

TIMELINE OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT WITH THE ATKINSON MORLEY SITE AND WORK WITH MERTON FOR THE CREATION OF MORLEY PARK

CAMPAIGN 1982 TO 2001

In 1863 a legacy from Mr. Atkinson Morley gave St. George's Hospital, then based at Hyde Park Corner, the money for a convalescent hospital in the country. They bought the site on Copse Hill and the area which will become Morley Park was used to graze cows to provide milk. The hospital and open land was owned by St George's until 2006.

1982



- 'Morley Park' was used as playing fields which were well maintained.
- Merton council prepared a Planning Brief which proposed that all the sports pitches (upper and lower levels) and the site of the current Scout HQ should be used for housing.
- The Residents Association of West

Wimbledon (RAWW) was founded with the specific aim of changing this proposal and protecting the open land. The draft planning brief was withdrawn. The campaign had begun.



RAWW prepared evidence to achieve planning designations for the site that would shape future planning briefs and prevent development on the open land.

1990

The Victorian hospital and open land were designated as Conservation Area.

1994

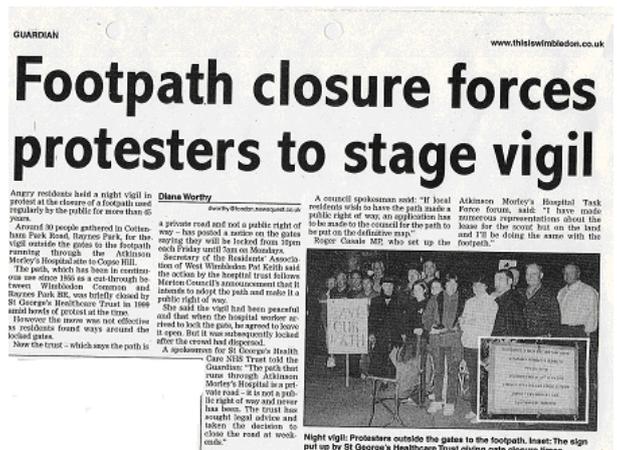
The woodland and lawn to the south of the hospital were designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The open land was all designated as Metropolitan Open Land (MOL). A record number of responses was sent from the community in support of MOL status.

1999

The Wimbledon Society, RAWW, NWWRA supported by Merton, submitted a draft proposal and business plan to create a privately funded public park (owned by a charitable trust) for the benefit of the community and local wildlife.

2001

RAWW protested when the NHS Trust started to lock the north/south path at weekends. The path was reopened following a demonstration by local residents and pressure from the council. RAWW made an application to the Council for the path to be Adopted as a public right of way. The application was eventually rejected.



CAMPAIGN 2002 to 2010



2002

LUNG was formed as an umbrella organisation by local residents' associations to campaign for permanent protection and retention of the site's open land.

2003

- St George's NHS Trust had declared their intention to close the hospital and sell the site. Morley Park Trust was set up in case the opportunity or need arose for an organisation to take on the ownership or management of the open land. **Morley Park Trust** is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee.
- Merton Council's **Planning Brief** for the Atkinson Morley site was adopted in October 2003. This included requirements for the north/south path to be retained, the playing fields to be improved, and for public access to be provided to the open land. All things for which LUNG had campaigned.
- LUNG organised several events to increase awareness of the site and the potential for a new public park. The Walk, and Planning for Real event gave people the chance to see the site and tell us their ideas for the open land.
- Around 2000 people turned out to enjoy the **Victorian Fair** which was held on the disused playing fields. The event was a tremendous success and raised £3000.
- LUNG set up a website amhlung.org.uk.



2003 – 2005 St George's Trust planning applications



- St George's submitted its first planning application in 2003 and 3 variations followed prior to final approval in 2006.
- There was strong local objection to what was seen as very unsympathetic and intensive development of both the hospital and Firs sites. The design of the 2 blocks of flats on the Firs site were especially unpopular. Some concessions were won on the built development but the approved version remained very unpopular.
- The planning consent included agreement that the freehold of the open land would pass to the Council with £627k for its maintenance and improvement. The Council were working with LUNG on plans for a Community Trust to manage the site but it was sold to Laguna Quays who had completely different ideas for the whole site.

Laguna Quays 2006 – 2010

- Laguna Quays planned to renovate the hospital to create a private paediatric hospital and fertility clinic, and renovate the Firs as accommodation for staff and visitors. LUNG never established who owned Laguna Quays, and all communication was through their solicitors and two doctors who were employed as ‘advisors’.
- They planned to retain ownership of all the open land, divert the north/south path to a fenced off strip on the eastern edge of the old playing fields, and otherwise allow no public access to the playing fields.
- Planning consent was granted subject to a legal agreement which was never signed. For reasons as mysterious as their true identity Laguna Quays gave up on the negotiations and sold the site.

CAMPAIGN AND WORK TO CREATE MORLEY PARK SINCE 2010

Berkeley Homes 2010 to 2017

Berkeley Homes (BH) bought the site in April 2010. Following public consultations and amendments, their planning application was approved by the Council in July 2011.



- 8 houses on the Firs site
- The 200 bus turning circle relocated in front of the Wolfson.
- 28 affordable flats in 3 blocks and 17 houses, and the hospital will be converted into 26 apartments on the hospital site.
- The residential development to retain ownership of the open land to the east of the north/south path (i.e. the lawn behind the hospital and part of the woodland). These areas are part of the Site of Importance for Nature Conservation and will have to be managed accordingly.

BH consulted LUNG on their plans for the remaining open land, which will become Morley Park. Their original plan was for a ‘wetland’ nature reserve on the old playing fields. This was rejected by LUNG as there is a need for playing fields and their restoration is a requirement in the planning brief. LUNG alerted the Cabinet Member to the threat to the playing fields. BH then began developing a business plan for the open land based on the assumption that it would be owned and managed by a Community Trust, and that the playing fields would be restored. BH started negotiations with Morley Park Trust as a possible Community Trust to manage the park and with the Ursuline School (at the request of the Council) for use of the sports facilities. As the planning application was being prepared for submission the Council unexpectedly announced that it proposed to take on the freehold of the open land itself. However it did not prepare a business or management plan for the site.

In 2011 LUNG presented a detailed and costed proposal for a Community Trust to manage Morley Park. This was rejected by the Council.

Berkeley Homes bought the Wolfson site in 2012. In 2013 BH got consent to build 8 detached houses on the site. The application included a proposal to include some MOL in a private garden. After objections from local residents and at the request of LUNG an agreement was signed to reduce the MOL take for private gardens to create a landscaped approach to Morley Park from Atkinson Close, and for 2 additional areas of land to be transferred to the Council to go into Morley Park. BH finally agreed to create step free access to Morley Park from Atkinson Close and the woodland walk. LUNG volunteers had been campaigning for both for some time, and pegged out the route to prove it was possible to create the step free path.

In 2013 BH made an application to replace 8 houses at the back of the hospital with 2 blocks with a total of 30 flats. This resulted in a massive protest from the local community. This was not sufficient to stop this inappropriate development, which intrudes into MOL, being approved in 2014 but local residents did achieve significant benefits for Morley Park and the community in terms of an additional £75k for works to Morley Park, additional land to be incorporated in the park, and guarantees of public access to the park, and no artificial surfaces or lights on the playing fields. BH also agreed to further reduce the MOL take for the Wolfson development by further widening the landscaped approach to Morley Park.

In 2015 BH got consent to build 11 houses on the Wolfson site and to replace 3 of the houses in the original 2011 consent for the hospital site with 5 smaller houses. Following objections from LUNG and local residents additional land was agreed for transfer to Morley Park.

In January 2017 BH submitted a third application for the Wolfson site with 85 flats in 4 blocks, one rising to 6 storeys high. LUNG's very detailed objections revealed misleading information in the BH planning application and sought to protect the security of Morley Park by preventing privileged private access for Wolfson residents. It also sought to ensure that land already agreed for inclusion in the park was not now included in the Wolfson development site. The Council advised BH that the application was over intensive.

In October 2017 the Council's Planning Applications Committee approved a revised application with a total of 75 flats in 7 blocks despite about 100 objections and strong evidence from LUNG that the application still did not comply with planning guidance.

Designing and protecting Morley Park from 2015

LUNG presented BH and the council with a plan showing the location of Japanese Knotweed (JK) in the park in 2015 and made the Council aware of the serious shortcomings of BH performance on treating it. Despite strong opposition from BH LUNG insisted that BH must keep the obligation to eradicate it, not just treat it for 5 years and then provide a guarantee. LUNG provided the council with a measurable definition of the eradication of JK which was adopted and agreed with BH. In late summer 2017, when the Council lawyers got involved in preparing the documents required



for the transfer of the park to the Council, the liability for any future spread of the JK beyond the park was raised as an issue that has delayed the transfer and opening of the park into 2018.

LUNG first notified BH and the Council of flooding in the SW corner of the playing fields in Autumn 2015 and has been monitoring the situation, and providing updates ever since. Prior to 2015 there was no history of flooding in the park or onto the adjacent public footpath. Despite repeated warnings that the hydrology in the area had changed BH were in denial that the problem was due to anything more than the lack of grass on the playing fields. Subsequently, after repeated and very serious flooding to the adjacent scout site and footpath BH has to undertake 2 programmes of remedial drainage works. As of February 2017 it is still evident there is drainage problem even before a test with prolonged or exceptionally heavy rain.

LUNG proposed that the orientation of the rental cottage was changed such that the vehicle access was direct onto Cottenham Park Road. This was to enhance the rental value and make control over vehicle access to the car park easier to manage. The proposal was adopted.

LUNG worked with the Ursuline High School and the Council to improve the design of the pavilion hall, kitchen and service areas to make them a more practical and flexible space for school and community use.

Negotiations on the management of Morley Park from 2015

LUNG has been in discussions with the Council and the Ursuline High School, which will be granted a 99 year lease for the playing fields and pavilion, since October 2015 and less intensively for many years prior to that. The Advisory Group for Morley Park comprised representatives from the local community (LUNG), the school and the Council.

In 2016 LUNG produced a detailed, costed Landscape Management Plan for all parts of the park other than those leased to the school, and obtained a detailed estimate of the gross and net income available from letting the cottage. This plan was produced by LUNG volunteers, at the request of the Council, at no cost to the Council, and was still in use by the Council when the Advisory Group was 'suspended' in February 2017.