

PRIORY PARK PAVILION

An appreciation of the published plans

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Sources

These comments are based primarily on the 7-page PDF from

http://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/public/Leisure/Parks_countryside/Parks/Priory_lottery/default.asp

I have also consulted the planning application documents at [http://www.reigate-](http://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/Planit2/planit2.jsp?Controller=p2Controller&Action=FindAssociatedFilesAction&REFVAL=05/02689/F&WARD=RC&MAPEAST=525330&MAPNORTH=150030)

[banstead.gov.uk/Planit2/planit2.jsp?Controller=p2Controller&Action=FindAssociatedFilesAction&REFVAL=05/02689/F&WARD=RC&MAPEAST=525330&MAPNORTH=150030](http://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/Planit2/planit2.jsp?Controller=p2Controller&Action=FindAssociatedFilesAction&REFVAL=05/02689/F&WARD=RC&MAPEAST=525330&MAPNORTH=150030)

Summary

Ambitious, but out-of-place. A country park of this style requires features that can be discovered and cherished as discoveries, not another competing focal point.

What are the sustainable features that are mentioned?

The Business Plan for the catering operation does not seem to be available.

How can such a large snack bar with such limited facilities pay its way?

1 EXTERIOR VISUALISATIONS

The first two illustrations show the pavilion in its proposed setting. It has nothing to do with its surroundings, not in scale, not in style, not in colour, not in function.

Something like the Beauborg Centre, Swiss Re's Gherkin or the Lloyds Building play with contrasts between their own shape and those of surrounding buildings – but these contrasts make sense and have impact because we know they share similarities of function, scale, bulk and geometry with those surroundings.

This pavilion would have more visual impact in a rectilinear setting, perhaps surrounded by tarmac or paving. Here, it just looks uncomfortable, out of place.

Although its design proclaims its difference in time from its surroundings, it seems to crouch amongst the trees, almost hiding itself, using its translucence to try (unsuccessfully) to merge into the background.

The third visualisation shows where the customers could sit outside the pavilion. Tellingly, though the setting shows some sort of grass lawn, it could be AstroTurf given the lack of connection with the surrounding trees and leisure activities. Take away the simulated grass and we could be in any out-of-town shopping mall.

2 INTERIOR VISUALISATION

This reminds me of the restaurant conservatory at Wisley, which gets uncomfortably hot on sunny days (like the central courtyard at Denbies).

The Design Statement specifies special glass to manage this temperature gradient and any glare, combined with an insulated roof. I would insist on experiencing such an arrangement at an equivalent reference site, which is being

used for catering purposes. Otherwise, where are the blinds going to be fitted, and which doors are to be left open for ventilation?

I'd also want to hear more about sustainable energy usage for environmental conditioning, food hygiene and storage, in both winter and summer.

The space as illustrated looks very noisy to me, in the Conran manner (so 90s!) whereby background clatter forces diners to eat quickly and move on somewhere they can hear what they're saying to each other. This is not a space for conversation.

I bet the architects don't have those un-ergonomic chairs in their own canteen.

[I realise they've done all these visualisations on a computer, with all the advantages and drawbacks that entails, but I don't see why we should make any allowances for that. Also, in the interior visualisation, I can't easily relate the veneered furniture unit (shown to right) with the layout of the central units shown in the plan – is this viewpoint supposed to be from the entrance doors nearest the office (far right/east side)?]

3 PLAN

Examining a building plan, a first concern after rain and sun is footfall and pathways, so...here are 5 double-door **entrances**, broadly arranged as follows:

- a 'Welcome Space' / Disabled Toilet / Office door
- b, c, d Kitchen counter / cleaner's store
- e Toilets

That's about right, with more doors to the kitchen/dining area than anything else.

But surely some of the 'Welcome Space' (what does this mean?) should be transferred to the café area, to allow more space for, say, disabled patrons to navigate round the tables.

Also, the 3 doors providing the main source of **ventilation**/draught are on the south side, exactly the main source of heat/cold –temperatures which may be amplified by the surface used for the apron outside.

When the **access** doors are shut, especially during cloudy/gloomy weather, I hope it will be easy to distinguish the doors from the full-height glass panels, especially as the design is supposed to make everything reflective. Will it be easy to see when the snack bar is closed – where will the 'Closed' sign go?

There's good provision of **toilet** space for men, though you should replace one of the stalls with another sit-down, and think carefully about where to put the hand-dryers (sustainable please) out of the corridor for those going in and out. You may have your own views about toilet provision for women, if there's any likely gender imbalance amongst users for most of the day – unless your business plan confidently predicts a flood of male customers each time there's a sports fixture. You might also like to consider where people are going to queue.

Please involve a **disabled** group in checking the size of the disabled toilet. When I was helping my Mum off and on disabled toilets, we often found that the basin got in our way – and often we couldn't get the wheelchair near enough for her to

reach the taps. Beware: able-bodied staff under pressure of events find it irresistible to use apparently excess space in the disabled toilets for storing things for which no storage has been made elsewhere.

The so-called '**kitchen**' is remarkably small. Evidently this is simply a snack bar, to be stocked with all the usual branded junk food. Try getting the hard-pressed concession-holder to stock some locally produced cakes and sandwiches – where would this produce be stored? Displayed?

Presumably, washing up is done in the Cleaner's Store, given the connecting door to the 'Kitchen'. Where will the trolley of dirty dishes be parked?

What does 'Technical Local' mean?

4 PLANNING DOCUMENTS

[The link quoted in the PDF no longer works. With some persistence, I could find the Planning Applications search page. This would be a better link to quote.]

The **Cross-Section** shows a "Round Wood Pavement". I hope these are wood blocks but, disappointingly, the Design Statement refers to decking.

Use of wood blocks as a road/path surface has a heritage (there are still a few examples in central London). However, it can be very slippery in wet weather. I should be interested to know how the surface will be treated to minimise this.

I forgive the purple nonsense at the start of the '**Planning Statement**' – it's notoriously hard to turn visual/spatial ideas into words, never mind in translation from one set of cultural reference points to another.

However, it goes on to claim that the "light reflecting material visually merges the building with the landscape", -- I'm sceptical. Also, I doubt there'll be much "peace and contemplation" inside with the furnishings as illustrated.

It occurs to me that these architects come from a **tradition** of more formal continental parks, rather than the Capability Brown style to which the south and west area of Priory Park aspires. In this context, the idea that this pavilion will merge with its surroundings strikes me as unconvincing.

The Planning Statement also mentions

- An Information Centre, implying this may be in the 'Welcome Area'. Who will provision and dress this area? Will any information be available when the pavilion is shut?
- Use as a concert venue. Has anyone done an acoustic analysis of this design? Will this be for buskers, or for bands? Are evening openings envisaged? Is this use included in the Business Plan?

The "**Design Statement**" clarifies the use of the 'Technical Local' as the base for a Community Support Officer as well as the Park Manager. It must surely be a significant drawback if they can't see anything from their cramped cubby-hole?

I'd be interested to know how this design is expected to "discourage vandalism and anti-social behaviour".

It does not look as though the **Technical Panel** included someone with catering experience, though perhaps some of them have personally promoted and managed one-off events in a public park?

Not having seen the other proposals, I don't know what to make of the Jury Panel's comments. I'm glad they worried about gutters and graffiti on some proposals, so I'll assume they worried away at those points on the selected design as well.

[NB Page 8 of the Design Statement has been omitted from the PDF available on the website – this should be remedied.]

5 FIT FOR PURPOSE

I hope there's a **Business Plan** to go with this design. What are the predicted overheads, and how is a concessionary going to cover them from snack sales?

Will they be able to charge entrance for one-off events?

Doubtless, you have also reviewed **security** considerations, given the time it will take police/security personnel to reach the pavilion from the surrounding roadways, and the number of escape routes for vandals/thieves/druggies.

If I were the manager, how long would it take me to secure the building?

The interior space is remarkably **inflexible** – not much opportunity for “private functions and catering for special events held in the park” except by closing the whole building to the public. In any case, what is the attraction of a snack bar for private functions, especially if the weather is bad? Would guests walk across the park from the Morrisons or Bell Street car parks?

Presumably, catering **deliveries** and refuse collections will be made early mornings, except I doubt a concessionary will find it worthwhile to staff the snack bar much before 11am – will there be problems with access at this later time?

6 OVERALL

Good points: It's bold and ambitious in seeking to become a focal point. It seeks to welcome visitors from all directions. From within, it focuses attention on the Park more than the Priory.

Not so good: the park doesn't need another focal point; it needs a sheltered arbour which enchanted visitors can discover for refreshments and conversation.

Thinking about the brief, the pavilion should be a refuge that the visitor discovers and comes to cherish. Although I like the view from the pavilion to south and west, I'd suggest the building should be invisible from east and north, and partially obscured when viewed from the top and side of Reigate Park hill.

Compare equivalent buildings at Kew, Dulwich Park, Southwark Park (an art gallery that you'd never expect), Wisley, even Standen. At the moment it's all too obvious what this building is and what it's going to be like.

I think the **practical functions** of the building need more thought, especially how it will be used, and how it can pay its way. [END