

Friends of Downhills Park

By Email and Hand

Dear Sir / Madam

Draft Local Plan Consultation – SA 61 Keston Centre

I am writing as the Co- Secretary of the Friends of Downhill Park. We are an active group of local residents that care passionately about the park and who have been working since 1999 to improve its facilities. We have recently worked closely with the Council to build a new cafe, establish a new pond and a playground, which has undoubtedly contributed to the Green Flag status the park currently enjoys. We regularly assist with maintenance most recently planting hundreds of spring bulbs and undertaking litter picking.

We are writing to object to the proposed development to the site at the Keston Centre that is next to one side of Downhills Park.

We understand that there is a proposal to build up to 87 dwellings in a development up to five storeys directly adjoining the Park. This will entail taking part of the Park and will adversely affect the facilities and the overall amenity of this much loved and well used local park.

We are astonished that the Council has not seen fit to consult us in any way about this proposed development. No information of any sort has been provided to the Friends of Downhills despite the fact that removing part of the part of the Park (near the tennis courts) is proposed. A five Storey Development will directly affect park users and this therefore should have been notified to a Friends Group. We normally get all Planning applications for the area around the Park so we are perplexed at the lack of notification of this potential development

Our objections are as follows:

1. Removing part of perimeter of Park (Metropolitan Open Land)

We understand that from the brief details on the Site Requirements some of the park may need to be “swapped... to create an improved vehicular entrance”. The land that would be “swapped” would therefore need to include the existing boundary and footpath that runs the perimeter of the park and would have a massive impact for park users.

We are distressed that Haringey council should even propose taking any part of a public amenity such as a park to use as building or access land.

Under **London Plan Policy 7.17 Metropolitan Open Land** -“The strongest protection should be given to London’s Metropolitan Open Land and inappropriate development refused, except in very special circumstances, giving the same level of protection as in the Green Belt.”

MOL is a valuable local resource and at a time when the local authority is planning on increasing housing throughout the borough, any existing MOL will be of increasing importance for the residents of the whole borough. The proposals do not constitute a planning justification for the release of land from MOL.

2. Building a huge and intrusive Development of 5 Storeys next to the park

A five storey development on the edge of the park would completely dominate the park. The rest of the park edges are tree lined and the setting back of any development creates a rural retreat for park users and the ambiance that they are outside of the city when they enjoy the park. A five storey building on the park edge would therefore be completely out of character with the existing park and massively detract from the value and visual character for users of the park.

Correspondence from officers at the Council suggested that the best parks have 'active frontages and grander buildings facing them'. Downhills Park is distinctly different in character from some other parks in the Borough. For example, Finsbury Park where the southern fringes have a much more urban character and where activity and grander buildings might be appropriate. Downhills Park in comparison is much smaller, quiet, suburban and peaceful - as per its surrounding area. Development on the site should therefore fully respect and preserve this character.

3. Lack of Consultation

As stated above there has been no consultation with the Friends. We are only aware of this as it was brought to our attention by one of our members. We have had less than two weeks to read, understand, absorb and then respond to four large and complex Development Plan Documents.

Despite the Council's wish to "ensure robust and comprehensive engagement with the local community" (Introduction to Development Management Policies), we understand that no other residents in those streets surrounding the Park, or adjoining Keston Road have been notified of this proposed development, despite the detrimental effect this proposed development will have on them as park users.

4. The loss of existing use by current occupants of the site- the nursery and the green space and trees associated with and adjoining it.

One of the uses on the site is a well-used and needed nursery/ playgroup. The playgroup has great outdoor play space where children can properly play and run around. It is an asset for the local community and one that has been and continues to be used by local families especially in terms of nursery place provision.

As Friends we are concerned about the loss of green space and numerous trees on this site that enhance the Parks aspect making it seem more rural. We also believe this development and the consequent loss of trees, shrubs and land would have a detrimental impact on the existing biodiversity of the park.

5. Loss of Historical features

Downhills park grounds exist from when Downhills House was built on this site in 1728 . After a campaign by local residents, Tottenham Urban District Council bought the house and grounds in 1902.

To improve the vehicle access from the site would mean destroying a stretch of the park boundary in that area, herbaceous border with some mature trees, the adjoining footpath,

and damaging the tennis courts. The boundary at this point demonstrably existed in 1619, and marked the medieval boundary (dating from 1585). It continued as the boundary of the grounds of Downhills House (1728-1900ish), and then as the historic boundary of the park itself. The border has existed in some form as a green strip from 1864 or earlier; some of the mature trees predate the park; and the footpath line is also part of the 18th/19th century layout of the grounds and was wisely retained by Tottenham Council in 1902.

We would be very interested to learn what regard the Council has taken of the historic nature of the Park as it appears that this has not been considered.

All this goes against the recommendations in chapter 7 of the London Plan

Conclusion

The park is an important public amenity and is used and valued by a much wider community than those living next to the proposed development. As the numbers of people in the Borough rise, these green spaces are of increasing importance and must be preserved at all costs. The area around the proposed site is an essential asset to the whole area. It contributes greatly to the well-being of locals and must be maintained in its entirety; none of it should be given up for any type of development at all.

To decide to use part of the park, to put an intrusive development blighting the boundary and demolishing historical features is totally contrary to what has been achieved in recent years. The park remains a friendly open space for the whole community and under no circumstances should that be taken away from us or future generations.

We therefore strongly object to this proposal. We look forward to your response and would like to be kept informed of any progress of this plan.

Yours faithfully

Rod Wells

Co Secretary of Friends of Downhills Park