

# The penpushers are stealing my park

A ROLLING splash of green in south London, Brockwell Park is everything a local open space should be: packed with children, footballers and dog-walkers, picnicking, feeding the ducks, hanging out. I must have walked up the hill with the kids in tow on scooters hundreds of times; it's a big local school route too. But now Lambeth council wants to chop a slice off. And the high-handed way it's doing so sums up the frustration of dealing with London town halls — as well as how cheaply it values our green spaces.

The junction at the south-east corner of the park, in Herne Hill, does get a bit jammed in rush hour — although no worse than a dozen other places nearby. More serious, it's unsafe for pedestrians: there is no proper crossing on Norwood Road, the busiest side of the junction, and you have to dash across between light changes.

Lambeth has for years nursed plans to remodel

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ANDREW  
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the junction but the latest involves shaving the corner off the park — more than 1,000 square metres of Metropolitan Open Land — in order to widen and straighten the lane turning into Dulwich Road. The plans were drawn up with minimal consultation, and without offering alternatives — even though pressure group Friends of Brockwell Park has since got a consultancy to devise an alternative to take half the parkland and deliver the same benefits.

The council's plans are expensive at around £1 million. They're ugly: the new junction swaps trees for a large concrete traffic island. And the

sole benefit appears to be higher traffic speeds, at a junction swarming with pedestrians.

I haven't spoken to anyone locally who is in favour of this monstrosity. Indeed, more than 4,000 locals opposed planning permission and when Lambeth referred it to the Secretary of State, around 900 objected. By this time it had become political: local Labour Party members were emailed, telling them to support the scheme. It was no surprise that the minister, Hazel Blears, rubber-stamped the decision last month.

London's neighbourhoods matter: in the end I care more about my patch than about any city-wide Mayoral scheme. Still, only one man can save us now. The scheme is using Transport for London funding. Boris Johnson has pledged to protect London's green spaces. Come on, Boris — get on your bike down to SE24 and stop the town hall bureaucrats steamrolling our park.