

Date: 28nd November 2019

Save West Street Park! A community-driven campaign to save key green space from problem-ridden housing development – sign the petition!

The clock is ticking to save the West Street Park in Erith. After consultation with Erith and West Street residents, local community group the Erith Think Tank are launching a campaign to save this green space for the town.

The creation of the West Street Park came out of a 1970s programme where the Council identified the southern side of West Street as a General Improvement Area (G.I.A.). Under legislation which dealt with the Council's promoting of G.I.A.'s, Councils were able to acquire land so that it could be laid out as Public Open Space. The current location of the West Street Park was chosen to create a street that was more desirable with clear open space for communities to enjoy, and to provide respite down a busy road.

The proposed development that Erith residents now object to go against these original ambitions. The objections are:

- This would mean the loss of key green space in Erith. Aside from the Riverside Gardens there is very little open green space in Erith for communities to enjoy. It was a criticism of the Council's Growth Strategy, by the GLA, that not enough provision for green space was allowed for in their regeneration plans. It is too costly to lose another Erith asset.
- The development includes no affordable housing allocation, in spite of there being a great need for this kind of housing. It will be sold at market value. Leader of Bexley Council Teresa O'Neill, indicated in an email to the Think Tank that BexleyCo will 'prioritise' Bexley residents when the properties are sold, but refused to expand on any detail about how this might be done.
- It would mean the removal of the majority of 20 mature trees to make way for the development and a car park; and the remaining trees would likely not survive because of the trauma to roots.
- It would mean the loss of light for residents living in the existing flats that surround the park.
- There are no provisions for additional civic infrastructure. In fact, there are no plans for new nurseries, schools or doctor's surgeries in the whole of Erith, despite huge increases in population size owing to recent and in-progress new builds, many of them on West Street.
- This green space plays or could play an important role in connecting old and new Erith – at one end of West Street is the town's oldest building St John's Church, and at the other end the current town centre.

Local residents also question the tactics being used to push this development forward:

- Residents have been given only days to have their say regarding the plans, as the deadline set by Bexley Council is 02 December. A public exhibition, held on one evening, was also poorly publicised and announced with little notice.
- In 2003, when the new build flats were constructed, residents were promised that this area of land would remain a park.
- In 2015, the council delivered consultation on about 30 pieces of land which included the West Street Park. At the time, local residents strongly opposed plans to build on the park. However, these consultation reports were never published and now cannot be located. The BexleyCo representative was not aware of this consultation, and didn't deem it relevant.
- The developer is BexleyCo, a private company that is 100% owned by Bexley Council. This raises questions about accountability and use of public funds.
- In the Bexley Growth Strategy there is a commitment to enhance social and green infrastructure for the wellbeing of the borough's residents and its environment; there is little evidence of this in the current proposals, and no information is available on the bigger picture for Erith's regeneration, therefore making a valued judgement impossible.

The Erith Think Tank are now asking for your support by signing the petition to save West Street Park. Your support will act as a record of objection to be put before the planning department.

<https://pa.bexley.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=dates&keyVal=Q08EE5BEIY900>

The Think Tank are also organising an 'activation' event, in collaboration with Extinction Rebellion Bexley, to raise awareness of this development.

This event will happen in the park from 11.30am on Saturday November 30th, and will include an 'exhibition' showing BexleyCo's plans, highlight the parks value and ecology, and propose an alternative vision for the space. We will be seeking signatures on a [petition](#), and planting a tree (donated kindly by the [Wasteless Market](#)) as part of the '[Big Climate Fightback](#)' led by the Woodland Trust at midday. We will be engaging with local residents and hope to do what the Council should have done, and connect properly with affected residents.

Regarding the alternative vision - we are not just opposing the development, but want to proffer an alternative vision! There is an exciting initiative, [Pocket Parks](#), that allows for groups such as the Think Tank, to apply for funds to improve and revitalise parks for the benefit of local communities. We have had lots of ideas for how the West Street park could be improved, intensifying and promoting its use, and making it more of an asset to all of Erith. We will present visuals of some of these ideas at the exhibition on the 30th.

Material:

The current plans for the Park are available on Bexley Council's website to view and comment on by 2nd December 2019:

<https://www.bexley.gov.uk/services/planning-and-building-control/planning/view-and-comment-planning-applications>

Ref. No: 19/02645/FULM

Photographs of the park as it is now, by Tiina Erameri:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Enk56mR8wFlfHMjEko650sV1YwmH_EP

Google Maps image from above:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1dYr2DwpQjjNMGhOVIPJ9LTz1bwhMSwGa>

Before/After image from Google Maps and Bexley Co pre-planning exhibition:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1xLY9ze5ehb_IYwfpSbUYK_QW48HvtZG

Petition:

<https://www.change.org/p/bexley-council-save-the-west-street-park>