

## Mansfield Open Space: Response from Neighbours Group : 19 February 2014

What happens to the Mansfield Space is the topmost environmental decision locally. (In "Mansfield Space" we include both the designated private Open Space and the former clubhouse and indoor bowls arena.) It is essential to get this decision right, even if this takes time.

We had begun to hope that some kind of dialogue with the MBC/Generator/Iceni development group was emerging. But, regrettably, the developers seem to be moving back towards the confrontational style which marred their earlier scheme for a luxury housing estate on the Open Space, destroying the Open Space and the tennis club in the process.

The developers are ignoring the Camden planners' own insistence on full, open and continuous engagement with the community.

Last week the developers put together a supposed local "workshop" to discuss options (12 February). But (a) they arranged a pre-application discussion with Camden planners for the very next day, before the full range of public response could be absorbed; (b) they lodged formal confirmation of appeal against last year's refusal. This is our considered response.

MBC/Generator/Iceni are attacking on three fronts : (1) trying to revive last year's failed project, despite talk, earlier, of a "new broom" and "starting from scratch"; (2) creating a limited range of new "options," which seem more and more like an empty exercise (last week's "workshop" was an entirely PR-managed event); (3) closing all options on anyone else buying any of the land unless or until all planning permission is finally refused.

No genuine dialogue is emerging. This is NOT how to win friends with the neighbourhood.

The developers appear to be trying to drive the community into a corner. They will not succeed.

.....

For clarity, we give our considered response to the two development options put forward at the "workshop," We, at least, can try to play a straight game

There are various levels of response :

A : Should there be any major rebuild at all in the Mansfield Space component of the Dartmouth Park conservation area? As the planners have advised, the focus should be on leisure and educational uses. The owners have a "stewardship" for the community, to which they have so far paid little heed : closing down the bowling green and de facto the indoor bowls, and attempting to shut down the tennis club.

B : Which of the developer's latest alternatives offers most scope (if any) to add to - not detract from - the Mansfield Space.

A. No major rebuild. By the time of the original development case – rejected last summer – MBC Ltd had already closed the outdoors bowling green. Now the indoors arena has also been closed. We thus have an unadorned commercial redevelopment scheme, surrounded on three sides by the Open Space. For the community, it would be better to devote this entire area to leisure activities, with any minimal rebuilding as an “enabling development.”

The devious moves by the developers make the case stronger. This outcome depends on a change of ownership or attitudes. So far, the current owners or option-holders (MBC Ltd and Generator) have closed their eyes to a change of course.

But a refusal of the appeal on the previous scheme, and a refusal of planning permission for the latest scheme, would radically change the value of the land. It would open the way for more community-based bidders and uses. This should be kept firmly in mind. We do not accept any development scheme as so far presented.

B : The developer’s schemes. At the “workshop,” the developers artificially narrowed these down to two possible options.

Option 1 was mostly based on the footprint of the existing building. Option 2 extended deep into the existing Open Space. Both options raised problems.

The Mansfield Neighbours Group has always argued that any new-build should be limited to the existing footprint of the clubhouse/indoor bowls arena. Thus, we completely oppose Option 2, much of which amounts to relocating the rejected scheme of three-storey houses (plus basements), and increasing their number from 8 to 14. This scheme is altogether too intrusive. It will add nothing to the amenity of the neighbourhood.

Option 1 did attempt to keep inside the existing footprint. With 8 houses for sale, plus a block of affordable flats, it might lessen the impact of extra traffic and parking demands, compared with Option 2 and retain much more of the green quality of the space. But even Option 1 was a form of over-development, with too many housing units. A design rethink is called for.

In particular, an Option 3 is required - perhaps even more options - accepting that this is not primarily a housing site, though a very small number of enabling mews-type houses might be acceptable.

On any option, present or future, the developers have – as one commentator has said – “a bijou site.” The present design sketches for the two options - very much standard commercial architecture - showed no sign of responding to this challenge. More delicacy, more imagination, is required.

No aspect of any development should be higher than two storeys. There should be no basements. The focus should be on creating and enhancing a beautiful space and associated activities, not on cramming in a housing estate.

All the Open Space and any adjacent building must be carefully designed. The planners’ recent advice is : “We will only allow development on sites adjacent to an open space that respects the size,

