



Wandle Valley Forum

NEWS UPDATE

Issue No.8

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Forum 2014 Next Steps - Making Consultation Work – Who does the Forum Represent - Planning News - Big Green Fund Project News - New Walks - Flood risks along the Wandle – New CEO for the WVRP.

The Forum – the critical next steps.

We have achieved much since our recent reformation but there is much we still need to do in order to fulfil our role as effectively as possible. So in this New Year we are already looking at a number of ways to do this. One is a protocol or procedure to offer the WVRP that would enable us to respond better to the consultation process – after all it takes two sides to consult and they both need to believe the system works and as we are all painfully aware there have been marked lapses in the consultation process recently.

Then there is the task of how the Forum manages itself. We have a number of tasks to undertake and in spite of a high membership those members are already ensconced in their own programmes of voluntary work, administration, executive committee agendas, recruitment etc. So who has time to help an umbrella organisation?

Our own Executive Committee did wonders last year putting on a fully fledged conference in support of, and as a launch platform for, the WVRP. This year thankfully we can focus on more internal matters whilst still fulfilling our primary roles. If we had one additional active member from half of our member groups, we would have a workforce of 30! And there is no shortage of tasks. For example:

1. We need a recruitment leader to help Melanie complete the conversion of our informal membership into a fully paid up membership who see Forum issues as, at least, one of their top priorities and to recruit other groups we know are out there.

2. Having helped the WVRP with its own website we need to develop and launch our own and then regularly update it.

3. We need a Clean-up Coordinator to organise our own or member sponsored clean-ups or coordinate with the Wandle Trust's Clean-up programme. He or she will need to book out our hard won clean-up kits and check permissions with council parks depts.

4. Although our networking role means we are often the ones that bring news of concerns and opportunities to everyone's attention it is already clear that the Forum cannot lead on every planning issue and consultation as we need the local knowledge that only local people have. We also prefer local groups to lead on the issues affecting their patch and we can come in with support as required. That means we need representatives from every reach of the WVRP to monitor their areas. We have cover in Wandsworth, Earlsfield, Wimbledon Park, Mitcham, Hackbridge, and parts of Merton, Beddington and Sutton, but that still leaves several gaps.

5. We will need help with this Newsletter if we are to upgrade it, as I am well beyond my comfort zone in the desk top publishing department – I mean who else would use Word for a newsletter! And getting stuff to stay in 2 columns seriously threatens my sanity!

So we need help which I hope will not only make us a stronger and more effective group but also add strength to our members' groups too.

WVRP CEO – Thanks & farewell to Peter Wilkinson & Welcome to Sue Morgan.

Peter Wilkinson who took the reins at the birth of the WVRP and steered it to the position it is in today will be departing his post by the end of January. His frequently postponed departure as first CEO of the park has finally come to pass as we welcome the new CEO Sue Morgan from 20th Jan. Both the Forum's WVRP Trustees happened to be on the interview panel and we were both impressed by Sue's grasp of the management of open spaces and knowledge of how the wheels of funding, delivery and community involvement turn. All that on 1.5 days a week contract but probably twice that in practice judging by Peter's example.

We thank Peter for a truly Herculean effort in achieving what has been achieved on Big Green Fund awards, Heritage Lottery Awards

for funding strategy implementation, and for supporting the main Wandle Trust HLF £2m award. Getting the WVRP website up (with a little help from the Forum) and in the branding design and boundary negotiations and many other things. Yes we had a hiccup on the way but courteous dialogue was always maintained and we should note that the CEO is sometimes caught between a rock and a hard path as it is difficult to tell one's major benefactors, whether a council or an incinerator operator, where the red line is drawn. That's a fact of life and part of the art of management is to know where pragmatism ends and the greater good lies. No one ever said it was easy! We wish both Pete and Sue every success in their future roles in the Wandle Valley and wherever their assignments take them. **BSJB**



L > R: Bella Davies, Wandle Trust, WVRP CEO, Peter Wilkinson, outgoing Forum Vice Chair, Angela Gorman, Ziggi Sinette, Wandle Valley Forum Executive Committee John Hawks, Merton Priory Trust. Relaxing after the Forum's June conference.

WVRP vice chair: Goodbye Angela & welcome Melanie

We reported in the last issue that Angela Gorman, the Forum's vice chair, had stepped down at the AGM. In her place Melanie Nunzet has stepped up and having set up our bank account is already deeply involved in admin support, membership, notices and keeping the Chair on the rails and focussed.

Melanie is perhaps better known for the programme of walks she leads around Mitcham Common and the further reaches of the WVRP. The walks programme for the coming season is included in this newsletter. I know we will all give her the support that will ease the burden.

Flood Risks & Warnings

The Environment Agency

The Environment Agency flood risk warning system came closer to home recently. The source of the Wandle in the Surrey Hills is the Caterham/ Wandle bourne and the EA issued the following warning on Jan 8 about its local ground water levels. The message was circulated by Hackbridge & BC Group member Helena Barraclough:

EA website entry:

“Groundwater levels have risen rapidly in the upper Wandle catchment in response to recent sustained and intense rainfall. As a consequence groundwater levels, as measured at the Environment Agency’s monitoring boreholes, indicate the potential for sustained flow within the Caterham bourne. The rapid rate of groundwater level recovery within the chalk aquifer allows us to conclude with a high level of confidence that initially low lying roads and properties will be susceptible to flooding. We are monitoring the levels and will update this message as the situation changes. 8 Jan 2014”.

Interestingly the EA flood risk map, although showing a narrow area following the Wandle most of its course, as susceptible to flooding, raises that risk in Wandsworth between the Delta and Garratt Lane and also between Beddington Park and Wandle Park, Croydon. Wandsworth’s flood risk is exacerbated of course by the Thames which at the time of writing was still actually flooding homes around Sunbury and Chertsey. I witnessed the truly terrifyingly fast flow whilst lunching in the Phoenix, a riverside pub at Hampton, whose beer garden and smokers refuge were already partly underwater.

Sutton Council has already participated in the Blue Green flood alleviation programme (GRABS) and the gravel pit lakes in Beddington Farmlands are designed to absorb flood water (as included in the Green Grid Framework Area 8 project archive). Recent weather patterns suggest that we should increasingly take all this very seriously no matter how remote the perception of risk from our rather modest size local river – especially at its higher and lower extremities.



Beddington Farmlands, one of the gravel pit lakes designed to ease the flood risk from the Wandle when needed.

Forum AGM

The Forum’s AGM on Thurs October 10th was well attended and those present voted to retain the Chair (Bruce St. Julian-Bown) and Executive Committee including Gideon Reeve, Ivan Scott, DeNica Fairman, Melanie Nunzet & Ziggy Sinette. Melanie Nunzet was voted in as Vice Chair, replacing Angela Gorman. The issue of Weir Rd Wandle Trail was fully aired and the Chair’s position supported by a clear majority as was progress on all administrative fronts inc: Membership, Bank Account and the need for more support.

Greater access or landscape character? Must we choose?

Now that Merton Council has approved the Weir Rd/Wandle Trail specification ignoring strong local opposition, most of us are saddened and, by now, bored with this debacle but the implications of what many people regard as an act of vandalism by Merton need to be understood. WVRP Trustee and Merton Cllr, Andrew Judge and the park's CEO, who won the funding award, would not agree – other councillors accepted the need to address local concerns.

The result, it seems, is that Merton council is effectively allowing the degrading of what many people regard as a sensitive wilderness landscape to gain funds to expand the Mayor's cycling network. This has worrying implications.

It also raises an important issue for the WVRP constitution. As we have always said, improving access for all is of course a laudable aim, as is, for a unique urban regional park, the protection of rural landscape character. How do you prioritise and balance these essential ingredients of an important Regional Park? There is also another issue: if the WVRP designates a group as consultee Partner, in this case the founding body - the Wandle Valley Forum, to what extent should or can it be ignored by the consultation process?

To be clear, the Forum has always been in favour of improving a safe and 'wheel-friendly' Wandle Trail and shared cycling paths within the WVRP boundary – but to use what has become a mantra – not at the expense of degrading the fabric of the park itself. That is the perception of those who voiced their alarm and who believe that a sensible compromise is permitted in published DfT and TfL specification guidelines and could easily have been agreed. There are caveats to permit compromises on recommended specifications in special or sensitive circumstances.

The underlying concern is that if Weir Rd Nature Reserve is permanently degraded by

Merton's decision to go ahead in spite of objections, this scenario could be repeated on Mitcham Common, Poulter Park, even Beddington Farmlands and other places.

Yes the Trail does need enhancing in parts and most other stretches are not as sensitive to wide hard surfaces as Weir Rd, Earlsfield, which is a kilometre stretch only 35m wide but we need to be vigilant.

The issue is complicated because the mayor's Big Green Fund covers a package of projects including some major and welcome improvements to Watermeads, Poulter Park, and Bennetts Hole, however there is a growing suspicion that the reality is 'no cycle network improvements, no funding'. Speculation – maybe, but there are also plans to upgrade more paths into shared cycle tracks within the Park boundary especially on Mitcham Common and some of them are almost road sized. We know that the Mitcham community groups are on the case and they can count on the Forum's support where path specification and cycle routes conflict with landscape character. After all what is a regional park if it is not an area of outstanding landscape character? So it is, Yes, enhance access, but don't undermine the park itself.

But it was the first time a controversy had come up and it was against a background of many other achievements so we should keep it in perspective and look at the upside to this in terms of: our role being taken seriously and what has been learned from this unfortunate episode.

It is hoped that all members will provide feedback on any proposals that may affect their area for better or worse. It is also hoped that those WVRP local authority Trustees who pushed this through will understand that many people are not happy at what they see as the damage inflicted on the Park itself and its green credentials. I'm not holding out much hope from a final letter to Boris. **BSJB**

Who does the Forum represent?

As I was making a plea for the Trail a Merton Cllr trustee of the WVRP asked me 'Who exactly does the Forum represent?' Apart from the fact that we were asked to be, and designated as, the WVRP consultee body and have directly evolved from the organisation that created the WVRP I was able to tell him that we are an umbrella association for 60 local community groups and charities who themselves have collectively approx. between 5 - 10,000 members. Of course we don't claim to represent the views of every member of each group on every issue any more than a local councillor can. Like them we represent a minority of people but in our case they tend to be those passionate about open space. The councillor who asked the question can claim according to the MBC website, to have been elected by less than 25% of his constituency - well under 2000. However he was formally elected, whilst our chair is also elected albeit less formally, by the membership who attend the Forum AGM. Having now instigated formal membership registration we will get a

more precise picture of who we are and what proportion support specific projects hopefully by the end of the year. But we and all stakeholders need to recognise that the voluntary sector is different from public and corporate sectors. It is a fact of life that when a voluntary group's executive is doing what its membership generally approves of, people are happy for it to get on with it. The majority don't rise to every issue - they leave it to the executive - again rather like a councillor.

Until our website is up and running this newsletter is one of the key tools in our democratic tool kit. It enables us to act as a conduit for communications between members, stakeholders and media. At least it is now clear to everyone that we are an independent group in the WVRP's partnership pantheon and our position is not influenced by any other factor than what we believe is in the interests of the community's Regional Park. This is also consistent with the mandatory obligation of the Forum's Trustees on the WVRP's board.

Some evidence of consultation progress

There has already been much better consultation since the Weir Rd issue peaked, and the first lesson is that consultation on any project (or part of a project) that could have an impact on local community sentiments should be put out to proper consultation with the community in general and the Forum in particular. The following is an initial draft of how we might, in conjunction with the WVRP and its landowner trustees, make progress.

If a project is significant enough to warrant consultation it must be accepted by the author of the project, be it a council, WVRP or other landowner, that the response to the consultation could result in having to revise the proposals if a clear majority object. A window dressing exercise will not be acceptable.

The Forum also needs to be more on the ball about projects or lapses in consultation than it has been. This is for the Forum and the

WVRP to note. (In the case of the Weir Road / Wandle Trail there was NO consultation until three quarters of the way to inception deadline - which was not the Forum's fault).

So we need to sit down with key WVRP Trustees and new CEO (Sue Morgan), to establish how we interface during the consultation process.

To that end our Executive will shortly be commenting on proposals that we are currently drafting for internal review. It is important that we put our proposals to the WVRP and agree a protocol, sometimes if necessary, negotiating a compatible approach.

One of our tasks as we progress with formally registering members is to define how many they represent and whether their nominated Forum representative can claim to realistically represent their views.

This is difficult, as in the case of the Wandsworth Society, for example, whose 450 household members (estimated at about 1000 adults) are content in general to let its Executive Committee go ahead as it sees fit, bearing in mind that they approve of the aims of the Society and pay their dues.

This is a fact of life for the Forum and the voluntary sector as a whole which needs to be understood by all our partners in the Valley including those who have asked us to undertake the role of community consultee partner.

C O N S U L T A T I O N

Current / recent projects in consultation via the WVRP or between Forum & Council

Poulter Park Part 2

An exhibition of 4km of Regional Park paths and Poulter Park Big Green Fund Projects took place on Dec 11 from 3.00-8.00pm. It included plans for Bennetts Hole Nature Reserve and Spencer Road Wetlands. Consultation may benefit from the new awareness and make a difference this time. At least there has been consultation which suggests that the Forum's role has been recognised.

The Grove Park, Carshalton

The autumn saw consultation on shared use cycle paths for the Grove in Carshalton. The path is designed to provide a traffic free alternative cycle route to Butter Hill through the park as well as a new link between Papermill Close and the Westcroft Leisure Centre as well as the High St. Please check the WVRP website for the results when available.

King George's Park, Knaresbrough Drive

This is very good news for those keen to see the Earlsfield gap shortened, if not eliminated, as the missing link on the Wandle Trail. This development on the site of an old MoD warehouse on the banks of the Wandle will shorten it by at least 125m, maybe more, perhaps making the task of closing the gap easier to accomplish. It is also good news that a river facing café is part of the scheme - an important and all too rare riverside amenity which will hopefully improve local social aspirations too. This scheme for 193 homes of 3 – 5 floors high which replaces the long unused MoD warehouse in King George's Park is billed in the Green Grid to provide enough 106 funds to extend the Wandle Trail at least the 125m and help the enhancement of KGP itself. There seems to be adequate width to the Wandle Trail which will not be anywhere near as sensitive as the Weir Rd section as it is a newly opened stretch in an urban setting. If it matched the Trail in the adjacent King George's Park it would, I believe, be welcomed.

Happening Hackbridge

A lot seems to be happening in the Hackbridge area. There's the regeneration of the village centre on which BioRegional consulted the community. There's the new estate development on the brown field Felnex industrial site which will transform the economy of the area, and there's the field north of BedZed. And not forgetting the campaign to save Culvers Lodge!

Field North of BedZed, Hackbridge

BioRegional hosted a meeting on Dec 10th chaired by Lorie McManus about 'What shall we do with the field north of Bedzed?' (the field that stretches from London Rd to the railway line). This is a very important piece of WVRP land and it is right that there should be community participation in determining its future. This is a major step forward bearing in mind plans from some years ago that included residential development. Most of those that attended were local people, several of whom had attended the Forum conference in June last year, including Forum member Peter Alfrey, the specialist on the biodiversity of the Farmlands.

Attendees were split into subgroups of 4 or 5, each taking a different topic which they could then make some conclusions about and summarise for planning input. The group I was in focussed on funding which I found bizarre. Can you really start a consultation on the community's views about land use by looking at funding first? Surely logic suggests you decide what you really want to do with the land and then look at funding requirements and potential sources. As the differing uses require different funding levels and sources it may end up a sort of chicken and egg negotiation but – unless you start with the vision you risk under-achieving the potential you are trying to realise.

But it was a consultation and that, remember, is what the Forum is here for. We were delighted to accept and it is the first of a series so it is a bit premature to draw conclusions at this stage.

Felnex Development Hackbridge Village

A good number of local people turned up at Hackbridge Primary School on November 4th to give their views about the big supermarket and residential development of 725 homes opposite the station. It will without question transform the economy of the village when linked to the village regeneration scheme and the improvements on the Mile Road Bridge access to the Regional Park. There were the usual concerns about traffic and parking but I sense that most people see it as a major step forward. The new supermarket will have set down their requirements for parking and vehicle access, an important issue as it will undoubtedly generate more traffic. On the traffic upside longer journeys to supermarkets further afield won't be necessary and neither perhaps to the Sainsbury's Local now open on the corner.

The Forum amplified the concern, or rather the opportunity perceived by one local resident of supporting the idea of a visible pedestrian route to the Wandle, which runs behind the estate to the village, partly via the alignment of paths through the estate but also in terms of breaking through the narrow industrial strip along the river bank. This might be an area for a Farmers' / Craft market in future as it could also be for the vital Mile Road Bridge gateway approach to the Regional Park.

Culvers Lodge

The attempts led by Bob Steel, and supported by Peter Wilkinson and the Forum and others, to save this charming period cottage as a WVRP base have not to my knowledge been finalised but with the goodwill of Sutton Council and its WVRP Trustee councillors, this may yet happen. The new WVRP CEO will hopefully have this high on her agenda. The alternative is unacceptable i.e. to pull it down and convert to affordable homes. In terms of the charm of Hackbridge Village fringe and the Medford Rd link to the Wandle – it's a no brainer, especially if a small slice of CIL funding from Felnex can be attracted.

Merton Priory, Colliers Wood

Merton Priory Trustees are preparing contracts for work on the new Museum. Plans secured by the original Savacenter Section 106 funds and the new Heritage Lottery Funded award of £200,000 mean that it is hoped that site preparation and building work can start in Spring 2014.

Ram Brewery, Wandsworth

The approved plans for this Wandsworth town centre development which includes a 36 floor tower block mean that, according to the Evening Standard, the sale of the site to a Chinese Government led consortium has been secured? The Wandsworth Society fear that this may lead to revised proposals although they are by no means happy with what's already been approved. As the river Wandle runs right through the site everyone is keen to see what transpires.

Waddon Ponds

Waddon Ponds £60,000 slice of the Heritage Lottery Fund Award has already helped in enhancing the lakeside decking. Soon a primary WVRP gateway will be added to the improvements.

Goat Road Development

This is a major residential development proposal on the boundary of the WVRP and on which local views would be welcome and if concerns raised, taken up with the council.

Thinking along the trail

By Charles Barraball - Merton Cycling

At 71, now, I ride bicycles better; and as a stroke-survivor, my walking is improving, too! Campaigning with Living Streets, Transport for All and Go4M has led me to appreciate the needs of others, especially where family impairment is concerned. So it was with pleasure that I accepted the opportunity to engage with the Wandle Valley accessibility project as a user representative.



There is a real concern that shared-use paths are conflict-ridden, yet we need to get people cycling and walking, and Grannies and Grandpas out in their wheelchairs, without being dominated by motor vehicles. Wonderful activity is possible, if our green places and corridors were accessibly linked.

Yet the reality is we are heading to dementia and obesity epidemics, if not there already. How much worse is it for those caring for the impaired? Tricycles can carry a wheelchair-bound person; the joy in the faces of carer and cared-for is just breath-taking. But they need width!

The surfaces must be low maintenance, but easily walked and rolled over; it rains here, occasionally, and we want people to be able to use our tracks and paths after a shower. At the moment you can't push a pram through Morden Hall Park when the path is muddy, without getting smothered as well as worn out. Wheelchairs and mobility scooters are heavy, heavy! So our paths should be sealed.

Charles Barraball

Editor's COMMENT

I welcome Charles' views about wheelchair users and the increasing need for better access for all to as much of the public domain as possible and it is an aspect which is rightly much more accepted in today's society. But arguments on shared use paths are not only divided between wheelchair/bike users versus all others, but also by those who value and would protect rare patches of rural landscape in urban areas versus those simply wanting to get from A-B. Although the latter is a principle I would, in principle support, I repeat the mantra of drawing the line when access itself degrades the destination. So for much of the Wandle Trail it is fine to have 2.5m wide access for two way flow of, say articulated cycle wheelchair carriers, except where the park itself is so narrow that a 2.5m path would dominate. In such cases you might shave 75cm off the hard width and I believe most people who care about

landscape, whatever their conveyance, would accept the compromise.

The question of mud spattering is again one of appreciation of a rural landscape or the imperative to access everywhere at any time. Unless you take the view that regardless of whether you are a dog walker, a buggy pushing dad or a wheelchair user, if it rains you have a choice – get a little muddy or go another way. I would only add that if to some this seems harsh, it is a view that treats everyone regardless of disability or mobility with equal respect – we all risk a little mud now and then, that's an inherent aspect of rural landscape. Of course if the recent rain continues I might have to concede!

I hope both Charles' piece and this response, whilst maybe not changing minds, at least enables our respective positions to be understood and respected. **BSJB.**

MELANIE'S Winter/Spring Walks 2014

Date	Meeting place/time	Walk description	Distance
Sun 19 Jan	Mitcham Junction 2 pm	Mitcham walk to include visit to Wandle Industrial Museum (by Vestry Hall). Entrance to include refreshments £1.50. Finish Mitcham Tram Stop.	3-4 miles, easy
Sat 22 Feb	Mitcham Junction 10.30 am	Wandle Walk along the Wandle Trail via Hackbridge and Carshalton, to include a visit to Wilderness Island. We return to Mitcham Junction via Beddington Park with a stop at the café for refreshments. Joint walk with London Strollers.	5-6 miles, easy
Fri 18 April (Good Friday)	St Mary's Church 10 am (see below)	A walk from Beddington Park to Mitcham Common. We will take the path along the site of the future Wandle Valley Regional Park (about 45 mins and could be muddy!). Refreshments available at Mitcham Golf Club. £2 tea/coffee/cake. Return to St Mary's Church afterwards or public transport from Mitcham Junction. Please call or email to book.	2-3 miles, easy, but one stile!

For all walks starting at Mitcham Junction meet at bus stop on bridge.

Come and join us for an hour's walk around **Beddington Park or Waddon Ponds** every Friday morning at 10 am. Meet by St Mary's Church, Church Road, Wallington SM6 7NJ (Buses: 407 from Sutton, 463 from Mitcham). Refreshments available at church after walk. Contribution to church funds appreciated. Tour of this beautiful 10th century church possible.

The 10 year anniversary Beddington Park walk will be on Friday 9 May as part of the Get Walking Week which is organised every year by the Ramblers.

Please contact me (**Tel: 07944 833605**) if you'd like details of how to join the following:

Wandle Valley Forum
Friends of Mitcham Common
Mitcham Cricket Green & Community Heritage Group
The Mitcham Society

Wandle Websites

Remember to refer to the WVRP website which is full of useful and updated information. The Forum's own website needs to be progressed asap and whilst I can write it, it will need input from others to make it happen.

