

BRAMLEY ROAD OPEN SPACE LANDSCAPING CONSULTATION
DETAILED RESPONSE BY EALING FIELDS RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION (EFRA)
MARCH 2011

This document sets out EFRA's detailed concerns with certain of the proposals contained in the consultation document. It identifies the background to our concerns and includes a number of suggestions for modifications to the consultation proposals.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage with Councillors and Council Officers in developing a revised set of proposals for Bramley Road Open Space.

1 Objectives

We suggest that three underlying objectives need to be addressed in the proposals for the open space. These are:

- Increasing its attractiveness and usage
- Integrating the open space with the Library and the community activities that will take place in the rebuilt Log Cabin complex
- Designs that will minimise anti-social behaviour

2 Tree Canopy

A precondition for achieving the above objectives will be the extensive pruning of the trees in the open space. They have been allowed to grow in an unrestricted way for many decades and now overshadow the grassed and seating areas. Grass cannot grow in some places and planting fails.

The extensive tree canopy means that much of the open space is in the shade and unattractive to users who wish to meet and sit in the sunshine. The darkness is perceived to attract anti-social elements, which is a further disincentive to the open space's use by the wider community.

We therefore believe that there must be a commitment to a rigorous programme of pruning before the landscaping proposals are finalised.

3 Orientation of Site

It is important that the proposals maximise the potential benefits that result from the site's orientation. The open aspect along the southern and western boundaries means that it is exposed to sunlight for much of the day.

Increasing the amount of sunlight penetrating the central area, through a reduction of the tree canopy, will encourage the growth of grass and planting. It will also increase the open space's attractiveness to users.

4 Integration of Open Space with the Log Cabin Complex

Making the open space more accessible from the new Log Cabin facility and the Library is one of the stated objectives of the proposals, as is the provision of outdoor facilities that can be shared with users of the Log Cabin.

We appreciate that the Log Cabin will need greater access to this shared space at some times of the day more than at others, while in the evenings community groups using the complex will appreciate greater access to the open space.

As the nature of this shared use will vary across the day and the days of the week, we suggest that there should be clearer identification of these differing uses before the landscaping immediately in front of the Log Cabin is finalised.

A solution could be the introduction of a series of permeable zones that can be secured in different permutations according to the time of day and use.

5 Potential Users

We suggest that further consideration should be given to the different categories of users that it is hoped to attract to the redesigned open space, as the proposed design will have a major bearing on the attractiveness of the open space to different groups.

For example, key Library users include parents/carers with young children who, for safety reasons, are unlikely to frequent an unfenced open space. In addition, boisterous behaviour in the open space by teenagers could act as a disincentive to the older Library user.

6 Perimeter Boundary

We consider it essential that the wrought railings along the Northfield Avenue should be retained. In addition to their historic value, they serve two essential purposes.

Firstly, they stop young children rushing out into a busy road, and

Secondly, they act as a physical and psychological barrier to the open space to groups of young adults waiting at the southbound bus stop.

We also suggest that much of the chain link fence facing Bramley Road could be replaced by relocating the wrought iron railings from the front of the former Scout Hut to the north of the Library. In their current location these railings failed to meet the child protection expectations of the operators of the Pre-School and had to be supplemented by ad-hoc screening. This masks their historic features, which would be clearly visible if these railings were to be relocated to Bramley Road.

We also ask that the existing perimeter railings and fencing around the open space are retained and upgraded where possible.

As the open space lies within the Heritage Quarter, we suggest that consideration is given to repainting the Edwardian wrought iron railings in the heritage green colour and that any replacement railings are finished in an appropriate shade of green.

7 Vehicle Access and Safety Issues

We are unclear as to how vehicle access to the site will be regulated and how far into the site private vehicles will be able to proceed.

Clearly the separation of vehicles from pedestrians is desirable on safety grounds and a necessity where young children are involved. It is also important that on safe

guarding grounds there is a physical barrier between the Log Cabin and users of the wider site.

We understand that the existing chain link fence along the northern side of the open space is to be removed. This would give unrestricted access from the open space to the roadway alongside the Library. The plans also suggest that there will not be any child proof barrier across the roadway to prevent young children from running out into Northfield Avenue.

We suggest that this matter is revisited, a risk analysis prepared and revised proposals are circulated to those respondents who have raised concerns about this matter.

8 Pavement alongside Library

During the planning consultation it became apparent that daytime pedestrian access to the Log Cabin would need to be from the open space, as the other pedestrian entrance to the north of the Library would need to be closed off due to child protection issues when the Pre-School or Scouts are operating.

We therefore suggest that the existing pavement alongside the fence on the northern side of Bramley Road Open Space is relocated so that it runs alongside the southern wall of the Library, and would then lead directly to the southern entrance to the Log Cabin complex.

The deletion of the car park which was located behind the library will mean that most users of the Log Cabin complex will need to access the site on foot from Northfield Avenue. The proposed pavement is likely to be their main access route. It would therefore be helpful if the pavement could be covered by an awning projecting from the Library wall, as this would shelter users in inclement weather.

9 Children's Play Area

A number of residents have observed that the open space was intensively used when it housed the temporary Library. Parent/carers with young children would remain on fine days after their Library visit, with the children playing while the adults socialised.

We suggest that this behaviour could be replicated if the proposals incorporated an 'inner zone' children's play area that was protected by a waist high fence. Such a lower height inner fence would provide the protection sought by the parents/carers of young children, while not excessively visually intruding on the open nature of the space.

It has also been pointed out that a low fence should also keep dogs away from the inner area, and thereby increase its attractiveness to parents and carers.

10 Natural Play Area

We are not convinced by the proposal for a 'natural play' area on this site. This is a feature that is likely to appeal to older children and would be more appropriate if it was installed in the open space of Blondin Park alongside the existing children's play area.

In the event of funds becoming available, we suggest that a comprehensive adventure play facility, along the lines of that installed in Boston Manor Park, should be installed in Blondin Park.

11 Bramley Road Entrance

We are not convinced by the proposal to construct a pedestrian entrance to Bramley Road. There appear to be substantial disadvantages, which include:

- Minimal pedestrian movements that would benefit from this feature,
- The stepped nature of the proposal would make it inaccessible to parents/carers with push chairs/buggies. It would also be inaccessible to disabled users,
- Probable reluctance of users entering from Bramley Road to ascend the steep steps,
- Slippery nature of proposed timber steps which will be subject to leaf fall from the overhanging trees,
- Pedestrian safety issues in Bramley Road at the bottom of the flight of steps resulting from users descending the steps at too greater speed,
- Attractiveness of the flight of steps to teenage and young adult skateboarders and BMX cyclists,
- Loss of central grassed area to provide the diagonal access path,
- Cost of constructing the proposed feature.

We therefore ask that this feature is deleted.

We also note that a number of the Bramley Road members of our EFRA have submitted responses that object to the proposed entrance.

12 Central Path

We question the construction of a wide path across the central grassed area. This location attracts the greatest sunlight and should be reserved for the lawn and floral planting. The paths should be located near the perimeter, as at present, and under the reduced tree canopy in order to minimise the loss of productive green space.

13 Hard Surfacing

We are concerned that much of the hard surfacing is concentrated in those areas of the site, e.g. location 8, which are least overshadowed by the tree canopy and where grass stands the greatest chance of growing. The hard surfacing referred to in the planning application includes: concrete block pavers, bound gravel and stepping stones.

There is also a proposal to plant trees amidst the hard surfacing in location 8.

We suggest that hard surfacing should be restricted to the shaded areas where grass and plant growth is not possible and that location 8 should be grassed and the proposed trees should not be planted.

In the case of the areas reserved for vehicle access and standing we suggest that consideration should be given to using permeable cellular pavers such as

'grasscrete' that allow grass to grow through them. This would be both more environmentally friendly and would retain the green aspect of those parts of the open space that will be lost to vehicles.

It has been pointed out to us that a significant portion of open lawn will be lost to parking bays. It has also been suggested that it might be possible to negotiate weekday disabled parking bays at the Ealing Christian Centre on the opposite side of Northfield Avenue.

14 Bicycle Racks

The installation of these in location 5 would represent the visual intrusion of hard landscaping in what should be part of the grassed area.

We suggest that the bicycle racks are located between the disabled parking and Northfield Avenue, immediately behind the timber enclosure for the refuse bins and the meter box.

15 Seating

We suggest that a more informal approach to seating should be adopted, with some of the seats arranged in clusters that will facilitate social interaction. It would be beneficial if some, or all, of the benches were partitioned by dividing arms in order to discourage street drinkers and rough sleepers.

The majority of seating should be positioned so that it faces sunlight for all or part of the day and is located so that parents/carers can observe their children.

We are opposed to the 'long feature bench' for the following reasons:

- It faces away from the sun, which shines from the south (Bramley Road) and west (Northfield Avenue) – people want to sit facing the sun,
- It partitions the site and curtails the usage options behind it,
- Its extended length will encourage children to use it as a play feature, which could discourage other users from sitting on it.

We are unclear as to the colour of the proposed 'long feature bench'. It is illustrated in scarlet in the consultation document. We suggest that where the benches are to be painted this should be in the Parks / Heritage Quarter green livery.

As stated above, we believe that location 8 should be reintegrated with the central grassed area, with its seating redistributed across the site.

The location of a cluster of seating just within the Northfield Avenue pedestrian entrance is likely to result in its adoption as:

- an outdoor eating area for the clients of the nearby fast food take-aways.
- a seated passenger waiting area for the bus stop located just outside the entrance to the open space.

Both uses are likely to generate a substantial amount of litter, which would be mitigated if the seating was distributed across the open space and located further away from the entrance.

16 Litter Bins

The number and location of litter bins needs to be clarified so that their provision reflects the final design for the open space and the areas most likely to generate litter.

17 Planting and Ground Cover

We are concerned by the high proportion of the site that will be occupied by planting and ground cover, in particular the area nearest Northfield Avenue and the circular arc behind, and to the south of, the proposed linear bench.

We suggest that this will materially reduce the space available for recreational use and children's play.

Considerable care needs to be given to the type of planting as the proximity of fast food takeaways and the bus stop means that the planting will quickly become a magnet for discarded food wrappers and drinks containers.

At present anti-social behaviour on the site is constrained by its open aspect and the ease with which it can be observed from the surrounding pavements. Tall planting is likely to reduce sight lines and contribute to an increase in anti-social behaviour.

We also suggest that excessive planting of rapid growth shrubs etc should be avoided in view of the impending cuts in grounds maintenance budgets.

18 Boundary Fence between the Open Space and the Log Cabin Play Area

We question the desirability and cost of moving this boundary fence a few meters to the east. The area released will be under the tree canopy and will therefore be in shade and will make a minimal contribution to the open space.

19 Sensory Garden

We question the sustainability of the sensory garden proposed for location 4, and suggest that the aspiration for sensory planting would be better met by the planting of scented trees. The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea has planted a mimosa tree in a similar open space.

Subject to the views of the Log Cabin Trustees it might also be possible to plant scented honeysuckle or other climbers on the boundary fence between the open space and the Log Cabin play area.

20 Power for Community Events in Open Space

We suggest that some electricity power pillars are 'plumbed' into the open space to facilitate community events, festivities and activities.

Roger Jarman
Vice Chair
Ealing Fields Residents Association
March 2011