

## **SAVE TREES IN GUNNERSBURY CAMPAIGN – don't listen to the dusty academics**

I am an active member of the Save Trees In Gunnersbury campaign (STIG), which, whilst supporting plans to restore listed buildings, is primarily committed to the preservation of green spaces of Gunnersbury Park.

***STIG calls on the councils to widen the scope of the study to allow funding from other budgets, and consult more frankly explaining the full impact of each option both on the environment and the local community.***

As a non party-political organisation, STIG holds back from proposing alternative sources for the funding, to avoid the risk of appearing to criticise Hounslow and Ealing's current priorities.

However, I am writing to you in a personal capacity.

Please do not countenance the sale of 5.6 acres of woodland (featuring over 400 mature deciduous trees) in order to finance the refurbishment of listed buildings in Gunnersbury Park – allowed by previous administrations to fall into disrepair.

The area of land proposed for sale by Jura Consultants, whilst at the other end of the park to the “historic core”, is of vital importance to the whole western half of the park.

This western half, dismissively referred by Jura in their proposals document as “a green desert”, is an enormous rectangle of open space on a slight incline, surrounded on 2 2/3 sides by walls of trees. On a short side and 1/3 of the western side, it is bordered by houses with occasional trees. Some of the space is used for playing fields, and it is the site for the popular annual west London Mela.

If the proposed sale went ahead, and the proposed Sports Hub was built, 3/4 of the surround to this space would become buildings. The whole character would change from being a valuable area of wild open space to one of ordinary municipal playing fields.

The western half of the park is currently an area much loved by ordinary park users: walkers, runners and adults with children, both local people and people from far afield. This group will massively increase as people move into the new Beechams/Barratts development on the A4, almost directly opposite the endangered South West corner. It is a vital lung next to the A4/M4/A406.

If the Lionel Road South development is managed sympathetically, the endangered corner would become the central focus for a direct link between Gunnersbury Park and Kew Gardens. This link could enable future regional and national funding of our riverside heritage, and encourage more visitors from across the river.

STIG are accused of “well meaning ignorance” in challenging the orthodoxy of developers/architects and the library/heritage industry that approve of the sale.

Who are the players in this context? Let's look back at the interests with the loudest voices:

- Jura Consultants hope to raise £16.8m from the sale of this Greenfield site, but lose nothing from the proposal. As successful housing developers they will look to profit handsomely from the project.

- Architects too would do very well from this scheme, gaining up to £3.4m from consultancy fees.
- Librarians would get 2 impressive library buildings, including 1 not even open to the general public for a massive £4.8m.

However, the majority of ordinary people would suffer a devastating loss of an amenity, and it would create a precedent that raises public concern across west London.

Politicians are made vulnerable by this scheme. It is risky to alienate so many people by cutting down 400 trees and destroying the character of a much loved park

- Especially when Hounslow advertise a promise to plant 1000 trees this year;
- When £3.4m of the £16.8m would be spend on consultants;
- When £4.8m would be spent on new library buildings not even open to the general public – only to “researchers”;
- When the restoration would open key buildings only for conferences, functions and an elite restaurant;
- When the proposed “Sports Hub” requires new car parking and could open up more parts of the park for sale for housing in future.
- When Ealing are handing back £7m in cash back ahead of the local elections.

A massive £39m spending spree on an elitist development, such as that proposed by the Jura document, would be held up by opponents across the country as an example of profligacy in straitened times, and any mishaps would create massive political capital for them.

I beg you to exercise prudence and drop these proposals.

Ignore the dusty academics and suited consultant developers from far afield.

Instead, like your voters, take a couple of children and a lively dog to the park, with a kite on a windy day, and discover the physical delights of Gunnersbury Park as it is now!

Yours sincerely

Martin McCloghry

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(Financial figures gleaned from the Jura proposals document)