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MITCHAM [BISHOPSFORD ROAD] BRIDGE
Comments to Merton Council on the Consultation Document for a new bridge
June 2020

1. Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage and Mitcham Society are the two civic societies for the area and Wandle Valley Forum provides support and an independent voice for over 130 community groups and voluntary organisations and for everyone who shares a passion for the Wandle.
2. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the emerging plans for a new bridge over the Wandle on Bishopsford Road. This is an historic site marking the original crossing of the Wandle at the gateway to Mitcham. Its significance is recognised by its location within the Wandle Valley Conservation Area and it is positioned on the Wandle Trail in a green corridor within the Wandle Valley Regional Park. It is known as Mitcham Bridge which best reflects this historic role rather than a name derived from the more recent name of the road which it supports. We ask that this name is continued through this project.
3. We support the environmental and other benefits of a single span structure. There is a strong case for retaining an arched structure reflecting the historic role of this crossing but we recognise that downstream views are obstructed by the separate footbridge and upstream views will benefit from the integration of the more recently constructed existing footway into a single structure. Of the limited options presented in the Consultation Document we support Option 1 with parapets that combine appropriate brickwork and decorative wrought iron railings. We believe the railings should be distinctive and of high quality and make proposals below for how they can incorporate appropriate artwork. We caution against efforts to match the railings to those used at Watermeads which are relatively recent and have no historic significance. Option 1 will also result in a lower impact from litter, spray and surface run off on the river.
4. We ask that the following issues are addressed in bringing forward a planning application for a replacement bridge:
 - Acknowledgement of the Wandle in the design and presentation of the new bridge and associated structures, including:
 - a relevant artistic component incorporated in the final design, such as the integration of appropriate wildlife images (e.g. heron, trout) rendered in wrought iron within decorative railings over the river – this should be provided by a specialist in heritage ironwork
 - use of the Wandle Valley Regional Park visual identity in all signage and interpretation
 - Provision of a wider pavement over the bridge to support and encourage those on foot to dwell along with appropriate separate provision for those on bike, with an overall narrowing of road space for cars
 - Improvements to the immediate setting of the structure, including:

- retention of the brick wall running north from the river on the western side which provides visual and noise protection to the adjacent green space
 - strengthening the relationship to the green space to the north west which includes the Wandle Trail and which should formally be recognised as part of Ravensbury Park (including regularisation of the entry sign which includes incorrect information on its location)
- Incorporation of both parish boundary markers in the final structure – the Consultation Document implies there is a single marker
- Provision of appropriate interpretation accompanying the new structure which speaks to the historic significance of the location and its position on the Wandle Trail - we should be happy to collaborate on the content as a community-led initiative, working with Wandle Industrial Museum, National Trust and others. The final designs should make space for this within the public realm in sight of the historic ford on the upstream side of the bridge. We acknowledge that delivering this to a high standard and avoiding an inadequate and short-lived standard “interpretation board” may be considered an additional cost and should be pleased to collaborate over the development of a small separately funded project from external sources or through the Neighbourhood Fund
- The planning application should be supported by:
 - a detailed heritage assessment of both the significance of the existing 1880s bridge, the remains of any earlier structures (including the adjacent ford), and the impacts of the proposals on both the Conservation Area (including evidence of how it will meet the legal requirement to “preserve and enhance” its character) and nearby listed buildings
 - an assessment of the impact on identified key views, including along the Wandle from Watermeads and the Wandle Trail as it enters Ravensbury Park
 - an assessment of how the design supports delivery of the Wandle's Catchment Management Plan with a view to:
 - enhancing the natural flow of the river
 - reducing shadowing of the water
 - naturalising the river banks
 - enhancing wildlife
 - avoiding both long term pollution from surface run-off and short term impacts from silt during construction
 - an assessment of how the new structure and associated works contribute positively to its location in a key green corridor of wildlife significance flanked by National Trust land on both sides and public open space and including the Wandle Trail
 - a Design and Access Statement that explains the evolution from a three to a two and now a single span bridge design, especially given Cabinet approval in February 2020 was for either a two or single span bridge
 - details of the wrought iron and brickwork to be used
 - measures to save relevant historic features, such as the bridge number, in heritage collections (e.g. Wandle Industrial Museum)

5. We should welcome the opportunity to meet and take forward those aspects of the project which will require further community input. We should also welcome being included in the consultation on the relevant permit application(s) to the Environment Agency.