

CRYSTAL PALACE PARK CONFERENCE 20 MAY 2011

Paxton Suite, The Lodge, Crystal Palace Park

Conference Report

Ray Sacks (joint-Chair) welcomed everyone at the start of the conference and dealt with the housekeeping items.

Peter Austin (joint-Chair) outlined the purpose of the conference: to review the planning framework and to consider how the regeneration of Crystal Palace Park could be taken forward. He thanked the participating civic societies for their support.

Presentations from the landscape architects, English Heritage and the master planners followed.

Jo Gibbons (J & L Gibbons, Landscape Architects) set out the history of Crystal Palace Park and its landscaping. She stressed the urgent current need for a coherent strategic plan and said the Master Plan offered flexibility not rigidity.

Malcolm Woods (English Heritage – Historic Buildings and Area Advisor, London Region) talked about Joseph Paxton and outlined the history of Crystal Palace from its origins to the present day. He pointed out that several features of Crystal Palace Park (including the subways and the terraces) were on English Heritage's at-risk register.

Tilman Lutz (Lutz and Partner – Landscape Architects, Master Planner) gave a presentation on the Master Plan. He said there seemed to be no money currently available for implementing the plan but he was confident this would come. He thanked all the local societies and the Park Working Group for their support. The consultation process that had taken place was unique to the UK.

The Master Plan really consisted of several constituent ideas, each of which could be realised separately. He acknowledged the debates there were on funding and housing. The plan had aimed to integrate each architectural feature in the Park, without making any individual feature dominant. He stressed that it was only a Master Plan and that the realisation of any aspect would require the reworking of the original proposals completed in 2007. The Master Plan was like a sponge that could absorb many more ideas. The Park itself had strong features but needed waking up. Even if only part of the plan were implemented, it could draw visitors from all over the world.

An open discussion followed these presentations.

John Payne (CPCA) asked Tilman Lutz which he would choose, if only one part could be constructed. **Tilman Lutz** said this was difficult but one of his favourite aspects was the top terrace which was loaded with history and offered wonderful views of London. **Ray Sacks** added that the estimated cost of remedial work to the terraces is about £7 million.

Susan Wise (Lewisham Council – Perry Vale Ward, Cabinet Member for Customer Services) said she had been visiting the Park for 45 years and was now responsible for parks in Lewisham. She asked about the proportion of social housing in the proposed housing development. **Ray Sacks** said the 180 units consisted mainly of one and two-bedroom homes, possibly with some of three bedrooms. Any social housing content would need separate (public) funding but was quite feasible.

Annabel McLaren (Sydenham Society - Chair) said that other parks had been regenerated with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and asked if this had been considered for Crystal Palace. **Malcolm Woods** said that HLF had always been recognised as a long-term source of funding, for example for restoring the terraces and subway, but HLF funds were not usually available for new building work. **Jo Gibbons** added that there had been conversations throughout with HLF and applications would be invited when planning was complete.

John Greatrex (Great Exhibitions) suggested that money could be raised by offering people sponsorship of a volume (cubic inches) of the Crystal Palace corner.

Peter Morgan (Bromley Council – Portfolio Holder for Renewal and Recreation) asked about the kind of activities that had taken place in the original Crystal Palace. **Malcolm Woods** described the range of cultural and educational activities from huge choirs (Handel concerts) to dog shows and juggling.

Alan Freeman (West Beckenham Residents Association) asked for an update on the amount of money that could be raised by the housing development. **Jo Gibbons** said one of the purposes of the conference was to discuss governance and a possible new structure for funding. It was possible that the next steps might involve a number of small projects, but there had to be some momentum. If HLF were to receive a submission, they would want to see evidence of energy and engagement around the Park. **Malcolm Woods** said that housing was part of the funding package in the Master Plan but no new costings had been done. The opportunity remained to part-fund the regeneration scheme through a small amount of housing but it was not inevitable. **Ray Sacks** said HLF had been unable to attend the conference, but they had made clear that they could not become involved unless a governance structure was in place.

Murray Smith (Crystal Palace Campaign) said that, as a local resident, he felt that Crystal Palace Park was phenomenally under-used. In places the Park was impenetrable, and to improve the entrances would be a good way to start, coupled with some development to fund the improvements.

Ken Lewington (Crystal Palace Foundation) pointed out that the indicative costing in the Master Plan contained no specific funding for the museum. He wanted to know how much the new museum and restoration of the subway would cost and where the funds would come from. **Tilman Latz** said everything had been costed and included in the overall general cost plan. But this was in 2007 and features of the Master Plan could be changed. **Malcolm Woods** said the conference might help to provide answers: perhaps an organisation was needed to champion this part of the scheme.

After the coffee break, there were contributions from Bromley Council and the Greater London Authority (GLA).

Stephen Carr (Bromley Council – Leader) said his task was to persuade the conference that Bromley was committed to moving forward on the Park and bringing people together for consultation. He added, however, that not everyone would get everything they wanted. It was a highly competitive world for new funding, and if submissions were to be made, they would need to be made with one voice. He was personally committed to getting everyone together to make plans for implementation. Bromley recognised the economic and social issues facing this part of south London and the need for action, for example, to increase social housing and drive out crime.

Marc Hume (Bromley Council – Director of Recreation and Renewal) set out in more detail Bromley’s role in taking the plan forward, including establishing a project board, building community engagement, investigating sources of funding, considering various models of governance and facilitating the delivery of key projects.

He pointed out that, although the total cost identified in the Master Plan was £67.5 million, there were many elements that could be delivered incrementally with phasing. The Master Plan is subject to the outcome of the application for judicial review, but this did not mean that nothing at all could happen. He described work that had already been carried out (for example, the regeneration of the maze). All future projects would need to be considered against the framework of the Master Plan.

The housing development had originally been valued at £12 million, but this value was now likely to be lower and therefore probably not worth attempting to generate in the current climate. In any case, the Rockhills housing development could not start before 2019 because of the terms of the Caravan Club’s lease.

Among the various possible sources of funding, he flagged the idea of a borough precept (as had happened with Lea Valley). This would require primary legislation but if the five boroughs were each to raise £400k for Crystal Palace Park, that would be very helpful.

He pointed out that there was no mention of Crystal Palace Park in the London Plan and Bromley had been very vociferous on this to the Mayor. The omission could stand in the way of securing funding.

In terms of key future projects, energy and momentum were needed, together with some quick wins. The borough’s Crystal Palace planning group had been talking to the Eden Project about possible activity involving young people; this was something that was likely to be of interest to the Mayor.

Giles Dolphin (GLA – Assistant Director Planning) said that the GLA was very firmly behind the Master Plan. Crystal Palace was more than a local park: it was a metropolitan feature. Although the Master Plan was seen as the best option, this did not mean other ideas would not be considered if they came along. The GLA was happy to talk to the boroughs and took its co-ordinating role seriously. It currently had no spending powers and could not own land, but that was due to change next year. The Mayor could act as a figurehead.

He said that investment *was* available, pointing to £60 million just raised from Singapore for a floating river walkway. The problem that Crystal Palace Park had was that it was not in the centre of London. Supporters of the Park needed to draw attention to south London and to find help from elsewhere. The London Development Authority (LDA) was concentrating on its core duties in housing and the London Gateway, as it wound down. The Olympics in 2012 would also be a distraction for the boroughs.

On a couple of other matters, he described the proposal for Crystal Palace FC to move to the Park as a red herring, and pointed out that the transfer of responsibility for the royal parks to the Mayor was a considerable way off.

Val Shawcross (London Assembly Member –Lambeth and Southwark) told the conference participants that they were keeping the flame alive. Croydon and Lewisham boroughs had

objected to the multiplex plan and opponents of that scheme now had a moral responsibility to take things forward.

Crystal Palace Park might be underused but there was a strong aspiration across the community to see improvements. This was a project that had been interrupted. The Master Plan had cost £3 million to put together and had benefited from great expertise from around the world. It was a document of real value and the question now was: how could it be used?

The London Borough of Bromley could not handle the Park alone. They had done what they could, but this was a regional facility. The 25-30% reduction in public spending meant there was no longer the capacity in the public sector to drive the project alone. A big and serious partner was needed.

The LDA have already spent about £17 million on the National Sports Centre but it (the LDA) was due to be wound up in a year and its functions merged into those of the GLA. There was a serious need for political leadership and a London-wide delivery vehicle that could bring together sports, heritage and other interests.

Val Shawcross said she had led on Crystal Palace Park for Ken Livingstone (previous London Mayor, 2000-2008) and she promised that the Park would return to centre-stage if there was a change of leadership after next year's mayoral election. The tram project would be reinstated and a start could be made on implementing a rephrased plan. If Boris Johnson (current London Mayor, 2008 – present) remained in power, there was a job to be done of drawing his attention to Crystal Palace Park.

On football, she pointed out that Tottenham's proposals in relation to the Olympic stadium would bring £20 million of investment to Crystal Palace Park. She agreed with others that the suggestion of moving Crystal Palace FC to the Park was a non-starter. There was no realistic prospect of CPFC having the necessary funding and a football stadium footprint in the park would be massively damaging.

Commercial investment *was* available for some projects but it tended to go to the centre (of London). Serious political leadership was needed to drive things forward.

Following the walking tours of the Park and the lunch break, the conference was resumed with a plenary session.

Alan Freeman suggested that the awful fences in parts of the Park could be removed, and that if any money was available, it could be used on the subway vaulting in the area where a new museum was proposed.

Nick Goy (West Beckenham Residents Association) commented that the most controversial aspects of the Master Plan involved funding one section of the Park by selling another. He also referred to problems with some of the work that had been carried out; the wrong material had been used on paths and mould had developed on the dinosaurs. Lump sums could be spent on improvements, but ongoing care was needed to maintain the Park. Small things could make a large difference.

Pat Trembath (Sydenham Society) pointed out that Bromley would not be able to make all the necessary bids for funds, which is why it was important to resolve the matter of governance.

Toby Smith (Bromley Council – Parks Service Manager) said a quotation was awaited for remedying the dinosaurs. This would not be a major piece of work.

Ray Sacks pointed out that £80k had been spent on pumps and plumbing for the waterfall. **Toby Smith** said that the electric pumping had been replaced after the disabled toilets had burnt down. He added that other areas of expenditure included temporary fencing (£80k), refurbishment of the play area (£60-70k) and new water mains from the top of the caravan site to the visitor centre (£100k). Small infrastructure projects like these were continuing to take place.

Martin Heath (Ecospheres Project) endorsed Nick Goy's point about the undesirability of selling land for housing. It had been a pleasure to hear from Tilman Latz that there would be flexibility with the Master Plan. He hoped that something ecologically sound would emerge from the discussions.

Ken Lewington referred to the Park Life document produced in 1995 and on whose steering group Bromley had officers. This report had raised concerns about the declining quality of Britain's parks and the shortage of staff to maintain parks. The keeperless park could become a key feature. If Bromley could not afford to retain the park rangers, he wondered if they could be kept on by the GLA.

The conference then moved on to discuss models of governance.

Helen Neve (Land Management Services Ltd) said her company had already produced a management and maintenance report for the Master Plan. She was now presenting the results of a further study that considered options on governance and management structures. This provided questions but not answers.

She set out the management implications of regeneration at different levels – of a revitalised local park, an enhanced regional park and a park of national significance – and ran through the issues to be considered in deciding on a governance structure.

There were four principal options for governance: borough custodianship, partnership, a new park authority or an independent trust. There were advantages and challenges in each model. A trust, for example, would allow a strong degree of independence but with the boroughs as stakeholders. It would give volunteers a bigger role and might well enhance fund-raising opportunities. However, it would require compliance with Charity Commission processes and if the trust were to fail, it was not clear who would pick up the pieces.

Summing up, Helen Neve said progress was being made in the Park; things were happening. The next step was for the project board to take on the search for the most appropriate form of governance. It was necessary to be both proactive and flexible and recognise that circumstances might change over time.

One of the examples of a trust given in Helen Neve's presentation was Chiswick House and Gardens Trust.

A video on Chiswick House was shown.

Jo Gibbons said that although this had been produced for fund-raising purposes, it showed the excitement that could be generated for a project.

An open discussion on governance followed.

Annabel Sidney (UNIT – Chair) asked about the timescale for the formation of a trust. **Peter Austin** said the Chiswick House Trust had been formed in 2005. Prior to that, a project officer worked in the borough. Trustees were appointed, the trust was registered as a charity by the local authority, a website and press releases were produced and small events – walks and talks – got underway. A head gardener was appointed and, a year later, a director. Partnership and the support of the local authority were crucial, as was a business plan. A network of volunteers built up, initially through contacts established by the project officer.

John Payne said there was no sign of housing at Chiswick, though there were allotments. **Ray Sacks** pointed out that Chiswick was rather different from Crystal Palace in that the house and park were owned separately – but, as they were now owned jointly, the house could be said to subsidise the park.

Ken Lewington said that the Horniman Museum had a model of unlimited membership. A broad membership provided a base from which trustees could be elected. **Peter Austin** added that Chiswick also had a separate limited company trading organization.

Annabel Sidney noted that governance was a difficult issue and asked if there were any other options besides those outlined. **Helen Neve** said there were others, but her company was recommending these four and it was for the stakeholders to decide which best suited Crystal Palace.

Nick Goy questioned whether the whole approach of the Master Plan needed to be reconsidered in the current climate. Perhaps something smaller and more sympathetic was needed.

Madeleine Hall (Capel Manor) reminded the conference that incremental progression had been one of the main points made by speakers during the morning session. There were things that could be done. Crystal Palace Park did not have kitchen gardens because – unlike Chiswick – it did not contain a great house. But it could have good horticultural facilities and these were not incompatible with the rest of the Park.

Michael Warwick (CPCA) said the morning session had left him with a sense of déjà vu. There had been ten years of discussing the Park and its history. There was only one thing wrong with the plan for governance and management: it should have been in place ten years ago. He also resented the downgrading of the Park and the emphasis on its dilapidation. He had been visiting Crystal Palace Park for years and it was magnificent, simply glorious. He asked if people did not agree that the Master Plan was totally inappropriate at a time when the nation was bankrupt. **Ray Sacks** said this was going over old ground.

Returning to the subject of governance, **Annabel Sidney** asked if there were other trusts that could be looked at. **Helen Neve** said Milton Keynes offered one example. **Tilman Lutz** said the UK system was very different from elsewhere in Europe. In Germany, organisations were established by politicians to respond to actual needs. These bodies were managed and paid for by public authorities.

Ray Sacks said that in the case of Chiswick House and Garden, money was raised to meet running costs. There was a business plan and revenue stream, though Chiswick was a quarter the size of Crystal Palace. It had become sustainable after its first full fiscal year. **Peter Austin** said Chiswick was now seeking more development funds and more staff.

Annabel Sidney said that there were sources of income for community regeneration that could be tapped into, giving the examples of what had been achieved in Sheffield and at Sefton Park. **Alan Freeman** said that the Lost Gardens of Heligan had been set up with a trust and from that the Eden Project had sprung. **Helen Neve** said that local authorities could apply to the HLF but there were other sources of funding which they were not eligible to apply for.

Melvyn Harrison (CPF) pointed out that there had been allotments in Crystal Palace Park during the war and also that the Park had had a charitable trust in 1940-42. The chair had been the Lord Mayor of London.

Alister Hayes (Bromley Council – Heritage Coordinator) then gave a presentation on London's Green Grid. He said it was important to look at Crystal Palace Park and make wider connections. The Green Grid encompassed the whole of London and included the Green Arc (around the outside of London), the Green Belt and the Green Chain (a corridor of green areas within London). It was an initiative which had started in east London with regeneration funding and which was based on landscape character zones.

The boroughs of Bromley, Sutton and Croydon were working together in Green Grid planning, looking at all parks and local access to green spaces. Between them, they had over half of London's old woodlands and significant areas that attracted visitors and they were the source of much of London's locally produced food. Transport was key. The area framework that they were working on would bring together the many issues relevant to green spaces and would feed directly into the London Plan.

The Green Grid (which was currently driven by the LDA and supported by the LDA and Sustrans) offered both a strategic network and an opportunity to make connections. If projects could be linked, this could help with funding. For example, connections might be made between Crystal Palace's dinosaurs and Charles Darwin (whose home, Down House, was the subject of a bid to UNESCO for recognition as a world heritage site).

Peter Hore (Representative for Tessa Jowell, MP - Dulwich and West Norwood) asked if there was an example of anyone being appointed by all the boroughs. **Alister Hayes** said there was not. There were similar structures in other parts of London and the aim was to get all 12 chairs together to talk to each other. **Martin Heath** said that he would like to talk to Alister Hayes afterwards about wildlife networks.

Peter Martin (Bromley Council – Head of Strategy and Renewal) was invited to sum up at the end of the conference. He referred back to Marc Hume's presentation and highlighted Bromley's intention to set up a project board. He said there were a number of relatively small projects that could be brought forward. Obviously there was a problem of funding, but sometimes small amounts of money were harder to raise than funding for multi-million pound projects. One of the roles of the project board would be to concentrate on the small scale; the Master Plan was there to provide a framework for small-scale projects. No significant funding had yet been identified. Big elements of the Master Plan were unlikely to be implemented for some time, but progress could be made with some of the smaller schemes. Involving the community in these was very important.

The conference had offered a rare occasion to bring everyone together, and it was now time for Bromley to step up and create the project board. The Green Grid proposals and framework linked with points made by others about the status of Crystal Palace Park. There was currently

no recognition of the Park in the London Plan, which could make it harder to access funding, but the Green Grid enabled the Park to be part of something larger.

Crystal Palace Park was two facilities in one. There was the central sports complex and the Park itself, and the Master Plan integrated the two, although there were different issues associated with the management of both. It was possible that governance might be too big a task for a trust, but that was an issue for the project board to take on. There might be opportunities to set up a community interest company for a specific aspect of the Park, for example, the subway; such a body might be able to apply for funds that Bromley did not have access to.

Peter Austin expressed his appreciation of Peter Martin's summing up and thanked him for his long association with and support for Crystal Palace Park as well as his helpful association with regeneration issues and the development of the Master Plan. He wished him a fulfilling retirement.

Mike Warwick spoke briefly, concurring.

Ray Sacks closed the conference.

Notes taken and produced by Wendy Jones
