

The Camberwell Society – Revitalise5 – Comments on the proposals for Camberwell Green and Streetscape

The Camberwell Society is pleased to submit comments on the proposals put forward for Camberwell Green and on the Streetscape initiative. Section A deals with Camberwell Green. Section B covers Streetscape.

A. Camberwell Green.

As the Council points out in its 2012 Consultation Report, Camberwell Green is an historic small urban park, with mature trees dating back to the late 19th or early 20th century. It has not had any significant investment since the 1990s. As such there is now a real opportunity to improve the Green and make it a real benefit to the people of Camberwell. This is an opportunity that should not be missed, and one that should acknowledge the Green's historic context and significance.

We set out below our comments on some of the features common to all three of the design proposals.

1. Green Space and the roads around the Green

We are in broad support of the various proposals to increase the amount of green space on the Green (although this needs to be consistent with our views on keeping and indeed restoring the railings around the Green which we address below). This would include the proposals to:

- Reduce the width of the northern footway and relocate the recycling bins currently located there. In terms of a site for their relocation, then perhaps something appropriate could be found in the context of the plans for the new library?
- Decrease the width of Camberwell Green road, adding footway along the Green's eastern edge, and removing parking spaces at the southern end of the Green and pedestrianising that area.
- Remove the small area of tarmac in the north-western corner of the Green.
- Relocate the playground and the table tennis tables to the northern end of the Green, to link in some way to the new library.

The proposals for the Green itself need also to be considered in the context of the roads around the Green, particularly the main roads to the west of the Green (Camberwell Road) and to the south of the Green (Camberwell Church St). We would make the following comments:

- Camberwell Road. All the current options propose narrowing the road by widening the pavements. The choice as currently presented is between widening the pavement either alongside the western edge of the Green or on the other side of Camberwell Road. If this is the only choice, then the Society would prefer the pavement alongside the Green to be

widened. However, we would suggest that a better option would be if the pavements could be kept at their current width and the western side of the Green is enlarged slightly (thereby restoring some of the Green to its pre 1987 position).

- Camberwell Church Street. This was also widened in 1987 with a slice taken off the Green. Given that there are proposals for a traffic island extension to be added to the middle of Camberwell Church Street (to prevent U turns on Camberwell Church Street and right turns into Wren Road), then we do not propose that any changes are made to the Green or to the pavements here.
- The roads to the northern and eastern edges of the green should be shared car/pedestrian areas, giving access to the proposed new library. The paved area in front of the Magistrates Court is a tired area and we believe that the new library presents an ideal opportunity to improve the appearance of the whole area, including these access roads. On a related topic, we would suggest that “innovative planting” could be used to soften the somewhat stark lines of the proposed new library building.

2. Footpaths

We do not agree that the existing pathways need any realignment. The current alignment of the pathways is historically consistent, and moreover provides access to the Green from all its corners. There is a crossing point insofar as all footpaths do already meet, although not necessarily in the middle of the Green (which is where the play area currently is). We do not see the logic behind the proposal that would remove direct access to the centre of the Green from the south-western corner.

There would appear from the 2012 Consultation Report to be very little support for any change in the existing footpath layout, and so these proposals do appear to us to be change for change’s sake. As a “historic small urban park”, we would urge the Council to maintain the existing footpath alignment, and to concentrate any available resources on improving the quality of the footpaths themselves. We would fully support the suggestions made in this context by Jonathan Gregson in his submission to the Council and his email to the Society dated 25th February (a copy of which we are attaching to this Note for ease of reference).

3. Public Toilet

We would support the proposal to relocate the public toilet facility from its current location at the south-western corner of the Green. It is unsightly and unattractive landmark for the Green. We have no strong views as to where it should be relocated, although we do recognise that this is a well-used facility.

4. Railings around the Green

We understand that tackling antisocial behaviour (ASB) issues on the Green is a priority for the Council, and that ASB in general is something that was identified in the Consultation Report as a concern to users of the Green. We do not however see the logic of linking this with a suggestion that the railings around the Green should be removed.

We do not agree that the Green is 'closed off or hidden away' by *virtue of* (our italics) 'high railings'. The railings are an integral part of the Green as a small historic urban park, and are central to the character of the Green. The Green is not Clapham Common, and as such we are strongly against any proposal to remove the railings.

Indeed we do not see in the 2012 Consultation Report any strong evidence to support such a proposal. The Report notes that "opinion on the railings was not very strong, with most people not answering". We would suggest that people did not answer because they felt that there was nothing wrong with the Green having railings. The fact that the railings provide a boundary between the Green and two very busy roads should not be overlooked, particularly given that families and their children are users of the Green.

We feel that the main issue is that the Green is surrounded by the wrong type of railings. We understand that one of the aims of the Camberwell Green project is to "use long-lasting good quality materials so that the Green will look good for a long time." We support this aim, and would suggest that one reason why the Green is in its current state and condition is because this has not been the guiding principle to date.

As such, we feel that far from removing railings from the Green, the railings should be replaced by railings that are historically sympathetic to the Green's origins, and to its place as an urban London square. Again, when it comes to suggestions on this aspect of the proposal, then we can do no more than support in full the excellent and well thought through comments that Jonathan Gregson makes in his submission to the Council (as referenced above).

We do not think that Potters Field Park (a City space surrounded by modern office blocks and running alongside the south bank of the Thames) as an appropriate reference point when considering what is right for the Green.

5. Mounds, Trees and Planting

We are of the view that the random use of "mounds" for the sake of visual interest is entirely inappropriate to a London square such as the Green. We feel that visual interest can best be achieved through proper planting and through a careful and sympathetic restoration of the Green. We think that the use of mounds is very much an idea of the time that may not stand the test of time. They should be resisted. We do not favour the use of mounds to direct pedestrian movement –that can best be achieved with restored footpaths.

We favour planting which maximises bio-diversity, but again with the caveat that this is an urban London Green of historic significance, and not a park, a common or a heath. It may therefore be that this requires a degree of further thought. The same comment applies to mounded planting with equal force and effect – we are not convinced that it is appropriate in this context.

On trees, we would like to see as many trees as possible on the Green. These should however be healthy trees, and trees that are appropriate to the Green and its environment. To the extent that this means that unhealthy trees require replacement, then we support the proposals.

We also support the proposal to bring up the level of the Green at the southern end to the same level as the pavement on Camberwell Church Street. We do however have some reservations about

the proposed “innovative seating”, which in our view may not be consistent with a Green that is neatly enclosed by restored period railings.

B. Streetscape.

1. 20 mph speed limit across Camberwell town centre

The Society notes the conclusions of the March 2012 report "Reducing Road Danger to Southwark- Effectiveness of Current Strategies" prepared by Southwark Living Streets, Southwark Cyclists & Roadpeace that when properly enforced 20 mph zones lead to a dramatic fall in casualty numbers (predominantly amongst the most vulnerable road users). Accordingly, the Society welcomes this proposal.

2. Pedestrian Crossings

The Society welcomes the conversion of existing pedestrian crossings to pedestrian countdown crossings.

3. Clutter

The Society welcomes the proposed improvement to footways, removal of unnecessary signage and street clutter, improvement in street lighting and enhancement of the public realm.

4. Camberwell Road

a. The Society welcomes the widening of the footway to improve the bus waiting environment. However, we understand that part of Camberwell Green was originally claimed to increase the road width and we would prefer if possible for the Green to be extended rather than the eastern footway widened. This point is also addressed in our comments on the Green itself above.

b. The Society welcomes the proposal of a new pedestrian crossing between Camberwell Green and Camberwell passage.

c. The Society is concerned with any proposals which lead to any decrease in the segregation between cyclists and other traffic.

5. Camberwell New Road

The Society welcomes the proposals to replace the westbound cycle lane with 1.5 m of blue surfacing within a 4 m wide traffic lane and provide the blue cycle surfacing in the eastbound bus lane.

6. Main Junction

a. The Society welcomes the provision of more space for pedestrians at the junction.

b. The Society supports staggered pedestrian crossings at the junction

c. The Society does not agree with the need to make the near side eastbound lane on Camberwell New Road left turn only into Camberwell Road. However, the Society would like the council to consider allowing all traffic, not just buses, to turn right into Denmark Hill at the main junction. At

the moment right turning traffic is supposed to use the Medlar Street route but often it does not. Vehicles then attempt dangerous u turns in Camberwell Church Street. The opportunity to do a u turn will be reduced with the proposed traffic island extension to Wren Road and we are concerned that this will result in vehicles using Camberwell Grove , either to turn around in or as an alternative road to Denmark Hill. We would be concerned at any increased traffic flow on residential roads such as Camberwell Grove. If this suggestion does not prove practical as a secondary suggestion we would urge to council to improve the signage for the Medlar Street turn, particularly as this involves cutting across a bus lane.

7. Camberwell Church Street

a. The Society welcomes the proposals to widen the southern footway between Wilson Road and Wren Road.

b. The Society is concerned at the proposals to remove the traffic lights at Grove Lane. The lights were introduced in 1987 to reduce the traffic using Grove Lane as a 'rat run' and the long hold on red was to deter traffic from using Grove Lane as an alternative route to Denmark Hill. The introduction of the lights led to a substantial decrease in accidents involving pedestrians and children in Grove Lane. The location of Lyndhurst Primary school in Grove Lane was a particular factor in the need to reduce the volume of traffic in Grove Lane. The Society is concerned that the removal of these lights will lead to a substantial increase of traffic in Grove Lane and whilst this might achieve the Council's objective of reducing unnecessary stopping of traffic and queuing on Camberwell Church Street this should not be sort at the expense of pedestrian safety on Grove Lane. Accordingly, the society objects to this proposal. The exit of traffic from Grove Lane should not be controlled by pedestrians pressing the button on a crossing on another road. If the council are concerned about the traffic flow on Camberwell Church Street, then is it possible to introduce a box junction and synchronise the lights with the lights at the Green to improve traffic flow?

c. The Society welcomes the proposal to allow cyclists to enter Grove Lane from Camberwell Church Street by an access point but not a separate lane although the Council will need to ascertain where the three large bins at the junction will be relocated.

d. The Society welcomes the provision of pedestrian islands on Camberwell Grove.

e. The Society supports the proposal to close Datchelor Place to traffic and pedestrianise it.

f. On balance the Society feels that the best provision for cyclists would be a 1.5 m advisory cycle lane in both directions

g. The Society welcomes the proposed traffic island extension to Wren Road.

8. Denmark Hill

a. We welcome the widening of the footway to improve the bus waiting environment outside Butterfly Walk

b. The Society supports the relocation of the northbound bus stop to either side of the current pedestrian crossing to provide more waiting space

c. In the absence of evidence concerning the Council's statement about not reducing traffic flow we are concerned at the proposal to allow the right hand turn of cars from Denmark Hill to Coldharbour Lane.

d. The Society welcomes the proposals to improve pedestrian links between Love Walk and Coldharbour Lane and, having regard to the number of pedestrian crossings already on Denmark Hill and the impact on traffic flow, we would prefer the provision of refuge islands on both Denmark Hill and Coldharbour Lane and footway widening on Coldharbour Lane to the introduction of a pedestrian crossing on Denmark Hill.

e. The Society welcomes the proposed relocation of bus stop Q (for buses towards Brixton) from outside Butterfly Walk to Orpheus Street with bus stands in Daneville Road and Coldharbour Lane.

The Camberwell Society

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