

George Row, Bermondsey Public Consultation on Improvements to Open Space

Prepared for: London Borough of Southwark

Date: September 2019



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George Row Public Consultation on Improvements to Open Space

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Version Control

Version	Author	Changes from previous version	Checked by	Date checked
01	GWW	None	CD	16.9.2019
02	GWW	Addition of on line responses	JL	18.9.2019
03	GWW	Minor text changes	CD	26.9.2019

1 Introduction and aims

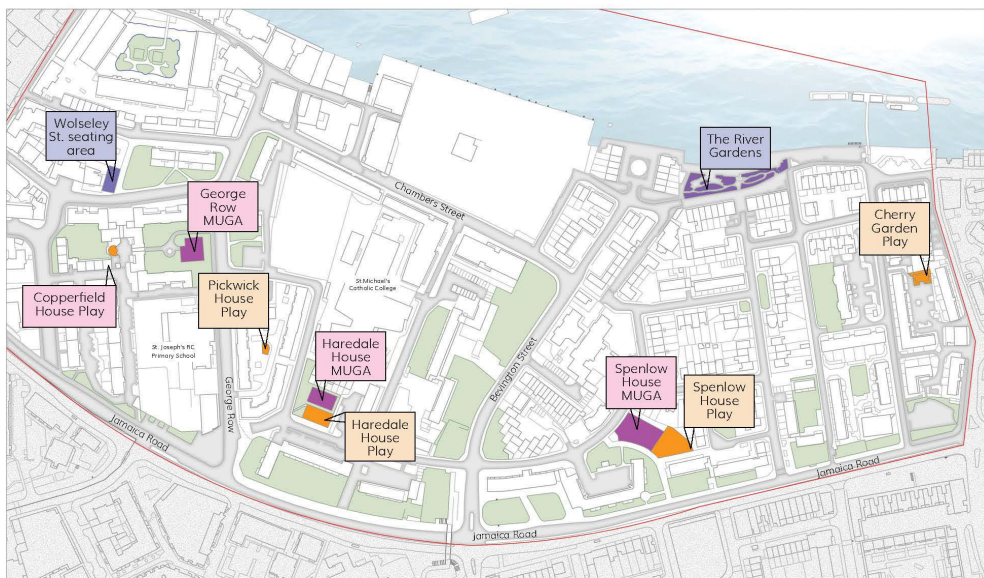
The consultation has been carried out by Southwark Council to seek opinions on proposals to upgrade or change the use of an existing ball court in a publicly accessible area of land off George Row. The aim of the consultation was to seek feedback on two potential options for the space and, from that finalise a brief for more detailed consultation and design development for an improvement scheme.

2 Previous consultations

2.1 Bermondsey Riverside Community Project

In autumn 2018 two reports were commissioned by Southwark Council and a community board under the banner of the Bermondsey Riverside Community Project (BRCP). Funded by the Thames Tideway Section 106 contributions, strategic studies were carried out to research and present options for the enhancement of open spaces across the Dickens Estate and wider Tideway 106 area. The aim was to consult on the opportunities, constraints and initial ideas for improving the public realm in the area. The outcome from the BRCP was that two reports were produced. One identified a strategy for environmental improvements on the Dickens Estate and the other looked at opportunities for social and play spaces within the wider Section 106 area.

The George Row ball courts were one of the spaces which were identified in the BRCP as having potential for improvement, and a sketch scheme was drawn up for the site.



Bermondsey Riverside Existing Play Sites and Open Spaces

Figure 1 – Map of Sites from the Bermondsey Riverside Community Project

3 Scope of this consultation

George Row is the first space from the BRCP strategy to be considered for improvements. In April 2019, Wynne-Williams Associates (landscape architects) were asked to draw up two alternative proposals for the space which could be used as the basis for a consultation about its future. One option was to retain but improve the ball court and its surrounding landscape, the other option was to remove the ball court and redesign the space as a play area.

The consultation was organised by Southwark Councils Community Projects team and letters were sent to 2092 addresses and contacts in the local area. The consultation ran from 10th June 2019 until 5th July 2019 and people were invited to respond on the online site, by email, letter or telephone expressing a preference for either option and making comments on the proposals.

4 Site description

4.1 Location

The site is located off George Row, London SE16. It is accessed from George Row and by a covered way beneath the adjacent residential blocks. It is a 3-sided courtyard, facing east on the open side with 4 and 5 storey residential blocks surrounding the space on the other three sides. The ball court is situated on the eastern side of the space with a landscaped area around.

4.2 Current condition and layout

The space has been identified for improvement because of its current condition and existing layout. The ball court itself is sunk into the soft landscape and is surrounded by high walls and ball stop fences. The walls need repair with cracks and broken sections, the paving is worn and the drainage to the court is not functioning.

The courts have an in-built stepped viewing terrace which faces the road and are surrounded by mature trees and shrubs.

Apart from the physical condition of the courts, the remaining space would also benefit from re organisation and improvement. Visibility across the space is poor because of the high walls to the courts. Access is restricted with only one gate into the courts and the path through the space has suffered damage from tree roots and it needs resurfacing.

Overall there are a number of opportunities to make a significant improvement to the space both in terms of its function, safety and aesthetics.



Figure 2: Aerial view of site

5 Options Offered

Two designs were drawn up for consultation and sent out to residents and local interest groups for comment.

5.1 Option A

This Option illustrated the upgrading of the ball court at the heart of the space and enhancements to the surrounding landscaped areas in the courtyard. The walls around the courts are lowered in height and repaired, new fencing, goals, bright surfacing and drainage

provided, and the terrace seating is upgraded with timber seats to make it more comfortable to use.

A new access is formed directly from the street on George Row into the ball courts so that there is an alternative means of escape from the courts and they are made more accessible to the residents.

In the wider courtyard space, informal play equipment is sited under the trees and new seating, paving and a table tennis table are shown.

The existing mature trees and rolling grass mounds are retained in the design.

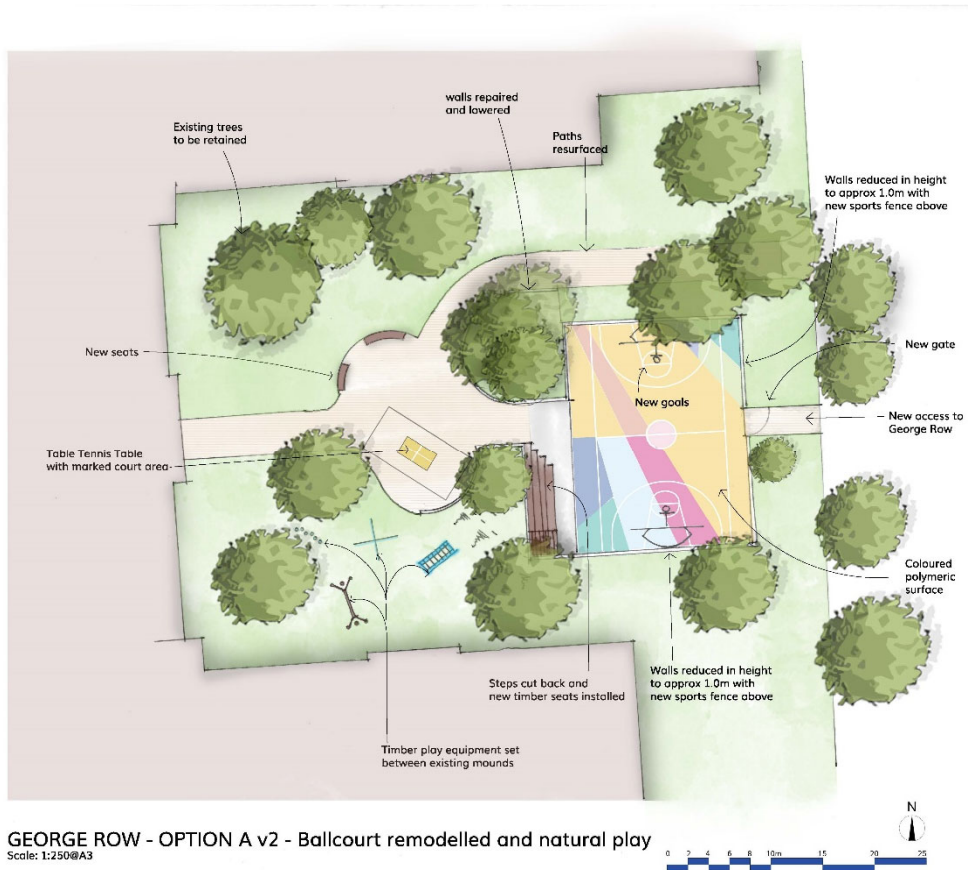


Figure 3 – Option A – Ball Court retained and improved

5.2 Option B

In the second option, the ball court is replaced with a play space. A new access is formed from George Row and the ball court area is remodelled to provide a play scape with a range of new equipment and soft surfaces. The walls are reduced in height to open the space and a new design area is formed in the wider courtyard. Existing trees and rolling grass mounds are retained and incorporated into the design.

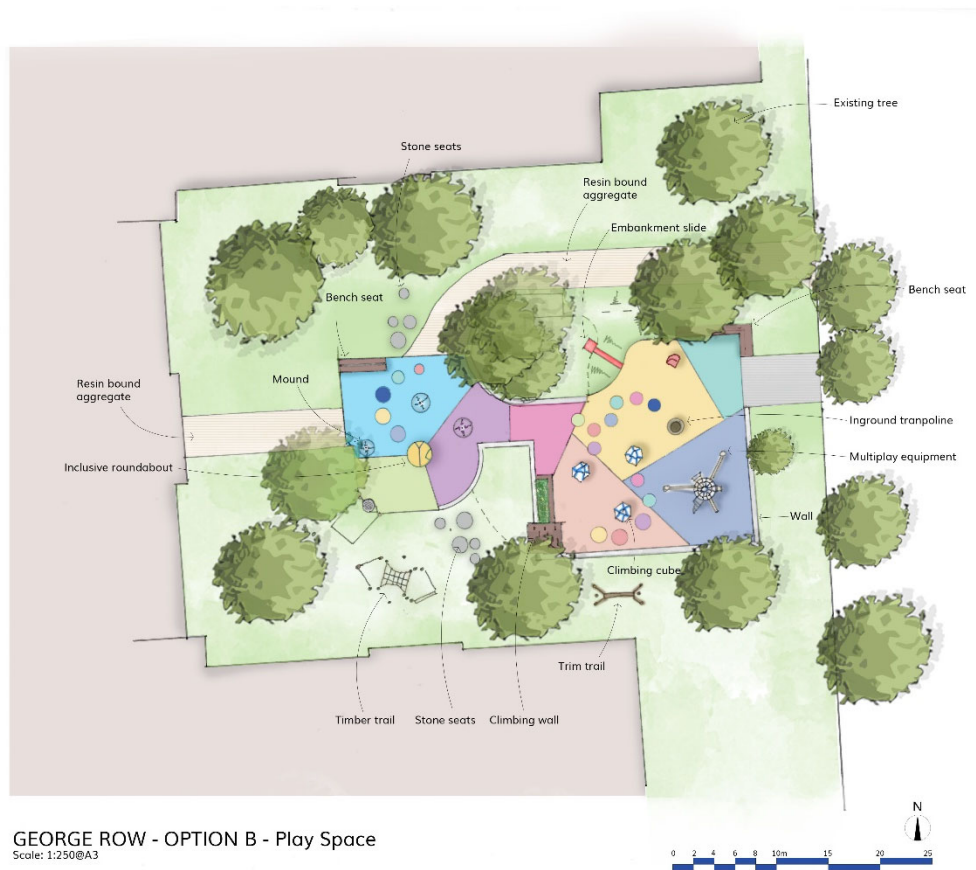


Figure 4 – Option B – Play Space

6 Feedback received from consultation

6.1 Preferences on the options

5 responses were received by phone, 4 of which supported the option 2 (play space) and 1 the option 1 (ball court upgrade)

42 responses were received by email. In response to the questions asked the split was:

Option 1 – should the ball court be brought up to a modern standard?

17 yes

Option 2 – Should the ball court be changed to a playground

25 yes

1 person responded that they would not like to see either project taken forward.

33 on-line responses were received. The results were:

Option 1 – should the ball court be brought up to a modern standard?

16 yes, 13 no, 4 unsure

Option 2 – should we change the use of the ball court to a playground?

18 yes, 12 no, 3 unsure

Note that one person voted 'yes' for both options. One person voted unsure for both options other wise people voted yes for one option and either no or unsure for the second option.

6.2 Total figures for responses

Overall 83 responses were received to the consultation.

Taking the phone responses combined with the email and on-line responses the outcome overall was that the consultation support was for Option 2 with 57% respondents supporting the change. The number of respondents who supported the upgrading of the ball court was 41% and 2% of respondents were either unsure or not supporting either proposal.

The number of respondents to the consultation was a relatively small (3.8% of households contacted).

6.3 Feedback and comments on the designs

16 respondents provided additional feedback as well as expressing a preference.

Those in favour of the ball court option (Option A) gave the following reasons for supporting its retention and made the following comments:

- Will boost its usage
- Will encourage young people to socialise
- Is already often used for football and basketball

- Will be appealing to a more varied age range
- No clutter
- Please make a dog free zone
- Shortage of good places to play basketball
- Not enough spaces locally for teenagers – will promote physical activity
- Table tennis would be good for adults
- Could a programme of first aid be run for young people to support the sports use?
- Girls should be encouraged to use the court more by markings for other sports / signage
- Would prefer more natural play instead of the table tennis
- The position of a playground at George Row would attract many school children and the space would struggle to accommodate them
- More inclusive facilities are needed for older children
- A play space would result in more noise

Those in favour of the play space (Option B) gave the following reasons and made the following comments:

- No adequate play facilities for small children nearby (resident of Providence Square)
- The ball court is not often in active use
- The area could do with additional facilities for children's play
- Only tiny area for parents and children by Bermondsey tube which gets very crowded
- Option B would be more inclusive for all ages
- Existing play area is too small – children could have more options if the courts were changed to a play space

There were also some comments on the proposed designs and suggestions for developing them further. These included:

Option A – Ball court

- Provide multiple markings and signage to encourage girls to use the courts
- Prevent dog usage
- Make the area no smoking
- Provide more for wildlife – flowering bushes
- Gym equipment would be amazing

Option B play space

- More space for sitting out
- Take down all walls to sitting height
- Provide more natural play features rather than traditional surfaces and equipment eg hazel weave, bark, logs
- Enhance the proposed seating area with planting, natural surfaces, lighting and possibly a water feature

- Provide biodiversity features such as logs, woodpiles, wildflowers, climbing plants and shrubs
- Provide a water pump
- Provide a swing as part of the play space

One respondent who lives in Dombey House did not wish to see the space developed as she was concerned about noise and anti-social behaviour so close to her flat; but was in favour of the space being tidied up.

7 **Way forward and recommendations**

The number of respondents to the consultation was comparatively small with only 83 responses by phone, email and on-line. The preference from the respondents favoured the change to a play space and useful comments were submitted regarding the design of the space. Revised proposals incorporating the comments and suggestions made could now be drawn up and used for future consultation on the development of the space.

