

Old Kent Road Community Review Panel

Report of review meeting: Parks and Recreation Strategy

Monday 24 August 2020
Video conference via Zoom

Attendees

Gurmeet Sian (chair)
Tyreece Asamoah
Lucy Atkinson
Hugh Balfour
Shelene Byer
Hazel Flynn
James Glancy
Muyi Kazim
Aaron Mo
Saidat Oketunde
Victoria Oluwabless
Peter Warren
Madison Westwood

Colin Wilson	Head of Regeneration, Old Kent Road, LB Southwark
Tim Cutts	Senior Regeneration Manager, Old Kent Road, LB Southwark
Alicia Chaumard	Planning Officer, Old Kent Road, LB Southwark
Tom Bolton	Panel Manager, Frame Projects
Sarah Thwaites	Panel Coordinator, Frame Projects
Penny Nakan	Panel Coordinator, Frame Projects

Confidentiality

As a public organisation the OPDC is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), and in the case of an FOI request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

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1. Project name

Old Kent Road Parks and Recreation Strategy – Linear Park Guidelines

2. Presenting team

Colin Wilson	London Borough of Southwark
Tim Cutts	London Borough of Southwark
Alicia Chaumard	London Borough of Southwark
Liz Awoyemi	London Borough of Southwark

3. Planning authority's views

The Old Kent Road Parks and Recreation Strategy sets out guidelines for the provision of a linear park connecting Burgess Park across the Old Kent Road, as part of a band of green space stretching from Nine Elms to Canada Water, as part of the Old Kent Road regeneration project. The council has worked with developers to produce a draft plan for the linear park, and it is reserved by conditions included in the planning consents granted along its length. The intention of the Parks and Recreation Strategy is to provide detailed design guidance to developers for the linear park, so that planning conditions can be discharged. The guidance will ensure the linear park has an overall coherence, rather than appearing as a set of separate spaces. Part of the purpose of producing the guidance is to ensure that local communities have input into detailed design, and that they feel ownership of the space. The strategy will set out how the space will be managed and maintained in the future, who pays for its maintenance and how access to the park is secured for all.

A set of headline principles underpin the linear park guidelines. It should:

- be open 24 hours per day.
- provide a continuous link accessible by foot and on bicycle.
- have a coherent approach to landscaping, planting, wayfinding etc.
- promote sustainability, biodiversity, healthy living and active lifestyles.
- consider crime prevention, safety and security.
- promote inclusion and social cohesion through design and management.
- facilitate understanding of heritage.
- accommodate a diverse range of uses including children's play, community.
- include gardening, a café and public toilets.
- integrate arts and culture.
- consider infrastructure beneath the park.

The plan requires the retention and integration of buildings of townscape merit that form an essential part of the area's industrial character. Co-design forms the foundation to the delivery of the park. Southwark will include local communities in creating a vision for the park. The plan is underpinned by effective working partnerships between the public, communities, stakeholders and the private sector. Southwark has encouraged the early sharing of ideas and aspirations to build trust, understanding and confidence alongside our community forum, business network and landowner workshops, which have directly influenced proposed designs for the park.



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4. Community Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel welcomes the plans to create a linear park for the Old Kent Road, and makes a number of comments intended to ensure that the new open spaces provide the widest possible benefit to the entire community. The linear park should provide continuity beyond the new green spaces, through use of materials, by creating a high standard of environment along its route, and by connecting different areas, avoiding places designed only for one type of use. There should be an emphasis on the heritage and identity of the area, which can be interpreted and reflected through the park's design. It is important that the park feels both secure, with effective but unobtrusive lighting. It should be welcoming to all the groups that will make use of it and accessible, considering the needs of older residents and including landscapes that will appeal to a range of ethnic groups. Cafés should be affordable for local people. Spaces for outdoor gathering and eating should be provided, with sufficient rubbish and recycling facilities. Landscape design should protect people from noise, and create quiet spaces. The panel asks that post-COVID requirements are considered, including areas for socially distanced gathering and hand sanitisation stations. Pedestrian safety should be ensured by managing potential clashes with cyclists and reducing cycling speeds. The park should include a safe crossing point at the Old Kent Road, considering ideas including a green bridge or an underpass. Long term management should include local involvement, maintaining local distinctiveness and avoid spaces that seem uniform. There is potential for the amphitheatre space to showcase local performers and poets, and for local artists to be involved, perhaps via a rotating 'linear plinth'. There are also opportunities to encourage local ownership of green spaces through community gardening. Recycling could be encouraged in partnership with local cafés or shops. These comments are expanded below.

Connections and legibility

- The panel supports the concept of a linear park stretching across South London. The legibility of the linear park will be important to its success, and materials can be used to create a sense of continuity. The kerbs and surfacing used in the Frensham Street Park could be continued into Burgess Park, and onto surrounding roads to provide a connection.
- The linear park could become a very popular route, but if people are to be encouraged to use it, security measures and lighting should extend beyond the new park elements to Burgess Park and beyond, where green spaces are often unlit and do not feel very safe. The design team should look at the linear park spaces can be connected, and a consistent quality of environment provided.
- A key point in the linear park will be the point where it crosses the Old Kent Road. At the moment, this is a busy and dangerous crossing for pedestrians, where accidents occur, so a safe crossing point is essential if people are to use the park on both sides of the road. The panel asks Southwark to consider



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a full range of options, including a green bridge across the street. It also suggests that the former Surrey Canal connection under Old Kent Road could provide a route for pedestrians to pass under the street.

- The panel also suggests that Leyton Square would benefit from being formally linked to the new Frensham Street Park. Leyton Square would benefit from maintenance and improvement, and the gate that would connect the areas at the moment is locked so it is not possible to pass between.

Local history and identity

- The panel encourages the design team to consider how the park can reflect the history and heritage of the area. This could include historical interpretation, as is the case in Burgess Park, and the use of naming to reflect local distinctiveness.
- Southwark Stands Together should also play a part in shaping the way the park responds to local history and identity.
- Local artists and poets, of whom there are many, should take a role in creating an identity for the park. The proposed amphitheatre could provide a performance space to showcase local talent and provide education benefit, and could also meet increased potential for outdoor theatre spaces.
- A changing 'Fourth Plinth'-style space could also be used for a rolling programme of visual art made by local artists – a 'Linear Plinth'.

Management and maintenance

- The panel is pleased to see that the long-term management of the park is being considered in advance. The way in which the green spaces are managed will prove very important not just to maintaining their condition, but also their character, preventing them from becoming uniform or sterile spaces. The management company should be empowered to involve local people in the process as well as professionals. The involvement of local groups should form a key component of future management plans.

User groups

- The panel supports the inclusion of play space for children in Frensham Street Park, alongside 'work' and 'rest' areas, but cautions against separating the park into disconnected zones. Separate environments could undermine the continuity of the linear park, and discourage people from moving through the space. An area designed only for children could also be empty and unused at particular times of day. Care should be taken to ensure the park can be used as a single, connected space by different user groups.



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- The panel also emphasises the need to consider the needs of older people, and encourages further thinking on the facilities that will be needed to ensure they can enjoy the park.

Landscape design

- The panel suggests that, while wild planting is popular with particular demographics, thought should be given to the way preferences for landscape types differ across ethnic groups. Research shows that non-white ethnic groups can prefer more formal park designs, so the design team should ensure the landscapes provided suit the requirements of all those who live on the Old Kent Road, with a good balance between types of space.
- The panel notes that the popularity of the raised mounds in Burgess Park, and encourages thinking about how the park could provide higher points, possibly with views, for adults as well as for children.

Community benefit

- The park offers opportunities for community gardening, which would help local people take ownership of new spaces, and provide wider educational benefit. The panel suggests that community gardens could be included in new park spaces, and local gardening groups and schools involved.
- The panel also encourages Southwark Council to take any opportunities offered by the linear park to create employment for young, local young residents.

Security

- While it is important that the park is safe and secure, with spaces used and overlooked, the panel asks the design team to consider how a secure park can also make people feel welcome. Some groups, for instance young, black boys, can feel uncomfortable gathering outdoors in groups because they may be perceived as security threat. It is important that security works for all park users, and that everyone can be confident they are welcome.

Noise management

- The panel suggests that the park should be designed to manage high levels of noise. For example, large sound systems are used in Burgess Park, and the Linear Park concept is likely to attract more people to the area and create similar issues. If design can be used to contain noise and provide sound insulation, it will help to ensure quiet places can be provided.



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Park facilities

- The panel feels it is important that new cafés in the park make local people, especially those living nearby, feel welcomed rather than excluded. It is therefore important that they are affordable to those on lower incomes. As landlord, Southwark could negotiate conditions such as the provision of discounts for local residents, or measures to encourage affordable pricing.
- The park should support activities that are already popular in the area's green spaces. For example, large outdoor picnics are particularly popular with the Latin community in the area, and the outdoor barbeque area in Burgess Park is well-used. The panel suggests the design team should consider how they can provide space for activities such as these in new park areas.
- Outdoor exercise spaces should also be considered, providing for people who practice training or activities such as yoga.
- The park could incorporate water fountains, which would help park users but also contribute to reducing the environmental impact of plastic waste.

Post-COVID 19 provision

- The design team should consider how the park can respond to the changed requirements of public spaces following the COVID pandemic. Thought should be given to how the park can allow people to gather while respecting social distancing rules, as well as to the provision of facilities such as hand sanitisers that will encourage people to use the park safely.
- COVID has led to more people using parks, and more rubbish being created. It will be important to consider how sufficient waste and recycling facilities can be provided to avoid litter, particularly if people eat outside in groups, which is often the case in Old Kent Road parks.
- Recycling facilities could be considered, such as in Granary Square at King's Cross, where recycling provides a discount on local cafés.

Lighting

- The panel encourages the use of low level lighting where possible, to provide security while avoiding standard, more intrusive, lighting systems.
- The panel suggests solar and other forms of renewable energy should be used, as far as possible, to power lighting in the park and provide any other energy needs.



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Pedestrian safety

- The panel raises the issue of pedestrian safety in the park. Burgess Park has places with the potential for dangerous conflict between cyclists and pedestrians, where cycle paths always overlap with busy pedestrian routes. It will be important to slow down bicycles and, whether separating them from pedestrians or using shared surfaces, take measures to prevent accidents and make routes safe for all users. The growing popularity of electric scooters should also be taken into account.

Next steps

The Community Review Panel is available to review the Parks and Recreation Strategy again if required, once proposals have developed further.

