

Comments on Wimbledon Park and Lake Masterplan

Dave Dawson, December 2019



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Summary

Merton's Masterplan is helpful in providing ideas on the future of the public park, and parts of it faithfully reflect the results of public consultation. Unfortunately, however, it's has such flaws as to throw into question some major proposals.

The plan risks harm to the Capability Brown heritage landscape by focussing on the public park and not co-ordinating well with the other half of the landscape.

The public consultation on the proposals was biased because the options offered were restricted. Despite this, it's most welcome that some clear-cut responses were heeded in the proposals. These include retaining angling, woodlands, both children's play areas, bowls, the tennis courts and café, and upgrading the crazy golf. The proposal to re-open the walkway through the athletics area is welcome.

However, there was no effective consultation on some major proposals and others run counter to the public responses. The intention to devote much of the great field to athletics throwing sports would lock away a large area that is presently free to use. This is contrary to the vast majority of public responses.

The proposal to spend £5,000,000 (almost half the total budget) to dredge the middle of the lake and use the excavated sediments to fill in the edges would lose a third of the open water, replacing it with a raw expanse of toxic soil. Misleadingly, the final Masterplan reproduced a fictional version of option 1 of the consultation showing much infilling. The actual consultation option 1 showed very little. Throughout the Masterplan, removal of sediment was grouped together with an essential requirement to make the dam safe, despite there being no effect of sediment on flood safety. This grouping also obscured the cost of moving the silt, which is hidden away in the small print of Appendix 1. Silt removal would not only be very expensive, but the infill would ruin Capability Brown's eighteenth-century design and destroy nationally important wet woodland and water's edge wildlife habitats. It is not needed to assist water quality. The extra depth would be of little or no benefit for watersports because the lake has always been shallow and the great reduction in the area of the lake would restrict room for watersports.

The Masterplan makes no reference to the obligation on the All England Lawn Tennis Club to establish a lakeside walk on their land once golf ceases. This makes redundant the proposed walk on the parts of the lake to be filled with toxic sediment.

The Masterplan has no proposals to lower the lake to its historic level, even though this would greatly reduce the risk of floods. Floods threaten park users, park facilities, the Tube line embankment and people living and working in places between the park and Earlsfield, but no detail is given of plans to avoid flooding from the lake. The proposal to reduce the area of the lake by a third would exacerbate flood risk by reducing the ability of the lake to store flood water.

The proposal to demolish the watersports building and open up views across the lake reflects consultation responses but, unfortunately, the intended replacement would also obstruct views. Possible flood control works, including a proposed Brownian cascade and the reconfiguring of the brook threaten trees or woodland. Except after heavy rain, there would be insufficient flow from the lake for the proposed cascade to be an effective landscape feature.

Watersports and athletics would operate at a significant financial loss.

Introduction

In 2015, LB Merton retained consultants to prepare a Masterplan for Wimbledon Park and Lake, to “*create a long-term vision for the next 25 years and provide focus for decision making and future investment.*”² Consultation on options took place in summer 2016 and the final Masterplan was published in December 2018. The Masterplan itself was accompanied by a description of the masterplan brief, site appraisal, concept development and consultation on options. The following comments review the Masterplan in this context. I begin with a summary of the main points and this is followed by a more detailed commentary on the document. To follow the detail, it would be necessary to refer to the published Masterplan document, available online³.

Main points

The heritage landscape that survives from the 18th century Wimbledon Park is over twice the size of the public park. Restricting this Masterplan to the public park compounds one of the factors that led to the heritage being considered at risk: divided ownership. We need a Masterplan for the whole heritage landscape.

The Masterplan development was constrained in such a way as to bias the results towards proposals that would seriously compromise heritage and biodiversity value.

The Masterplan is misleading in that it reproduces a diagram claimed to be Option 1 of the consultation, but which has been changed from that on which the public were consulted. The substituted diagram shows extensive infilling of Wimbledon Park Lake, changing its shape and reducing its area by a third. Option 1 of the consultation had very much less infilling. The Masterplan errs in its implication that the overwhelming preference in consultation responses for Option 1 applies equally to this fictional option, that would destroy the heritage design and seriously harm the biodiversity of the lake. In fact, all three consultation options on the lake were identical, so no choice was available. In effect, there was no consultation on this proposal.

There is no upfront cost-benefit analysis of the proposals, but section 6 shows that both the athletics and the watersports centre would operate at a considerable loss.

There is no documentation of any need to “de-silt” the lake. The amount of sediment is overestimated, and its very slow rate of accumulation is not given, yet this proposal was included identically in all three options in the public consultation and given no prominence, so that there was no consultation on it. The claim that the existing sediment has an adverse effect on flood storage is incorrect. Further, the

disposal of excavated sediment as a toxic, raw surface, infilling much of the lake does not provide for the establishment of a broad swathe of wetland vegetation around the reduced lake area; this claim is technically flawed and misleading. Rather, the waste material could support low grade dry land vegetation and even that only in the long run. It would bury existing wet woodland and water's edge vegetation, so destroying nationally important wildlife habitat. The reduction of the area of the lake would seriously compromise flood water storage and limit the room for watersports and angling.

Three main concepts for the future zoning of the park⁴ were developed, but the concept with the greatest benefit was compromised by a failure to consider moving the athletics provision to another LB Merton open space. Omission of this from the public consultation biased it to a choice between three more damaging options.

The background and appraisal missed the considerable existing biodiversity value of the lake and its margins. The presence of nationally important wetland habitats was missed as were important species, such as the European Eel and invertebrate species that make the lake important for specially protected bats and birds. These omissions allow the fiction that the proposals would improve wildlife habitat.

No background is given to the proposal for new woodland surrounding the Toddlers' play area but not elsewhere in the park, nor is it acknowledged that the proposed westward extension to the White Pavilion would sacrifice part of Ashen Grove Wood, an ancient woodland. No recognition is given to the great historic and wildlife habitat value of the older trees in the two woodlands and the veteran oak by the dog-free picnic area. Nor is the arboretum planting in the southern part of the park recognised as of value.

There is inadequate emphasis given to the main views designed into the landscape by Lancelot Brown and which survive today. The proposed demolition of the watersports building and removal of boat storage is a welcome response to the public consultation, as it opens up an important historical view from the great field across the lake to the landscape beyond. Unfortunately, however, the proposed design of the new watersports building imposes an unnecessarily great obstruction onto another such view.

The public consultation on options was biased away from free to use facilities, despite which 80% of respondents, adults and children, preferred these. Congruent with this was the great preference for the least change option and the opening up of views to the lake. The proposal to devote a large part of the great field to athletics throwing sports is contrary to this public preference. There was also emphatic resistance to moving the athletics provision (although no option was given to move the provision to another LB Merton park). No options were presented for fully 13 proposals, so few consultation responses picked up on those. These included proposals to desilt and reduce the size of the lake, moving the toilet block, and removing the café and toddlers' play area. Despite recent controversy over excessive car parking provision, it's proposed to upgrade both car parks. This bias in the public consultation makes several of its results unreliable. There are also many errors and distortions in the background material which could be misleading.

It's most welcome that some of the public consultation responses were heeded in the final masterplan. These include: retaining angling, keeping most of both woodlands, enhancing the Toddlers' play area, redesigning the café, and keeping all the tennis courts, bowls, crazy golf and beach volleyball.

Public consultation

A public consultation was undertaken in the summer of 2016 and the results summarised in Appendix C to the Masterplan. It's commendable that the consultation was aimed children as well as adults and at the whole catchment of the park, not just LB Merton. Unfortunately, however, the children's responses are not considered in the consultation report as reproduced in the Appendices to the Masterplan⁵.

The consultation was based around a comparison of three options⁶, each illustrated with a map and key to features and facilities. Superimposed on these options were a further three options for athletics provision⁷, so giving nine possible combinations. In the athletics option A, the centre of the track is used for hockey, so displacing throwing sports into the great field, and a new building provides more facilities. Option B retains the current provision refurbished and with throwing sports within the running track, and option C takes away the buildings and fencing and so does not provide for throwing sports.

Where changes are suggested, unbiased consultation must include closed questions which contrast alternatives. This was not so in this case, as all three main options were identical for fully 13 proposed changes. No consultation response was sought for these:

1. Repairs to the dam to make it safe whilst retaining public access.
2. De-silting the lake to "improve water-based recreation, water quality and biodiversity".
3. "Wetland areas introduced at edges" of the lake.
4. Removal of the Toilet block, Café and Watersports building.
5. Consolidation of children's play into the area by the White pavilion.
6. Using the White pavilion for public toilets, water play pump and kiosk.
7. Relocating parks staff to an area in the south of the park.
8. Replacement of the waterfall garden with a "Brownian cascade".
9. The brook and bridges improved for visual amenity, habitat and flood protection.
10. Drainage improvements for the great field.
11. Improvements to all three entrances.
12. Re-creation of the historic carriageway through Ashen Grove Wood.
13. Selective thinning of the golf course boundary hedge to provide views.

Whilst it's obvious that the dam must be made safe, several of the other 12 have proved to be controversial or to have technical faults, or both, so it would have been helpful to have had views sought on sensible options.

A further five features were indicated as remaining unchanged in all three options, so prejudicing the consultation away from any possible change:

14. Retaining crazy golf.
15. Retention of both car parks.
16. Retention and management of Horse Close and Ashen Grove Woods.
17. Managing the hedgerows on the tube line edge for nature.
18. Retaining angling.

Given a recent controversy over the environmental sustainability of car parking provision, it's unfortunate that the options of returning the Horse Close Wood car park back to woodland and the Revelstoke Road car park to grassland were not included in the consultation. The responses were also prejudiced by the failure to include the option of moving facilities to other LB Merton open spaces. This was especially the case for athletics, where relocation elsewhere would be comparable in cost to relocation within Wimbledon Park. Relocation to another park in Merton could be of great benefit to the surrounding area.

Some of the questions in the consultation are biased because they ask for a set of items to be ticked, so prejudicing choices to an item on this list. This is so even if off-list items could be indicated as "other". This bias applies for priority use and preference for facilities and to the "dream park" in the children's consultation, so that these results are unreliable.

The consultation responses showed that 80%⁸ of usage of the park was of places that are free to use. All the uses that were identified as desirable through the open question options ("other") were also free to use. So, despite the bias of the consultation away from free to use facilities, it's clear that by far the majority of those responding preferred these.

Congruent with this was the very great preference shown for Option 1, the least change option, with 500 approving least change, compared with only 25 considering Option 2 and 27 Option 3 to be the best. There was an emphatic thumbs down for movement of the athletics facilities (over 400 responses) and for ancillary problems of this, such as noise, light pollution and traffic. Most other differences between the options had few responses, but some disliked loss of open parkland in athletics proposals and bowls and volleyball in Option 3. A few welcomed the proposed conversion of half of the tennis courts to mini-soccer in Option 3.

Despite not being included in options, the responses to open questions identified a clear welcome for moving the Watersports Centre and opening up views to the lake, and opposition to moving the café and deletion of the toddlers' play space. Smaller numbers were concerned about excess provision for parking and loss of the toilet block. Doubtless, these preferences would have been much more obvious were they posed in closed questions.

Background and appraisal

Main points

1. The background material downplays the value of the lake and the existing lakeside promenade for informal use⁹, appreciation of biodiversity and views.
2. Paragraph 2.5.6 and Figure 2.6 purport to describe the vegetation of the lake and its margins but are badly misleading. They miss out two species of Water lily, several species of waterweed, the wet woodland (a national priority habitat), old oaks and the areas of Common reed, Greater pond-sedge, Yellow-flag iris, Sweet flag and Bullrush. These omissions are remarkable, given that the species list for the lake was available in one of the references cited¹⁰ and the edges are seen on the cover photograph and those on pages 9, 31, 35, 65 and 83. No attempt is made to describe the fauna of the lake, including the European Eel, wetland birds

and the invertebrate life that makes the place special for some bird and bat species. The suggested causes of a recent decline in some plant species are ecologically naïve and should be disregarded¹¹.

3. Section 2.8 and Figure 2.12 identify only the most important blockages to views, omitting others¹². They also fail to give adequate emphasis to the surviving historic view from the carriage drive (the top of the dam) across the lake and golf course to the well wooded hill slopes behind, with the spire of St Mary's Wimbledon. This view features on the cover photograph and on pages 9, 31, 35 and 65.
4. The silting up of the lake is said to be limiting access to it by watercraft¹³. In fact, the rate of sedimentation is so slow that any such problem has existed for the whole life of the watersports centre and so is not new. The amount of silt is overestimated in the study carried out for the masterplan¹⁴.
5. Little background is provided on the need for changes to reduce the risks from flood water escaping the dam and none on the supposed need to de-silt the lake. These two proposals are associated together even though there is no link between the two. The need for flood control works will impose great changes in the public park, but no consideration is given to this. This means that the no change option, which was greatly preferred in consultation responses, is impossible to achieve.
6. No reference is made to the requirement in the golf course lease for a lakeside walk to be created once golf use ceases¹⁵.

Minor points

1. The lake catchment is described as rising to a "ridge" of above 50 m OD¹⁶. The high points, however, are on the top of the Black Park Gravel, which is nearly level and better described as a "terrace".
2. The dam is described as 340 m long¹⁷, at odds with the 320 m cited in engineers' reports.
3. The waterfall is dated 1952¹⁸, which is incorrect, as it was shown on Ordnance Surveys from 1949.
4. The line of evergreen shrubs between the two blocks of tennis courts is described as "Yews"¹⁹; in fact, they are Lawson's cypress.
5. The description of the character of the Wimbledon Park Golf Course fails to account for the recent considerable losses of old trees and the incoherence of the planting of recent decades²⁰.
6. The description of "ornamental planting"²¹ omits the extensive arboretum planting in the southern part of the public park and the recent planting by the Friends of Wimbledon Park and Tree Warden Group Merton.
7. The brief description of the historic environment²² repeats a few errors from others' work that have been corrected²³. These corrected sources should be preferred. Figure 2.8 is inconsistent in showing the buildings of The Wimbledon Club as detracting from historical significance, but failing to indicate the golf course depot as such (nor the more distant buildings of the All England Lawn Tennis Club) and failing to indicate the parkland character of the golf course, including many veteran oaks, and the value of the part of Ashen Grove Wood on the golf course. Some of the omissions on the golf course are redressed in Figure 2.9. The failure to show the café as of medium significance is a further omission.

A serious omission is that the Horse Close Wood car park is not indicated as an element detracting from significance.

8. Figure 2.9 has benefitted from earlier criticism²⁴, but it continues to indicate a “main view from the house to Tibbett’s corner”, which was not a significant feature of Brown’s design²⁵. The key view from the dam towards St Mary’s Wimbledon is not empathised in the text or figures, even though it features in photographs on the cover and pages 9, 31 and 35. The carriage drive along the dam crest is indicated incorrectly²⁶. The veteran trees of the golf course are not indicated as “old trees of importance”, most notably the Tudor oak near the north-west corner of The Wimbledon Club. A superfluous line around the lake perimeter implies, wrongly, that its historic extent was less than that today in several places²⁷.
9. Figure 2.10, whilst broadly correct, unfortunately errs in the location and date of establishment of many elements of the public park, making it unreliable²⁸.
10. Access to the lake is said to be poor²⁹, which is contradicted by the large numbers of watersports users and families enjoying the birds of the lake from the lakeside path on a daily basis. Physical access to the lake water is appropriately limited, but the vistas across the lake provide visual access. Disabled access to the dam-top path is easy at both ends. The only lake features that have poor public access are the excellent water’s edge habitats of the golf course and Wimbledon Club.
11. Figure 2.11 omits some of the detail of the paths around the café and within Horse Close Wood. It, and Figure 2.13, also omits parking provision by the café, bowls pavilion and watersports centre.
12. The view from point 3 of Figure 2.12 south-east along the dam was blocked in Lancelot Brown’s design, because he retained Ashen Grove Wood on the dam slopes. No distinction is made between Brown’s designed framing of the views and more recent impositions.
13. The caption to Figure 2.13 numbers both the café and toilets as “2”, the former should be “1”.

Concept development section

This section purports to contrast three concepts, only the first two of which were taken forward for public consultation³⁰. The summary of the implications of each concept in the table on page 47 is unbalanced because the exercise was artificially constrained. The second and third concepts were given misleading titles, as the third (“restoration led”) would maximise landscape value, not the second (“maximising landscape value”). This is because the second option retained an athletics stadium, so constraining opportunities in the north of the park in comparison with the third. The second concept should rather have been entitled “moving the stadium”.

It was also assumed that the third concept would result in the loss of athletics provision. This is not the case, as the costs would be the same were the athletics to be replaced elsewhere in the public park or elsewhere in LB Merton. The latter concept has the considerable benefit that the facility could be located in an open space more accessible to areas of deprivation and need and with no extra cost compared with option 2. Thus, option 3 could retain all existing sports provision, with

some in a superior location, a major benefit omitted from the table. On this perspective, all four “issues” with option 3 in the table are also incorrect, making option 3 the clear choice.

Options development and consultation

Main points

1. Figure 4.2 is entitled “Masterplan Option 1” without qualification. It is accompanied by a schedule of *Features and facilities to be retained and removed...* Its inclusion in this section implies that the Figure is identical to Option 1 in the public consultation. It isn't! It differs from that used in the public consultation as follows:
 - a. It adds a “high ropes course” on the golf course near to the lake outflow (numbered feature 32, with a schedule entry “NA”, the schedule includes numbered feature 33, not shown on the Figure, a floating pontoon for events).
 - b. It retains the café and consequently shows fewer meanders of the restored brook in the southern part of area currently used for crazy golf and beach volleyball.
 - c. It retains beach volleyball but moves it north into the redundant second bowling green (currently used as a dog free picnic area and for events).
 - d. It loses much of the dog-free picnic area on the redundant bowling green.
 - e. It changes the shape of the crazy golf area to occupy the area not used for the brook.
 - f. It locates the new watersports building protruding out into the lake beside the northern boundary between the stadium and the golf club, rather than parallel with the lake edge.
 - g. It infills a wide strip around the perimeter of the lake beside the golf course and The Wimbledon Club to reduce its area by about a third, with the loss of part of the southern arm of the lake and reduction of the western arm to a narrow waterway.
2. These seven discrepancies mean that the Option 1 diagram is not that employed in the public consultation, but a deceptive fiction. This deception is especially significant for the extensive infilling of the lake which featured nowhere in the consultation documents.
3. The proposals for the lake were the same in all three options of the consultation³¹. This appropriately reflects the statutory requirement, identified in engineering reports, to plan for exceptional floods³². However, this was not appropriate for the proposed de-silting of the lake as there was no important, nor statutory requirement for that proposal. No documentation is provided to justify de-silting³³ and the absence of any options precluded consultation feedback on the proposal to remove sediment from the lake.
4. A claimed benefit of infilling much of the lake is to provide potential access paths along the edges of the lake³⁴, but there is already an agreement for a public walkway around the lake on land currently used for golf once golf ceases, and there is no need to duplicate this³⁵.
5. The fictions and exclusions mean that it's not correct to claim that the final masterplan was determined as a result of the consultation exercise³⁶.

Minor points

1. The replacement of Option 1 with a fictional version results also in a difference of emphasis: the underlining of the word “not” is removed, so giving less emphasis to not extending the car parks.
2. In a strange contrast to Option 1, the diagrams of Options 2 and 3 are reproduced faithfully, identical to those in the public consultation, and the background maps for the three athletics options (Figures 4.5, 4.6 & 4.7) and the maps for the distribution of sports and leisure uses (Figures 4.8, 4.9 & 4.10) are faithful to those in the consultation.

The final Masterplan

Main points

1. It's claimed that the final masterplan was determined as a result of the consultation exercise, and so it was based upon consultation option 1 with the addition of some elements from the other options that garnered support³⁷. The commentary on the consultation exercise (above) casts doubt on all but the most clear-cut consultation responses, so the Masterplan should generally be considered on its own merits, and claims based upon a flawed consultation should not be taken at face value.
2. The plan of Final Masterplan³⁸ is very similar to the fictitious Option 1 of the consultation (see the previous section of these comments)³⁹. It appears that the fictitious Option 1 was prepared to pretend that the Final Masterplan proposals received substantial support in public consultation⁴⁰.
3. Access to nature and informal recreation are said to be primary uses of the park⁴¹. This is welcome, but the proposals in the Masterplan do nothing to improve on the present position and certainly would harm nature.
4. It is claimed that the lake will be improved by the Masterplan proposals⁴². Although there was no effective consultation on the proposals for the lake, clearly, there will be works necessary to ensure that the dam and outflow meet modern flood safety requirements. Unfortunately, there are no firm proposals for this safety work⁴³, nor a separate estimate of costs⁴⁴. However, the plan is to spend £4,800,00 to remove sediment from the middle of the lake to form a large “wetland” around the edges⁴⁵: a raw new surface would be formed from toxic sediment⁴⁶ reducing the area of the open water by about a third⁴⁷. This reclamation would not only replace much open water, but also fishing stands⁴⁸ and existing national priority wildlife habitats: wetland and wet woodland⁴⁹. The great reduction in the size of the lake would eliminate the lines of Capability Brown's design⁵⁰. Figures 5.12 and 5.13 propose no trees on this new surface, so it appears that there is no intention to re-create the lost wet woodland on the edge of the lake.
5. The plan indicates a new lakeside path on the proposed “wetland”⁵¹. This is despite the existing legal requirement for the development of a Lakeside Walk by the All England Lawn Tennis Club on their land⁵². This existing requirement is for a path which would pass from the public park through Ashen Grove wood in the east, run close to the edge of the lake, and return to the public park at the

southern end of the athletics area. The failure to mention this existing requirement in the Masterplan cannot be an oversight, rather it is designed to promote the disposal of sediment to greatly reduce the size, and ruin the design, of the lake. We expect that the All England Lawn Tennis Club will have sensible proposals for a lakeside walk on their land as part of their development of the golf course. With the right design, such a walk would be an excellent public facility and provide access to vistas and wildlife that are currently unavailable except to members of three private clubs⁵³. This can be done whilst also preserving the traditional use of the perimeter for angling and does not require any infilling of the lake. It is clearly superior to the plan that depends upon the infilling of much of the lake

6. “De-silting” of the lake is a first priority project⁵⁴ “to improve water quality and the lakes capacity for water sports use.” In fact, there is no evidence that removing sediment will improve water quality⁵⁵, and there is no proposal effectively to prevent sediment entering the lake⁵⁶. The lake has always been shallow and water sports appropriate to shallow water have always been possible. The rate of sedimentation is so very slow that this will remain true⁵⁷. Appendix D of the Masterplan, which is the “full technical report”⁵⁸ on this subject, has an inflated estimate of the amount of sediment in the lake⁵⁹ and little information on toxins in the sediments⁶⁰. Although these faults make it a poor basis on which to plan extensive, damaging⁶¹ works, its estimate of the amount is relied upon (5.8.).
7. The claim that the sediment in the lake adversely affects flood storage capacity⁶² is incorrect and so is misleading. Flood storage depends entirely upon the area of the lake above the level regulated by the weir, which is, and will be, above the sediment level.
8. It’s welcome that hedgerows and both woodlands are to be retained and managed for nature⁶³, but unfortunate that there is no revenue allocation for this to be achieved⁶⁴, nor any priority given⁶⁵.
9. It’s claimed that vegetation is to be improved by the Masterplan proposals⁶⁶. New woodland is proposed for the area around the toddlers’ play area in the eastern corner of the park⁶⁷. No detail is provided of this proposal, nor was it subject to public consultation. Extra woodland would be welcome, but the rationale for choosing this site over alternatives (such as the Horse Close Wood car park) is not given. “Wetland” is proposed on the parts of the lake to be infilled⁶⁸. Appendix D of the Masterplan illustrates land reclaimed from another lake as indicating what is intended in this proposal and claims, ineptly, that the reclaimed land could be restored to excellent habitat⁶⁹. At best, a narrow strip of water’s edge vegetation might be possible at the steep edge of a raised⁷⁰ area of dry land.
10. The old oaks are to be recognised for special management and interpretation, but no individual tree receives specific mention⁷¹. The restriction on removal of old trees and shrubs to health and safety and opening up views⁷² is welcome, but unrealistic, given the proposal for an extension to the White pavilion, and two priority projects⁷³: the Brownian cascade and refigured brook⁷⁴. These two priority projects are related to the need for flood control works, but no indication is given of the likely nature of such work.
11. The watersports building is to be demolished and replaced with a two-storey facility projecting over the lake at the western edge of the athletics area⁷⁵, with a large boat storage area extending parallel to the golf course boundary, replacing

the existing storage. The demolition of the existing building and removal of the storage was supported in public consultation, as this would open out a valuable view. Unfortunately, however, the proposed design for the replacement building shows it rising high above the lake and so impeding views from the great field across the lake and beyond. Effectively, one visual obstruction is to be replaced by another, larger, obstruction. This runs against the public consultation preference for opening up views and calls into question whether the removal of the trees around the athletics area⁷⁶ would open up a new view. A low-profile, earth-sheltered building would be possible, but no such option is given. There is no mention of the obstruction these facilities would cause to this end of the lakeside walk that is required on the golf course land⁷⁷.

12. It's welcome that both children's play areas are to be retained, dog free, and upgraded⁷⁸. This is an appropriate response to the public consultation, notably the consultation of children.
13. All 20 tennis courts are to be retained in the interim⁷⁹ but five-a-side football⁸⁰ or high and low ropes courses⁸¹ might replace the southern 10 courts in future⁸². The retention of the tennis courts is an appropriate response to the public consultation.
14. The café is to be retained, as desired by most of those consulted, but rebuilt as a "a bright, reflective pavilion surrounded by translucent balustrading"⁸³ and with toilet facilities⁸⁴.
15. In keeping with the public consultation responses, bowls are to be retained⁸⁵.
16. The bowls pavilion will be extended towards the dam to nearly double the floor area and provide better facilities⁸⁶.
17. The crazy golf will be extended south and redeveloped⁸⁷. The suggestion that silt from the lake⁸⁸ be used in this redevelopment would reduce flood storage in this area, probably removing any gain from the reconfiguration of the brook.
18. Angling is to be retained once the works on the lake are complete⁸⁹. This is a welcome continuation of a traditional use.
19. Both car parks are retained⁹⁰. This denies the opportunity to restore these to parkland vegetation and so promote sustainable transport⁹¹ whilst enhancing the park.
20. The path on the western boundary of the athletics area that was closed off in the 1990s is proposed to be re-opened⁹². How this is to be done whilst keeping the area fenced is not clear. This proposal was illustrated in Option 1 of the Masterplan, but not listed, so consultation feedback was not sought. It was nevertheless supported in consultation and is a welcome proposal. It is a short-cut behind the ugly backs of buildings and beside stored sports equipment and corroding containers, so the treatment of its surrounds is in much need of improvement.
21. It's welcome that the woodlands are to be retained⁹³, although the historic carriageway that ran just east of the golf course fence within Ashen Grove Wood is proposed for re-instatement. Whilst this is possible, there was no effective public consultation on this proposal. Opening it to the road would duplicate the nearby public entrance to the park, so it might be preferable to reinstate the path, but not the entrance. The proposal to reduce the tree planting on the downslope of the dam⁹⁴ would prevent the re-establishment of this part of Ashen Grove Wood, which was integral to Brown's landscape. It would also condone the

gradual attrition of the arboretum planting or its removal to promote flood safety. It is also contrary to expert arboricultural advice which sees well managed trees as entirely appropriate in this area.

22. A high and low ropes course is a possible option for the 5 southern tennis courts, or for the area between the courts and the tube line boundary⁹⁵. This proposal is claimed to have money-earning potential⁹⁶, but was not favoured in public consultation and no background detail is provided.
23. The café is to be retained and radically refurbished, but possibly later lost and replaced in the area between the bowls pavilion and the lakeside path⁹⁷. The proposed move of the café was opposed in the public consultation responses and so the cost and benefit of this possible future should be considered carefully.
24. The part of Ashen Grove Wood adjacent to the lake (but apparently not the narrower strip beside the golf clubhouse) might be transferred into the ownership of Merton by the All England, so promoting access to the lake⁹⁸.
25. Land on the golf course adjacent to the athletics stadium might be transferred by the All England into the ownership of Merton to provide more room for watersports facilities and public access to the west of the stadium⁹⁹.
26. An extension of the White Pavilion into Ashen Grove to its west is proposed to replace the existing toilet block at the other end of the children's play area¹⁰⁰. This proposal is contrary to the principle that the woodlands of the park be retained and managed.
27. A first priority project¹⁰¹ is to widen the waterfall and reconfigure it as a "Brownian cascade" flowing into a meandering brook provided with waterside vegetation and places for flood water storage¹⁰². Whilst these are nice concepts, no alternatives were given as options in the public consultation. The great fluctuation in the flow from the lake means that a cascade of sufficient width to serve flood flows would be largely dry most of the time as would any flood storage areas¹⁰³. The only way to achieve the promise of the image on page 98 would be with a high capacity pump recirculation: an unsustainable option. A reconfigured brook would provide insignificant extra flood storage. The present regular flooding of the public park requires lowering the lake level and attention to the grille on the outflow that leaves the park under the tube line and continues underground to Earlsfield¹⁰⁴. There are no proposals in the Masterplan to attend to those fundamentals.

Other points

1. Most of the picnic area by the veteran oak is to be lost and replaced by beach volleyball¹⁰⁵.
2. Footpaths and entrances are claimed to be improved by the Masterplan proposals¹⁰⁶, but no detail is provided.
3. Parks staff facilities are to be moved to the bowls pavilion¹⁰⁷.
4. The path at the north-east corner of the stadium is shown curved around, as is the junction at the north-western end, which is curved round a central triangular patch¹⁰⁸ (as was indicated in Option 1 of the consultation).
5. Sections 5.10 and 5.11 outline general principles for tree, shrub and flower planting, but are poorly informed both on public risk and historic design¹⁰⁹. The first priority¹¹⁰ proposal for long grass, meadow and areas for the wildflowers of traditional arable fields around the edges of the great lawn are most welcome, but are ecologically naïve and will require special management into the future¹¹¹, that

must be secured within the parks contract. Most of the other proposals here are for continuation of present practice.

¹ This creative commons licence allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon a work even for commercial purposes, as long as they credit and license their new creations under the identical terms. This is the licence used by Wikipedia.

² Paragraph 1.1.1. All such unqualified references are to the masterplan as published in December 2018.

³ www.merton.gov.uk/leisure-recreation-and-culture/parks-and-open-spaces/parks-and-recreation-grounds/wimbledon/wimbledon-park/wimbledon-park-master-plan

⁴ I use “park” here as a shorthand for the public park, which includes the lake.

⁵ Rather than publish the results of the consultation of children, LB Merton chose to supply the author only with an electronic version of the results in response to a freedom of information request.

⁶ Option 1 was described as “minimal intervention”, Option 2 as “maximising landscape character” and Option 3 as “expanding commercial opportunities”. In both 2 and 3 the athletics facilities were moved to the north-east corner of the park.

⁷ Option A was described as “increased provision”, B as “existing provision” and C as “reduced provision”.

⁸ 77% of the responses (note that I recalculated the percentages because the inappropriate use of a pie chart to present the results to this question makes the percentages on the chart misleading, as more than one purpose could be selected, leading to those percentages adding up to 182%). The preference for free-to-use facilities is also evident in the children’s consultation responses (Dawson, D. 2019 *What do children want in Wimbledon Park*).

⁹ For example, omission from 2.9.1

¹⁰ *Wimbledon Park Lake* (Dr D. G. Dawson, 2017)

¹¹ A comprehensive account was available, but not cited.

¹² Omitted are the golf course depot, the buildings of the All England Lawn Tennis Club and the line of suburban housing along Elsenham Street.

¹³ 2.7.10.

¹⁴ The depth and rate of accumulation of silt have not been studied in any detail. The little good information made available shows that the depth has reduced by only about 7% over the 50-year life of the watersports centre, an insignificant amount, given the natural variation in the lake level (*Major works are proposed at Wimbledon Park Lake*. D. Dawson, 2019).

¹⁵ In the Transfer of the golf course freehold to the All England Lawn Tennis Club by LB Merton (dated 23/12/1993) there is already a strip of land around the lake identified to be dedicated as a public walkway by the AELTC once golf ceases (Schedule 3, clauses 3.1 & 3.2 and associated Plan B), so there is no need to use silt to infill the lake as this would merely duplicate this provision.

¹⁶ 2.3.1 and Figure 2.1

¹⁷ 2.3.3

¹⁸ 2.3.5

¹⁹ 2.5.3 & 2.5.5

²⁰ 2.5.7. This is evident in the survey of the golf course trees (*Wimbledon Park Golf Club tree survey*. Tree King Consultancy, August 2017).

²¹ Figure 2.6.

²² 2.6.

²³ The references cited do not include *Capability Brown’s Wimbledon Park. A history*. D. Dawson, August 2016, which corrects these errors.

²⁴ ‘Errors and omissions in the consultation materials for the future of Merton’s Wimbledon Park’ (Dr D. G. Dawson, July 2016).

²⁵ It afforded, at best, a distant view of the park perimeter near the present-day junction of Victoria Drive and Kingsmere Road. The position of the Spencer Manor House is shown incorrectly near to St Mary’s church. The house at the time of Brown’s landscaping was the Marlborough House, which was substantially further south. The view from the Marlborough House was south-east across rural Surrey towards the North Downs

(Capability Brown's Wimbledon Park. A history. D. Dawson, August 2016. The view that never was. Dawson 2019. Wimbledon Society Newsletter).

²⁶ The carriageway was along the same line as the present-day path from the large childrens' play area up to the dam crest, whereas the figure shows it as running along the bottom of the dam slope and rising slowly to reach the dam crest only at the present-day bowls pavilion. The captions to views 2 and 3 (page 34) state that these are on the approximate line of one of Brown's drives. Reference to 18th century maps shows that the coincidence is exact, not approximate.

²⁷ In fact, the only changes have been losses in the southern arm and in the area of the present-day stilling basin.

²⁸ Also, few precise dates are given in section 2.10. The plan omits the brook, the downstream part of which was in place by the 1920s. The part of the brook currently under the large playground was also above ground then. It was not put underground until the development of the larger childrens' play area after 1950. The café is indicated, correctly, as originating in the 1920s. The two 1920s pavilions indicated opposite the tennis courts are fictitious. There was a single pavilion or rotunda further north (in the corner of the perimeter path and brook), which features in old postcards. Its foundation still exists in the area recently planted as "the copse". It was not indicated on Ordnance Survey maps until 1949. Apart from the large childrens' play area, the path network from the bowling greens south was complete by 1933, so the omission of 1920s paths by the café and crazy golf is incorrect. The bandstand is miss-mapped as within Horse Close Wood. The 1933 map shows it in the nearby "sports ground" alongside a pavilion. There were also buildings in the site of the present-day Horse Close Wood car park in the early 30s. Most of those, and the pavilion, had gone by the 1939 map and all had gone by 1949, to be replaced by woodland. The perimeter path is correctly indicated, as it had been established around the northern part of the park by 1950. The perimeter path on the west edge of the sports stadium was closed off in the 1990s, but the diversion of the path around the stadium was already in place in 1983, contradicting the 2000s indication. The only path developed in the 2000s is the short cut between the Bowls pavilion and the corner of the stadium. The waterfall and bowls pavilion were first shown on a map revised in 1949, contradicting the 1920s indication for the waterfall and 1930s indication for the pavilion (the latter also in 2.10.14). The sports stadium is correctly indicated, as it was first mapped in the 1950s (this applies also to the date given in 2.10.21 for the grandstand). The large childrens' playground was a 1960s development and it was not until then that the upper part of the brook was put underground. The two car parks which were established after 1960 are indicated correctly.

²⁹ 2.7.8 & 9. Image 1 on page 26 shows pushchair access on the dam crest path.

³⁰ The consultation boards presented just the first two options and made no reference to the rejection of the third.

³¹ 4.10.1

³² 4.10.2 & 4.10.5

³³ 4.10.3 & 4.10.4 identify three reasons for de-silting and a supposed benefit to biodiversity that are not documented. These have been scrutinised and investigated in detail and found wanting (*Major works are proposed at Wimbledon Park Lake*. D. Dawson, 2019).

³⁴ 4.10.3

³⁵ In the Transfer of the golf course freehold to the All England Lawn Tennis Club by LB Merton (dated 23/12/1993) there is already a strip of land around the lake identified to be dedicated as a public walkway by the AELTC once golf ceases (Schedule 3, clauses 3.1 & 3.2 and associated Plan B), so there is no need to use silt to infill the lake as this would merely duplicate this provision.

³⁶ 5.1.2

³⁷ 5.1

³⁸ Figure 5.1

³⁹ Whilst it omits mention of angling, the land use map (figure 5.1) and text show that angling would continue once lake works are complete. It omits mention of the high ropes course and pontoon on the lake.

⁴⁰ 5.3.9 states that "Uses and facilities largely follow Option 1 as described in Section 4" but fails to point out that Option 1 is a *post hoc* invention.

⁴¹ 5.3.2

⁴² 5.3.2

⁴³ Section 5.8

⁴⁴ The costs buried away in the small print of Appendix 1 (2.2) are for long overdue repairs to the dam, but not for coping with exceptionally large flood events.

⁴⁵ Figure 5.2, 5.10.12.

⁴⁶ The toxicity of the sediment is outlined in 5.8.10 and Appendix D of the Masterplan.

⁴⁷ Measured on Figure 5.1.

⁴⁸ These are indicated diagrammatically in Figure 2.12 of the site appraisal and angling was indicated as retained in all three of the consultation options. Paragraph 5.3.8 states that “Angling can be retained once the lake works are complete”, which is illustrated in Figure 5.2. Appendix 1 allocates £250,000 for re-instatement of angling facilities.

⁴⁹ These are described in: *Major works are proposed at Wimbledon Park Lake*. D. Dawson, 2019

⁵⁰ The remarkable survival of Brown’s design, more or less intact, is detailed in *Capability Brown’s Wimbledon Park, a history*. Dawson (2018) for the Friends of Wimbledon Park.

⁵¹ 5.3.8, 5.7.5, 5.9.2, 5.9.6 & Figure 5.1 “Lakeside path on newly formed lake margin” and appendix D.

⁵² This requirement is in the Transfer of the golf course freehold to the All England Lawn Tennis Club by LB Merton (dated 23/12/1993). It requires a strip of land around the lake to be dedicated as a public walkway by the AELTC once golf ceases (Schedule 3, clauses 3.1 & 3.2 and associated Plan B), so there is no need to use silt to infill the lake as this would merely duplicate this provision. Without mentioning this obligation, the Masterplan states that a lakeside path is “not currently possible, due to the different ownership of the existing bank.” 5.7.10. This statement is, at best, a half-truth.

⁵³ The golf club, Wimbledon Club and Anglers.

⁵⁴ Figure 5.1, Section 5.7, 5.8.10, table 7.2.1 & Appendix D.

⁵⁵ The best scientific evidence is referenced in: *Major works are proposed at Wimbledon Park Lake*. D. Dawson, 2019. Studies reviewing relevant experience show that there is no precedent for removal of sediment to achieve a lasting benefit. That sediment removal is not necessary for our lake to recover is shown by the quality of the lake water improving some five years ago without any removal of sediment.

⁵⁶ There is no mention of the proven technology to intercept silt with traps on the inflow drains. Rather “contaminant interceptors” are to be improved contingent on the infilling proposal (5.7.10). I presume that this is to be achieved through reed beds or similar vegetation. Effective interception of contaminants by such vegetation requires very large areas, so taking away from the open water of the lake.

⁵⁷ The rate of accumulation of silt is best measured from an unbiased survey in 2008. The survey for the Masterplan was biased and provided an overestimate of the amount of silt. This is discussed in: *Major works are proposed at Wimbledon Park Lake*. D. Dawson, 2019

⁵⁸ 5.7.2

⁵⁹ Appendix D provides a poor estimate of the volume of sediment because the sampling points were biased towards places with most sediment. A much better estimate was made for LB Merton in 2008, because it was based upon an unbiased regular grid of sample points (*Major works are proposed at Wimbledon Park Lake*. D. Dawson, 2019). This found significantly less sediment.

⁶⁰ Results from just three places which differed considerably one from another.

⁶¹ Paragraphs 5.7.10 and 5.10.12, which argue that the landscape can be restored after the extensive infilling, are irrelevant because they assume that the existing landscape and biodiversity have already been destroyed by the unnecessary infilling. For example, it’s arrogant to assume that Brown’s ruined lake can be restored by reference to the principles he used and it’s wrong to imply that wet woodland that has developed over decades can be replaced by “aquatic and marginal planting at the edges”. Two species of waterlily occur in the lake already, so planting is not necessary to restore them.

⁶² 5.8.10

⁶³ 5.10.2

⁶⁴ Appendix 1 2.6 & 2.7.

⁶⁵ 7.2.6&7

⁶⁶ 5.3.2

⁶⁷ 5.3.3 “woodland with new tree and shrub planting”, 5.10.2 “south of the tennis courts”

⁶⁸ Figures 5.2 & 5.13. Labelling as wetland does not constitute a thought-through project (see the next endnote).

⁶⁹ “the opportunity for the area to be planted to create features like reed beds or other excellent habitat, see the photo below.” The photograph shows a raw surface of land raised high above the level of a lake, without

any valuable vegetation, let alone a reedbed. It appears that there is no precedent for such reclamation to be restored as wetland as, if there were, it would have been illustrated. Land raised so high could not support a wetland.

⁷⁰ 5.7.10 requires that the edge should not be gradual to deter the movement of Canada geese. This would preclude the characteristic Capability Brown lake edge.

⁷¹ 5.10.3

⁷² 5.10.4

⁷³ 7.2.3&4

⁷⁴ 4.9.7. There is an explicit allowance for tree removal for the works to the brook in appendix 1 (2.3) of the masterplan of £15,000. Tree removal is also implied by the “re-landscaping” of the waterfall garden. There is no cost estimate for tree or landscape works for the White pavilion, but this work would not be possible without some removals.

⁷⁵ 5.6.15-17, 5.11. Figure 5.1 clearly indicates that this would be constructed largely over the lake, but Figure 5.7 suggests that the projection over the lake would be by only a few metres. Clearly the design of this replacement facility is not yet quite resolved.

⁷⁶ 5.11

⁷⁷ This walk is required in the Transfer of the golf course freehold to the All England Lawn Tennis Club by LB Merton (dated 23/12/1993). It requires a strip of land around the lake to be dedicated as a public walkway by the AELTC once golf ceases (Schedule 3, clauses 3.1 & 3.2 and associated Plan B).

⁷⁸ 5.3.3

⁷⁹ 5.3.4

⁸⁰ 5.4.2

⁸¹ 5.4.3

⁸² 5.4.2

⁸³ 5.6.4

⁸⁴ 5.6.5

⁸⁵ 5.3.5

⁸⁶ 5.6.8

⁸⁷ 5.3.7

⁸⁸ 7.2.22

⁸⁹ 5.3.8 and an allocation of £250,000 in Appendix 1 (2.30) for reinstatement of fishing stages.

⁹⁰ Figure 5.2, but strangely the car parks appear to be deleted on Figures 5.10, 5.12 & 5.13.

⁹¹ In contrast to the woodlands, for which there is no budget allocation, Appendix 1 (2.11 & 2.22) allocates over £180,000 for improvements to the two car parks.

⁹² 5.9.5. This proposal runs counter to the need to fence off the athletics area to ensure safety and deter vandalism. Appendix 1 (2.29) allocates £50,000 for a new fence to the athletics area.

⁹³ Figure 5.2.

⁹⁴ 5.10.11

⁹⁵ 5.4.3

⁹⁶ Tables 6.2 & 6.5. Appendix 1, 2.31. Interestingly, this entry places the high ropes course in Ashen Grove Wood, where it would cause great harm.

⁹⁷ 5.4.4

⁹⁸ 5.5.2 & Figure 5.4

⁹⁹ 5.5.3 & Figure 5.4

¹⁰⁰ 5.6.2

¹⁰¹ 7.2.3

¹⁰² 4.9.7, 5.10.10

¹⁰³ Measurements of the flows over the last three years confirm this picture.

¹⁰⁴ *Major works are proposed at Wimbledon Park lake.* Dawson 2019.

¹⁰⁵ 5.3.6

¹⁰⁶ 5.3.2

¹⁰⁷ 6.6.4

¹⁰⁸ 5.9.3

¹⁰⁹ For example, the risk posed by Oak processionary moth unfortunately militates against oak trees adjacent to well-used paths. Planting around the periphery of the great lawn could echo Brown's peripheral avenues, but peripheral positioning alone does not replicate Brown's design. Both of these considerations are already taken into account in the plantings by the Friends of Wimbledon Park with the Tree Warden Group Merton.

¹¹⁰ 7.2.5

¹¹¹ 5.10.6, Figure 5.13. The wording suggests that cornfield annual flowers can be provided within meadows. The annuals were weeds of arable crops before the advent of selective herbicides and need annual cultivation to persist, whereas meadow is of perennial grasses cropped for hay. Its flowers are perennials. Meadows require mowing, not cultivation.