



Hackbridge & Beddington Corner
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RESPONSE TO VALENCIA'S CONSULTATION ON CHANGES FOR BEDDINGTON FARMLANDS RESTORATION

About the Hackbridge and Beddington Corner Neighbourhood Development Group (NDG) and Beddington Farmlands

The NDG was established under the Localism Act 2011; formally constituted in September 2012, renewed in 2018 and more recently in October 2022. The NDG's Neighbourhood Plan was written by volunteers from the local community and adopted by Sutton Council in November 2018. The neighbourhood plan includes planning objectives, policies, and improvements for our local area, including support for Hackbridge becoming a major gateway to the Wandle Valley Regional Park. Key to this vision is the restoration of Beddington Farmlands as an important resource for nature conservation and the opening up of this green space for public access and connectivity to the surrounding Metropolitan Open Land.

The Current Restoration Plan

Due to ineffective management by Viridor and now Valencia and an inability for them to be held to account, the current plan for the restoration of Beddington Farmlands has failed to meet its objectives. This has resulted in large areas of still unrestored habitat, the loss of key wildlife species and an undetermined commitment to the provision of public access. Valencia had the opportunity and legal obligations to deliver and manage all non-contested habitats by the end of 2023 but refused to do so.

The New Restoration Plan

1. THE CONSULTATION

The NDG have already raised concern over consultation, highlighting the minimal effort given to provide the local communities with sufficient notice and detailed information.

A maildrop to residents nearest the site was two days before the scheduled live event and the advert in the paper after the event! There were issues for the online live event, in that many residents were unable to ask questions as they were given 'view only' access and the website only became live that morning. This combined with the consultation period taking place over the festive period, gave limited opportunity for residents to participate and respond.

We feel the online questionnaire relating to the east/west route is misleading and full disclosure of it being part of the Section 106 routes should be added to the text.

2. PUBLIC ACCESS

Members of the NDG have been part of the Conservation and Access Management Committee (CAMC) for some years now. Although the CAMC is the body tasked with overseeing the restoration of Beddington Farmlands, it has sadly not been given the power to effect significant positive change in the landowner's actions since its formation. As part of the CAMC, the NDG have been promoting public access on Beddington Farmlands and the links to the wider green spaces. The NDG has pushed for particular benefits for the local community, including the resurfacing of the whole of the north/south permissive path and the creation of an east/west footpath link to the Beddington community.

The NDG representatives worked hard to produce a community access strategy in 2020, including a cost analysis to help Viridor (the previous owner) in their request to move the (now unviable) Sustrans approved path, from the middle of the Beddington Farmlands site onto the existing permissive path, as approval from the local community was required to support the submission of an application to vary conditions.

Although the new plan does provide the DDA compliant public access to Beddington Farmlands that we desired, it falls short on the benefits for the local community, with no commitment to resurface the whole of the north/south permissive path and a rejection of east/west route to the Beddington community, despite both footpaths being included in the Section 106 Agreement. Currently the condition of the permissive path is such that in wet weather sections of it are impassable.

It is noted that the east/west footpath/cycle route proposed in the plan is a welcome addition but does not fulfil the aspirations of the Hackbridge and Beddington communities. Also, the establishment of this alternative east/west route has raised concerns because when it was proposed by the NDG over a year ago, it was rejected by the owner on safety grounds. This was apparently due to its proximity to the Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) and the associated heavy vehicle movement, making it unsafe for pedestrians. There has been no detail from Valencia as to how they will mitigate this risk.

As the plan is now to submit a full application, it is important that the original Section 106 agreement is upheld and that the requirement for a southern east/west footpath, which will link Hackbridge and Beddington local communities, is fulfilled.

3. VISITOR EXPERIENCE FOR NON-LOCALS

Whilst we advocate sustainable travel, access should not be limited only to those who can arrive by train, tram, bus or bike; and further plans should be sought so that people with limited mobility or young families who require a car to get there are not excluded. (It should also be noted that the gap and height drop from trains arriving on Platform 2 is dangerous.)

A main entrance to the Farmlands and how it is facilitated has not been proposed, nor have other visitor requirements been taken into consideration ie toilets, refreshments or longer term a visitor centre.

The main entrance from Hackbridge over Mile Road Bridge to the permissive path sits within the boundary of the Section 106 and the path needs renovating to become DDA compliant. Valencia needs to work with Thames Water to ensure the whole of the path is upgraded and not just the section within the lease area.

4. BIODIVERSITY

Sadly, almost all of the key wildlife species in the original Restoration Management Plan have been lost from the site and are unlikely to return. Lapwings are in danger of leaving due to a lack of habitat management, despite a public petition of 66,902 signatures and concerns raised in our letter of 6 April 2023.

Considering that there has been a significant loss of wildlife habitat since the original planning application was approved, we are interested to understand how Valencia can substantiate its claim of there being an overall Biodiversity Net Gain as a result of this new plan, which we believe should be calculated against the original baseline.

The presentation mentions minor modifications to the Restoration Management Plan, but these changes are not minimal, and an Environmental Impact Assessment should be required.

5. DELIVERY

Delivery of the plan is key to restore public confidence in the future of the site. For the CAMC to carry out their role under the Section 106 Agreement, Valencia needs to provide them with project plans, key deliverables and timelines that can be monitored and held to account if deadlines are missed, including fixed penalties. This includes full disclosure of yearly financial accounts and Bond updates. It is noted all previous attempts to obtain this information have been ignored.

With the failure to restore Beddington Farmlands on time, restricted public access and the unnecessary loss of key wildlife species, it is imperative that enforcement action continues, and that compensation is sought.