

The view of St Paul's from Waterlow Park.

A report for TAG From the Trees and Views group

Background

In a report from the Trees and Views group in 2017 a tree policy for Waterlow Park was mooted which would deviate from the standard Camden Council tree policy. The justification for this is the need to preserve and enhance unique features of the Park, situated as it is on the slopes of Highgate Hill with spectacular views over London, as well as of Lauderdale House and over its ponds. Trees in Waterlow Park need to be managed in particular harmony with the landscape to cope sympathetically with evolving views.

The Park is held in Trust by Camden. Now, thanks to the formation of the Trust Advisory Group (TAG) and re-branding of the Park, it is recognised as distinct from other Camden municipal parks. This gives it the opportunity to create new policy in areas where none exists, and where policy does exist such as is the case of Trees, to prepare policy variation where there is clear justification that this is appropriate for the Park.

Proposal

It is proposed that in the near future some wording be developed for approval by TAG and submission for endorsement to the Camden Trustee, which allows certain provisions of Camden tree policy to be overridden for Waterlow Park in order to preserve or enhance views.

Test case - the view of St Paul's from Waterlow Park

As a specific case in point to test this approach, Camden have asked a number of questions about the 'signature' view from the Park of St Paul's cathedral which is progressively being obscured due to tree growth. The questions from Camden along with answers follow.

Q1. A more specific description of the problems currently experienced with maintaining the park's view. Are there specific buildings that the group wish to remain relatively unobstructed? (e.g. St Paul's. The Shard etc,)

A1. In relation to the view of St Paul's it is clear that one of the prime reasons people visit Waterlow Park is to enjoy the views towards the London Skyline¹, and notably the view of St Paul's from the path next to the location of the statue of Sir Sydney Waterlow. This view is being progressively lost as canopies rise with the growth of trees. In the past trees have been planted without particular consideration to the maintenance of views, so certain species have been sited in locations that are now proving problematic. Notably now progressively obscuring the view towards St Paul's is a Dawn Redwood planted to the south of the lower pond. This is now level with the far horizon and the top of the dome of St Paul's. Ten years ago, in 2011, it was barely noticeable from the same location, with the top of the Dawn Redwood below the level of St Paul's.

¹ See A6 below for additional evidence.

Q2. *We feel better evidence is needed – for example photos from different years, with standardised horizons and framing*

A2.



2012

2021

Q3. *Which are the specific trees that the group wish to request are managed differently e.g. crown reduction / removed?*

A3. Having considered a reduction of both the oak to the right of the photos² and the dawn redwood in the centre, the Trees & Views group would recommend that the redwood is reduced and reshaped by approx 25% to drop the peak of the tree to below the sight line of the view. Our belief is that the Oak with its associated animals makes a much greater contribution to biodiversity in the park, and that reducing it might stress and threaten the stability of the tree. We also propose crown reducing the lime on the left in order to broaden the skyline and to maintain a view of St Pauls as one moves towards Lauderdale House.

Q4. *What would the anticipated crown reduction programme look like (repeated in years to come?)*

A4. Crown reduction would need repetition in future years. This might be every 4 or 5 years, or with more substantial initial reduction perhaps every decade or so.

Q5. *TAG needs to understand that such a request to maintain the view from the top of the park would be considered by Camden as landowner/manager and distinct from the Planning Authority which does not currently recognise this view as a protected view.*

A5. TAG made representations to the consultation process of what was to become the 2021 London Plan to have the view of St Paul's from the Park designated. This was not progressed so it is not specifically mentioned in the 2021 Plan. There are however a number of clauses in the London Plan which point to the importance of preserving views such as this.³ It is hoped that the Trust might make a formal representation to Camden to have the

² Lower tree in the background slightly above the horizon. Far right is a second tall lime tree.

³ There are a number of policy declarations in the London Plan relating to views

view designated when the Local Plan⁴ for the borough is next revised, and in the meantime include it as a view to be taken into consideration during any planning applications and wider development plans. The Council could also bring this view to the attention of other boroughs and city hall, as it is clearly the case that were a tall building to be sited behind the dome of St Paul's in the borough of Southwark the view would be compromised.⁵

Following consultation with Camden Council as Managers of Waterlow Park TAG makes recommendations to the Waterlow Park Trust as the landowner. Normally recommendations are actionable subject to any constraints and funding availability. In some circumstances the corporate Trustee of the Waterlow Park Trust may need to make a final decision.

Policy D9 Tall Buildings C 1a) deals with the visual impact of buildings specifically long-range views - "these require attention to be paid to the design of the top of the building. It should make a positive contribution to the existing and emerging skyline and not adversely affect local or strategic views" Also C1 d) "...proposals should take account of, and avoid harm to, the significance of London's heritage assets and their settings."

Policy HC3 Strategic and Local Views

F "Boroughs should include all designated views, including the protected vistas, in their Local Plans and work with relevant land owners to ensure there is inclusive public access to the viewing location, and that the view foreground, middle ground and background are effectively managed in accordance with the LVMF SPG.

Policy HC4 London View Management Framework

B "Development in the foreground, middle ground and background of a designated view should not be intrusive, unsightly or prominent to the detriment of the view."

E "Viewing places should be accessible and managed so that they enhance people's experience of the view."

P 294 7.3.6 also speaks of the importance of clearly identifying local views in local plans.

⁴ The Camden Local Plan covers key open spaces in Camden. Notably:

6.43 "Hampstead Heath - views of Palace of Westminster and St Pauls"

7.26 (within Design and Heritage section) speaks of:

"views of St Paul's Cathedral from Kenwood, Parliament Hill and Primrose Hill"

This section should designate Waterlow Park as another view of St Paul's

⁵ The London View management Framework (LVMF SPG) has considerable detail about views of St Paul's (see <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/implementing-london-plan/london-plan-guidance-and-spgs/london-view-management>) Specifically the views of St Paul's from Alexandra Palace, Kenwood House, and Parliament Hill are carefully documented. It should be noted that Waterlow Park is along a very similar axis, positioned as it is between the Kenwood and Alexandra Palace viewpoints.

Q6. *How does the group think the public and park users would respond to the concept of managing, possibly felling trees to maintain the park's view? Does the group have ideas for an engagement process for these issues?*

A6. The Friends of Waterlow Park recently carried out a consultation about different Park issues. In one question respondents were asked to choose three favourite aspects of the park from a list or volunteer their own. Of 20 who did this, 8 said 'City Views' and 'Fantastic View over London'. Question 6 asked for any suggestions. 172 out of 328 gave their suggestions. Ten people mentioned views, of these specifically:

Two said 'Keep view of St Paul's' (and obscure the Shard) and 'keep general views by judicious pruning'.

One said Trees obscure views of Central London.

Three others mention views of City (1) or Central London (1) or London (1)

The Friends have long known that Views are important to Park visitors. Indeed it is for this reason that they first instigated a 'trees and views' group, combining the two subjects as they cannot be taken in isolation in Waterlow Park.

With regards to other views in the Park there could be an online and/or in person consultation process led by the Friends to ensure that there was public support.⁶

Q7. *What is the interplay between the Trees and Views group and the Biodiversity working group over this issue?*

A7. All Volunteer Groups are part of the tracking system put in place by TAG with group leaders identified and via the Tracker and Friends meetings made aware of each-others activities. Contact between the biodiversity and Trees and Views group over the St Paul's view has addressed the fact that any kind of tree work is incompatible with the ideal of preserving the maximum number of habitats and resulted in adjusting this document. The Friends committee has also been consulted and has confirmed support for preserving views taking precedence over limited habitat loss in this case. The Trees and Views group and the Biodiversity group will be consulting further along with the Friends and Camden about species planting for resilience to climate change. This is of course particularly important for trees given they would be expected to have a longer lifespan than many other plants.

Q8. *We also note there isn't currently a budget for such work, so it would need to be investigated as to whether the park budget could support such work in the future.*

A8. This will need addressing by TAG / Camden and FoWP in relation to other expenditure.

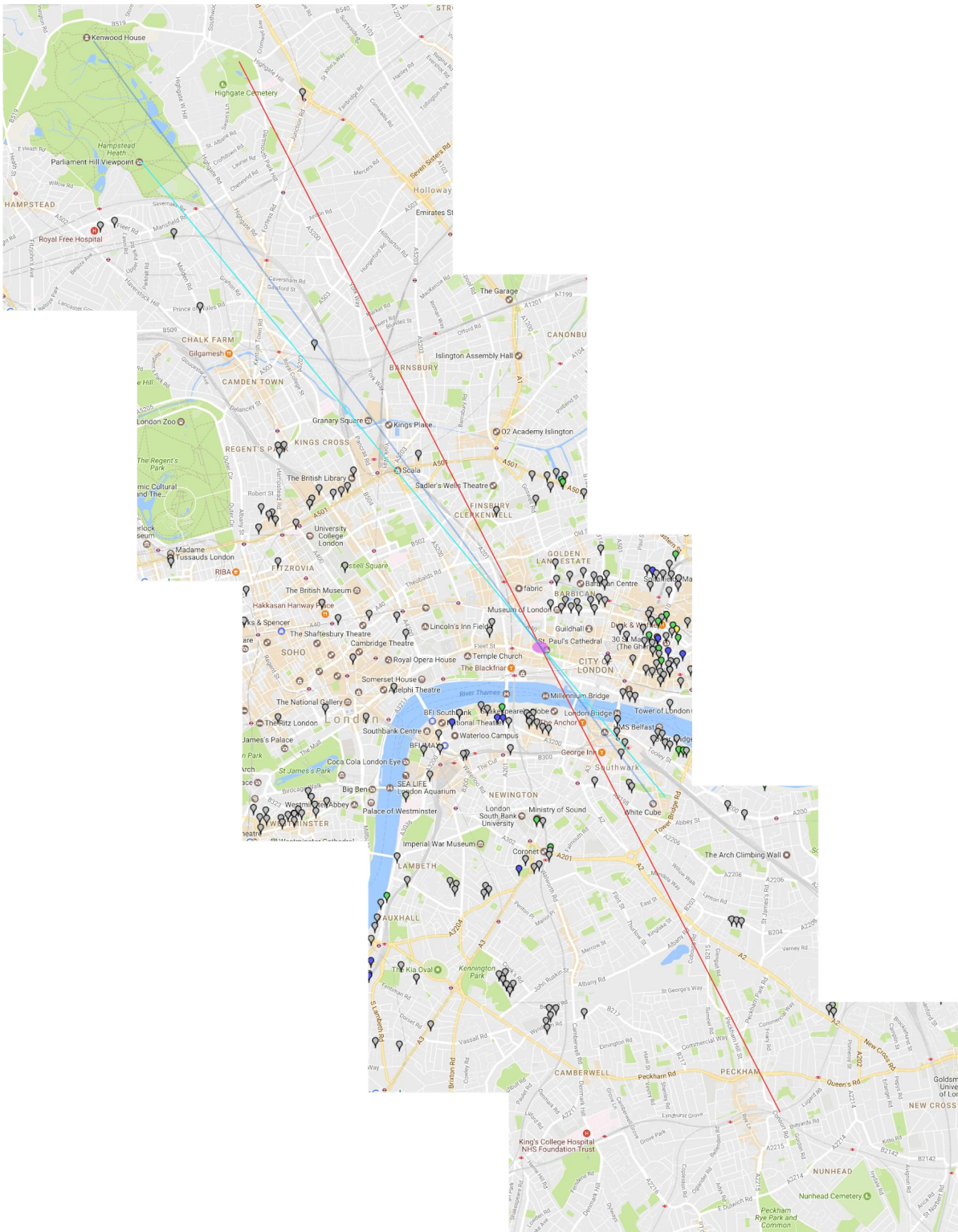
2036 compared to 2021

⁶ The aim would always be to prune a tree rather than fell it

Based on the growth rate of the dawn redwood over the last 10 years the following is a montage showing how it may be anticipated to look in 15 years time if it is left to grow. In the last 10 years it has grown from below the cathedral columns to touch the horizon.



Sight-line of St Paul's Cathedral from Waterlow Park



Viewed from Waterlow Park (red line) there are no tall buildings immediately behind St Paul's Cathedral which gives its dome a particular prominence as the cross touches the skyline. Also shown are sight-lines from Kenwood and Parliament Hill