

OPTIONS EMERGING

Paul Jardine of Jura Consultants presented the main “headlines” of his options appraisal work to the Regeneration Board on 26 February, the full details of which are to be given on 2 April. He has tested a full range of alternatives for each building against constraints such as appropriateness in a historic park, or commercial viability. He did more detailed work, including valuations, on the surviving proposals and it is this which he presented in his slides, which are on our new web-site in the News/Documents section.

The package of key proposals is that:

- the Large Mansion be used as a restaurant and for functions/conferences, with staff accommodation above,
- Gunnersbury Park Museum be moved into the Small Mansion,
- the Museum’s stored collections be housed in the restored Stables,
- the Orangery become a tea-room,
- the historic landscape be improved,
- and, after council funding and public grants are accounted for, other costs might be covered by building houses beside the southern end of Lionel Road as the local authorities did around the rest of the park in the 1920s.

None of these is yet fixed but for the first time we can consider proposals for Gunnersbury’s buildings with realistic supporting information.

This work reveals the outlines of the route we may have to follow if we want to restore the Park, the Museum and the historic landscape and buildings, and create a place with a future.

NEW FRIENDS WEB-SITE LAUNCHED

Over the last few months we have been assembling a new web-site. You can now find it at www.gunnersburyfriends.org. If you are not comfortable using the internet do ask a friend or your local library to show you what is there.

The web-site is accessible to anyone, not just to Friends. It has information about our organisation, including a short history and a complete archive of all issues of our *Newsletter* since 1981. We will continue to post a paper copy of the *Newsletter* to paid-up members of the Friends, but we will also add each one of them to the archive on the web-site.

The site has descriptions of the Park and the Museum and a comprehensive list of links to related web-sites. We intend to keep the news section updated regularly, with information about our activities and about what is going on in the Museum and the Park. If you register on the site, you will be able to post comments about the news items; all comments will be monitored to ensure that the web-site is not misused.

Please note that registering on the site is not the same as subscribing to membership of the Friends. If you have an e-mail address, please add it to the subscription renewal form to enable us to send you occasional e-mail updates about our activities. Recording Friends’ e-mail addresses will also help us distinguish the comments posted by members from those submitted by others. This may be important when we need to assess members’ views on any issue.

Once registered you can also add your memories and photos of the Park and Museum to the *Our Gunnersbury* section. We have added some earlier memories and some recent pictures to get this section started – we hope it will become a fascinating “scrap book” to share with others.

HISTORIC LAND-SCAPES SEMINAR

Nearly 100 people attended this seminar in the Small Mansion, on 26 February 2009. It was organised by the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum and English Heritage, and supported by LBs Ealing and Hounslow. Participants came from many London Boroughs (park managers or Friends groups), and from organisations like the Heritage Lottery Fund, Royal Parks, Capel Manor College and the Corporation of London.

There were gloomy moments, and optimistic moments. We heard about the importance of parks to Londoners, the way legislation to manage the protection of the heritage might change, and something of the difficulties of preserving garden buildings which have survived but may have lost their purpose (and their financial support) now that they lie within public parks not private estates.

The visitors were then offered tours of Gunnersbury Park or the Museum stores. One party took the opportunity to cross the Park and climb inside the Potomac Tower. Even though many of the visitors were seasoned professionals, it was clear over lunch that some had been taken aback by the state of buildings like the Stables.

In the afternoon we heard how the London Parks and Gardens Trust is compiling an inventory of London's Historic Green Spaces (2,000 entries so far), and of the importance of the "Conservation Plan" (which Gunnersbury now has). We ended with two very upbeat accounts of a park which is preparing a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (Barking Park) and of one (Valentine's Park) which is just completing its whole project.

James Wisdom

THE OPTIONS APPRAISAL PROCESS

On 24 January Paul Jardine of Jura Consultants gave a 30-minute presentation to the stakeholders' meeting about the Options Appraisal which his firm is undertaking, and answered questions. He described the options appraisal process in relation to similar projects undertaken by Jura.

Blairtummock House, Easterhouse was a run-down listed building, formerly a GP's surgery. The project to develop it took 4 years. The outcome was not an expected one but when the options appraisal revealed that businesses were leaving the area, a fairly run down part of Glasgow with many social problems, it was developed to provide a suite of offices for flexible use by small firms, with a large meeting room.

Lews Castle, Western Isles was built for James Matheson in the C19th. After operating as a college, it fell into disuse and was vandalised. After the options appraisal it has been agreed that it should be converted into a boutique hotel and a home for the Museum of the Western Isles. The current banking crisis has delayed these plans.

Belle Vue Park, Newport, is a public park which had become very run down and vandalised. Jura found funding to restore the Victorian features including terracotta, a magnificent cascade and pond.

Garrison House, Ayrshire was an 8 year project. Jura first persuaded the 6-8 funding bodies of its long-term sustainability. From their long list of possibilities the agreed scheme is to house the local library and the museum service there with a contemporary extension for a café.

Jura Consultants' role at Gunnersbury

This is likely to be a 10 year project. The options appraisal is the first step to develop a value for money solution for the buildings and the park. Jura will define project objectives; consider options; identify, quantify and, where possible, value the costs, benefits and uncertainties of each option; put the costs and benefits onto a comparable basis; weigh up the uncertainties; assess and balance the options and present the results.

Questions and answers

Q *Did any of the buildings described have covenants regarding their use?*

A Yes – but these were not allowed to dictate the options chosen and in some cases were removed or varied. Jura are looking at the Gunnersbury covenants but will not let these obstruct a preferred option.

Q *Are you involving other local groups to help draw up the long list?*

A We have already spoken with elected members and others. The shortlist will involve different packages based on critical assets including the stable block, the mansion houses and the bath house.

Q *We are not familiar with all the buildings. Could we have a tour?*

A Richard Gill (RG) offered to arrange a tour of the 2 mansions.

Q *What arrangements were there for the future management of the projects described in the presentation?*

A Sustainability was an important part of the projects but the management and governance arrangements depend on the various uses to which the buildings are being put, e.g. in one case a community development trust was set up.

Q *I am concerned about the long lead time because the buildings are deteriorating. Is anything being done about repairs?*

A RG has obtained a temporary repair grant for 2008-9 and will reapply for 2010. Funds are being used on the stable block.

Q *What funding sources are available?*

A The main ones are English Heritage which has already expressed a keen interest in Gunnersbury, and the Heritage Lottery Fund which has made grants to parks in the past.

Q *I am concerned about rumours of building houses in the park and do not trust council promises.*

A We will consider all the options based on need and will then look at the costs and means of funding. All options must be seen as part of a package. The executives of Hounslow and Ealing will look at recommendations from English Heritage and council officers before making a decision.

Q *I am concerned about the upkeep of the park which has been seriously neglected.*

A RG gave assurances that the park will continue to be looked after and developed. Capel Manor College has promised help and have already planted some trees near the car park. He is taking steps to reduce vandalism, although it can never be completely eliminated in a public park.

At the end of the meeting the audience was asked to submit suggestions for the park and buildings to RG. One member of the audience talked of the lack of facilities for children with disabilities in the local area, and advocated the installation of a specialist adventure playground and a centre for life skills and other training. There are funding opportunities for such facilities.

Philippa Dolphin

A CREATIVE COMMITTEE

In our last issue we mentioned a new book by Renée Tyack, one of our committee members. As a result we discovered that another member had published a novel.

Helen Poskitt's book, *Rising to the Surface*, is the first in a planned series of four. The story is formed by first-hand experience of obsessive compulsive disorder and charts an emotional journey through the rigours of a common condition. It was published in 2007, ISBN 1847474500, and costs £15.00.

On 6 April there will be a reading of Helen's play *Check!* at an Actors and Writers Workshop at the Polish Centre in Hammersmith, at 7.30pm, admission £5. See <http://helenposkitt.com>.

PROMOTING LOCAL AUTHORITY MUSEUMS AND ARCHIVES

Advocacy papers were recently issued on the internet for museums and archives at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/our-past-your-future.pdf and www.museumsassociation.org/asset_rena/text/re/unlockinglocaltreasure.pdf.

ANOTHER DISGRACEFUL MEETING

On Friday 30 January 2009 the Gunnersbury Park Regeneration Board held a Special Meeting to consider the Options Appraisal. The quality of the discussion and the behaviour of some councillors was so dreadful that it confirmed once again that this model of managing Gunnersbury can no longer continue.

Paul Jardine of Jura Consultancy outlined 5 scenarios which his team had developed, and what might be the implications of each one. It looked as though he was hoping for debate around the principles behind them.

The first was "Do Nothing", and it was interesting to hear how expensive even this approach might be. The other four scenarios were "Do the Minimum", "Maximise Community Benefit", "Maximise Commercial Opportunities" and finally "Develop Gunnersbury as a Destination" ("Destination" in the leisure industry buzz word for somewhere which attracts users from a wide area).

If there was an outcome of the discussion, it was that the Board was not inclined to follow the first two (doing nothing or the minimum) and wanted to see further work done on the options which emerge from seeing where the last three overlap. This requires detailed valuations, costings for refurbishments, and market testing to see who might join in partnership – which was the work Jura was in the process of doing.

The meeting room was chilly, drug users were hanging about outside, tempers flared - "It's my park as much as yours", "It's my park as much as yours" was one high quality exchange. One councillor left early saying it was a waste of time. Others kept asking for detail yet, when illustrations were offered, quickly knocked them down. Little of the discussion matched the seriousness of the situation

Although it was an open meeting, the only public were three Friends Committee members. This Board started by holding its meetings in private and the minutes had to be forced out of them by using Freedom of Information legislation. Those minutes and this meeting show that this Board, like the Joint Committee before it, simply cannot do the job expected of it. How will we get a sensible public debate when the Options Appraisal report is published?

James Wisdom

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, December 2008

At our annual general meeting, in addition to the usual Chairman's and Hon Treasurer's reports, we had a useful discussion on current issues relating to the Park and Museum. Our accounts have a healthy balance; this has enabled us to pay for the technical work needed for our new web-site.

The existing members were re-elected to the committee. In alphabetical order, they are Val Bott, David Bush, Joan Catterall, Philippa Dolphin, Anne Hobson, Sonya Leydecker, Helen Poskitt, Renée Tyack and James Wisdom.

FUTURE MEETINGS

According to the Hounslow Council website the next meeting of the **Regeneration Board** will be held at 7pm in the Terrace Room of the Small Mansion on 28 May 2009.

Members of the public may attend but, as with all council meetings, may have to leave during discussion of confidential matters.

Future **Stakeholder** meetings will be held in the same place on 23 April at 7.30pm and 30 July at 7.30pm.

BRANCHING OUT

Isleworth and District Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild, 6th biennial exhibition, 9-31 May 2009

Works by members show how they have been encouraged to "branch out" and try new ideas, including large 3-D sculptures like a palm tree and an embroidery based on a map of Chiswick Roundabout. Traditional needlework from the museum's collection will also be shown and there will be opportunities for visitors to try out embroidery with guild members' help.

GRANTS TO SUPPORT THE MUSEUM'S WORK

Gunnersbury Park Museum has secured grants from two organisations.

The first grant, from the **John and Ruth Howard Charitable Trust**, is for £1,850 and will provide an Archaeology box for Hounslow and Ealing schools and community centres to borrow. The aim is to engage children in learning more about history in an entertaining and inter-active way. The boxes can be borrowed for two weeks at a time and can provide museum education support for schools which, for various reasons, cannot make the journey to Gunnersbury.

The new box contains original objects, maps, archaeologists' tools and a teacher's guidebook with suggestions for activities in the classroom, quizzes and games. It completes a trio for the Museum alongside two other recent grant-funded loan boxes on *The Victorians* and *World War 2*. These are proving popular and the *World War 2* box has been particularly successful in reminiscence work with local elderly residents.

For further information about loan boxes and all aspects of the Gunnersbury Park Museum Education Service, contact Clare Oliphant or Lisa D'Agostino on 020 8992 2247 or gp-museum@laing.com

The museum has also recently received funds from the **National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies (NADFAS)**. The NADFAS Greater London Area Committee has paid £600 for a textile conservator to survey the museum's large costume and textile collections. The conservator made recommendations on improving storage and will provide training for volunteers who will then be able to work on the stored collections. The volunteers from the Ealing branch (EDFAS) will be making archive storage bags and padded hangers for the museum's magnificent 18th and 19th century dresses. To promote the project, EDFAS is donating £250 for the conservation materials.

EDFAS has also awarded the museum £600 for a Young Arts Project, allowing the museum to provide some free activities for children during the summer holidays.

EDFAS volunteers have already helped the museum by staffing the Temple during Open House weekend last Sept-ember, by making and mending costumes for the museum education interpreters, and by helping with the spring clean of all the displays in the Victorian Kitchens before they open to the public at Easter.

FRIENDS of GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

The membership year starts on 1 April so please send you subscription payment soon. If you are already a Friend, do encourage someone else to join. The subscription, at £5, is very modest - a bigger membership means a better income and a stronger voice. Send your cheque, made out to the Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum, to **Membership Secretary, 39 Lionel Road, Brentford TW8 9QZ.**

Contributions to the Newsletter are always welcome – the next issue will be prepared in June 2009

To contact the Honorary Editor, write to Val Bott, 25 Hartington Road, London W4 3TL or email ValBott@museums.freeserve.co.uk

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