

Dulwich Hamlet Supporters Trust

Working for a successful Dulwich Hamlet

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BY EMAIL

22 August 2014

Dear Pippa,

Submission of representation on Greendale Consultation

I am pleased to enclose the comments of the Dulwich Hamlet Supporters Trust (DHST) with regard to the public consultation for Greendale.

Summary

- Dulwich Hamlet has played their home fixtures close to the site of the existing stadium for over a century. The football stadium provides an important sporting and social function that is unique in both Dulwich and the wider Southwark area.
- Dulwich Hamlet Football Club has seen first team average home attendances rise by 160 per cent over the last three seasons, despite the challenging economic climate. This brings wider benefits for the local economy.
- DHST support the Council's desire to create a more meaningful and useable open space at Greendale.
- However, we are concerned that:
 - the lack of reference to the football club as being anything other than tenants with an expiring lease;
 - the Council's conclusion (page 32) does not give sufficient due consideration to its own open space objectives (e.g providing multifunctional open spaces with a range of recreation types and providing opportunities for young people).
- We ask that:
 - Southwark acknowledge formally that the future of the football club is as important as improving the quality of the surrounding open space.
 - Southwark acknowledge formally that locating the football club wholly or partially on the site of the current astroturf pitch could address several of the Council's own open space objectives.
 - as one of the largest community bodies in the local area, DHST be included as a stakeholder going forward.
 - the two landowners discuss and agree an approach that works for the football club, local residents and the wider community.

Background to Dulwich Hamlet Supporters' Trust

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, making it one of the largest community groups in the local area.

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Background to the Football Club

Dulwich Hamlet Football Club is located immediately to the east of the land which forms the subject of this consultation.

The club has played their home fixtures close to the site of the existing stadium for over a century and is one of the most respected and recognised non-league football clubs in the country. This is partly due to the club's illustrious history and distinctive pink and blue shirts. The club currently play in the Isthmian League Premier Division, which is three divisions below the Football League.

The reason for building Champion Hill stadium in this location in 1992 was to provide a suitable home for Dulwich Hamlet Football Club following the demolition of the previous stadium and development of a new supermarket (adjacent to the site of the current Champion Hill Stadium). This has allowed the club to remain within the local area with which it has connections going back to the 19th Century. The need to provide a new home for Dulwich Hamlet Football Club was an important consideration for Southwark Council in deciding whether this development was acceptable, and at the time presented a number of complex issues that the football club, its supporters, the local community, and Southwark Council and its elected members worked hard to resolve. This effort demonstrates the strength of community feeling towards maintaining the presence of Dulwich Hamlet Football Club within the local area and the importance of the football stadium as a community asset that facilitates this.

The football stadium provides an important sporting and social function that is unique in both Dulwich and the wider Southwark area. The level of football that a stadium is suitable for is generally dictated by the range of facilities it offers (this can include things like number of seats, turnstiles, and refreshment facilities). Champion Hill stadium provides a standard of facilities that may accommodate a team close to the top of the non-professional game – there is currently no other comparable facility in Southwark. Specific team activities that are undertaken at the ground include:

- Dulwich Hamlet Football Club first team home league and cup fixtures
- Dulwich Hamlet Football Club reserve team home league and cup fixtures
- Fisher Football Club first team home league and cup fixtures
- Representative fixtures involving other leagues

Champion Hill stadium provides a vital platform within the community for those who play for these teams to participate in sport at a level above grassroots but below the fully professional game. Many of the players come from the local area and a variety of different socio economic backgrounds. There is much evidence to demonstrate that taking part in sport contributes to physical and mental wellbeing and can improve outcomes in other areas of life – including family and professional.

This provides benefits not only for the players themselves, but also others who strive to achieve similar. The positive media attention that comes from these achievements, and those of the clubs more generally, serves as an important source of community pride and presents a positive image for the local area.

In addition to the playing opportunities that it provides for in the local area, Champion Hill stadium also allows the community to get involved in other aspects of the game. This includes football management, coaching, scouting and other important roles that are vital to the operation of the club – e.g. running turnstiles, stewarding games, being on the club's committee or supporters trust. Most of the roles are filled on a voluntary basis and offer a real opportunity for members of the community develop new skills and build friendships.

The stadium provides a safe environment where families can spend time together and socialise with others while enjoying a game. Families and young people are encouraged to visit using concessions – for Dulwich Hamlet Football Club match day tickets are free for

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under 12s accompanied by an adult. There are also a range of other concessions offered, for example to pensioners, students, “blue light” workers and those on benefits. Dulwich Hamlet has given free tickets to the children and parents of local primary schools in the past and will be offering free ticket offers throughout this season, e.g. to students in full-time education.

The continuing and increasing value of the land as a community facility for spectators is evident from the increasing attendances. 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. The average supporter attendance at the league games was nearly seven hundred and almost one thousand four hundred people attended the last game of the season.

Put in context, Dulwich Hamlet Football Club has seen first team average home attendances rise by 160 per cent over the last three seasons, despite the challenging economic climate. The rising attendances are linked not only to the successes on the pitch, but also a rise in general interest in the non-league game locally.

The retention of Champion Hill stadium in its present or adjacent primary use is crucial for enabling Dulwich Hamlet Football Club and the other teams mentioned to deliver the important social and community benefit discussed.

Greendale

DHST support the Council’s desire to create a more meaningful and useable open space at Greendale.

However, we are concerned by the lack of reference to the football club as being anything other than tenants with an expiring lease. As referenced above, the club plays a valuable role within the local community and is a key contributor to social cohesion in this part of East Dulwich. By simply ignoring the existence of the club, the Council could ultimately jeopardise the long term stability of the club.

It is of particular concern that the football club is implicitly seen as a weakness with both the clash of users/uses and the floodlights being seen as negative aspects within LUC’s report.

We are concerned that the Council’s report concludes (page 32) that “the biggest risk to wildlife is insensitive development”. While, we agree with this point in part, it underlines the report’s slant towards biodiversity objectives to the exclusion of other objectives for open space. The Council must give due consideration to its own open space objectives, such as providing multifunctional open spaces with a range of recreation types; and providing opportunities for young people.

We are concerned that the failure to acknowledge options pertaining to the partial or whole relocation of the stadium (as being considered by the owners of the ground, Hadley Property Group) is a significant weakness of the consultation as many do not know of the club or understand the current position regarding the current ground.

Consequently, the fait accompli presented does not allow members of the local community who use the football club and its resources to adequately articulate their view point. Namely, that finding a long-term home for Dulwich Hamlet is of paramount importance to the development of the area and that this could and should come forward alongside an open space strategy for Greendale.

In his role as both Leader and ward councillor, Peter John has said that the future of the football club is as important as maintaining open space at Greendale. However, in order to achieve this, Southwark need to accept that the two projects should come forward as part of a cohesive phased development.

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We are disappointed that a joint proposal between the football club's owners, Hadley Property Group and Southwark Council has not at this stage, been discussed as there are some clear benefits of a joint masterplan for the two sites, which seem to be following a very similar timeline.

Irrespective of whether the future of Dulwich Hamlet lies on the existing site or wholly/partially on Greendale, we would urge that there is a closer connection between the two landowners to seek a long term resolution that satisfies all parties as the ongoing duplicate consultations is not a satisfactory way for either organisation to reach a view as to how best to optimise their respective sites.

It is clear that the Council have some bold aspirations for Greendale and if this could be part funded by the adjoining development, then Southwark should consider this as a viable solution to save taxpayers further expense.

As Hadley's proposals are at an equally embryonic stage, there is potential for the two bodies to draw up a wider plan for the area that considers the interests not just of local amenity groups, but also key users of the spaces.

We ask that Southwark acknowledge formally that the future of the football club is as important as improving the quality of the surrounding open space in the next round of consultation. In addition, any future consultation should consider the potential benefits of the relocation of the football club on the existing location of the astroturf pitches.

We also ask that as one of the largest community bodies in the local area, DHST be included as a stakeholder going forward.

We look forward to discussing this matter in greater detail with you and the ward councillors in the coming months.

Yours Sincerely

Eddie Muraszko

Chairman

Dulwich Hamlet Supporters Trust