

FRIENDS OF GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

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For the attention of
Sean Doran and Natalie Lynch

Hounslow Planning Dept
Civic Centre
Lampton Road
Hounslow TW3 4DN

3 February 2015

Dear Planning Officers,

Gunnersbury Park Cafe and Carriage display

I am writing on behalf of the Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum in response to the recent planning application, ref nos P/2015/0150 and 00885/C/S3.

The Friends have been working in and with the Park and Museum since 1981 and for three years we ran the Café and developed the first ever functions business for Gunnersbury. We submitted comments upon the previous application made in 2014, particularly in regard to the size of the kitchen area and the way in which the display of the transport collection would be handled. We recognise that the revised proposals have taken on board some of our earlier comments, but the new design raises different issues on which we have set out our response below. We also recognise that some comments may not all relate specifically to planning issues, but as we wish to make a helpful contribution to the regeneration of Gunnersbury we felt it worth submitting comprehensive comments, both to the Planning Department and the Project Board.

The Café

The new Café must be able to cope with the anticipated 1 million users who will be attracted to the refurbished Park. In addition the business plan proposes a function business which will use Park buildings and the fine rooms in the Large Mansion. These factors mean that Gunnersbury needs a larger catering operation, with a kitchen that can cope with a café service for visitors on a busy summer Saturday or Sunday whilst preparing for events in the Large Mansion or the Orangery at the same time. As the preparation space proposed for the Large Mansion is for preparation in advance of serving and not for cooking, the capacity to cook in the Café kitchen is really important. While the new kitchen/food storage area appears larger than before, we would welcome evidence that a professional caterer has been part of the design process, to confirm that the kitchen is large enough for this purpose.

Café Toilets/new toilets by playground

One of the reasons that the previous design was problematic was the space taken up by public toilets. The new design improves upon this. However, we are very concerned that it is now accompanied by a proposal to close the recently rebuilt toilets when the Sports Hub toilets

become available in the future. The rebuilt toilets were planned with input from a range of advisers, including English Heritage, with the aim of producing something simple and robust, designed to minimise any security problems or risk to users. The proposed internal toilets will be inaccessible to Park users when the Café is closed. On busy days the closure will add to the pressure inside the Café with queuing. The existing toilets are easier to use by families with small children at the nearby playground. Any toilets constructed as part of the regeneration of sports facilities in the rest of the Park will be some distance away and cannot provide a substitute. For a Park with hugely increased visitor numbers this is a very short-sighted plan.

Re-configuring the Café

This second application reconfigures the interior of the Café in ways which will have a significant impact upon the way it operates.

- ***Views from the Café***

In the first application para 1.3.3. reads “... Its outlook over the Round Pond, although screened by established shrubs, has great potential”. We are disappointed to see that in the redesigned Café only half the length of the west side is now glazed, reducing the vista towards the Round Pond.

- ***Landscaping***

On the south side the view from the Café towards the children’s playground and into the Park is poor so there needs to be a condition that the quality of the landscaping here is upgraded. [NB The *Design and Access Statement* makes reference to the landscaping described in Appendix A, but this has not been published as one of the planning documents.]

- ***Internal circulation and queueing***

This Park Café has to be able to provide two different kinds of service (three, if the functions catering is included). On weekdays, especially during term time, it can be quiet. On weekends and public holidays it can get extremely busy, and it is at its busiest on hot, dry summer Sunday afternoons.

The internal configuration now proposed makes aspects of the café service very hard to deliver well. In the summer the staff will be clearing tables outside, and on busy days they will either be walking around the Café, to and from their separate entrance, or trying to get back in through the main door while customers are coming out with trays. On the busiest days the queue will be backing through that door onto the paved area, so it will be congested. The staff will then be crossing the queue with their trays to get to the dish-washing area, or piling crockery on the counter for the dish-washer to take. That will be at the beginning of the food counter, which is not attractive. The suggested lifting section is much too valuable as sales space on the short counter and any operator will do their best to avoid using it, so on busy days staff access through the counter will be difficult.

The proposed dog walkers’ hatch would be a sensible place to insert a stable-style door to enable staff to clear outside on busy days. This same hatch could not double as an ice cream sales hatch because of the enclosure for the dog walkers. The demand for ice cream and drinks

is high. The existing Café has an ice cream sales hatch (sliding window). Our experience was that on busy days it would trade well on a Sunday morning and have a non-stop queue from 2 pm to 6 pm. The pressure of queueing inside the Café would be reduced by providing an external mobile ice cream and drinks service (a stall or van) near to the building, and a suitable place for this should be considered.

The west wall of bi-fold glazed doors is an attractive idea for the finest days of the year; the operator will need to manage their use in the event of wind or a sudden rain storm. When all are open this will have an impact upon both the table layout and the queueing arrangements. When they are closed it may be necessary to label one door as a pass door for busy days, and as a fire exit.

Centring the main door on the south side may be aesthetically pleasing but it loses good internal space for covers, with queues forming directly across the eating area from the door to the counter. Moving the door in the south side eastwards, so that it adjoins the carriage display space, would encourage the queue to form along the glazed wall, providing interest for customers. This would also allow a better disposition of tables. The toilet queue on busy days would be easier to separate with a rope if the toilet entrance door was in the corner, not beside the staff access lifting section of the counter.

During term-time week days, when the Café is quieter, there will be pressure to bring school parties to see the carriages. The queueing space which is busy at weekends could become a viewing area for a class; the children will discover what a nice Café there is and ask their parents to bring them back. This could be a valuable part of the word-of-mouth marketing at which children are so effective.

- **External service**

The *Design and Access Statement* proposes 150 covers outside. Only a few fixed picnic benches are shown, so this implies a storage building for the many extra tables and chairs when they are not in use (a security matter as well as a seasonal one), which is not shown.

External appearance

The *Design and Access Statement* claims that the building will have a discreet appearance to avoid competing with existing Park structures. This explains why it looks so dull. It is hard to agree with the principle behind the claim, as park cafés are legitimate buildings in their own right and should be expected to make a significant visual contribution. On hot, dry, busy days they and the children's playgrounds are the Park hot-spots and even trading from a B&Q garden shed would make a profit. The trick is to make a place that trades well on cooler, wetter, week days during term time, and that requires a building that people are going to look forward to visiting.

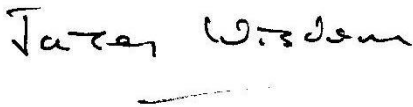
Carriages

The area in the 2014 application was 128 sq m internally and is now only 61.6 sq m. As a result we understand that the Project Team are suggesting offering one of the Rothschild carriages to Waddesdon Manor, and other vehicles from the Museum's Transport Collection which could have been displayed here will probably have to go into storage.

The new triangular viewing area occupies approximately 28 sq m. We wish to register our serious concern that despite being visible from the main path in daylight, the proposed viewing area could become a security problem, especially at dusk or at night. We are told that this space is in part to shelter the exhibits from the sun and in part to enable school groups to view in poor weather. To maximise the display space we propose that the design should be revised to incorporate the viewing area within the space for exhibits, with the provision of simpler external shading from sun and an overhanging shelter from rain for viewers.

The chance of creating a fine display of the transport collection in an appropriate setting is unlikely to come again for a long time and we feel that the current proposals fail to do justice to the collection.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Wisdom". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a short horizontal line.

James Wisdom
Chairman

jameswisdom@compuserve.com

Copied to
Jonathan Kirby,
Ealing Council, for the Gunnersbury Project Board