London Borough of Sutton  
Beddington and Wallington Local Committee  
7 October 2008  
The old air raid shelters in Mellows Park and on Woodcote Green  

Report of the Executive Head of Leisure and Libraries  

Ward Location: Beddington South  
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Area Served: Borough wide  
Lead Member:  
Councillor Graham Tope, Lead Member for Leisure & Libraries  

Summary  
Second World War air raid shelters have survived in Mellows Park and on Woodcote Green. There are five options for their future for the local committee to consider and make a recommendation to the Executive: do nothing; carry out minor repairs and erect an interpretation board; re-open the shelters; demolish and seal the entrances; demolish the whole shelter including the underground structure.  

Recommendations  
I recommend that the local committee consider the options and decide either to do nothing, or to restore the shelter from public realm monies, or to recommend the demolition of the structures to the Executive.  

1. Background  

1.1 There are surviving brick air raid shelter entrances at the south-east corner of Mellows Park and on Woodcote Green both in Beddington South ward. These date from the Second World War (1939-45). They are small structures with brick walls and a concrete slab roof which covered the steps leading down into an underground shelter. The entrances are blocked so there is no access to the shelter, which generally consisted of a tunnel a few feet below the ground usually lined with concrete, but sometimes with steel.  

1.2 Air raid shelters were common in the borough and were often constructed in parks and open spaces. Some of them have been demolished and infilled and the underground parts of others may survive, but the Mellows Park and Woodcote Green entrances are the only ones remaining in reasonable condition. They are from an important period of local and national history and are minor but significant historical monuments.  

1.3 The entrances are still in fairly good condition although they would benefit from minor repairs to the brickwork. We do not know about the condition of the underlying shelters, but they are likely to be fairly well preserved.
2. **Issues**

2.1 There are five options for the future of these two shelters:

a) **Do nothing**

b) **Carry out minor repairs and add an interpretation board explaining the structures to park visitors**

c) **Restore access and open the shelters for educational visits by schools etc**

d) **Demolish the entrances leaving the underground spaces undisturbed**

e) **Demolish and fill the entrances and the underground spaces**

a) **Do nothing**

2.2 The shelter entrances have already survived more than 60 years of benign neglect and there is no reason why this should not continue for some time. The brickwork needs some repair but it is not urgent. This would obviously have no cost.

b) **Carry out minor repairs and add an interpretation board**

2.3 This would recognise the historic significance of the structures and help people understand them. The brickwork needs some repair and repointing and a robust outdoor interpretation board could be erected at each site. This would ensure the preservation of the sites and allow more people to understand their significance. This would cost approximately £6,000 for the two shelters.

c) **Restore access**

2.4 This is not simply a matter of unblocking the entrance and inserting a lockable door. At the very least we will need to establish that the structure is safe and reinstate the ventilation. It may also be necessary to carry out repairs, clear rubbish, add some lighting and deal with drainage issues. The shelter could then be opened to the public at intervals and could be visited by school groups.

2.5 It is likely that below ground the shelter is in fairly good condition but we cannot be certain of this without reopening the blocked entrance and carrying out a structural survey to determine the extent and cost of any repairs and to gather the information needed to address ventilation, lighting and safety issues. Once this is done it would be possible to work out how much it would cost to reopen the shelter. It may be possible to get a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to cover a significant part of the capital cost if the project had strong and active community support.

2.6 There would be no funding to cover running costs so the shelter would have to be opened by volunteers under the auspices of the Museum and Heritage Service and a group would need to be established for this purpose.

2.7 The shelter would be a useful educational resource for local schools and could be opened to the public at agreed times.

2.8 This option would be best pursued in stages:

   I. The initial investigation

   II. The development of a restoration plan and management arrangements to run the shelter after it had been completed. There would need to be a group of interested and active volunteers or supporters to hold the keys, look after the building and arrange openings and visits.

   III. Restoration and opening.
2.9 The initial investigation including re-opening the entrance and installing a lockable door will cost about £5,000 for one shelter. It is not possible to estimate the capital cost of restoration until a survey has been completed.

d) Demolish the entrances leaving the underground spaces undisturbed

2.8 This will mean the loss of the visible part of the historic structure. The entrances are capped with reinforced concrete and it will be necessary to bring machinery onto the sites to break it up. The entrance will then need to be capped with a concrete slab set below ground level and the area covered with soil and seeded with grass. The demolition of the two entrances would cost about £10,000.

e) Demolish and fill the entrances and the underground spaces

2.9 The structure is probably made of reinforced concrete so it will be necessary to bring heavy machinery into the park. The work cannot be costed without knowing the extent of the underground spaces but it is likely to be extremely expensive.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 Currently there is no provision for this work in the Capital Programme. Any decision involving incurring capital expenditure will need agreement to allocate available resources from the public realm capital budget for Beddington and Wallington.

3.2 Any project to reopen the shelter cannot be capitalised and will have to be run by a friends group as the Council do not have any funds to cover ongoing running costs.

4. Influence of the Council’s Core Values

4.1 The establishment of a friends group for the shelters would meet the values of partnership and empowerment.

5. Equalities and Diversity Impact

5.1 If the shelter is re-opened it would be difficult to provide disabled access as the original entrance was almost certainly by steep steps. However, the inside of the shelter would be captured on video for others to see what the inside looks like.

6. Background Papers

Air raid shelter file
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