

Dulwich Hamlet Supporters Trust

Working for a successful Dulwich Hamlet
E: info@dhst.org.uk



Robert Foster
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27 August 2014

Dear Robert,

Submission of comments following Hadley's Consultation

1. I am pleased to enclose the comments of the Dulwich Hamlet Supporters' Trust ('DHST'), which respond to the public consultation by Hadley Property Group ('Hadley's') regarding Champion Hill Stadium and the adjacent Greendale open space.
2. DHST was set up in 2003 and is an independent, democratic, not for profit organisation aiming to secure a successful and sustainable future for Dulwich Hamlet Football Club. The key objectives of DHST include working to see a thriving club and a secure future for the ground. DHST has over 200 members, which represents nearly 30% of an average attendance – a level of supporter engagement that would be the envy of most league clubs.
3. This response is based on the information that has been made available to DHST and the public during the consultation event that was held at the ground in late July. The comments are also informed by survey work undertaken by DHST to establish the views of our members and other supporters on any future stadium that is built for the club. The survey was open for views for over two weeks in August and received a total of 102 responses.

Overall positions on the redevelopment of the ground

4. DHST's overall position regarding the proposals to redevelop the ground and the adjacent Greendale open space is that it is too early to fully establish that the plans will secure a thriving club for the future. However, DHST is keen to engage positively and proactively with all relevant parties over the coming months to secure the best possible outcome.
5. The club has played their home fixtures close to the site of the existing Champion Hill stadium for over a century and is one of the most respected and recognised non-league football clubs in the country. It is vital that any proposals demonstrate clearly how they will keep the club within the

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immediate area **in the long term** and ensure that future generations of Hamlet supporters get to see their local team play in their local area.

6. Those with a long enough memory will recall that providing the club with a sustainable home for the future was also one of the reasons given for building the existing stadium in this location in 1992. It is disappointing that this same argument is being put forward barely 20 years after the previous development and therefore any proposals will understandably be viewed with a healthy degree of scepticism.
7. DHST will scrutinise any more detailed plans that are put forward to ensure that they genuinely present a viable and deliverable long term solution. It is vital going forward that Dulwich Hamlet Football Club is treated with the respect that it deserves, yet has been so lacking from previous owners in recent years. Respect for its history and respect for the contribution the club makes as a community asset in the local area.

Delivery

8. DHST is supportive of the overall general planning approach put forward by Hadley's. A single planning application and cohesive masterplan for the site is preferable to a more piecemeal approach and will help to demonstrate that a clear vision is being put forward. This is subject to the comments later in this response about better joined up working with Southwark Council.
9. DHST is also of the view that there should be a strong presumption in favour of phasing any development in a way that does not include the need for the club to ground share while work is undertaken. The outcome of DHST's survey work supports this position, with over 60% for respondents saying that a requirement to ground share would have either a marginally or significantly negative impact on their attitude towards the development proposals. DHST will look for any commitments on this to be delivered through an appropriately S106 agreement/ planning conditions.
10. Ownership of the football club and ground will also be an important issue going forward. Security of tenure and ensuring that the ground and club remain in the hands of those who have the best interests of Dulwich Hamlet at heart is a critical part of providing a long and secure future for the club.
11. DHST is also committed to exploring sensible and sustainable options for supporter/ community ownership and would like to start early discussions with Hadley's and others in advance of submission of any planning application to discuss how this can best be secured.

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The ground

12. Overall DHST is of the view that any new stadium should deliver a ground that can be managed and financially sustained over the long term, while at the same time provides for the needs of the club and its supporters and has the flexibility to allow the club to grow in the future. DHST is pleased with early commitments from Hadley's that indicate that they are seeking to deliver a ground that could be made suitable for entry to the football league.
13. It is important that the club is fully able to capitalise on the growing interest in Dulwich Hamlet and the non-league game more broadly. For the Dulwich Hamlet first team alone the cumulative attendance for the 2013/14 league season saw over ten thousand spectator visits to Champion Hill. Put in context, the club has seen first team average home attendances rise by 300 per cent since the 2010/11 season, despite the challenging economic climate.
14. DHST recognises that the supporter experience that the club provides off the pitch is every bit as important as the football that is played on it. It is important that any new stadium provides our diverse range of supporters with a quality experience and that the unique and distinctive nature of Dulwich Hamlet that has attracted so many in recent years is preserved. This is not just about how a place looks, but how it functions and feels for the users.
15. The survey work undertaken by DHST asked trust members and other supporters to give us the top three things that any new stadium would need in order to deliver a thriving Dulwich Hamlet Football Club for the future. A word cloud is at **Annex A** that aims to summarise the views that were put forward and give a sense of the scale of different issues (bigger words denote greater frequency of being raised).
16. The word cloud shows that getting the bar and club house area right was the most frequently raised issue. This was followed by provision of an all weather pitch and having facilities available to hire – these two issues are clearly strongly linked with providing the club with additional income streams and ensuring that losses and cashflow issues due to postponed games are reduced. DHST recognises that there is an important balance to be struck between having additional facilities that can be an important source of income and ensuring that such facilities do not become underused and burdensome in maintenance and other terms.

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17. The survey work also asked respondents to rate specific issues linked to a new ground on a scale of importance from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). The issues can roughly be categorised under **access issues**, **detailed design**, and **facilities**. The weighted average scores for each of these issues is presented below:

	Average score (1-5)
Access Issues	
Easy pedestrian access to the ground	4.4
Easy access to the ground from public transport	3.7
Level access to the ground and facilities	3.4
Cycle friendly access and parking	3.1
Appropriate car parking	2.4
Detailed design	
A ground that looks good (quality materials, etc)	3.7
Energy efficiency	3.6
Cover at both ends of the pitch	3.5
Cover on both sides of the pitch	3.2
Protection of Greendale as open space	2.3
Facilities	
Toilet facilities	4.2
Quality bar area	4.1
Provision for children/families	3.8
Separate quality tea bar	3.6
Quality club shop	3.5

18. Respondents to the survey were also given the opportunity to offer other comments. A selection of these comments are presented in **Annex B**.

Process of engagement going forward

19. DHST appreciates the early efforts that Hadley and the development team have made to engage with supporters about the potential future of the club. However, these efforts have clearly been undermined somewhat by the actions of Southwark Council – launching their own consultation on the future of Greendale that makes no substantive reference to the club. The result of these two consultations has been to send mixed messages in a way that does not appear to be to anyone's benefit and seems to discredit this process.

20. As Hadley's do not have a freehold interest in a substantial part of the land that they see as the future home for Dulwich Hamlet FC it is clear that urgent further discussions between land owners will be required to advance these proposals in any meaningful and credible way.

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21. This is essentially a property negotiation between two land owners in the first instance, and an ongoing process of separate public consultations on different visions for the same site is an entirely unsatisfactory way to proceed and severely risks disengagement by the local community and other supporters.
22. DHST has already voiced its concerns to Southwark Council about the lack of joined up thinking on their approach to the future of Greendale. Clearly there could be benefits in Southwark and Hadley's exploring a joint masterplanning approach to both sites and working together to meet the aims of all parties. A key part of this must also be a willingness to be flexible in exploring different options before positions become too entrenched.
23. Prior to recommending that our members play a positive role in any further engagement, DHST will expect to see clearer and more consistent evidence that both land owners are pulling in the same direction.
24. In the meantime, we trust that these comments have been useful and look forward to discussing these matters again with you in greater detail when it is appropriate to do so.

Yours Sincerely

Eddie Muraszko

Chairman

Dulwich Hamlet Supporters Trust

cc.

- a. Hadley Property Group
- b. Dulwich Hamlet Football Club