

THE CONTINUING SAGA OF THE AELTC VS SAVE WIMBLEDON PARK

Back in November 2025 Lord Gus O'Donnell (director of the AELTC) together with his chums Lord Banner, Lord Grabiner and Lord Pannick attempted to insert a clause into the Planning and Infrastructure Bill which would have neutralised the legal case mounted by Save Wimbledon Park (SWP) to oppose AELTC's plans to build on Wimbledon Park. The clause was Not Put in the face of considerable cross-party opposition. At the time Government minister Baroness Taylor of Stevenage told the House the amendment "*will not resolve this issue effectively*" and would "*create a contradiction to the procedures in the Local Government Act 1972*" while "*operating retrospectively, which could have unintended consequences.*"

She promised "*full consultation*" before reconsidering any law change – consultation that never took place before the amendment returned. The minister announced a "*wider review of existing protections*" for public recreational space to "*bring coherence to the legal framework, making protections more transparent and accessible, so communities can protect their most valued open spaces.*" She committed to "*working at pace to find a solution that works for developers and councils while also safeguarding the local spaces that are most valued by communities*" and promised to "*seek to resolve this issue in future legislation.*"

On 5 March Lords Banner and Grabiner returned to the fray, although Lord O'Donnell decided to sit this one out. This time it was the English Devolution Bill to which they attempted to introduce Clause 222C. It received a very different response from Baroness Taylor: "*We need a mechanism to close this lacuna in the law, while ensuring balanced decisions can be made in the public interest. In my view, Amendment 222C does just that.*" And what about the promised commitment to '*full consultation*'? Clearly not a priority "*I will write to noble Lords who have taken part in these debates and inform them of how and when we are going to carry out that review and the likely timescales. I have been a bit busy with other legislation, I am afraid, so I have not got round to that yet.*"

Lord Lucas (Con) was having none of this: "*At the heart of the amendment lies the travails of the All England Lawn Tennis Club. I declare an interest as someone who holds a very low opinion of that organisation, which seems to be entirely concerned with itself and its money and very unconcerned with the communities that it interacts with. That is a widely shared opinion, as noble Lords will know- although they may not agree with it.*"

In this particular case, the AELTC has behaved abysmally, and it should not be advantaged by shortcutting what should be a careful review. I would like to see it soon and done with speed, but it should be an open public review, involving national bodies and others that are interested in the protection of public trusts and recreation rights to arrive at a coherent, well-agreed solution to this problem. To do it by way of an amendment in a Bill is far too limited. I urge the Minister to stick to her previous resolution."

Baroness Pinnock (Lib Dem) was similarly unimpressed "*In summary, Amendment 222C is a four-page amendment that proposes to grant the Secretary of State unprecedented power to permanently discharge statutory trusts from land once held for the public's enjoyment. It is being framed as a measure to resolve legal technicalities - we have heard that argument from the noble Lords, Lord Banner and Lord Grabiner. In truth, it seems to me that the*

amendment would be an assault on some of our nation's parks, sports grounds and green open spaces, which were created for the benefit of the local community."

Lord Lucas added *"The provision for consultation in the amendment is exceptionally thin and ill-defined. There is nothing here that I would recognise as getting in among the community and finding out what they care about and want. There is no provision for that kind of depth of research, particularly in the context of the issue we are talking about in Wimbledon, where the interests of those who actually live there seem to be ignored entirely. If this is an amendment which is to be proceeded with on Report, we will have a large number of amendments to it and a long debate."*

Lord Banner (Con) finished with: *"This amendment is not just about Wimbledon. While welcoming the Minister's support in principle for the amendment, given that there is a degree of contention, I withdraw it now but will bring it back on Report."*

So the threat remains and now it appears that the government has changed its position and are now supporting AELTC's misleading the House Of Lords. We await information as to when the Report stage of the English Devolution Bill will commence.

All quotes are from Hansard