

TRAFFIC RESTRICTION PROPOSALS IN RICHMOND PARK

BY THE ROYAL PARKS AGENCY (RPA)

PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING ORGANISED BY THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON UPON THAMES

5 September 2002 at the Tiffin Girls' School, Richmond Road, Kingston

NOTE OF THE MEETING

Introduction

The Chair of the public meeting, Tim Darwen, Head of Environmental Care welcomed everyone indicating that its purpose was to hear the views of residents on the Royal Parks Agency proposals for Traffic Restrictions in Richmond Park. Two of the Borough's Neighbourhood Committee's Maldens and Coombe and Kingston Town had requested this, as the Agency would not be consulting the public generally on their proposals.

A record of the points made would be kept, which would be sent to the Agency and all those present who complete the questionnaire provided.

The meeting was not seeking to achieve a consensus view on the proposals nor would it possible to answer questions as the Agency were unable to attend. The Agency's leaflet setting out in summary the background to and the proposals for Richmond Park was circulated together with a questionnaire based on this leaflet.

In addition to the note of this meeting a copy of the completed questionnaires would be sent to the Agency. The address to write to direct was provided.

In attendance as an observer to the meeting was Mr Chris Smith, Traffic Engineer, London Borough of Richmond. Apologies for absence were presented on behalf of Jenny Tonge MP.

Public contributions

A summary of the points made are set out below:

1. Save the Pen Ponds Car Park Committee

Former Councillor Gwen Symonds made a detailed presentation, on behalf of the above Committee. In summary the points identified largely in relation to the closure of the pen ponds car park were:

A petition with some 15,000 signatures was sent to Tessa Jowell, Minister for Culture, Media and Sport opposing the closure of Pen Ponds car park;

Information on the geographical, geological, scientific and historical context to the Richmond Park which illustrated reasons for the need to retain the car park at pen ponds. Specifically this referred to the traffic problems that would arise and that landscaping could be undertaken to improve the visual impact of the area.

The impact on vulnerable people; young parents with children and the elderly who cannot be reasonably expected to walk from other car parks safely.

Road safety issues associated with visitors using the perimeter car parks that are close to the roads and the continuous problem with speeding cyclists on the footpath.

There is a feeling of stigmatisation of designating car park places for the disabled when this is not available for others.

There is not enough information about the proposal public transport arrangements.

Could alternative traffic arrangements be made for the occasions when the park is known to be busy.

The affects on bird life in the park does not seem to have been substantiated with evidence.

In concluding her presentation Gwen indicated that the prestigious Park was a resource for a great many people and that the closure of the Pen Ponds Car Park was insensitive and unnecessary.

2. Neil Bloom, former Councillor.

Why fix something that is not broken. The park provides a nice beginning and end to the day. The park belongs to the community. The road train proposal is ridiculous. The RPA consider that the motorist is the villain, but the cyclist is also a villain. However there is an argument in favour of the Robin Hood Gate being closed in the morning.

3. Karen Gray, local resident.

Was concerned about the levels of pollution in the park from traffic and increased congestion leading to increased smog from petrol use. Could cycle lanes not be provided alongside the Park's roads.

4. Councillor David Cunningham

This was the twelfth meeting on this issue he had attended over the last 2 years. The Park is a jewel that should be protected and enhanced. He felt very sad that there was a conflict over this issue. Personally he had a Springer Spaniel and it would not be possible for him to get the right exercise for his dog without the facility to use the car park.

The RPA had consulted but had not provided a form for return on the issues. Proper proforma's were required. There was scepticism in the community on the reasons for why RPA were doing this and some residents suspected that it was for overriding financial purpose.

The latest development of providing the facilities for the elderly and disabled at the pen ponds car park seemed to be a new development that he couldn't recall being included in the previous edition of the consultation papers.

Wandsworth Council had taken action to challenge the RPA consultation process through a judicial review and as a result they agreed to undertake this further consultation. This

sort of action is to be supported and residents should tell the Kingston Council in act in a similar way if it is needed.

5. Anthony Barker, local resident

There is a constant stream of traffic in the park and it does cause concern for users as drivers do not seem to be considerate. Indeed the cars detract from the beauty of the Park.

With cars dominating the park he expressed concern about the levels of smog and fog from diesel fuel and its potential impact on lung cancer occurrence. With so many cars in the park can we not leave some of it free to discourage traffic in those areas.

RPA should get more support for their proposals who are moving in the right direction on the management of the park.

6. Mr Chris Hughes

Pollution is damaging to the eyes, ears and lungs. RPA have put forward sensible proposals.

There is a land train at Leeds Castle that works well. The volume of traffic in the park is increasing dramatically and not everyone wants to drive in the park.

7. Vaughan Thursby Pelham

Enjoy the park without parking in it. Elderly people are not able to walk very far but they would enjoy the park and the deer. There is a need to protect the interests of others and the RPA should be making special arrangements for those with difficulties. Would it not be better if the car park was open between 10am and 4pm with a pay and ride facility for the elderly and disabled at other times.

It would be disastrous if the car park was closed early in the morning for the needs of the local neighbourhood.

8. Angela Ailes, Kingston Vale resident

There is too much traffic using the Robin Hood Gate.

If the pen ponds car park is closed it would be difficult for the elderly and those with dogs if they have to walk between the perimeter car parks and pen ponds.

The closure of the car park would cause problems for weekend events held frequently. An option would be to stop those events.

Who was invited to the meeting, how and why (this point was answered by the Chair indicating that 17,000 letters had been distributed to the relevant areas of the Borough inviting them to attend).

9. Councillor Patrick Codd

The closure of the Robin Hood Gate would cause major problems for residents living in Kingston Hill and Kingston Vale suffering continuous traffic jams. The proposal was just unworkable for local residents whose livelihoods should be protected.

10. Charles Carter

The park is a facility used for dog walkers, joggers, cyclists and horse riders. If the Park is not broken then don't fix it, but the problem of cyclists needs to be addressed.

The land train proposal is more of a Disney world idea than something appropriate for the Park and would be more visually intrusive. The Land train simply would not be used.

Closure of pen ponds car park is not supported together with the other proposals by the agency.

There seems to be an underlying reason for the proposals that is not mentioned in the consultation and some would say it is the cost of repairing the damage to the roads.

11. Mr John Stokes

The park is enjoyed by many people those walking dogs, young people, elderly and the Agency have taken an arrogant approach in their proposals.

The land train proposal is ridiculous. There are no toilets or shelter at Pen ponds and if bad weather prevails the users could be left stranded and it would lead to total failure of the proposal.

The agency seem to be administering the policy in isolation and if they were a private firm running the park they would be sacked for incompetence. They should not be above the law or the rights of the public.

12. Councillor Eric Humphrey

Pen ponds car park is a valuable resource and frequently used by people taking a picnic as a safe area for children with skateboards and roller blades together with those who are vulnerable.

Don't write to the monkey, but to the organ grinder and send your comments to Tessa Jowell MP Minister for Culture, Media and Sport.

The agency have provided a case study on how not to consult on proposals or introduce changes to current facilities.

13. Eve Halsey

Saddened if there is reduced access to Pen ponds which is used by many women on their own taking a walk, who don't feel concerned because there are a lot of cars around which gives them the feeling of security.

The 20mph limit will be very difficult to police in the park and the slower traffic is likely to lead to increased fumes.

Skylarks had been designated a place in the park but they don't seem to have settled. They probably need a better site to try again.

14. Mr Simon Shoot

It is a large park and the roads take up a small part of it. Why don't users go to other areas of the park that are away from the car parks.

30mph speed limits would be OK and should be enforced. Cyclists using the park are aggressive and give themselves a poor reputation.

He would not support the proposals that create more pollution but in general would support the Agency proposals.

15. David Evans, Transport Manager, Wandsworth

There are too many cars in the park. The closure of Robin Hood Gate would affect users of the park travelling across to Wandsworth. Car users drive too fast in the Park.

16. Gordon Southwood, Managing Director of business in Kingston

The park is for the people and some of the justification for the proposals refer to the number of beetles and bird life, but that detracts from the overall purpose of the park being for the community.

As a child I swan into pen ponds with half a dozen second world war bombs and dropped them into the water. They are, to my knowledge still there.

[Note: Subsequent to the meeting RBK officers have informed the RPA of this incident for them to take the necessary action.]

17. Michael Croney

It is pleasure to drive in the park and the speed reduction proposals will be difficult to enforce. Keep the park open.

18. Dennis Reed

Cyclists using the park do not have bells. 9/10ths of the park is inside the roads. How many users go into the park.

Crossing roads from the car parks is an issue. Traffic management schemes could be considered to deal with the peak demand periods e.g. traffic lights.

19. Mr Hein

The park provides great freedom for children to walk, play and cycle.

The deterioration of the park is more around the car parks and when you go beyond those there is none evident. Therefore leave the park alone.

20. Councillor Lally Malik

The Park belongs to the people who should stick together over this issue to keep it open.

21. John Newall

The park is a marvellous asset.

22. Venessa Fison

Why is the meeting necessary. The agency have done their report so why cover the same ground again.

Answered by the Chair indicating that the Borough Council expressed the need for a public consultation which the agency had declined to undertake so that community views could be received and forwarded to them. The authority believe in consultation and the number of people in the audience validates that action.

23. Councillor David Cunningham requested a vote to establish the views of those present.

This resulted in the meeting feeling that the following aspects of the Agency proposals be supported:

1. reducing the speed limit to 20 mph;
2. improved bus links to the park;
3. improving existing car parks;
4. improving crossings for pedestrians;
5. continued liaison with neighbouring Authorities,

That the following aspects of the Agency proposals be not supported:

- A. closure of the Robin Hood Gate;
- B. closure of the pen ponds car park; and
- C. investigating road charging.
- D. introducing a land train; and
- E. improved links through the park.

24. Gary Compton

The park provides people with a huge source of enjoyment. The exercise appears to be a money saving one so that the Agency can reduce the maintenance cost required at the park.

25. Councillor Eric Humphrey

The Government have indicated that museums should be free as they are seeking to reach out to the community and charging to use the park now would exclude poorer people.

26. Gwen Symonds

The Government have provided £22m for 7 major parks. It is a people's park and the Government should provide more money for the parks to operate.

27. Margaret Chester

Never known anything that is undertaken for a temporary period of 12 months to be undone at the end of the period.

28. Sharon Mehta

Many people don't have cars to get through the park so this aspect should not be dismissed.

CONCLUSION

The Chair, in thanking those present for contributing to such a constructive discussion on these proposals, indicated that the notes of the meeting in addition to being sent to the Agency would be made available to those attending and placed on the Council's website.

The 104 completed questionnaires resulted in the majority favouring the following:

- Reduced speed limit to 20mph;
- Keeping Robin Hood Gate open to traffic;
- Keeping Pen Ponds Car Park open;
- Improving bus links to the park but not through it;
- Not proceeding with the land train proposal;
- Not proceeding with the investigation of road charging;
- Improvements to the car parks, road crossings and liaison with neighbouring authorities.

The votes expressed for the options are set out on the analysis overleaf.

Chris Phelan
Committee Secretary
Guildhall
Kingston

19 September 2002

Analysis of the questionnaire completed at the public meeting on 5 September 2002

Proposal	For	Against	No view
1. Reduced speed limit to 20mph	47	39	10
2. Close Robin Hood Gate to motor traffic	21	71	5
3. Close Pen Ponds car park	5	94	5
4. Improved bus links to and through the park*	40	31	15
5. Land train proposal	13	57	18
6. Improve existing car parks	81	5	11
7. Improve road crossings for pedestrians	79	5	10
8. Liaise with neighbouring local authorities	86	3	4
9. Investigate the possibility of road charging	15	75	7

* Note: This result represents a spilt. Those in favour are supporting improved bus links to the park. Those being against would not like to see the buses introduced in the park.