



## **Formula E in Battersea Park?**



**Wandsworth Green Party Response**  
05/08/2015



## Introduction

In July 2013 when the question of Formula E in Battersea Park was under discussion the leader of Wandsworth Council Cllr. Ravi Govindia said that there was

*"a decisive weight of opinion among my colleagues that in light of the length and scale of disruption in the park, there was distinct potential to undermine the current fine balance between the income-earning events that are staged in the park and its use as a peaceful 'oasis of calm' in the city"*

We have now seen the event staged in the park and plans are afoot to make it an annual event for the next five years. Members of Wandsworth Green Party, many of whom are park users, have been closely observing the lead up to Formula E in Battersea Park and the impact made by the June 2015 event. We offer below an outline of our key concerns around maintaining that all-important balance to which Ravi Govindia referred two years ago.

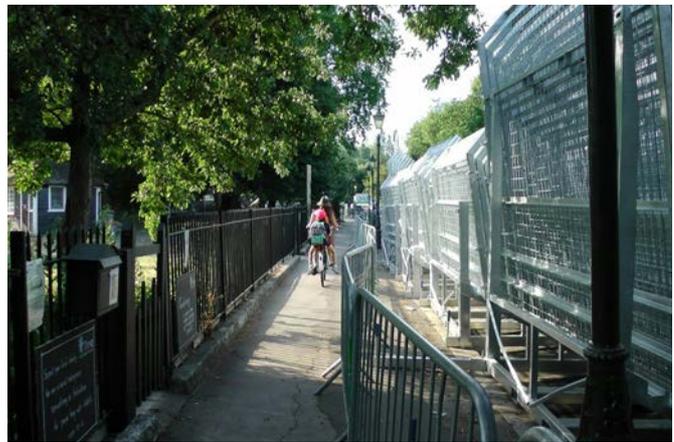
## Safety concerns

By turning the park into a building site for 3 weeks each year the council is allowing the public to mingle with heavy machinery and construction materials in a way that would not be acceptable under normal construction safety regulations. As well as the usual park visitors such as joggers, cyclists, dog walkers and adults and children seeking outdoor recreation, hundreds of children attend school events at the millennium arena and the sports fields. Safety should therefore have been a top priority. However, during the June 2015 event extra staff were brought in only after the first day of construction when it became apparent that the contractors had little idea of the numbers of park users they would be working around. The same level of staffing was NOT provided in the de-rigging process.





Although temporary barriers were used to create cycle lanes the lanes were only wide enough for one bicycle and posed considerable dangers in cases where parents with pushchairs or even another bicycle was coming in the opposite direction.



No mention of the health and safety risks and how they would be mitigated was made in any of the consultation documents available to decision makers and consultees and to our knowledge no post event safety assessment has been made.



As confirmed in the Heritage Impact Assessment closing the park for a full three weeks in summer is not an option but turning a heavily used public park into a construction site for three weeks each year is surely an accident waiting to happen and no amount of income generation really warrants this.



There has been no base-line monitoring of the effect of the event on air quality. While the racing cars themselves are certainly carbon neutral, the event has required some 800 lorry-loads of concrete to be brought into Battersea and three weeks' use of heavy construction equipment. Furthermore a significant amount of extra energy was generated for catering, lighting, entertainment etc and several helicopters were deployed throughout the weekend of 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> June. Given that poor air quality in Battersea is acknowledged by the council to be of concern, an air quality impact assessment should have been carried





out for such a change of use of a valuable green space. A report on this should most certainly be made available to the Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee responsible for reviewing the event.

## Our Heritage

Community services spokesman Cllr Jonathan Cook stated on the council website in spring 2015:-

*“what is of paramount importance is ensuring that nothing is done that causes harm or damage to the park and its historical features. This was a red line for us and one we have adhered to strictly.”*

Wandsworth Council invested £10.4 million, largely funded by Heritage Lottery Fund Grant in restoring Battersea Park to its original 19<sup>th</sup> Century design. The restoration was completed as recently as 2004 and one of the principal aims of the project was to re-establish and redefine the original width of the Carriage Drives. This work has essentially been undone to accommodate the event and it is currently proposed to maintain the temporary alterations to the Carriage Drives as hard surfacing for the duration of the five year contract. This flies in the face of the Heritage Lottery Fund’s intended use of public funds given for the Park’s restoration and shows a distinct lack of respect, on the part of the council, for the borough’s heritage assets.



## Due Process

In following the meetings and studying information provided in various reports surrounding the Formula E project Wandsworth Green Party has come across a number of procedural irregularities:

- The initial planning application quoted ‘Existing Land Use D2 - Assembly & Leisure’ – however Battersea Park is also a **designated conservation area**.
- It should be noted that in granting planning permission Condition NC47 - Limited period was put in place with the detail *“This **permission is for a***



**limited period**, and the use shall be discontinued and the park shall be restored to its former condition by July 3rd 2015". This has not happened. The extra hard surfacing is due to remain in place for a full five years if the contract goes ahead but no new planning application has been submitted to reflect this.



- At the time of writing, work is still being done to replace the barriers which prevent cars gaining unauthorised access to the carriageways which they regularly do (top photo) and in some areas 'restoration' would be better described as patch work.



- The [Heritage Impact Assessment](#) has stated that "*Experience of other events large-scale in Battersea and other Major London Parks shows wear and tear can be significant and require up to one year to recover*". It also described specific impact on e.g. the Carriage Drives and Park Entrances and Gardenesque Shrubberies and Mounding as "*Moderate adverse – asset can be re-instated within 1 year, but if event held annually for five years will be difficult to achieve reinstatement*". Formula E in Battersea Park clearly poses a long-term risk in this conservation area, particularly when conditions set by the heritage impact assessment are ignored e.g. "*All existing Park railings and fencing would be retained in situ*". – They were not.



- The intention to have several helicopters circulating the park during the event was never mentioned in any impact assessment or consultation document. This added to the already high level of aircraft noise suffered by residents in



the area and was a considerable nuisance for residents across Queenstown, Latchmere, St Mary's Park and beyond. Any further impact does not appear to have been considered anywhere.

- The ecology report conclusions were based on an assumption that there would be no additional lighting in use and stated that *"If a requirement for supplementary / additional lighting arises then a further assessment on the impact on bat foraging within the park will be required to be submitted and approved prior to any lighting being approved"*. There was a great deal of additional lighting but no assessment of the impact of lighting on bat foraging has been made either before or since the 2015 event. This coupled with the fact that objections to the plan made by the Wandsworth Conservation Area Advisory Committee have been ignored indicates a worrying disregard for environmental protection on the part of the Council.



- In answer to questions about the carbon footprint of the event, councillors were told that low carbon glycerine generators would be used. However, these generators were only used to charge the cars - ordinary polluting ones were used to provide extra electricity.
- Certain Zoo animals that are sensitive to noise had to be relocated for the event. The effect of annual moving of these animals has not been included in any impact reports.



## Financial Costs/Benefits

Information about the amount the council is to receive from Formula E organisers has been withheld from councillors and stakeholders on the grounds that it is commercially sensitive and no guarantees have been given that any of this income will be ring-fenced for spending on parks, leisure or community facilities more widely. At the same time no assessment appears to have been made of the impact on the council's staffing and resources in the light of the obligation to ensure works are carried out in accordance with agreed method statements in particular during the construction and dismantling phases. This level of opacity is not acceptable for activities surrounding public assets. The council should declare the financial benefits arising out of the 2015 event as well as the costs to the council of managing the contract and other aspects of the impact of the event.

## Public Consultation

The council says that some 800 letters were sent out to residents about the proposals to stage Formula E in Battersea Park but in the process of collecting hundreds of signatures on the petition against Formula E, Wandsworth Green Party members failed to find a single local resident who had received such a letter. Practically everyone using the park during the two week setting up period was totally unaware of what was happening and had not had prior warning. The council put some planning notices up around the park on 18 December 2014 but have confirmed that they took them back down on 31 December. Effective steps have clearly not been taken to make the public aware of this important change of use of a much used and loved facility.

Of the stakeholder groups invited to comment, The Battersea Society, Friends of Battersea Park, Clapham Junction Action Group and even the council's own Conservation Area Advisory Committee all submitted objections to the plan.

Nevertheless the event has gone ahead in 2015. Since that decision was taken, over 2000 have signed a petition against the Formula E in the Park which is well above the norm on controversial issues in Wandsworth; hundreds have written complaints about it to their councillors and most of the feedback from the Formula E Community Forum has been negative in spite of considerable efforts of the event organisers to garner support amongst local residents.

All those considering whether Formula E in Battersea Park should be continued should conclude that if public consultation has any value in local democracy the answer is a resounding NO.



There is now a rather poorly designed [survey](#) available on the council's website which is supposed to represent further consultation on whether Formula E in Battersea Park should be continued. We hope it does not suffer the same fate as previous surveys, such as those concerning the closure of the Adventure Playground and One O'clock Club in Battersea Park where 86% opposition in survey results was thoroughly ignored.

## Conclusion

When it comes to Formula E itself, The Wandsworth Green Party are in no way opposed in principle - we believe that electric vehicles are the future and that we should be pushing for real policies and action that work to bring them centre stage as quickly as possible. What is clear to us is that Battersea Park is not the right venue for this event. There is a balance to be had between tranquillity and utility of our parks and finding this balance can be hard for an individual council member - this is why public consultation is vital. We implore the council to listen to the voices of its many residents who feel angry and upset that such a large scale repurposing of their park at a prime time of year was, and potentially will again be, forced upon them. We also recommend that the council heed the advice of its own Conservation Area Advisory Committee and consider imposing a limit on the number of temporary events that can take place in the Battersea Park in order to minimise harm to its special character. This would go some way to help convince the public that the council is indeed working in their interests to ensure that parks are for people, not profit.