



mountsfieldpark@gmail.com

Rachel Stephenson
Planner - South Team
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23 July 2016

Dear Ms Stephenson,

We understand that you are the main point of contact for the application to build a cafe in Mountsfield Park, submitted by Mr Kostantinos Korrovesis (reference DC/16/095961). We also understand from Mr Korrovesis that you are minded to reject the application unless he is able to satisfy three demands: to modify the design to meet the BREEAM 'excellent' rating; to modify the design to conserve what you describe as the 'biodiverse living roofs' existing on the current unused container units; and to provide detailed information about the placement and planned emptying times of waste bins.

BREEAM rating

The desire for the new cafe building to achieve a BREEAM rating of 'excellent' is laudable but, we feel in the circumstances, excessively demanding. The application process has taken a number of months and responds to a tender exercise run by the Council. In other words, Mr Korrovesis has, in his proposed design, responded to the specifications set out by the Council in the tendering exercise and importantly to the views of the local community also made clear during that process. A late demand to adapt the design to achieve the highest BREEAM rating feels excessive, and we note that Mr Korrovesis has agreed to present a pre-assessment to achieve an optimum rating of 'very good', which we believe is more than sufficient.

Biodiverse living roofs

For the sake of clarity, the existing 'biodiverse living roof' is in fact a series of wooden planters along the front and sides of the two container units, currently unkempt. They are not covering the whole roof. We are including some photographs alongside this letter. We understand that Mr Korrovesis has suggested the existing planters be moved elsewhere in the park, which would mean there is no loss of biodiverse habitat - that the existing habitat is in fact maintained - but you are currently of the view that this is insufficient.

In our opinion, it feels disproportionate to demand that any new cafe building in the park includes a biodiverse living roof to replace the planters currently on top of the container units. It seems a significant stretch to define the existing planters as a 'living roof', not least because they are not integral to the roof, but merely resting on it. By this definition, planters on a windowsill would make it a 'living windowsill', which I think most people would agree is nonsense. Demanding that the new cafe meets



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a significantly higher standard than the existing, neglected planters feels both unfair and unnecessary.

It is obvious but worth mentioning that the cafe will be in a park, in fact one of the largest parks in Lewisham. The park is roughly 32 acres, the vast majority of which is green space, and it includes the new Community Garden, opened in November 2014. Since its opening, the Community Garden has been nurtured by local users to become an area of significant biodiversity, with a range of fruit, vegetable, and decorative plants, as well as areas of wildflowers. In addition, we have recently planted 300 new trees and shrubs in the park, which we secured via the Woodland Trust. These are meaningful addition to the biodiversity of Mountsfield Park, which more than offsets the loss of a few, unkempt planters on top of unused container buildings.

Waste management

We agree that the proper management of waste in Mounstfield Park is an important issue. In fact we have an ongoing dialogue with the Council and with Glendale on the desirability of improving the current bins in the park, and improving the collection of rubbish in the park. In particular, we were disappointed by the reduction in park keeper time available to Mountsfield Park which has had a detrimental impact on litter throughout the park.

Mr Korrovesis has stated that he will provide sufficient bins for the new cafe, including recycling bins (which is something the park currently lacks). Nobody will have a stronger vested interest in maintaining a clean environment than Mr Korroesis, given that it will have a direct impact on the success of his business. It is unclear to us what additional information you require, but we cannot accept that this issue could justify rejecting such an important planning application.

The broader picture

We urge you to take a broader view when considering Mr Korrovesis's application, including the historical and social context.

A new cafe is something long promised; we have been engaging with various Council efforts over the last decade to bring a cafe to fruition, most notably leading up to the recent redevelopment of the park, which included creating the Community Garden and redeveloping the play area. That redevelopment was also supposed to include the creation of a new cafe, but the Council's plans failed to attract a developer, once again disappointing the hopes of the local community. To be clear, the cafe was an essential part of that Council redevelopment, acting as a new social hub in Mountsfield Park to encourage local families and the wider community to spend more time in the park. When the Council ran a public survey to support the redevelopment work mentioned above, 83 per cent of respondents stated that a new cafe was their top priority. Any new cafe proposal needs to be considered in this context, taking into account what it is replacing (container units in a state of disrepair, with inadequate toilet facilities) and the economic and social benefits it will bring.

It is important to note that the Council approved plans for a cafe from 2014 involved keeping the existing container units, and the decision was taken to waive the requirement that those plans had to meet the BREEAM 'excellent' rating, and they did not include a green roof on top of the cafe. These



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appear to be demands being made only of Mr Korrovesis, ones the Council did not demand of itself, and which we suggest are excessive and unjustified.

With this latest set-back, it increasingly feels as though there is an intent to prevent a cafe ever being built in Mountsfield Park. It started when the cafe was not included in the final redevelopment undertaken in 2014-15. When this news was first announced, in July 2014, we had to fight to ensure that some money (£50k) was set aside to support the development of a new cafe. We then had to push again in July 2015 before any action was taken to use this money and invite bids from outside investors. Now that a viable cafe provider is in place, prepared to invest significant sums of money into Mountsfield Park, it feels as though the Council is determined to block the redevelopment by making unreasonable demands.

We try to remain positive, in the face of set-backs, and to explain to our members and the wider local community that there are justifiable reasons for the delay in achieving a new cafe. But we cannot think of any way we could explain that the latest proposal is to be rejected because, for example, a handful of unkempt planters mean that the Council is demanding Mr Korrovesis increases his investment to add a 'biodiverse living roof' to his design, or because there is insufficient detail about bin emptying times. Such a message would mean a complete loss of confidence in the Council's decision making process, and destroy any faith that people have in the good intentions of the Council.

We urge you to remove your demands that Mr Korrovesis amend his design at this late stage. We are prepared to work with you and others in the Council to find alternative solutions to any issues you are still concerned about, including for example finding a suitable location for the existing planters so there is no loss of habitat.

Yours Sincerely,

The Friends of Mountsfield Park Executive

Rory McNally (Chair), Max Calo, Carrie Blackman, Ros Philp, Gareth Conyard, Rilke John, Maria Conyard

Copied to Councillor Onikosi, Councillor Smith, Councillor Walsh, Councillor Klier, Heidi Alexander MP