



Open Space

*An occasional newsletter of the
Aldborough Hatch Defence Association*
Issue 9 – October 2002

Residents reassured at Public Meeting and determined to continue to fight London City Racecourse

Some 150 residents at the Aldborough Hatch Defence Association's Public Meeting on Friday 20th September were reassured to hear leading local politicians confirm that – irrespective of the results of the appeal by Wiggins PLC – there will be no racecourse at Fairlop Waters.

Councillor Keith Axon, Leader of the Council, repeated his assertion that under the terms of the lease the Council has the final say on what is built on Redbridge-owned land, reaffirming that Wiggins will not build the London City Racecourse at Fairlop Waters. Councillor Axon was supported in this by Councillor Elaine Norman, Leader of the Opposition, and Councillor Richard Hoskins, Leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Grounds for appeal by Wiggins

Commenting on the grounds on which Wiggins are taking the Deputy Prime Minister to judicial review for rejecting the Planning Inspector's report which gave the go-ahead for the racecourse, Aldborough Hatch Defence Association Chairman Ron Jeffries said: "There are five grounds – each in the alternative – so that if one fails they move on to the next."

Noting that Green Belt legislation permits the construction of 'unobtrusive spectator accommodation for outdoor sport', the Chairman said: "The Planning Inspector found that the seven storey, 37 metre high, 14,460 square metre grandstand fitted this description of 'unobtrusive spectator accommodation' – and was appropriate in Green Belt – whilst the Minister found otherwise." The Chairman's comment that: "Wiggins' first ground of appeal centres round just that," was greeted by howls of laughter from the audience.

"On the day when Wiggins' share price has dropped yet again to 2.88 pence – just a whisker above it's lowest ever figure of 2.75 pence – they are clutching at straws," said the Chairman.

Linda Perham, MP for Ilford North, confirmed her continued opposition to the racecourse, congratulating residents

for their tenacity in keeping up the fight against the proposal over the past three years. Linda Perham emphasised that following the appeal to the High Court, the final decision rests with the Deputy Prime Minister, who was robust in his objections to this and any other inappropriate building on the Green Belt of Fairlop Waters.

Holding Wiggins to terms of lease

Residents made plain to Councillors Axon, Norman and Hoskins that they now expect the Council to hold Wiggins PLC to the terms of the lease and insist that Wiggins do not continue to allow Fairlop Waters to be run-down and neglected. There were calls to withhold maintenance payments to Wiggins until facilities on the site are repaired and put into proper order.

Fears that if the racecourse does not go ahead, Fairlop Waters will be developed for housing were stridently allayed by Councillor Axon, who pointed to the Minister's clear statement that the area is to remain as Green Belt and the fact that the Borough's Unitary Development Plan would not permit housing on the site.

Residents expressed concern that land under the golf course is polluted as the result of household waste infill following earlier gravel extraction and that there are dangers from methane emissions. Councillors assured residents that this is being monitored, whilst Councillor Hoskins called on the Council to explore the possibility of obtaining environmental funds from Europe to deal with this potentially lethal problem.

Speaking after the meeting, Ron Jeffries said: "The high turnout of concerned residents of all ages was a clear repudiation of the claim that the Association is a small unrepresentative bunch of vociferous people. Not one person in favour of the racecourse bothered to attend to put across their viewpoint. Every local newspaper carried the date and place of the Public Meeting. Clearly those in favour are in the minority and not us."

"Ward Councillors Vanessa Cole and John Coombes were joined at the meeting by a number of Councillors representing different parts of the Borough. The Association was heartened by their uncompromising support."

"The meeting was assured that the Council has Fairlop Waters high on its agenda. Whilst the appeal may take some months to be finally resolved, we urge Councillors to be vigorous in the meantime in keeping Wiggins to the terms of their lease."

"In the long term we look to the day when Wiggins will pack their bags and leave Fairlop Waters so that the Council in partnership with local residents can find a developer to take on the lease who will offer social leisure activity in keeping with the Green Belt and retain the openness of Fairlop Plain for the benefit of families in Redbridge."

Aldborough Hatch Defence Association Annual General Meeting

Friday 29th November 2002 at 8pm
The Vestry Room, St. Peter's Church Halls,
Aldborough Road North

Aldborough Hatch Defence Association Application for Renewal or New Membership

I wish to: *become a Member of the Aldborough Hatch Defence Association for the year 2002 to 2003

* renew my Membership for the year 2002 to 2003

*Please delete as applicable

Name: (Mr, Mrs, Miss).....

Address:.....

Postcode: Telephone:

I enclose £ as a donation towards the Association's Fighting Fund (£5 or more per individual or family).

Signed:..... Date:

Please bring to the Annual General Meeting on 29th November or return to Paula Hems, Hon Treasurer, c/o 37 Spearpoint Gardens, Aldborough Road North, Newbury Park, ILFORD, Essex IG2 7SX.

Public Meeting debate

The following is an edited version of speeches and discussion at the Public Meeting. We are grateful to Balvinder Saund for the transcript.

Linda Perham, MP for Ilford North - who had spoken against the London City Racecourse at the Public Inquiry - expressed her frustration at the 12-month delay following the Public Inquiry and had lost count of the number of times she had telephoned the Government Office to enquire about progress.

The Planning Inspector had listened to our case and whilst his decision to allow the Appeal was a disappointment, the Deputy Prime Minister's reasons for rejecting the Appeal were robust. Linda Perham congratulated the Association on its campaign against the London City Racecourse and urged everyone to keep on fighting.

Congratulating the Deputy Prime Minister on his decision, **Councillor Keith Axon, Leader of the Council**, assured the meeting that the Racecourse would not go ahead. The Council's lawyers had examined the lease and confirmed that Wiggins do not have the right under the lease to build a racecourse without the Council's permission. Councillor Axon agreed that Fairlop Waters has become run-down and is not up to standard. The Council will ensure that maintenance is carried out.

Should Wiggins lose the Appeal and submit a fresh application, the Council would look at this on planning grounds and take into account the Borough's Unitary Development Plan. Other options would be for the Council to take Wiggins to court if the company do not keep to the terms of the current lease and have the lease returned, or for Wiggins to hand the lease back. If the lease is returned, the Council would look for another group to run the golf course and country park. With hindsight, Councillor Axon agreed that the original lease could have been tighter, but the Council has learned from experience. The Council is very concerned at the maintenance of Fairlop Waters and are looking into this with vigour. In conclusion, he thanked everyone for their contribution in opposing the racecourse and was sure that the opposition will continue.

Councillor Elaine Norman, Leader of the Opposition, affirmed that the Labour Group is committed to the preservation of the green belt and nature conservation. If the Council were fortunate to get the lease back, the Council should talk to the community before considering letting the lease again and work in partnership on this issue. Any future lease must be tight as the Council is duty bound to protect its green heritage. Councillor Norman assured the meeting that on this issue the Labour Group will support the Majority Group in the preservation of the land.

Councillor Richard Hoskins, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, stated that the Deputy Prime Minister had strengthened the Council's hand on Fairlop Plain. Whatever planning application is submitted, the Council has the word of the Secretary of State that Fairlop remains green belt. Councillor Hoskins was concerned that the pollution under Fairlop Waters cannot be allowed to continue. Commenting that a coach and horses could be driven through the current lease, he said that it is vital that the whole community works to get the lease back and to protect this land for future generations.

In reply to a question from the **Chairman** regarding housing development on Fairlop Plain, **Councillor Axon** confirmed that such a development would not be permitted by the current administration. All three political parties are pledged to protect the Green Belt.

Aldborough Ward Councillor John Coombes spoke of the cost of clearing the pollution from Fairlop Waters, which would be astronomically high. In addition to household waste, other chemical waste is buried there. A resident spoke of seeing his son light up the methane gas with a cigarette lighter.

Aldborough Ward Councillor Vanessa Cole commented that there are some 80 bore holes on the site for the escape of methane gas, while expressing concern that the young golfers' scheme had been run down.

Councillor Patel said that many parents were unable to use the golf course as it is too expensive and asked the Leader of the Council if the area could be improved and facilities provided for youngsters? **Councillor Axon** said that there is a plan for developing culture and sport in the whole Borough and that not just at Fairlop Waters. He supported Councillor Norman's view that before we decide what we are going to do on Fairlop Waters we should consult with our partners. He agreed that the Council has a huge problem in dealing with the underground methane gas.

Commenting that some planning inspectors must be from Planet Mars and not Planet Earth, **Councillor Tiwari** was disappointed that many applications turned down by Councillors on good planning grounds were given approval by the inspectors on appeal.

John Sharrock, Chairman of Barkingside 21, thanked the Association for its hard work in opposing the London City Racecourse. He was disappointed that the bar and restaurant at Fairlop Waters had been allowed to run down, the children's play area is a health and safety hazard, and that the facilities are inadequate. With Wiggins appealing to the High Court another nine months will go by, and he wanted to see the Council act urgently in this matter and not allow the issues to drag on for years. **Councillor Hoskins** assured the meeting that the Council has no intention of giving up in this matter and will resist the appeal in the High Court.

Councillor Axon referred to the money paid by the Council to Wiggins to maintain the area. The Council has set up a Working Party under the chairmanship of the Chief Executive and Councillor Axon is being updated daily on the issue of pursuing monies due from Wiggins to the Council as the Company had not kept their part of the bargain in maintaining the area properly.

In response to a question on the likelihood of applying for European funding for this site, **Councillor Hoskins** agreed that in conjunction with a partner, the Council should look to Europe for funds to clear the pollution from this site.

Vivian Bendall, former MP and Parliamentary Candidate, advised that there is a government contingency fund for reclamation funding and urged the Council to bid for this money.

Councillor Patel asked a question regarding transfer of the lease. **Councillor Axon** replied that the lease could not be transferred without the Council's permission, but this can happen if Wiggins is taken over by another company.

In answer to other questions regarding the lease, **Councillor Axon** said that if the terms of the lease are not complied with, the Council would have to prove this in court. If the company was found to have breached the conditions of the lease the Working Party would look into this issue and report to the Cabinet.

In conclusion, the **Chairman** said that he was heartened to hear the three representatives of the parties agreeing, but reminded residents that there was still a battle to be fought and won. He noted that the Council wants to consult on the future of Fairlop Waters and the Association is ready to give its views on the future use of the green belt of Fairlop Plain.

Aldborough Hatch Defence Association

For further information on any of the items in this issue please contact
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