residents aware</p> <p>Strong partnership developed offers</p> <p>To change the law on Lee Valley precept</p> <p>Completing the Wandle Trail</p> <p>Wider publicity</p> <p>Sport England support</p> <p>Defining the roles of the different organisations and integrating their activities</p> <p>More funding for the Wandle Valley Forum</p> <p>Diary page on Wandle Valley Forum web site</p> <p>Nos of schools within the area</p> <p>Education projects 140 plus – Wandle Trust</p> <p>Litter picking opportunities – school children made aware</p> <p>Performance arts / poetry / London International Festival of Theatre</p> <p>Polka Theatre</p> <p>National Park City</p> <p>Historical references as sources for events</p> <p>Many volunteer groups already exist</p> <p>Make softer, greener banks to absorb flash flooding and de-urbanise the river</p>	<p>Incinerator – can the effect be mitigated</p> <p>Pollution and rubbish</p> <p>Focus on River not Valley</p> <p>Problems of conserving views across the Wandle Valley (from Streatham Common) by management of tree-line etc (care needed in location of new planting)</p> <p>Need to replace interpretation panel at Pollards Hill viewpoint</p> <p>Complexity of organisations with Wandle titles – Forum, Trust, Regional Park etc</p> <p>Councils won’t agree (branding coordination)</p> <p>Unsympathetic development</p> <p>KNK stadium – too much noise</p> <p>Loss of momentum (eg towards Regional Park)</p> <p>Funding is short term – need core funding</p> <p>Movers and shakers (Tony, Sue) move away</p> <p>Volunteers aged – fade away</p> <p>Pennywort, knotweed, balsam mutate into a new super-aggressive invasive species</p> <p>Development</p> <p>Poor planning</p> <p>Supervision of contractors</p> <p>Short term funding and contracts</p> <p>Physical disconnection</p> <p>Don’t know how to value the asset – can’t see it</p> <p>Funding (lack of)</p> <p>Pollution – incidents and ongoing</p> <p>High & low water levels – abstraction & flash flooding from run off of concrete surfaces</p> <p>Statutory body resources (lack of)</p> <p>Volunteer group numbers (lack of)</p>
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What next?

Taking account of this discussion groups identified some priorities for what should happen next, bearing in mind all the previous discussions. Each group agreed three priorities and these were all subject to a straw poll among those present to see which of the ideas were the most popular.

There were two favourites:

- **Support the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust (10 votes)**
- **Amplify and link voices of local groups and people (10 votes)**

Other priorities identified by the event participants were (number of votes in brackets):

- A campaign to enlist all businesses along the river for funds and volunteering (9)
- Complete the Wandle Trail (8)
- Define the roles of the different organisations and integrate their activities (6)
- Encourage meaningful commitment and joined up approach by the four local authorities (6)
- Raise awareness to general public through events / outreach (5)
- Get elected members on board! (and secure common approach by Wandle local authorities) (5)
- Get the Lee Valley precept (5)
- Encourage field trips in Wandle Valley at all levels including higher education (4)
- Condense number of involved organisations / NGOs / charities etc to produce a more effective management structure (4)
- Make the Wandle Valley an issue for the Mayoral elections (4)
- Need to inform public on proposed completion of Regional Park (2)
- More regular Wandle valley Forum open meetings probably in a central, easily accessed location – it has to be a suitable pub! (William Morris or in one of the three breweries)
- Get funding for a series of Wandle interpretation panels along the length of the river to raise public interest / awareness (2)
- Education in how to use the more accessible Wandle (1)
- Wider publicity (1)

There was also a call to *“maintain continuity and momentum from today’s meeting”*.

Next steps

Wandle Futures provides an important steer as to the future priorities of Wandle Valley Forum. The results of the workshop will inform the Wandle Valley Forum’s prospectus due to be published in Spring 2016 following further engagement with Forum supporters and others.

