

Appendix four

King Georges Fields Trust Application to place a statue in Mile End Park

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To present an application from the Vivekanda Human Centre to place a statue within Mile End Park on land that falls within the management of the King Georges Fields Trust.
- 1.2 This report was considered by the board at the meeting on the 27th June 2017 . No decision was taken and the board requested more information on the proposal and in particular the connection of Swami Vivekananda with the proposed site in Mile End. Additional information obtained at a meeting with the applicants is contained in item 5.2 below.
- 1.3 At the meeting on the 27th June 2017 the Trust also requested a copy of the current guidelines for the placing of statues, plaques and other structures in Mile End Park and other land within its remit. These guidelines are attached in Appendix 5.

2. BACKGROUND

The Council has been approached by the Vivekanda Human Centre, Aldgate, for permission to erect a statue of Swami Vivekananda. He was a Hindu Bengali who died in 1902 who had an international profile and promoted Tolerance, Harmony and Peace amongst all faiths. The application is supported by the Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum.

In 2016 parks adopted guidance and a formal application process for those who wished to put statues, plaques and other structures into our parks either on a temporary basis or a permanent one. The key elements of the guidance within the form are laid out below. The application, attached, was reviewed by three parks staff who make their recommendations at the bottom of this report. It should be noted that this is the first application we have processed using this format. Additionally as the request is for location within King Georges Fields Trust land the report is to be considered by the KGFT Board.

3. The application

How the application matched the criteria and officer comments. (Red text from guidelines to applicants)

3.1 Context

Research should be carried out before deciding to make a proposal to the Council to ensure the chosen site is appropriate. In the case of major memorials such as statues and monuments proposals must have a direct link to the site in which it is proposed to be placed and relevant information should be included within your application.

Assessment: The site being suggested is on the edge of Mile End Park in Grove Road close to the bus pull in just up from the Green Bridge. It has been considered by officers and offers:

- Good visibility which would reduce risk of theft or vandalism.
- Sufficient room for small groups to view it without obstructing the pathway
- Ease of installation.

Swami Vivekananda has no direct connection to this park but has connection to the borough and relevance to the communities living here

3.2 Quality

Tower Hamlets wants to ensure that any new artworks and memorials are of the highest quality and that they respect and enhance existing landscapes, streetscapes and enrich the vibrant and diverse feel of the borough. The quality of a proposal can be enhanced by commissioning experienced artists and by using an experienced panel of people to carry out the selection process. Commissioning can be by open invitation or it can be by a direct commission where the artist has an established reputation for producing work appropriate to the proposal. We appreciate that different works suit different environments across the borough and we welcome proposals that capture the culture of Tower Hamlets through high quality art.

Assessment: The application has an image attached of the proposed sculpture which they would prefer to be life sized but are willing to review this. It is not displeasing to the eye. Exact materials would be confirmed and open to discussion but likely to be bronze. Officers had some concerns about the plaque and felt it might be helpful for it to say a bit more about the man himself.

3.3 Is an artwork or memorial the only option?

There are opportunities for a wide variety of temporary and permanent public art works in the borough. Apart from the obvious landmark buildings parks and open spaces there are also schools, colleges and medical facilities, sheltered housing

and hostels, community centres, libraries, idea stores and sports centres, train stations and other transport structures. There are also a variety of media you could consider, lighting, mosaics, restoration of building facades and 2 dimensional artworks. Permission from the relevant landowners must be sought at all times.

Assessment: For the purposes of promoting learning about Swami Vivekananda a statue does seem to be appropriate for this purpose, however as stated above officers felt there should be more information on site and perhaps a link to a web site with full history

3.4 Diversity

Tower Hamlets is a hugely diverse borough and we want to celebrate and recognise this. We are committed to being an inclusive borough which recognises shared values as well as the distinct needs of the borough's different groups and communities, particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. We welcome initiatives and proposals for artworks and memorials that recognise the variety of experiences and cultures the borough enjoys and that commemorate and celebrates people and events that have important connections to the local community.

Assessment: The statue has particular resonance for the Bengali Community in the borough but would also be of interest to a wider group interested in history and links to Tower Hamlets

3.5 The 20 Year principle

The death of a well-known or prominent person or a major event can lead people to want to commemorate almost immediately by erecting a memorial. This is an understandable reaction and in some cases the right thing to do; however, it could result in memorials of poor quality and ones that do not stand the test of time and therefore may in years come to feel inappropriate.

For these reasons our guidance is that there should be a pause of 20 years after the event or death of a person to allow time for reflection, planning and gaining support for a proposal. **Note that this principle does not apply to proposals for plaques, trees and park structures**

Assessment: Swami Vivekananda died in 1902

3.6 Safety

Any proposal needs to consider safety and anti-social behaviour issues. An artwork placed in or near an area children play in will inevitably be climbed on. In some areas benches are used for street drinking and can also provide a focus of

anti-social behaviour. Some statues and memorials can also become a focus of anti-social behaviour and graffiti because of the controversial nature of the person or event they portray.

Assessment: Proposed location should limit vandalism to the piece.

3.7 Support

If the applicant is not the landowner, proof will be needed to prove that the proposal has the full support of the owner. No proposals will be considered without proof of landowner support.

It will need to be demonstrated that engagement has taken place with the local people and organisations (where appropriate) support the proposal. The level of support would be proportionate to the impact of the proposal. For example, for a memorial planting, consultation with a local friends group may be sufficient but for a significant statue commemorating a person or an event, more substantial support will need to be proven, both from individuals and organisations with an interest in the proposal. As well as demonstrating support, applicants will also need to show that they have engaged all interested parties in an inclusive and open manner.

Assessment: This is Council Owned land managed by the KGFT and permissions would be required from the board with the approval of legal services regards process and liabilities.

It is for the KGFT board to provide a steer on consultation should they wish to proceed with this proposal.

3.8 Costs including maintenance

Where an artwork or monument is located in one of our parks, open spaces or the public realm, the Council will need to be satisfied by the arrangements for the future maintenance. Responsibility for maintenance and security can rest with any of a number of institutions. Artworks and monuments are currently maintained by Royal Historical Palaces, Tower Hamlets Council, English Heritage, the Greater London Authority, and in many instances by the freeholders of the site. Where several parties are involved it is prudent to record rights and responsibilities between them in a formal manner.

The Council will want to ensure that the development group or proposer can fund the entire project costs and that provision is made for the artwork, along with any associated landscaping, to be maintained into perpetuity, and to the specification of the Council. This must include the continuing maintenance and repairs of the structure including such things as graffiti removal and cleaning of moss or lichens.

Assessment: The application indicates that the proposers would cover all costs including manufacture, installation, ongoing maintenance and repairs, all necessary insurances.

4. Officer summary

Officers felt that a weakness of the application was no evident connection to the park or specific site within the Park.

In relation to connection to the borough Swami Vivekananda did visit in 1896. The other ties relate to his ethnicity and the organisation making this proposal. So whilst not as strong as actually having lived here the panel felt that these were significant.

The panel felt that the statue would fit well into the Council's policy of promoting community cohesion and supporting Multi Faith initiatives, noting the support of the multi Faith Forum. It was felt from the parks perspective, given the likely interest in the statue that it would help attract a more diverse visitor profile and provide a good historical subject matter for local schools groups.

All other issues around cost, liability and ongoing maintenance are covered and agreed.

4.1 Recommendation

All three officers were in agreement that they could recommend that the Council give provisional permissions subject to agreeing final terms and conditions and the granting of planning consent which would sit with the proposer to apply for.

There were some issues and some risks which officers wanted to highlight:

4.2 Issues

- Look at options and wording with regard to information and links
- Structural engineer sign off on final design, material and method of installation.
- Require a steer on consultation required

- Sign off from legal, particularly around liability and would need to put into place robust checks that commitments were kept up with regard to maintenance and insurances.

4.3 Risks and mitigation

- Failure to raise the necessary funds. It would be made clear that this sits entirely with the proposer and the council would not commit to finding any shortfall
- Statue could fall into disrepair and get damaged. If not remedied by owners piece could be decommissioned by Council
- Complaints from public that parks should be secular spaces. There are examples of other such statues and structures in parks across London and in this case it could be argued that although Swami Vivekananda was of the Hindu faith his message and his teachings had a wider pertinence for society as a whole.

5. Application form

Below is the application form received.

Applicant

Forename: Ram Chandra
Surname: Saha
Organisation Name : Vivekananda Human Centre
Address: Suite 508, 1 Alie Street, London E1 8DE
Tel No : 07946737272
Email Address: info@vivekanandacentre.com

Site Details:

We need to know the following details about the site

Enter the site postcode below to search for a Tower Hamlets address. Alternatively you can type the details into the box below

Mile End Park near Grove Road E3. Adjacent to bus pull in

Site address

E3

Name of owner : London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Address of the owner

Owners Telephone
Owners email

The proposal

We need to know the following details about the proposal itself.

Give full details of what you are proposing including dimensions, materials and landscaping.
Please also include drawings, sketches and photographs if these are available (you will be able to upload these at the end of this form)

A Bronze Statue of Swami Vivekananda. Enclosed Drawing. We have already discussed with Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Mr Stephen Murray and agreed to accept their advice concerning dimensions and necessary works.

Connection between the object and the site

Let us know why this object is particularly suited to this site

Swami Vivekananda is an important figure in the modern development of good interfaith relations, would be a very fitting place for a statue of him to be erected. As a Hindu Bengali who is respected by all faith communities as his universal message of Tolerance, Harmony and Peace. By putting it in a public park rather than an enclosed space it will be open to more people and act as a visitor attraction for the park given his international importance.

Memorial Objects

Is this proposal for a memorial object? Yes ✓ / No

If yes:

Name of the person or event being commemorated

Swami Vivekananda

Date the person being commemorated died or when the event happened:

12 January 1863 and passed away 4 July 1902

Description of the person or event's connection with Tower Hamlets or Tower Hamlets communities

Tower Hamlets is home to the largest Bengali community in Europe. Swami Vivekananda was born in Bengali family. As a Bengali we are very proud of Him for his universal message of Tolerance, Harmony & Peace, and Unity in Diversity. This Statue would arouse interest in his teachings, which deserved to be much more widely known in Tower Hamlets. As we know Tower Hamlets is a one of the best place of all faith communities and place of Unity in Diversity. The proposal is supported by the Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum as something that would help promote interfaith relations. He was known to have visited the borough in 1896 and the Vivekananda Human Centre is located and active in the borough.

Temporary installation

Is this a temporary installation yes / no✓

Please let us know the length of time you would like the object to be in place and why

N/A

Future Works

Have you checked that the site in which you wish to install the object in will not be affected by work or development in the near future?

Yes✓ / No

If yes

Please give details of the information sources you have checked

Mile End Park, near Grove Road. Yes We have visited the site with Stephen Murray Head of Arts Parks and Events and there are no planned works in the chosen area.

The Artist

Has the artist already been chosen?

Yes / No✓

If Yes:

Artist Name:

to be informed

Examples of previous commission (you can also upload photographs at the end of this form

N/A

Please enter hyperlinks to any biographical information of images to previous works:

N/A

If No

Please give us details of commissioning process you will be undertaking

After agreeing size and specification we will obtain a quote from artists who have produced similar works.

Consultation

Give details of the consultation methods used, including the number of bodies/people/households etc..mailed out or contacted, consultation methods used, dates of meetings etc..

Consultation with approved by Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum and Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets. Please find attached supporting letter. We are happy to carry out consultation locally to the location if required.

Gives details of all feedback you received and how it changed your proposal (if appropriate)

All feedback positive and supported by Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets and Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum

Site ownership

Please give us the following details about the ownership of the proposed site. You will be asked to upload a copy of the letter from the site owner where their consent has been given for this proposal at the end of this form

Owner Name : London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Company Name
Address
Tel No

Funding

Please give details of the full cost of the proposal, broken down into phases from conception to installation

Full funding to be provided by Vivekananda Human Centre

Give details of how the funding for this proposal has been secured

Once we have the full price of commissioning and installation we will fundraise to cover the costs.

Give details of the estimated cost of future maintenance and how this will be guaranteed
The centre will take on the future maintenance and repairs of the statue.

Public Liability insurance

How much cover will be secure, what will be covered by the insurance and how will the payment of future premiums be guaranteed?

The centre will provide agreed level of public liability insurance

5.2 Additional information from a meeting with the proposers on 13/09/17

5.2.1 It was agreed that there was no direct connection between the Swami Vivekananda and the proposed site in Mile End Park.. The connection with borough is that the Vivekanda Human Centre is based in the borough and that the proposal is fully supported by the Borough's interfaith forum.

5.2.2. The proposers wanted to emphasise that although the swami was of the Hindu faith his works and teachings transcended all religions with his message of tolerance and harmony between the different faiths.

5.2.3. It was noted that if permissions were given then it would be unlikely that the statue could be created and installed before summer 2018 with a preferred unveiling date to co-incide with his birthday on the 15th July.

5.3 image


