



The Royal Parks

Metropolitan Open Land Assessment

Roehampton Gate Cafe, Richmond Park

Final report

Prepared by LUC

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The Royal Parks

Metropolitan Open Land Assessment Roehampton Gate Cafe, Richmond Park

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Overview

1.1 This Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) Assessment accompanies a request for pre-application advice for the replacement of the Roehampton Gate Café and associated works, within Richmond Park. Richmond Park is designated as MOL, which is a designation specific to London and established by the London Plan.

1.2 In the London Plan, MOL is defined as "*extensive areas of land bounded by urban development around London that fulfils a similar function to Green Belt and is protected from inappropriate development by land-use planning policies*".

1.3 This Assessment provides the planning policy context for MOL, assesses the scheme in the context of the policy exceptions to inappropriate development, and seeks to demonstrate the '*very special circumstances*' that are considered to exist to outweigh any potential harm.

Roehampton Gate Café, Richmond Park

1.4 Richmond Park is London's largest Royal Park, extending to 950 hectares and is located within a conservation area and is a Grade I Registered Park and Garden. It forms part of a network of green and blue spaces across London, linking landscapes and acting as stepping stones for the movement of wildlife. The park is characterised by its mosaic of habitats, protected species and opportunities for enjoyment and recreation. Since enclosure by Charles I, it has first and foremost been – and remains - a deer park.

1.5 Roehampton Gate Café is located on the north-east edge of the park, close to Roehampton Gate. Alton Primary School is located immediately to the north-east beyond the site boundary and the Richmond Park Golf Course is located to the south-east. The car park within which the existing café is set, is separated from the park by Priory Lane which forms part of the network of roads within the park, giving access to the car parks and forming a circular route for cyclists. The site also provides access onto the Tamsin Trail, a dedicated off-road circuit around the park.

1.6 The site comprises the area of Roehampton Gate Car Park, which consists of formal (tarmac surfaced) parking and informal parking on gravel, a café building with outdoor servery, cycle hire and toilets located to the rear of the site.

Designations

1.7 The application site includes the following designations:

- Registered Park and Garden
- Conservation Area
- Metropolitan Open Land
- National Nature Reserve
- Special Area of Conservation
- Site of Special Scientific Interest

Background & History

1.8 The existing café building was only ever intended to be a temporary solution following an original restaurant (known as the Pavilion Restaurant) and golf club house (serving the Richmond Park Golf course) burning down in 2004.



Figure 1: The original Pavilion Restaurant and Club House

1.9 The former Pavilion Restaurant and club house were one building (as shown in the above photo) which was accessible from both the park and the golf course and as well as a restaurant/café it provided toilet facilities for visitors. A golf pro shop, a separate building, also previously occupied an area within the same parcel of land.

1.10 Following the fire, the existing café building was brought onto the site as a temporary solution to ensure food and drinks could still be served at the site. Given the temporary nature of this building, it has now come to the end of its useable life and is no longer fit for purpose. This is covered in more detail later in this report.

1.11 Temporary toilet facilities (those which currently serve visitors to the existing café and wider park) were also brought onto the site following the fire. Rather than being located with the current café, they were located closer to where the burnt down restaurant was located to make use of existing services (foul water and sewerage etc.).

1.12 As the popularity of cycling increased, particularly with the introduction of the Tamsin Trail (a perimeter track around Richmond Park) the existing cycle hire buildings were located adjacent to the existing café building.

1.13 Today, only the existing café, cycle hire and toilet buildings are in existence. The burnt down Pavilion Restaurant and golf club house, as well as the golf pro shop, have all been removed from this parcel of land.

1.14 This background is particularly relevant to the MOL assessment and is referred to in more detail later in this report.

Structure & Content of this Report

1.15 The primary purpose of this document is to set out to officers a detailed explanation and justification of the scheme in the context of Metropolitan Open Land planning policy. It includes and details the very special circumstances which are considered to exist in respect of justifying why the proposed development should be considered acceptable in the context of MOL planning policy, if officers are minded not to consider the scheme to fall within the exceptions to inappropriate development as set out by policy.

1.16 Whilst other matters and considerations are referenced in this report, it intentionally focuses on MOL; specifically, the argument for the scheme to be considered as an exception to inappropriate development, and the very special circumstances which are considered to exist to outweigh any perceived harm. Notwithstanding this, the planning application also includes (among others) a Planning Statement, Design and Access Statement, Heritage Statement, Ecological Appraisal, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and a detailed set of existing and proposed drawings, including landscape scheme drawings. The other documents which form the planning application are cross referred to in this document where relevant to do so.

Chapter 2

The Proposed Development

Background & Overview

2.1 As referenced earlier in this report, the existing café building was only ever intended to be a temporary solution following a fire burning down an original café, known as the Pavilion Restaurant, and the Richmond Park Golf Club House.

2.2 The current café building was originally located in St James' Park. It was essentially 'flat packed' over from St James Park in order to provide The Royal Parks with a quick temporary solution following the 2004 fire. It is notably much smaller than the Pavilion Restaurant which burnt down but was the only option available to The Royal Parks at the time given strict Government spending and comprehensive spending review budget cuts which were in place at the time.

2.3 From the very outset therefore, the existing café was not large enough to service the needs of visitors to the park. Furthermore, having been in situ now for many years, it is well beyond its building design life. Its temporary nature, and that of the temporary toilet provisions, also detract from the setting.

2.4 Ideally, a permanent replacement befitting the landscape of a Royal Park would have been quick to be realised. However, the reality of budget cuts have meant that a significant number of years have passed and it is not until now where The Royal Parks have an opportunity to bring a permanent scheme forward to finally adequately replace the original Pavilion Restaurant and overall improve the landscape setting in which it is located.

2.5 It is therefore important for this proposed scheme to be read in the context of the original buildings which serviced this area of the park, not just the temporary solutions which the scheme will directly replace.

2.6 In addition to the above, the existing cycle hire provision is now a tired facility which does not make the most of its location by providing visitors a way of exploring the park and enjoying outdoor recreation. The proposed scheme also therefore seeks to better this, becoming an asset for encouraging outdoor activity in the park, through enhanced facilities and a better more inclusive landscape setting whereby all visitors of all abilities can enjoy both the immediate setting as well as the wider park.

Summary of Proposed Scheme

2.7 The Design and Access Statement describes the detail of the scheme design, including highlighting the changes which have been made as a result of pre-application engagement with the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and other relevant stakeholders.

2.8 The landscape led proposed scheme aims to improve the current facilities, whilst delivering a number of benefits to the site and the wider park in line with overall park management objectives. The key elements of the scheme are set out below:

- A permanent and upgraded café building, including toilet facilities for park visitors, set within an inclusive landscape which is welcoming to all users.
- Landscape and ecological enhancements, including tree planting, soft landscaping, biodiversity enhancements and more on-site water attenuation.
- An upgraded cycle hire building with better and safer connections onto the Tamsin Trail.
- Reconfiguration of the vehicle and cycle access to the site.
- A new access gate to the Alton Estate, allowing more direct and simplified access to this important green open space for more people.

Building Uses

2.9 The proposed buildings would include:

- A café with internal and external seating and a separate kiosk facility.
- A cycle hire facility.
- Public toilets that are available for all park users (including out of hours when the café is closed).

2.10 All of the above uses already exist on the site in three separate buildings.

Amount

2.11 The total GIA of the proposed buildings is 446sqm.

2.12 The area of outdoor seating has been designed to meet the current demand (currently significantly under provided for). This also reflects the predominantly outdoor activity focussed clientele including park visitors, leisure and sports cyclists, and those hiring bicycles.

Scale

2.13 The new buildings have been designed to be of a similar scale to other ancillary buildings located within the Royal Parks. They will be single storey with an extensive area of flat green roof covering the buildings and link canopy and a pitched roof over the café area. An area of plant above the back-of-house facilities will be screened with vertical cladding.

2.14 The roofs will have a consistent eaves level which will give a human scale to the buildings. The general roof level will be 3.45m above ground level with the pitched roof over the café seating area rising to a maximum of 5.6m, providing a more generous space inside.

Building Appearance and Materials

2.15 A palette of natural, attractive, and robust materials is proposed to ensure that the buildings blend into their environment and remain attractive in the long term. The buildings have been designed to be low-key and to sit quietly in their context.

2.16 The following materials are proposed:

- Bricks and larch cladding for external walls.
- Zinc roof and photovoltaic panels.
- Green and brown roofs.
- Porous paving.

Landscape

2.17 This is a landscape led scheme designed to improve this area of the park in line with wider Management Plan objectives.

2.18 The proposed scheme aims to enhance the landscape setting of the site and the wider park. The key elements of the landscape scheme include:

- Minimising removal / relocation of trees and addition of new trees.
- Retain and enhance areas of existing habitat including enhancing conditions for existing semi-mature and mature trees.
- Increase areas of scrub habitat, hedgerow planting along boundaries.
- Enhance collection and retention of surface water to create wetland habitats / swales.
- Providing a safe and inclusive visitor facility which avoids conflict between pedestrians, cycles and vehicles.
- Enhance the connections with the Tamsin Trail.

- Provide direct access from the Alton Estate to open up the park to a wider group of visitors from the local community.

Biodiversity

2.19 Measures to reduce negative ecological impacts and deliver biodiversity gains will include:

- Allowing the scheme to be 'landscape led', putting improving the landscape at the centre of the design process.
- Increasing the vegetated footprint throughout the site.
- Reuse of acidic / nutrient poor subsoils to enhance grassland habitats, including the creation of mounds and features for invertebrates.
- Protection of retained trees and scrub during works and installation of long-term protection measures around veteran trees.
- Installation of an extensive, biodiverse roof over part of the new buildings, creating acid grassland habitats.
- Inclusion of bat roosting and bird nesting features within buildings.
- Investigating opportunities to use runoff to create wetland habitats and encourage water recharge e.g. through swales.
- Ensuring no increase in artificial lighting, with the only external lighting to comprise downward facing security lighting over building entrances.

Sustainability

2.20 The proposal has been designed to provide highly sustainable buildings which target BREEAM 'Excellent'. A fabric first approach will be employed to ensure a highly insulated and air tight external envelope. Green roofs are proposed as well as rain water harvesting for use in WCs and for bike cleaning as well as solar photovoltaics. The buildings have also been designed to provide solar shading by including rooflights and sun pipes and prevent overheating by including overhanging eaves. It would also switch from the existing use of calor/tank gas to electricity / air source heating.

Access and Parking

2.21 One of the key aims of the proposal is to improve the access arrangements around the site to provide a safer and more enjoyable experience for all park users. The proposal includes relocating the car park entrance from the centre of the site to the north end. This will allow the free movement of

cars in and out of the car park while reducing the overlap with cyclists and pedestrians.

2.22 The existing overflow parking area will be formalised with a tarmac road surface and gravel parking bays.

2.23 The creation of a pedestrian and cycle area at the heart of the design will improve safety at the site. The outside space adjacent to the café will link directly to the Tamsin Trail providing off-road cycle access to the wider park.

2.24 The proposal will result in a marginal decrease in car parking spaces, from 245 to 225. Ten additional accessible parking spaces will be added. Two electric vehicle charging points will be included for the catering vehicle spaces.

2.25 Cycle parking will be provided at the front of the café close to Priory Lane and the Tamsin Trail. It is intended to provide a large number of lockable cycle parking spaces sensibly located in the context of the café, toilets and outdoor seating areas.

Chapter 3

Policy Context

MOL Policy

3.1 As mentioned in the previous chapter, MOL is a designation specific to London and established by the London Plan.

3.2 Policy G3: Metropolitan Open Land in the London Plan states:

Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) is afforded the same status and level of protection as Green Belt:

- 1) MOL should be protected from inappropriate development in accordance with national planning policy tests that apply to the Green Belt.
- 2) Boroughs should work with partners to enhance the quality and range of uses of MOL.

3.3 The national planning policy tests that apply to the Green Belt are outlined below. Paragraph 152 of the NPPF states:

Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

3.4 Paragraph 154 of the NPPF lists the different types of development that are considered to be exceptions to inappropriate development:

- a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments, provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- e) limited infilling in villages;

- f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan; and
- g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
 - not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or
 - not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need.

3.5 Paragraph 155 of the NPPF lists certain other forms of development that are not considered inappropriate in the Green Belt, provided they preserve the openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it:

- a) mineral extraction;
- b) engineering operations;
- c) local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
- e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and
- f) development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Local Plan Policy LP 13 states that:

The borough's Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land will be protected and retained in predominantly open use. Inappropriate development will be refused unless 'very special circumstances' can be demonstrated that clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land.

The policy goes on to state the following:

Appropriate uses within Green Belt of Metropolitan Open Land include public and private open spaces and playing fields, open recreation and sport, biodiversity and open community uses. Development will be supported if it is appropriate and helps secure the objectives of improving the Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land.

Improvement and enhancement of the openness and character of the Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land and measures to reduce visual impacts will be encouraged where appropriate.

Application of the Exceptions to Inappropriate Development to the Proposed Development

3.6 The sections below are intended to assess the proposed scheme against the exceptions to inappropriate development as defined by relevant MOL planning policy. The relevant exceptions in this instance are considered to comprise:

- Exception b) in Paragraph 154 of the NPPF: *The provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments, provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.*
- Exception d) in Paragraph 154 of the NPPF: *The replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces.*

Cycle Hire & Toilet Provision

3.7 The proposal includes two separate but intrinsically linked buildings; a cycle hire / toilet building and a café building.

3.8 The cycle hire facility is considered to be an appropriate facility (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport and recreation. It would replace an existing cycle hire facility of the same capacity (in terms of cycle hire capability).

3.9 Equally, as the toilet provision is to serve all visitors to the park, that element of the scheme could also be considered to be an appropriate facility for outdoor recreation – without such a facility, outdoor recreation in the park, especially for families, might not be possible. The facilities are also required for users of the rugby fields in the park and to serve sporting events which take place there such as the London Duathlon.

3.10 The existing toilet facilities are sub-standard, not fully accessible to all users, and are not adequate in number. It is important to note that toilets in this location are for the benefit of all users of the park, not just visitors to the café or cycle hire. The proposed toilet provision is the result of an optimisation process with the objective of providing better compliant facilities for visitors to the park whilst not drastically increasing building footprint.

3.11 It is therefore considered that Exception b) applies to the both the cycle hire provision and toilet provision provided that it preserves the openness of the MOL and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

3.12 To make the most efficient use of building footprint, the proposed cycle hire facility and toilet provision have been combined into a single building. The toilet provision would also replace an existing toilet provision on the site and by removing the existing toilets which are currently located further to the south east adjacent to the overflow parking area, the spread of built form across the site would be significantly reduced.

3.13 The existing cycle hire provision (52sqm) and toilet provision (38sqm) has a combined floor space of 90sqm (GEA). There is also an existing storage container (15sqm) to the east of the existing toilets. The buildings are spread across the site by approximately 130 metres and their temporary nature is somewhat unattractive, resulting in visual clutter across the site, detracting from the immediate and wider landscape setting.

3.14 The proposed cycle hire building would be 50sqm, therefore almost exactly matching the size of the existing one which it would replace. The proposed toilets would include a baby change area and a cleaners cupboard, 94sqm in size.

3.15 Whilst the toilet space would be larger than that which it would replace, it would be a far improved facility designed to meet the needs for visitors, which the existing toilets (which are very basic and run-down) do not. Furthermore, by combining the cycle hire provision, toilets and cleaners storage into one building, the proposal minimises the built form required and significantly reduces the spread of built form across the wider site – from approximately 130 metres (where the existing toilet building is) to approximately 45 metres. The areas containing the existing toilet building and storage container will be completely free of built form as a result, leaving the only built form in the area of the existing café and cycle hire buildings.

3.16 Given only the marginal increase in floor space and that the proposal would result in a significant reduction in the spread of development across the site and removal of visual clutter, it is considered reasonable to say that it would not be *materially* larger than the existing buildings which it would replace and would actually reduce the impact on the openness of the MOL.

3.17 The provision of a cycle hire and toilet facility would also not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt (or in this case MOL), for the following reasons:

- The proposal would not result in unrestricted sprawl of a large built-up area;

- The proposal would not result in two towns merging into one another;
- The proposal would not result in encroachment into the countryside;
- The proposal would not impact the special character of any historic towns; and
- The proposal would not prevent urban regeneration / the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

3.18 Given the above, it is considered that Exception b) would fully apply to this element of the scheme.

3.19 As stated above, taking account of the existing site circumstances and the location of the existing buildings across the site, the proposed cycle hire and toilet building would not be materially larger than the existing cycle hire and toilet buildings and would significantly reduce the spread of built form across the site. As such, Exception d) would also apply to these elements of the scheme.

Replacement Cafe

3.20 The proposed café would have a floor space of 341sqm (GEA) which includes all back of house areas, a catering kiosk, internal circulation space and plant. The existing café has a floor space of 182sqm (GEA).

3.21 However, whilst the replacement café would be larger than the existing café currently situated on the site, this is not a true representation of the proposed scheme in the context of MOL policy. As noted earlier in this report, the existing café building was only ever intended to be a temporary solution following a fire which burnt down the previous café and club house, known as the Pavilion Restaurant, which serviced this area of the park.



Figure 2: The original Pavilion Restaurant building

3.22 The Pavilion Restaurant and club house building was far bigger than the existing café. It had a floor space of

approximately 402sqm. The reason for not replacing it at the time with a similar sized building was due to the current café building being already in the ownership of The Royal Parks – it was transported over from St James' Park as a temporary solution. The Pavilion Restaurant could not be permanently replaced due to extensive budget cuts at the time, so the smaller café building was the only solution available.

3.23 Therefore, the scheme currently being proposed is actually a replacement for the original Pavilion Restaurant and club house building. The current café on the site should be considered as a temporary building filling the void in time between the original Pavilion Restaurant and a permanent solution.

3.24 It is noted that the original Pavilion Restaurant and club house building was also accompanied by an 'L' shaped Golf Pro Shop within the same collection of buildings. This also had a significant footprint, with a floor space of approximately 402sqm (GIA). However, the Golf Pro Shop was demolished in 2011 as part of a scheme for a new facility for the Richmond Park Golf Club now located at Chohole Gate (ref: 10/3768/FUL) and formed part of the assessment in relation to the application of MOL planning policy. For this reason, the Golf Pro Shop is not considered to be a material consideration in the assessment of this current proposed scheme in the context of MOL policy.



Figure 3: Former Pavilion Restaurant, Club House and Golf Pro Shop

3.25 Following the above explanation being provided to officers in a recent pre-application submission (ref: 23/P0048/PREAPP), they agreed that the Pavilion Restaurant and Golf Clubhouse should be considered as the original building.

3.26 However, officers advised that whilst the proposed café would be considered to be of a similar enough use to the Pavilion Restaurant (in the context of applying the exceptions to inappropriate development), the Golf Clubhouse would not be the same use as the proposal and as such would not be considered as part of the quantum for any replacement of the restaurant with a café.

3.27 Taking account of the advice from officers, if looking at the Pavilion Restaurant floor space alone (214sqm) in comparison to the proposed new café (341sqm), the floor space figures suggest that the proposed building would be materially larger than the original, and as such it would not fall within the limitations of Exception d). However, whilst arguably of a different use, the Golf Clubhouse nevertheless is part of the original building in terms of the physical built form which would be replaced. The original building was also read as a single building in the landscape, rather than as component parts. Therefore, the actual harm to openness by proposed built form in comparison to original built form would be negligible – the original buildings are 402sqm with a height of approximately 6.2m versus the proposed café building which would be 341sqm with a maximum height of 5.4m (and a lower main roof height of 3.45m).

3.28 This reduction in overall floor space, bulk and mass, along with the reduction in the spread of built form across the site (from approx. 180m when considering the original buildings, to approx. 45m as proposed), would significantly improve the openness of the MOL.

3.29 All things considered therefore, it is not considered unreasonable to conclude that the proposed café would not be materially larger than the one which it would replace.

Very Special Circumstances

3.30 Notwithstanding the clear argument for considering the scheme as an exception to inappropriate development in MOL in accordance with planning policy, given the pre-application feedback provided previously by London Borough of Richmond upon Thames officers (pre-app ref: 21/P0203/PREAPP and ref: 23/P0048/PREAPP), it is recognised that officers may form an alternative opinion and insist that the scheme should not be approved unless very special circumstances exist. For this reason, the very special circumstances which exist are presented here for officer consideration.

3.31 The NPPF does not contain a definition for very special circumstances since they vary from site to site. Paragraph 153 states that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt (or in this instance MOL) by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

3.32 This is reiterated by Policy LP 13: Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Local Green Space in the LBRuT Local Plan, which states that "*Inappropriate development will be refused unless 'very special circumstances' can be demonstrated that clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land*".

3.33 The Courts have not defined the term '*very special*' beyond confirming that the words must be given their ordinary and natural meaning as contained in *R (Chelmsford BC) v First Secretary of State* [2004] EWHC 2978 (Admin):

The words 'very special' must be given their ordinary and natural meaning. Since the expression 'very special' is so familiar, any attempt at definition is probably superfluous, but for what it is worth, the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary tells us that special means:

Of such a kind as to exceed or excel in some way that which is usual or common; exceptional in character, quality or degree. The circumstances must not be merely special in the sense of unusual or exceptional, but very special.

3.34 The decision-taker must therefore exercise a qualitative judgement and ask whether the circumstances, taken together, are very special.

Very Special Circumstances & Planning Balance

3.35 As described above, paragraph 153 of the NPPF stipulates that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt (or in this instance, MOL). '*Very special circumstances*' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt (or MOL in this instance) by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

3.36 As set out in the introduction, this document intentionally focuses on providing officers with a detailed explanation of the very special circumstances which are considered to exist. However, policy dictates that the very special circumstances must be read in the context of their weight against any harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm. The key matters in respect of such harm are therefore addressed below, noting that these are also assessed in greater detail through individual topic reports and the Planning Statement which accompany this planning application.

Openness

3.37 According to the Planning Practice Guidance, the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in assessing the impact of a scheme on the openness of Green Belt (and MOL). These include, but are not limited to:

- Openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;
- The duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and
- The degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.

3.38 Further to this, Policy LP 13 in the Local Plan states that "*improvement and enhancement of the openness and character of the Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land and measures to reduce visual impacts will be encouraged where appropriate*".

3.39 The proposed development is intended to replace the existing café, toilet and cycle hire buildings and provide a permanent replacement for the Pavilion Restaurant and club house building which burnt down in 2004.

3.40 Whilst it would represent an increase in scale over the existing buildings, as explained earlier in this report in the context of the original buildings which it would actually replace, albeit some 15 years later, its scale and size would not be materially larger. Notwithstanding this, it has still been designed to only provide the minimum floor area required to meet the identified and evidenced need. A full floor space rationale is included in the following chapter of this report and is the result of a thorough process of optimisation and analysis which has resulted in the footprint, bulk and mass of the café being kept to a minimum.

3.41 It is important to note that volume as an exact figure can have less bearing on visual impact than the physical form of a building. For example, a tall, narrow building may be more visually apparent than a shorter wider building and yet have a lower overall volume. In this instance, the proposed development has sought to achieve an appropriate balance between footprint and height in the context of its location and the development which it would replace. It is entirely restricted to single storey and has a roof form which minimises height whilst still providing a design which sits well within the landscape in which it is set.

3.42 The proposed new café is taller than the current building (although significantly lower than the original Pavilion building). However, the majority of the building is covered by a

flat green roof to lessen the impact on views within the MOL. It would also result in the spread of built form across the site being significantly reduced – from approximately 130m currently (180m when the original Pavilion building was in situ), to approximately 45m. Furthermore, as a landscape led scheme, the improvements such as increased areas of soft landscaping, new planting and sensitive choices of materials, would lessen the visual impact of the scheme on the openness and character of the MOL and vastly improve the landscape setting in this area of the park.

3.43 The table below sets out a quantitative comparison between the existing situation, the original situation (i.e. when the Pavilion building was in existence) and the proposed situation. For the avoidance of any confusion, the figures account for the following:

- Existing Buildings:
 - Existing café building,
 - Cycle hire building,
 - Toilet building and
 - Storage building.
- Original Buildings:
 - No longer existing Pavilion Restaurant and Golf Clubhouse building
 - Existing cycle hire building
- Proposed Buildings:
 - Proposed café building
 - Proposed cycle hire and toilets building

Table 3.1: Quantitative Comparison

	Existing Buildings	Original Buildings	Proposed Buildings
Footprint	287 (GEA)	454 (GEA)	504 (GEA)
Max. Height	3.87m	6.2m	5.4m (3.45m main roof)
Spread across site	130m	180m	45m



Figure 4: Original Buildings



Figure 5: Existing Buildings



Figure 6: Proposed Buildings

3.44 Further architectural detail regarding the building's design, bulk, mass and materiality is included within the Design and Access Statement. Taking account of all the evidence and detail provided within the wider package of documents which support this application, the very special circumstances evidenced and described in this document are considered to demonstrate how any harm to openness, considered to be minimal in this instance, will be significantly outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme.

Designated Heritage Assets

3.45 In accordance with Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, special attention should be paid to the desirability of preserving (i.e. doing no harm to) or enhancing the character or appearance of the Richmond Park Conservation Area, and weigh this factor in the balance with other material considerations which have not been given this special statutory status. This creates a strong presumption against granting planning permission where harm to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area is identified, but the presumption can be rebutted by material considerations powerful enough to do so.

3.46 Paragraph 205 of the NPPF states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

3.47 Policy LP 3: Designated Heritage Assets in the LBRuT Local Plan requires '*Development proposals likely to adversely affect the significance of a heritage asset to be assessed against the requirement to seek to avoid harm and the justification for the proposal*'. More specifically, the policy states '*all proposals in Conservation Areas are required to preserve and, where possible, enhance the character or the appearance of the Conservation Area*'.

3.48 Additionally, the policy requires the protection and enhancement of the Borough's registered Historic Parks and Gardens by ensuring that proposals do not have an adverse effect on their significance, including their setting and/or views to and from the registered landscape.

3.49 In the process of site selection, design and purpose, The Royal Parks (TRP) and the design team have had the site's heritage designations at the forefront of their thinking. This is described in detail within the following chapter.

3.50 Overall, it is considered that the landscape led scheme to provide a new café, cycle hire and toilet facility would

enhance the character of the site in the context of the historic environment designations which affect it.

3.51 A Heritage Statement accompanies this application which assesses the scheme against relevant historic environment policy. It does not identify any significant harm to any heritage assets or designations. Furthermore, the applicant has engaged in pre-application discussions with Historic England. They have confirmed that they are supportive of the scheme and recognise that its design is aiming for high quality and standards and have taken the significance of the registered park and garden, the special interest of the conservation area and the archaeological interest of the APA into consideration; as such they feel the scheme reflects NPPF, London Plan and Local Plan policy requirements from a heritage perspective.

3.52 It is therefore considered that, based on the analysis and evidence undertaken, there is no harm to the historic environment as a result of the proposed development which require any weight to be attributed to it in the balance and consideration of very special circumstances in the context of compliance with MOL planning policy.

Trees and Landscaping

3.53 Similarly to the matters described above, the impact on trees and landscape are addressed in the Design and Access Statement and the Arboricultural Impact Assessment. As a landscape led scheme, this submission is also supported by a detailed landscape scheme (see content within the Design and Access Statement and individual Landscape Scheme drawings).

3.54 This is very much a landscape led development which is seeking to respond to The Royal Parks Management Plan by bringing significant improvements to this particular area of the park.

3.55 The development has been designed to retain existing trees on site and provide opportunity for significant landscape improvements around it. The landscape scheme is fundamental to achieving the objectives for the site of providing a better, more welcoming and safer facility for the significant number of visitors to Richmond Park, including those on bicycles, pedestrians and families. The landscape improvements are also fundamental to improving the site in the context of the park setting and its designations as a Registered Park and Garden and Conservation Area. This is reflected in the design of the scheme.

3.56 With consideration of all of the detail presented in this application, there is not considered to be any harm in this regard. This is a landscape-led scheme which seeks to improve the overall appearance of the site and its contribution

to the wider park setting rather than a scheme which has any detrimental impact in this regard.

Level of harm: Summary

3.57 Given the above, the potential harm to the MOL by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is considered to be very limited.

3.58 The question in relation to MOL policy therefore, is whether the very limited harm is outweighed by other considerations. Such 'considerations' are set out within the following chapter of this report.

Chapter 4

Very Special Circumstances

4.1 There is no legal definition of very special circumstances and a number of factors may be considered together to constitute something very special, but this is a matter of planning judgement (*Basildon District Council v. First Secretary of State* [2004] EWHC 2759 Admin). However, the considerations set out here individually and collectively constitute the very special circumstances in this case which would ensure compliance with MOL policy.

4.2 The very special circumstances described here are considered to outweigh any potential harm to the MOL by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm.

4.3 Any other harm, including any impact on the historic environment and setting, is considered to be very limited. As such, it is considered that the very special circumstances described below would significantly outweigh any potential harm in this instance.

The Need

Overarching Principles

The Royal Park's Responsibilities

4.4 The Royal Parks is the charity which cares for London's eight historic Royal parks and other exceptional green spaces across the city. The charity was formed in 2017 and is tasked with managing, protecting and improving the 5,000 acres of parkland in an exemplary and sustainable manner so that everyone, now and in the future, can enjoy their natural and historic environments. The eight Royal Parks are: Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, St. James's Park, The Green Park, The Regent's Park and Primrose Hill, Greenwich Park, Richmond Park and Bushy Park. The charity also manages other important public spaces in the city, including Brompton Cemetery in West London, and Victoria Tower Gardens in the heart of Westminster.

4.5 It is the responsibility of The Royal Parks to consider the needs of everyone who uses the parks and to encourage new people to discover what the parks have to offer, while at the same time conserving and enhancing the parks' landscapes and heritage.

4.6 The Royal Parks charity was created to manage the parks for the long-term benefit of the public. It does this by

advancing environmental protection and supporting biodiversity; providing opportunities for education, recreation, health and wellbeing; and promoting national heritage. The charity manages the parks on behalf of the Government.

4.7 TRP has a responsibility and duty driven by their formal charitable objects, which are as follows:

- To protect, conserve, maintain and care for the Royal Parks, including their natural and designed landscapes and built environment, to a high standard consistent with their historic, horticultural, environmental and architectural importance.
- To promote the use and enjoyment of the Royal Parks for public recreation, health and well-being including through the provision of sporting and cultural activities and events which effectively advance the objects.
- To maintain and develop the biodiversity of the Royal Parks, including the protection of their wildlife and natural environment, together with promoting sustainability in the management and use of the Royal Parks.
- To support the advancement of education by promoting public understanding of the history, culture, heritage and natural environment of the Royal Parks and (by way of comparison) elsewhere.
- To promote national heritage including by hosting and facilitating ceremonies of state or of national importance within and in the vicinity of the Royal Parks.

4.8 The objects set out above are a key reason for the proposed scheme. By providing a key piece of visitor infrastructure within a landscape led setting, TRP are seeking to promote the use and enjoyment of the park for public recreation whilst protecting, conserving and maintaining the natural and built environment to a high standard.

The Royal Park's Long-Term Objectives

4.9 The Richmond Park Management Plan (2019-2029) is a 10-year plan which directs effective park management. The plan is strategic in nature, setting out the 100-year vision for the park and the broad objectives which will guide its management. The aim of TRP is set out in the management plan and is copied below:

'To manage the Royal Parks effectively and efficiently, balancing the responsibility to conserve and enhance the unique environments with creative policies to encourage access and to increase opportunities for enjoyment, education, entertainment and healthy recreation.'

4.10 Richmond Park has experienced a substantial increase in visitors in recent years. Visitors have increased two fold in

the last 10 years and four fold in the last 25 years. This increase in visitor numbers puts pressure on the existing facilities which have largely not changed in recent years. Roehampton Gate Café is extremely popular and is notably the most popular location in the world for a break during bike rides according to Strava.

4.11 In relation to catering facilities, the Management Plan states:

'The Royal Parks will ensure that catering facilities in the park are of a high standard, provide value for money and cater for a wide range of park visitors. We will continue to review current provision and seek enhancement opportunities.'

4.12 Given the above, it is clear that the improvement of this area of the park, and more specifically the facilities it provides, is embedded within the long term objectives for The Royal Parks as set out in their Management Plan.

The Need for a New Development

Consideration of a 'do nothing' approach

4.13 As described above, and accepted by officers in pre-application discussions, the existing building was only ever intended as a temporary solution following the original Pavilion Restaurant and Golf Clubhouse burning down. It is inadequate for its purpose and is beyond its building design life.

4.14 A structural engineer report carried out in 2020 made recommendations for some remedial work which could extend the life of the building by 'a few more years' but it was clear that it should be prior to the replacement of the building with a more permanent and long-lasting structure.

4.15 Leaving the existing buildings to fall into complete disrepair would mean that there would be no visitor facilities in this area of the park. As a key hub for people accessing the park, not having any visitor infrastructure, particularly in the form of a café facility and toilets, would mean that not all groups of people would be adequately provided for to enable them to visit the park successfully. The cycle hire provision is also important to allow visitors to travel and explore further around the park and make use of the established Tamsin Trail.

4.16 Whilst there are other catering outlets around the park in the form of small kiosks, as well as toilet facilities, the distances involved mean that these cannot be easily accessed by those people entering via Roehampton gate. Together, the kiosks around the park and the facility at Roehampton gate, form a joined up strategy to providing adequate facilities for

visitors to the park. Without the kiosks, the provision at Roehampton would potentially need to be larger, and vice versa, and further access routes across the open green space would potentially be required to provide accessible routes.

4.17 The elements included within the proposed scheme and their size has been devised with the wider reaching strategy of the park, and The Royal Parks management objectives, at the forefront. Not seeking to improve the facilities through replacement with an enhanced facility that has been designed to meet the need of visitors, as well as significantly enhancing the landscape character of this part of the park, would be contrary to those strategies and objectives. It is this that underpins the fact that this is not simply a 'desirable' scheme, but one which is 'needed'.

4.18 A 'do nothing' approach, should therefore neither be considered appropriate or possible.

Visitor Infrastructure

4.19 As stated above, visitors to the park have increased two fold in the past 10 years and four fold in the past 25 years. The park is highly valued by visitors and provides many benefits to many people by improving well-being and quality of life that cannot be overstated.

4.20 Visitor numbers are continuing to rise whilst resources become increasingly difficult to allocate. It is therefore critical to the long-term protection of the park and its value to the people who benefit from it, that the infrastructure within it adequately meets the needs put upon it. Visitor facilities such as those at Roehampton Gate are key pieces of infrastructure within the park and form a crucial element of how the park is managed and protected, both on a day-to-day basis and long term.

4.21 The Jenkins Report (February 1996) outlined the inadequacy of the existing facilities and concluded that *'the chaotic, almost shanty town, situation at Roehampton Gate cannot continue. Major changes are required in layout, buildings, general appearance and management to create attractive facilities which are worthy of a Royal Park and sit comfortably in the landscape'*. This scheme seeks to finally address these deficiencies.

4.22 Visitor experience surveys undertaken by The Royal Parks show that 45% of people visit the park with family and almost 10% of visitors said that they have an additional need that affects their ability to access the park. Furthermore, support with physical and mental wellbeing was given as a top priority for visitors.

4.23 In order to meet their duties, responsibilities and charitable objects, The Royal Parks must provide the infrastructure to support visitors to the park and in doing so respond to the results of the surveys which they undertake.

This development is a key element of this given its significant role within Richmond Park from a visitor infrastructure perspective. As described earlier in this report, a long term café solution is needed as part of the visitor infrastructure for the park as a whole, and to be fully inclusive it needs to provide suitable facilities, such as baby changing areas and fully accessible toilets.

4.24 The Royal Parks are arguably London's most valuable green open spaces in the context of their role in the lives of the local population who live in London, for those that work in London, and for those that visit London. Richmond Park, like the other Royal Parks, is a hugely important green open space providing for millions of people. Ensuring that the park has the appropriate infrastructure to support those that wish to make use of it, is vital to its value and what it contributes to the community, both locally and wider. With this in mind, it is absolutely in the public interest for this scheme to be supported by the local planning authority.

Operational Need

4.25 As described earlier in this report, the existing café was installed as a temporary building following the original Pavilion Restaurant and club house being destroyed by fire. Recent structural surveys demonstrate that it has come to the end of its useable life. Various temporary repair works have been implemented in recent years to address problems of leaking / rotting throughout the building. However, the existing building cannot continue to be used and needs to be replaced.

4.26 The primary driver of the scheme is therefore the need to replace the existing café with a building which is fit for purpose and ultimately provide a permanent replacement for the original Pavilion Restaurant and club house building. The overall aim is to meet the needs and expectations of existing customers rather than drive additional visitors to the park or for the café to become a visitor destination in its own right.

4.27 The current café is also not large enough to cater for the existing number of customers. As described previously, it was previously located in St James' Park and was brought over to Richmond Park as a temporary solution following the fire which destroyed the original Pavilion Restaurant. Due to severe budget cuts at the time this was the only option available, so rather than re-building an adequately sized replacement, the park had to make do with a far smaller building and substitute as a stop gap.

4.28 Therefore, as well as addressing the structural issues with the building, the proposal aims to address the following operational issues which have been in effect for the existing café's entire life as a facility within Richmond Park:

- Insufficient indoor and outdoor seating.
- Insufficient kitchen and storage facilities.

- The lack of toilet facilities for staff.
- Lack of disabled toilets.
- Lack of baby changing facilities.
- The lack of staff welfare area.
- Insufficient bin storage.
- A small building which gets very hot in summer.
- No outdoor covered/shaded areas to protect visitors from the sun in summer.

Specific Catering Need

4.29 The facilities at the café are not up to modern standards and are not adequate to facilitate the preparation of all food on site. In order to adequately cater for the number of customers at the café, some food is prepared off site and brought to the site. Operationally this is an undesirable approach and results in a number of additional vehicle movements to and from the site daily. Given the lack of space and facilities at the existing café this also limits the ability to cater for special dietary needs.

4.30 As the main catering facility within the park, it also needs to operate as a hub for the other smaller facilities (small catering kiosks etc.). By doing so, it can reduce transport movements across the wider park and enable it to be managed in a more efficient manner. This was also how the park operated pre-2004 from the original larger Pavilion Restaurant building.

4.31 Notwithstanding the above, The Royal Parks undertook an extensive analysis of whether any alternatives to this operational set-up could work better, with a view to exploring the potential to reduce the size of the replacement building which is needed. This analysis considered the following options for storage:

- Offsite catering storage:
 - With no onsite storage, there is a significant risk of not being able to attract competitive bids from caterers. The lack of competition could affect commission rates which could have a detrimental impact on The Royal Parks finances as a charitable organisation.
- Repurpose a redundant building elsewhere on the site for catering storage.
 - Redundant buildings are in short supply across the park. Whilst there is a potential option at Holly Lodge, it would result in significant transport movements across the site and additional resource to manage. It would also prejudice its use for more appropriate operational purposes in that location.

- A new build catering storage facility elsewhere on the site.
 - Would result in a completely new build facility in MOL (i.e. rather than on an existing developed site) and would require additional transport movements to be facilitated once operational.
- Designing the new Roehampton café to incorporate catering storage to service the whole park.
 - Would reduce new built form by being incorporated into the scheme for a replacement café.
 - Is well located to provide a centralised well serviced catering hub with good electricity supply.
 - Would require less vehicle movements across the park in comparison to other options, in line with the objectives of the Movement Strategy for the park.
 - Location close to the park gates would reduce delivery vehicle travel across the site.
 - Would be the most cost-effective long term solution for The Royal Parks.

4.32 The above demonstrates the design and operation interrogation optimisation process which has been undertaken to inform the design of the proposed scheme, to ensure that only what is robustly needed is proposed so that the building is no bigger than it needs to be in this MOL location.

Consideration of Alternative Locations

4.33 Policy COM4 of the Richmond Park Management Plan states TRP will ensure that any new facilities are concentrated in areas of existing use and around the outer areas of the park and do not detract from the essential character of the park.

4.34 Replacing the café, rather than providing a café in a new location, will be least impactful in terms of the impact on the Registered Park and Garden. Given the replacement café will be built in place of the existing café and within an area of car parking, there will be no loss of green space. This is one of the key aims of the Richmond Park Movement Strategy to prevent loss of green space within the park.

4.35 The Royal Parks, including Richmond Park are some of the best green spaces in London and are important outdoor spaces for people to enjoy and they promote healthy lifestyles. It is therefore not considered feasible to introduce a café in another area of the site as this would be contrary to both the Richmond Park Management Plan and the overarching charitable objects of The Royal Parks.

4.36 Providing the replacement café outside of MOL would mean it would be located beyond the park boundaries, so it would not then meet the need which the park has from a

visitor infrastructure perspective as it would have no value to visitors of the park and as such would fail to meet the need which exists. Locating the scheme outside of MOL, is in this instance therefore, not a valid option.

The Proposed Building: Justification

4.37 The proposed new café has been designed to address the current problems with the building and to cater for the existing number of customers. All of the proposed floor area provides a function in the building. Notwithstanding this, a process of optimisation has been carried out to ensure that the floor space provided is utilised in the most efficient way so that the proposed scheme is not any bigger than it needs to be to meet the identified needs. Each element of the design brief has been carefully considered so that the proposed new facilities can function efficiently, comply with current regulations, and provide an appropriate service to meet the need without being larger than is strictly necessary.

4.38 Notably therefore, the scheme as presented here represents a significant reduction in scale in comparison to that presented in the pre-application submissions which have been made to the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames prior to a planning application being submitted.

4.39 With the above in mind, the proposal has been designed to take account of the following:

Café Area

4.40 This has been designed in collaboration with the catering consultants to ensure that enough space is provided for comfortable seating inside and that there is enough queuing space retained, taking account of peak visitor times.

Café Kitchen and Back-of-House Areas

4.41 The kitchen and ancillary spaces have been designed by the catering consultants to provide enough space to service the café and kiosk and to comply with current health and safety and building regulations. The dry stores and cold stores have been designed to provide storage for both the Roehampton Gate Cafe and also the other catering kiosks around Richmond Park, which are serviced from this site. As described on the previous page of this report, a detailed analysis of alternative options for storage location was considered, with the result being that this was the most appropriate location, both in the context of MOL as well as other factors specific to The Royal Parks and their objects as a charitable organisation.

Kiosk

4.42 The kiosk size has been based on the size of the most recent medium-sized kiosks development by TRP. This size of kiosk has been proven to work efficiently whilst not having any excess or under utilised floor space. A kiosk is also an effective way of the facility meeting more of the need without requiring a larger amount of floor space within the main café.

Toilets

4.43 The toilets in this location are required to service visitors to the park in general, not just café visitors.

4.44 The existing toilets are inadequate for the number of users so the proposed toilets have been designed to allow a greater number of WCs and urinals to be provided, ensuring that there are enough for both the café users and general park visitors.

4.45 The proposal also includes a staff WC and accessible WC, neither of which are currently provided.

Bicycle Hire

4.46 The proposed bicycle hire facility has been optimised to provide the minimum area required for the facility to operate effectively and is a reduction on the current area.

Floorspace Detail

4.47 A breakdown of the existing and proposed floorspace is provided below.

Table 3.1 Existing and Proposed Floorspace

Accommodation	Area in sqm (GEA)
Existing Buildings	
Existing temporary café, including kiosk and store	182
Existing cycle hire facility, including store	52
Existing storage container	15
Existing public toilets	38
Total	287
Proposed Buildings	
Café, kiosk, store	341
Plant room	19
Bicycle hire	50

WCs, baby change, cleaner cupboard	94
Total	504

An Exemplar Level of Design and Construction

4.48 Given the age and temporary nature of the existing building, the proposal presents the opportunity to significantly improve the energy efficiency of the building and deliver sustainability benefits. The proposal will target a BREEAM rating of 'Excellent' in accordance with Local Plan policy. A fabric first approach will be employed, with measures including:

- A highly insulated and air tight external envelope.
- Extensive green roof to most areas with rain water directed into the ground.
- A pitched roof over the café seating area with rain water harvesting for use in WCs and for bike cleaning.
- Extensive areas of south facing photovoltaics.

4.49 Further measures will be employed, including those impacting structure and services, as the design develops, to ensure that the building achieves its environmental goals.

Measures taken to reduce the impact on openness

4.50 Within the design of the scheme, the following measures have been taken to reduce the impact on openness:

- Positioning: The proposed building has been sited and designed to fit with the existing landscape features, such as veteran trees. It also makes use of the existing developed area within this part of the park so that no green space is lost.
- Consolidation of built form: The scheme considerably reduces the spread of built form across the site, by removing the existing toilet building and storage container and consolidating these elements within the new building envelope. This therefore increases openness across the site as a whole.
- Low sloping and green roof: The extensive green roof will create a building which sits more harmoniously within the landscape setting. The shallow sloping design will result in a building which complements the character of the park, rather than creating a prominent feature within it.
- Materiality: The design consists of two modest timber clad buildings linked by a curving, timber framed canopy

supporting a green roof – befitting of the landscape in which it is set.

- Extensive new landscape features: As a landscape led scheme, there will be vast improvements to this part of the park as a result of the scheme and it will tie in with wider landscape objectives. It will include significant amounts of new planting, new swales to provide sustainable drainage and new areas of soft landscaping to connect it with its surroundings.
- Role within wider park operations: As described earlier in this report, this site will act as a hub for the operation of the other smaller catering outlets within the park, therefore preventing the need for another standalone facility on another site and reducing vehicle movements into and across the park.

Overall Benefits of the Proposed Development

Benefits to the Site

Vastly Improved Building Appearance

4.51 Given the historic environment designations which affect the site, its appearance, particularly that of the buildings within it, are an important factor.

4.52 In this instance, the nature of the existing café building is such that it was only ever intended to be a temporary facility to fill the gap in time between the original Pavilion Restaurant being destroyed by fire and a permanent replacement being built. The result of this is a building which does not sit well within the landscape or contribute positively to the setting. Furthermore, because it was not purpose built for this location (having previously been located in St James' Park) it does not provide all of the facilities required. The result of this is the need for other unsightly temporary buildings on the site, including the toilet facilities and storage facilities.

4.53 The proposed building has been designed to meet the needs of the site and allows the spread of built form across the site to be significantly reduced. The proposed building, with pitched roof structure and green roof would represent a vast improvement in terms of physical appearance. It has also been designed around the landscape in which it is set, retaining trees and providing the spaces required for new features such as swales and additional planting, whilst providing a safe outdoor area for park visitors to congregate in.

4.54 The design and materiality of the proposed building is such that close up, it would appear far more appropriate for its

setting than the current building, but from more distant views it would not appear prominent within the landscape (as demonstrated in the verified views which accompany this application).

Landscaping

4.55 This is a landscape led scheme. The landscape proposals are key to the operational improvements which the scheme seeks to achieve including balancing the needs of the different user groups such as cyclists, pedestrians, families and vehicles.

4.56 The intention is to significantly improve the landscape within this part of the park in accordance with Richmond Park Management Plan objectives and The Royal Park's charitable objects.

4.57 It will result in the restoration of parkland to provide a setting for the café using native trees, shrub and ground flora and acid grassland to create a strong connection between the café and the park and includes moving infrastructure from the root protection zones of the veteran trees in order to better improve their longevity.

4.58 Furthermore, the landscape scheme will enable a better connection and relationship with the Tamsin Trail as well as providing a new access directly from the adjacent Alton Estate. Again, these are seen as key elements of the design in the context of delivering the Management Plan for the park and The Royal Parks performing their duty and obligations as set out in their charitable objects.

Biodiversity Net Gain

4.59 With the vast improvements in landscaping in this area of the park which the scheme would bring, along with the inclusion of a green roof on the proposed buildings, a net gain in biodiversity will be achieved beyond that which is now obligatory in the statutory requirements. The precise BNG calculations are included in the BNG report which accompanies this planning application. The Royal Parks have a duty to protect and develop the biodiversity of the Royal Parks, including the protection of their wildlife and natural environment, as set out within their charitable objects, so achieving a significant net gain in biodiversity as part of this scheme has been a key focus throughout the design process and the resulting BNG score is a reflection of the landscape led approach to design.

Improved Access

4.60 As a key hub for visitors to Richmond Park, it is important that it operates in a way which provides a safe environment for all users. The park is very popular with cyclists and the Roehampton Gate area acts as a focal point

for meeting, rest and refreshment. This needs to be balanced with pedestrian visitors and those visiting by car as well as for specific user groups such as families.

4.61 The landscape led scheme seeks to achieve a balance between the different user groups and create a safer more inclusive environment. The re-positioning of access points seeks to avoid conflict between pedestrians, cars and cyclists, and provide the required visitor infrastructure in a layout which would work efficiently. This has led to the introduction of improved cycle parking in sight of the kiosk, a vehicle entrance and access route away from the pedestrian congregation areas, and café and toilet facilities designed to be fully inclusive.

4.62 By re-routing the vehicle movements to the rear of the café, the setting would have a stronger connection with the natural environment of the park and the improved pedestrian and cycle facilities will encourage more people to use sustainable forms of transport to make their visit to the park by.

4.63 This fits with the The Royal Parks' Movement Strategy 2020 which states that the parks should provide a safe and enjoyable walking experience for visitors, reduce traffic through the park and increase cycle parking facilities.

4.64 The scheme also seeks to create a better connection with the Tamsin Trail, the use of which would be further encouraged by a new and improved cycle hire facility. This is particularly important in the context of Richmond Park, which relies more on its natural attributes for outdoor recreation in contrast to some of the other Royal Parks which have more formal outdoor recreation facilities (play areas and apparatus etc.) for visitors to make use of.

Drainage

4.65 The London Plan states that developments should ensure that surface water runoff is managed as close to its source as possible. There should be a preference for green over grey infrastructure in line with the following drainage hierarchy:

- Rainwater used as a resource (e.g. rainwater harvesting, blue roofs for irrigation).
- Rainwater infiltration to ground at or close to source.
- Rainwater attenuation in green infrastructure features for gradual release (for example green roofs, rain gardens).
- Rainwater discharge direct to a watercourse.
- Controlled rainwater discharge to a surface water sewer or drain.
- Controlled rainwater discharge to a combined sewer.

4.66 An extensive green roof is proposed. Most of the hard landscaping will have permeable surface with porous sub-base free-draining to the ground. The access road would need to be standard asphalt road (impermeable) to withstand the increased wear and tear of use by delivery vehicles and incoming cars using the car park.

4.67 It is proposed to attenuate all the surface water runoff in green infrastructure features for gradual release. The landscape proposals have intentionally focussed on such features, including swales and extensive areas of new planting.

4.68 The proposed development would therefore represent a significant improvement in sustainable drainage in comparison to the existing site.

Bins, Waste & Recycling

4.69 Historically, going back some years, it was all general waste and very little to no segregation. The environmental impact of waste is now a mainstream topic and The Royal Parks believe in proactively helping where they can. They aim to remove waste/packaging wherever possible but the reality is that the current café is so small, it pushes people to take away. Thus a lot of waste is produced and the café now currently segregates the following: Food, mixed (card, glass, plastic and cans), waste coffee grounds, coffee cups, coffee cup lids and lastly general waste. Each waste stream needs their own bin (typically euro bins) and cannot be contaminated.

4.70 By creating more internal covers, the ratio to 'eat in' and 'take away' should generate proportionally less waste.

4.71 The scheme also includes a bin store area designed to meet the needs of a café in this location. The waste and recycling provisions along with the improvements to the café in comparison to the existing facility will allow The Royal Parks to significantly reduce the level of waste produced and for the waste that is produced, ensure that it is managed in a sustainable manner.

Benefits to the Wider Park

4.72 This site and proposed scheme should not be viewed as a standalone development of a replacement café. Its location is such that it is a key piece of visitor infrastructure to Richmond Park as a whole. The current café and toilets do not adequately provide for the needs of visitors and also detract from the park in terms of character and appearance.

4.73 The proposal to improve this area of the park is part of the Richmond Park Management Plan and is required in order for The Royal Parks to fulfil their duties and responsibilities as set out under their charitable objects.

4.74 As well as improving a key piece of visitor infrastructure the scheme will have far reaching benefits in terms of landscape and biodiversity through better connecting it with its surroundings.

4.75 All of the above also accord with The Royal Park's 2030 vision for nature which aims to make the parks healthier, more resilient and better connected for people and wildlife.

4.76 Also, as mentioned earlier in this report, the improvements would allow the site to efficiently act as a hub for catering activities which occur in other locations across the Park, for example the small catering kiosks which operate near to other park entrances. This will result in less vehicle movements across the park and fewer deliveries going to different locations as well as less waste.

Encouraging Physical Activity

4.77 An improved visitor facility means people are more likely to engage in physical activity within the park. Fully inclusive facilities, including toilets, will also mean that the park is accessible to all.

4.78 The landscape improvements are seeking to balance the needs of all users, so that the site is welcoming and provides for the needs of cyclists and pedestrians in a harmonious way, whilst also providing a safe environment for families. The landscape proposals will also better connect the site with the Tamsin Trail, encouraging people of all ages to explore the wider Park. The improved cycle hire provision will also enhance visitor's ability to engage in outdoor recreation.

4.79 All of the above accords with the key aims of the Richmond Park Management Plan and The Royal Parks charitable objects to encourage access and to increase opportunities for healthy recreation.

Improvements in Accessibility

4.80 As referenced in other sections of this report, the improvements in accessibility would be significant. The buildings would be fully accessible in accordance with up-to-date building regulations and the landscape scheme would provide a safe and inclusive environment for all visitors.

4.81 The proposed toilet facilities would represent a vast improvement on the existing facilities which is particularly important given their role as a facility for wider park visitor use (i.e. not just the café). They would comply with all regulations and would include baby changing facilities and accessible toilets which are not currently provided by the existing toilets.

4.82 The landscape scheme has also been designed to improve accessibility and create a safer environment for all users. The scheme would mean vehicles are directed to the rear of the site, rather than entering from the front as is the

current arrangement, and the area in front of the buildings has been designed to provide a safe and inclusive environment for all users.

Local Community Benefits

4.83 The role of the Roehampton Gate Café site as a key piece of visitor infrastructure for Richmond Park is such that improving the facilities on the site will bring significant benefits to the local community by encouraging the use of outdoor green spaces and partaking in outdoor recreation.

4.84 The scheme also includes a new pedestrian entrance to the park to provide direct access from the Alton Estate. This has been the result of significant engagement between The Royal Parks and representatives of the local community with the objective to increase social inclusion for all members of the local population.

4.85 A direct access from the Alton Estate will mean the local community from the Estate would be able to enter the park on foot and have immediate access to the visitor facilities provided for at the site as well as the trails and footpaths which come into/out of the area. It will also unlock the potential for further education and volunteering opportunities for residents of the Alton Estate without the need for transport to be arranged in order to access the park via existing entrance gates.

Improvements in Sustainability

4.86 As described in other sections of this report, the proposed development would result in the following:

- Buildings with far greater sustainability credentials (including BREEAM Excellent) than the existing buildings on the site.
- More sustainable operations, both on the site and in Richmond Park as a whole, as the site could then effectively operate as a hub for other catering facilities around the park.
- Significant improvements in the natural environment through a landscape led scheme which includes natural features such as swales and new planting, and better connections with the surrounding natural landscape.

Employment

4.87 With an improved café designed to meet the needs of visitors, there will be a significant opportunity for the employment of local people. The existing café provision employs 15-20 people from local universities (Kingston and Roehampton) and this number would be expected to double with a new facility on the site.

Summary of VSC Considerations

4.88 The above detail, evidence and information is considered to demonstrate the following:

- There is a clear need to replace the existing building.
- There is a clear need for the replacement building to be larger than the existing building.
- The design, layout and location of the building, both as a whole and its component parts has been analysed and optimised to ensure that it does not include anything which is not required to be located in MOL and is not any larger than is required to meet the established need.
- The benefits of the scheme are both localised to the site and wide reaching, in the context of the park as a whole, as a Royal Park, as an incredibly important piece of green infrastructure in London, and to those who visit. Considered together, the weight which should be attributed to the benefits is significant.

4.89 As set out in the previous chapter of this report, the harm to the MOL by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is extremely limited. In contrast, the circumstances which exist in favour of the scheme are considered to be significant. It is therefore considered that very special circumstances do exist as the considerations considerably outweigh the harm, in accordance with the requirements of MOL planning policy.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusion

5.1 This report has set out how the proposed scheme can reasonably be considered to fall within the exceptions to inappropriate development in accordance with National, London and local planning policy. Notwithstanding this, it also provides justification for the design of the scheme and the very special circumstances which are considered to exist in this instance to outweigh harm by inappropriateness (if considered by officers to not fall within the exceptions to inappropriate development) and any other harm.

5.2 This report should be read in conjunction with the other reports and documents which accompany this planning application, notably the design and access statement, landscape scheme, heritage statement, ecological appraisal and BNG report, arboricultural impact assessment and drawings.

5.3 In the event that officers do not agree that the scheme would fall within the exceptions to inappropriate development, the very special circumstances described and evidenced within this report are considered to significantly outweigh the very limited harm to the MOL by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm. It is therefore considered that the scheme should be deemed to be compliant with relevant MOL planning policy.