

Trees & Views meeting re public engagement on the view of St Paul's 26th May 2023 1pm Waterlow Park

Fiona Brown (FB), Ian Henghes (IH), Andrew Hinchcley (AH), Gabi Howard (GH), Pippa Rothenberg (PR)

The meeting was called to review the progress of the public engagement materials and to review issues which could not be resolved without being in situ to look at the view with trees in leaf.

IH recapped the current situation and walked through the viewpoints of St Paul's. First to be looked at was the current viewpoint close to the statue of Sir Sydney, which over the course of some years is set to be obscured by tree growth (notably of the dawn redwood by the lower pond). The second viewpoint considered (proposal 1 in the current engagement material draft) would be seen standing at the edge of the path by the second bench from the end of the row. This is currently obscured both by lower branches on the left hand side of the downy beech in foreground, and in the middle distance by the lime tree in the park on which engagement surrounding the proposal for significant height reduction is proposed. Also looked at was another viewpoint from which the dome of St Paul's may just be glimpsed. (Proposal 2 in the current engagement draft). This is several paces off the path a little to the right hand side of the downy birch. There is only a very small radius in which this view is visible and a pace or two off the spot hides it.

Whereas it is evident that a view of St Paul's will be visible to members of the public from the path with proposal 1 work undertaken, this is unlikely to be the case with proposal 2, even with lower branches on the right hand side of the downy birch removed. When off the path standing at the position where the dome is currently visible, the work will make little difference to the view, though it will give a slightly larger radius of movement within which it is possible to still glimpse the dome, (likely only as far as immediately next to the trunk of the downy birch). It was noted that since the photograph used in the draft engagement material there has been further growth of both the lime and the dawn redwood, and it is apparent that the remaining view of St Paul's will be obscured by the dawn redwood quite rapidly.

Given the marginal benefit of proposal 2, the fact that explaining and illustrating it to members of the public would be difficult, and that whilst suggested as an alternative there was no active support for it, it was proposed by IH and agreed by AH to simplify the engagement and remove this as an option.

IH made the point that keeping engagement material simple is important and observed that detail about carbon capture was difficult to be succinct about and there are currently too many lengthy 'top level' bullet points. AH said that CO2 background table data could be provided in a 'background' document rather than as part of the main public engagement material.

FB suggested that one approach to address concerns people might have about loss of carbon capture in the park was to propose an additional tree be planted, but given this would take years to establish and new trees are planted where opportunity allows anyway it was not thought that this was an especially meaningful proposal. ¹

¹ It may be worth considering if this is something to add to the engagement material.

PR left the meeting at this point as others moved along the top path looking at how proposal 1 would also open views of the London skyline more generally, especially toward the city, before taking the steep path to the middle pond.

Walking along the left hand side of the middle pond the lime on which work is proposed comes into view and there was a pause to consider the impact of height reduction from here. It would clearly be visibly different, but as the tree is surrounded by others it might not be that remarkable. IH noted that this path is 'low footfall'. Moving on and turning right onto the bridge at the bottom end of the middle pond the lime is again visible when looking back, its foliage rising above another tree between it and the path to the bridge. Here a height reduction would be obvious by comparison with how it looks at present, but because of the density of trees in the plot not remarkable in a startling way. AH asked that a photomontage be prepared to illustrate the difference (see below).



There was a further discussion about how assuming work were to proceed following engagement this would be represented in guidance for management of the park. IH said that in 2017 there had been a report from the Trees and Views group to TAG which was accepted at the TAG meeting, proposing a Trees and Views policy document for the park with some headline suggestions for this. AH and GH said that a further exchange would be useful about the detail of this, as there wasn't currently an intention to write a bespoke tree policy for Waterlow Park. What was at issue is a request that the Trust consider authorising tree works which is not standard practice or covered within Camden's tree policy. It was agreed that a decision on policy change was unnecessary ahead of engagement. GH said we should aim to start engagement in July.