

ATHLONE GARDENS – STATUS AND PROGRESS REPORT

BY THE HEAD OF LEISURE

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Athlone Gardens sits within the Wornington Green Estate in Golborne Ward, but is used by a much wider community. As part of the redevelopment of the Wornington Green Estate, the Council has agreed to allow Kensington Housing Trust and their developers to use half of the park to facilitate the phasing of the development, and minimise the number of moves that displaced tenants will face. This means there will be a significantly smaller temporary park for approximately three years, and it will be heavily compromised by building works going on around it. The developers will then open a further temporary park to the north of the existing park.
- 1.2 This is the Council's park. TELS has the responsibility for sustaining the best possible park during the works, and for creating a Green Flag quality park by the end of the redevelopment.
- 1.3 Between June and September 2010, officers from TELS attended several meetings and held drop in sessions to let local people know about the imminent changes to Athlone Gardens, and to seek their views on how best to manage the park during the works. This paper sets out the findings of those events.
- 1.4 The events held or attended included:
 - Residents Focus Group (KHT)
 - Wornington Green Residents Steering Group meeting (Independent Tenants Advisor)
 - North Kensington Women's Textile Group (2 sessions attended)
 - Venture Centre IT suite session
 - Park drop in sessions (2 sessions held)
 - Golborne Forum Board meeting
 - Children's Playscheme session
 - Venture Centre Family Fun Day
 - Joint Planning/Parks drop in session
- 1.5 Overall we spoke to around 110 adults and over 30 children.

2. VIEWS ON THE TEMPORARY PARK

2.1 Comments on the closure of the park

- 2.1.1 The closure of half of the park triggers different responses in different people. Some are angry that the Council has agreed to the closure, and do not feel confident that there are longer term benefits in enabling a developer

to use park land at this stage. Some said they felt the Council has betrayed their wishes and has not listened to the views of local people. Others said that, while it is a shame that the park is to be made smaller, they are hopeful that the long term benefits will make the sacrifice worth it in the end.

- 2.1.2 Many people are wary about the future of the park – people said they thought they had been lied to and misinformed repeatedly over the redevelopment of the housing estate, and they no longer believe what they are told about what is going to happen. Several people expressed the belief that the development will not be completed, and that they will be left with only half a park; they do not believe that the Council has a way of getting the land back from KHT if this happens.
- 2.1.3 Several local residents who currently use the park said they would not use it in future, as they did not think it would be a safe or enjoyable place to be. When asked, most people said that the Council should provide play equipment for those who did want to use the temporary park. There was some concern over the amount of money the Council would be spending on temporary equipment, and whether equipment could be moved in future to avoid spending more than necessary.
- 2.1.4 Many of the people we spoke to did see themselves still using the park in future and were interested in making sure that the Council did what it can to keep the best park available for local people.
- 2.1.5 A couple of people mentioned the loss of the graffiti wall (known locally as the Hall of Fame) during the first phase. This is a well known and well used graffiti area and its destruction is seen as a loss of local amenity.

2.2 Suggestions for the temporary park

- 2.2.1 We asked if there were any concerns people wanted to raise or suggestions they had for how the Council could make the temporary park as good as possible.
- 2.2.2 Some suggestions and requests made were as follows:
 - **Facilities for dogs:** The dog exercise area is in the area of the park to be closed. Several people asked that dog facilities should be put into the temporary park, including access to water, a new exercise area, and a dog toilet.
 - **Seating:** Some people expressed concern about loss of seating, since the current seating in the park is well used. There was a specific request about the height of the seating for the elderly (minimum 18 inches, we were told). The Golborne Forum asked if the paved seating area near the entrance could be preserved alongside the new playground in some way, as it currently is a welcoming aspect of the park.

- **Water Fountain:** Playground users and dog owners asked for a water fountain (given that the staff accommodation will be gone, and so the park keeper will not be able to provide water).
- **Trees:** Many people thought the loss of trees in the park was a great shame, and were concerned that the new park should have plenty of trees. Some also pointed out that trees in the new park would be newly planted and therefore not mature, and a finished park would therefore take much longer to achieve. Several people asked that trees in the temporary park be kept for as long as possible.
- **Space for football:** The Moroccan Community Project uses the park twice a week for football training and games. They would like to continue doing this, and asked if a small area could be designated for 5-a-side games. If this is not possible, they asked that any extra seating should be around the edges of the grassed area rather than across the middle, to maintain enough space to play games.
- **Safety:** Local residents at the Steering Group, Venture Centre users, park users and the Golborne Forum raised the issue of safety (particularly child safety). They are concerned that the park will be unsafe for children because of noise, dust, works traffic, and demolition works. There was a question over the height of the hoardings around the park, and whether these would be high enough to prevent young people climbing over them. People also feared that children playing ball games may lose balls over the hoardings and try to retrieve them.
- **Fencing:** Residents at the Steering Group meeting, Golborne Forum board members and park users asked whether the fencing around the park would be kept during the redevelopment. Members of the Golborne Forum also asked specifically whether the new play area would be double fenced for safety.
- **Staffing:** Many people were concerned about what would happen to the park keeper as a result of half the park closing, since the Quadron facilities are in the area of park to be closed. People at all the events said that the staff presence was valued and important and should be maintained. Only one negative comment was made - that the park keeper does not stop people letting their dogs foul the grass in the park.
- **Access to Portobello Road:** The Golborne Forum advised us strongly that Athlone Gardens must be preserved as a public space for a wide range of people throughout the redevelopment. They are concerned that it should not become a park for only the Wornington Green Estate. In order to keep this wide community ownership the Forum has asked that the access to the park from Portobello Road is maintained throughout the redevelopment. To be specific, this access should be a direct access from the pavement on Portobello Road into the park, and

not through any alleyways. In the first temporary park this would mean maintaining the Portobello entrance as it is now.

- **Graffiti:** We heard the view that we should preserve a place where graffiti is allowed, and replace the 'Hall of Fame' which is being removed in the first phase.
- **Signage:** Some people advised us to provide suitable signage to direct people to alternative local playgrounds,. particularly while there is a gap in provision before the temporary playground is finished. Some also sought signage within the new playground to prevent skateboarding and dogs
- **Shelter:** The Golborne Forum asked for the current shelter to be reprovided in the temporary park.

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FINAL PARK

4.1 Some of the people we spoke to gave us ideas to take forward to the new, final park at the end of the redevelopment of the Wornington Green estate. Some were based on what they like about the current park, including the idea of having separate areas, with screening of planting and seats, to allow people to have their own space within the park. Others included;

- A shelter – the current shelter, or something similar.
- Enough seating, no less than in the current park
- Plenty of trees, and as many mature trees as possible
- A café or kiosk
- Toilets
- A water play feature for children

5. AGREED ACTIONS

- Install a new playground by Proludic, which was the most popular equipment with children.
- install some dog facilities; seating; a water fountain; and suitable signage to alternative parks and playgrounds
- preserve the direct access to Athlone Gardens from Portobello Road
- consider the request from the Moroccan Community project to leave enough space for 5-a-side football, and accommodate it if we can do so without seriously affecting other park users

- Let people know that the Quadron park keepers are not under threat of redundancy, and that alternative arrangements will be made to ensure their continuing presence in the temporary park
- investigate the feasibility of installing some new mature trees to compensate for any losses, and – if this is not possible - explain why
- challenge the developers to find a way to reduce the risk of balls going over the site fencing
- consult more widely on whether some form of replacement 'Hall of Fame' can be installed nearby without causing offence
- consider our policy on fencing the park and playground during the works
- extend our consultation activity so far as possible to include other potential or actual users of the park, including customers of the market stalls and Golborne Road shops