



Common Knowledge

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Victory For Common Sense

Four months ago, Lambeth Council offered Streatham Common to Tesco as the best place for the 'temporary' ice rink that needs to be in place before the current rink is demolished and until a new permanent rink is built as part of the Hub. The Friends strongly objected to the idea that our Common should be used for this purpose and soon joined hands with other groups to form the Hands off our Common protest group. Our protests have not been in vain as the Council has now changed its mind and instead offered the Pope's Road (condemned) car park site in Brixton. This is a victory for the Common but unfortunately a loss for Streatham, in which several potential alternative sites were available but were disfavoured for various reasons - some more valid than others - by the Council officers. What is crucial for Streatham now is that there is a cast iron guarantee that a permanent ice rink returns to the Hub, along with a swimming pool and gym, as has long been promised. And that these leisure facilities are up and running before the Tesco supermarket can be opened, as has also been promised. The Council promises both will happen. Failure to deliver on either promise would be a betrayal by the community's elected council members. We have learned much about organising an effective protest and would not hesitate to do so again. We hope that Lambeth Council has learnt that it needs to provide far more information, communication and consultation than it did in this case if it is to have the respect and support of the community. You can judge how poorly the Council performed from the diary that follows.

The poster that worked!

**HANDS OFF
OUR COMMON**



**SAY NO TO A 'TEMPORARY' ICE
RINK ON STREATHAM COMMON**

Join the campaign to demand Lambeth Council
find an alternative site for this large structure
so that we can protect the common **AND** continue
ice skating in Streatham.

MORE INFO/TAKE ACTION AT:
www.HANDSOFFOURCOMMON.com

Hands Off Our Common Diary

16 March – first news of the new Hub agreement between Lambeth Council and Tesco, part of which is to place a ‘temporary’ ice rink on Streatham Common, emerges in the Streatham Guardian online. There is no communication from the Council to the Friends.

18 March – the Friends receive an email from Cllr Rachel Heywood saying “You have obviously heard that we have been successful in reaching an agreement with Tesco, which we are very pleased about. I understand that you may well be worried about elements of the proposals which are under discussion at the moment, and which will be reviewed at a special Cabinet meeting on 29th March.”

24 March – Friends meet with Cllrs Heywood and Mark Bennett, explaining the grounds for their strong opposition. They are told that if the rink does end up on the Common there will eventually be many benefits for the Common. Friends request the opportunity to address the special Cabinet meeting.

29 March – The special Cabinet Meeting considers the recommendation (among others) that “authorises officers, subject to further investigations and necessary permissions being obtained to grant licence to Tesco to provide, operate and decommission a temporary ice rink on Streatham Common”. Although the Friends and others opposed to placing the ice rink on the Common are allowed to address the Cabinet meeting, the recommendation is rubber stamped.

11 April – The first petition against the rink on the Common is organised by the Friends at Kite Day and gets around 200 signatures. A discussion with Bridged Hall of Sustainable Streatham sows the seeds of what is to become Hands off our Common (HOOC).

28 April– HOOC is formed at a public meeting. In addition to the Friends and Sustain-

able Streatham, other organisations represented include Streatham Society, Streatham Action, Friends of Unigate Woods, Open Spaces Society and various local resident associations. There are also several local Councillors and representatives of groups of local school parents, residents and businesses.

Early May – HOOC website starts providing information about the organisation, details of protest events planned, updates on actions taken and an online petition.

9 May – in HOOC’s first public protest campaign supporters mark out the presumed area of the proposed rink on the Common. The dimensions are based on those of the ‘temporary’ ice rink in Cardiff that are featured on HOOC’s protest poster.

21 May – local primary school parents, who have started their own petition, hold a picnic protest on the Common that is attended by local press



24 May – HOOC resorts to a Freedom of Information request to identify which alternative sites had been considered as Lambeth refuses to divulge this information, let alone why Streatham Common is favoured over the other sites.

29 May to 6 June – momentum gathers for the petition with names gathered on the High Street, on Streatham Common and online.

7 to 13 June – petitioners pass 1500. Unofficial news reaches us from two sources that a site in Brixton is being seriously looked at as an alternative. An article in the Council’s *Lambeth Life* confirms the rumours, identifies the condemned Pope’s Road car park as the site in Brixton and adds that an undisclosed site on Streatham High Rd is also being considered as another alternative.

16 June – the Friends AGM is attended by Cllrs Sally Prentice and Florence Nosegbe, the first time since the Cabinet meeting that any member of the (new, post election) council has put their head above the parapet. They confirm that Pope’s Rd is a serious

alternative contender and that the other possibility is the site bordered by Streatham High Rd, Penistone Rd and Kempshott Rd that used to be used for building MI5 vehicles. Against the Common, they say, is the 12-18 months probable planning application process (too long for Tesco), plus the problem of power supply and the public opposition. Against the MI5 site is the tight fit and the rent that would be charged by the new owners, which Tesco's budget wouldn't cover. Against Pope's Rd is that it is not in Streatham. We are told a recommendation will be made for a Cabinet meeting on 26 July, with at least some information released before then.

16 / 17 June – HOOC protests covered by articles in Evening Standard and, again, by local papers.

24 June – HOOC meet Streatham's MP, Chuka Umunna, who has also been frustrated by the lack of information coming from the council. He says he intends to set up a public meeting and request Council and Tesco representatives to attend.

27 June to 2 July – HOOC's Freedom of Information request finally reveals the other sites considered but not the criteria by which they were judged because, it is said, this might damage the commercial interests of the parties involved (which, were it true, does allow withholding of information).

Also, we learn from Chuka Umunna that a report on the ice rink is to be published on 16 July. We assume this will be the recommendation for Cabinet to consider on 26 July.

And HOOC submits a series of critical questions about the plan of putting the rink on the Common to Lambeth's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their 22 July meeting.

3 July – a Friends / HOOC stand at Streatham Festival's Top of the Common event nets another 200 petition names, hands out stickers and creates a wallpaper strip with childrens' handprints.

5 July – we hear a rumour that we will not be disappointed by the 16 July document. And another rumour has it that Pope's Rd car park site is likely to be chosen over the Common. But we are not counting our chickens.

14 July – petition names now exceed 2000 and HOOC mailing surpasses 700.

15 July – a written response in advance of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's meeting adds almost nothing to what little we have previously gleaned about why the Common was chosen despite the many reasons for it not being a sensible option.

16 July – the recommendations prepared by Cllrs Prentice and Nosegbe et al., and to be considered by the Cabinet on 26 July, are published. They are that the temporary ice rink is built on the site of the Pope's Rd car park rather than on the Common, essentially for the three main reasons mentioned by the Councillors at the Friends AGM. The sting in the tale is that the document raises the possibility that a temporary gym and dance studio will be erected on the Rookery car park, a proposition that had previously been raised but we were led to believe had been dropped.

HOOC issues a statement saying it is glad that the Streatham Common is no longer the recommended site but unhappy that the site is not in Streatham.

22 July - in response to HOOC's concern, Cllr Nosegbe lets us know that she will be recommending that the idea of a gym on the Rookery car park is not pursued.

Also two HOOC members attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to raise a supplementary question to those presented in advance and to which the response was inadequate.

And Chuka Umunna's People's Question Time on Streatham Hub is held at Dunraven School. Cllr Nosegbe gives a commitment that there will be no return to the idea of having the rink on the Common and says she is absolutely committed to a permanent rink returning to the Hub site.

26 July – Lambeth Council's Cabinet accept the recommendation that the temporary ice rink should on the Pope's Road site in Brixton and that the possibility of using the Rookery car park for a gym should not be pursued. Cabinet also reaffirmed that Tesco would not be permitted to open the supermarket until all the leisure facilities were up and running. VICTORY!♦

Memories

My earliest memory of the Common is a scary one.

I'm in the Rookery café with my dad, hanging on to his navy blue duffel coat while he waits to be served. After playing on the Common with my sister and brother, I'm eagerly anticipating cake. I tug on the pocket of my dad's coat and look up to meet his affectionate gaze. Then horror strikes. The face looking down at me is that of a total stranger, complete with ferocious black beard. It wasn't my dad's duffel coat after all, but a similar one. Shock and embarrassment mingle with panic. Where's Daddy?

In fact he wasn't far. But I was a timid child and it took me a while to recover from the awkwardness of the encounter. And I'm still coming to terms with that beard.

Thankfully that's my only unpleasant childhood memory of the Common. My siblings and I loved playing there. Rolling down the grassy slopes at the top of the Rookery was a favourite game, of course. Another involved my sister, Jessica, and I filling our cheeks to bursting point from the water fountains, then seeing who could spit out the longest stream of water. We liked the fountains and would drink from them at any time of year, even if we weren't thirsty. I remember how icy cold the metal tap and water would get in the winter.

My dad taking us to see the crib during Advent was a particularly special time. I'm glad the crib is still used, and get a warm glow inside when I see it there, especially at night with the light on.

These childhood memories are particularly precious because our beloved Jessica was killed by a car three days before her twelfth birthday.

As a teenager I spent lots of time on the Common, mostly with my best friend, Emma. We spent hours in the café chatting, and, at one stage, devouring huge quantities of white toast. This didn't spoil

my appetite for my mother's cooking so I must have been having a growth spurt.

If we weren't in the mood to walk to the top of the Common, we'd stay at the bottom, hanging out in the playground, although we were too old for it.

About this time, I remember the appearance of the green signs listing somewhat grandiosely the facilities of Lambeth's green spaces. Emma has a memorable turn of phrase, and dismissed one amenity, the lower paddling pool, as "ninety per cent piss".

I lived away from SW16 from the age of 20, then, following a mental breakdown when I was 30, found myself back in Streatham Common for a month, at a residential psychiatric unit in Lewin Road.

There I spent time with Hilary. She was suicidal and unable to talk about much other than how she wanted to die, but I got a sense that in 'normal life' we might have been good friends.

I took her for walks in a vain effort to take her mind off her hellish suffering. At the Rookery café I bought her a cake, and she was disappointed that its filling wasn't fresh cream. One might think that someone able to enjoy food and care about the quality of ingredients couldn't be that depressed. Not true. That tea on the Common would be Hilary's last. The next day she threw herself under a train at Wimbledon station.

I avoided the Common for a while after that.

In 2007 I moved back into the area with my wonderful partner, Tama. He grew up herding goats in West Africa, and has adapted so well to urban living that he sometimes forgets how important it is to experience greenery from time to time. Introducing him to the delights of the Common / Rookery has been great, because I have been able to rediscover them.

As I write I'm looking forward to a visit from my brother, Leo, and his family next week. He's got two children – Ruby, 4, and Max,

1, and I've scheduled some time for a walk on the Common followed by ice cream at the café. I must have been about Ruby's age when I nearly went off with Black Beard. So we'll keep a close eye on her.

Grace McCann, 35, grew up in Westwell Road and still lives in Streatham

What's Up?

Local Nature Reserve - the draft plan for the creation of such a reserve on the Common has been approved by Natural England. There will now be a period of public consultation before the final plan is submitted for approval by the Council. If you have any comments or questions, please send them to the editor or to the Friends email.

Green Flag - the Council plans to apply for a Green Flag award for the Rookery next year. The Friends will be working with council officers to ensure the Rookery is up to scratch and has the necessary management plan in place.

Play Structure – the architects responsible for the new play structure for 8-13 year olds produced a sketch of their initial ideas for public comment at the Streatham Festival event on the Common. The sketch showed a netted and raised tunnel that wound between trees near the paddling pool at the top of the Common, possibly ending with an observation platform just into the woods. It can be seen via the homepage of the Friends website. Further development of the idea and pre-planning application consultations are under way.

Football / Cricket – work is largely completed on the new football pitches and cricket strip. The drainage work to allow all-year football has finished but a period of settling in and tidying up is needed before the pitches are marked out. Meanwhile temporary pitches will be created. The cricket strip - artificial turf over limestone - has been installed but not to the satisfaction of the Council so remedial

work will be necessary before it is usable.

Drinking Fountains - after years of being out of action, both the fountain in the Rookery and the one just outside are in action again. Welcome back.

Rookery - the water cascade is operational but only during the hours that gardeners are on site. Longstanding problems of water leakage through the base of the pools means there is a danger of the recirculating pump burning out unless someone is on hand to top up the bottom pool with a hose as necessary. The recirculating pump in the round pond is still not working following vandalism. Repair work has been completed on the shelter and wooden fencing.

Willow Trees - the willows recently planted near the playground are not faring well. Some seem to have died and others look as though they are ailing, perhaps through lack of water. They will now be watered more frequently - let's hope they recover ♦

Recent Events

A busy season events kicked off with a **Spring Egg Hunt** that saw 186 very happy children go away with a reward and three even happier children win a large egg in the raffle for their age groups. **Kite Day** thankfully returned after Bob Colover's 'sabbatical' year and was a spectacular



success. Hundreds of people enjoyed

great weather, plenty of wind and brilliant kite-flying displays, while scores flew their own kites of every shape, size and hue. The **Spring Bird Walk** yielded excellent views of nuthatches and singing summer warblers for the 25 people who came along, and the **Bird Box Survey** discovered two pairs of nuthatches using boxes in addition to the more expected blue tit and great tit occupants of another seven boxes. This year's **Cake Competition** attracted at least twice as many entrants as last year's, meaning that the judges had to sample 30 cakes, poor things! Two successful sessions of **Chess in the Rookery** made use of our new giant chess set. **The History and Natural History of Streatham Common** was the title of a well attended walk organised by the Friends and Streatham Society. A new event this year was **Band in the Rookery** at which John Brown and his friends provided acoustic music for a crowd of happy listeners. Last, but not least, this year's **Shakespeare in the Rookery** attracted a record crowd, on a perfect afternoon, to watch Merchant of Venice. Theatre Set-Up, who performed the play, said that for the second year running the Rookery was their most successful location. Our **Annual General Meeting** was dominated by a discussion about the ice rink and was the first time that council officials had made themselves available for public questioning on the topic ♦

Many Thanks

We would not be able to run our events without a willing band of volunteers. The Friends and the Park Rangers would like to thank the many volunteers who play such a crucial role. Thanks also to Sainsbury's for donating the prizes for the Spring Egg Hunt and for allowing their café to be used for our AGM. Veolia have kindly donated some high visibility vests to the Friends and equally kindly sponsored the portable loos at Kite Day, which we were required to provide for the first time. Finally, thanks to Streatham's new Town

Centre Manager, Angelina Purcell, for supporting Shakespeare in the Rookery ♦

Events for your diary

("to be confirmed" information will be added to our website as soon as possible)

September 5th. Fun Dog Show. Opposite the Rookery café, starting at 2.30 pm.

October 2nd. Big Draw. In the playground, 1.00 - 3.00 pm.

October 20th. Friends Public Meeting. 7.30 pm. Venue to be confirmed. Main topic: creating a community garden in the Rookery.

October / November. Volunteer Days on the Common. Dates to be confirmed. Spend an hour or six helping with conservation work.

November 7th. Bird Walk. Starting at 9.00 am from the Rookery café.

December 8th. Carol Concert and Friends Christmas Party. Starts with mince pies and mulled wine at 7.00 pm by the Christmas tree near the playground.

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