

London County Council (Improvements) Act 1900

A major part of the Act was a scheme for realigning and widening Millbank, extending the Thames embankment, altering and rebuilding nearby streets and extending the existing open space (Victoria Tower Gardens – VTG). This note concentrates on the proposed extension of VTG.

The northern part of what is now VTG had been purchased by the Government under the Houses of Parliament Act 1867 (30 & 31 Vict, cap 40). The land was purchased and cleared to reduce the fire risk to the new Palace of Westminster, and the 1867 Act made no provision about the use of the land. In 1879, W.H. Smith donated £1000 towards laying it out for public use, and the remaining £1400 was voted by Parliament (documentation is in The National Archives, WORK 11/2/3 and 4; WORK 11/63). Smith asked the Office of Works to record in a minute that the sum had been accepted to level, turf and gravel the ground ‘in order that it may be thrown open to the public and become available as a recreation ground’. The minute requested has not been traced, but the undertaking is referred to in the First Commissioner of Works’ letter of 23 February 1900 ([pdf.19-22](#) below), and influenced negotiations on what became the 1900 Act.

Note that the ‘Parliamentary Committee’ referred to in several extracts is the LCC’s Parliamentary Committee.

1898

- 29 Mar Prompted by a private scheme for rebuilding the Millbank area, LCC instructs its Improvements Committee to prepare a scheme for that area (see [pdf.5](#)).
- 26 Apr The private scheme for rebuilding the Millbank area is rejected by the Commons, partly because the proposal is to build on the riverside rather than extend the open space. LCC undertakes to bring forward its own scheme. (See [pdf.7, 24-25 & 26](#).)
- 15 June LCC’s Improvements Committee reports on initial proposals ([pdf.5-6](#); LCC minutes, 21 June). It says it has assumed that the existing garden would be extended to Lambeth Bridge; its estimate of the net cost of the whole scheme is £642,500, but only £71,900 if the land by the river could be built on; the £570,600 difference in cost for four acres of open space could not be justified unless Parliament were willing to make a contribution.
- 5 July LCC agrees the Committee’s recommendation that it approach the Government (LCC minutes).

1899

- 21 June LCC’s Improvements Committee proposes a scheme, with a plan showing the land between Millbank and the river as a garden ([pdf.7-11](#); LCC minutes, 27 June). The plan is evidently [pdf.1](#), with the coloured hatching referred to in [pdf.9](#) ([pdf.2](#) is the same plan relabelled to indicate where it came from; both plans are in LMA, LCC/CL/IMP/01/048).
- 4 July LCC approves the proposal for submission to Parliament, but after amending the resolution so that the Council is not committed to laying out the land by

the river as a garden ([pdf.12](#); LCC minutes). This is later said to have been in order to increase the LCC's bargaining power with the Government (see [pdf.24, 25](#)).

- 12 July Westminster Vestry agrees to contribute £100,000 on condition that the land between Millbank and the river be converted into a public garden ([pdf.13](#); Westminster City Archives, Vestry minutes). (The newly-created Westminster Council agreed on 6 December 1900 to honour that undertaking – Westminster City Archives, Council minutes.)
- 12 Oct LCC's Improvements Committee's proposes an amended scheme ([pdf.14-16](#); LCC minutes). The First Commissioner of Works and the Treasury had been willing to give up a small part of VTG (as well as houses in Abingdon Street) on condition that the land between Millbank and the river be added to VTG. The realigned Millbank could therefore be closer to the river, making more land available for building and reducing overall cost. The plan submitted showed the land between Millbank and the river as garden (plan not found, but see [pdf.25](#)).
- 24 Oct LCC approves the amended scheme (LCC minutes).
- Nov Bill deposited, with the plan showing the amended scheme, but not specifying that the land by the river is to become a public garden. (Copy in LMA, LCC/CL/IMP/01/195; plan is [pdf.3](#), at LMA, LCC/CL/PARL/01/009).
- 14 Dec Letter on behalf of First Commissioner of Works to the LCC objecting that the bill did not specify the land by the river becoming a garden, although that had been the basis for the discussions between the LCC and the Commissioner and Treasury. ([pdf.17-18](#); LMA, LCC/CL/IMP/01/048.)
- 1900**
- 23 Feb Letter on behalf of First Commissioner of Works to the LCC insisting that the bill must provide for the land by the river to become a garden, and pointing out that he had only agreed to surrender part of the existing garden on condition that the new land was added and that that had been the basis for discussions. ([pdf.19-22](#); LMA, LCC/CL/IMP/01/048.)
- Feb-Mar Draft amendments are negotiated between the First Commissioner and LCC (later s.8 of the Act).
- 28 Feb Report by the LCC's Improvements Committee emphasising that the intention all along has been to extend VTG, and that otherwise the Government would not give up the small part of the existing VTG and five houses in Abingdon Street required for the scheme, that Westminster Vestry's £100,000 would not be forthcoming and that Parliament would be certain to reject the bill ([pdf.23-26](#); LCC minutes, 13 March).
- 1 Mar On Second Reading of the bill in the Commons, the First Commissioner says that the bill must be amended to provide that the land between Millbank and

the river be laid out as a garden, and that he will otherwise ask the House to reject the bill on Third Reading ([pdf.27](#); Hansard).

- 20 March LCC agrees to accept a clause specifying that the land between Millbank and the river is to be laid out as a garden ([pdf.28](#): LCC minutes).
- 2-4 May The Westminster improvements clauses of the bill are considered by a Commons Committee, which accepts that the preamble of that part of the bill has been proved. Mr Pope and others appear as Counsel for the promoters of the bill ([pdf.29](#)): his opening speech is [pdf.30-37](#) (both from LMA, LCC/CL/IMP/01/195, 2 May).
- 8 May Commons Committee agrees amendments to the bill, which must have included what became s.8, apparently without discussion ([pdf.38](#); LMA, LCC/CL/IMP/01/195).
- 18-19 July The Westminster improvements clauses of the bill are considered by a Lords Committee. Mr Freeman and others appear as Counsel for the promoters of the bill ([pdf.39](#)): his opening speech is [pdf.40-50](#) (LMA, LCC/CL/IMP/01/048). The Committee rejects the proposed alignment of Millbank in favour of something close to the original scheme of June 1899, but without having an exact plan of what it wanted ([pdf.51-52](#); same source). The plan at [pdf.4](#) is the LCC engineer's attempt to show what the Lords committee meant, with his interpretation of the Lords route in orange and the LCC's proposal where it did not overlap in green and white stripes (this copy in LMA, LCC/CL/IMP/01/048; another copy with explanation at LMA, LCC/MIN/07898, 23 July).
- 24 July LCC agrees to accept the Lords Committee's proposal and proceed with the improvements on condition that the Committee approves the plan first proposed by the Improvements Committee in June 1899 ([pdf.53-59](#); LCC minutes; [pdf.2](#) is the June 1899 plan, apparently reprinted on this occasion).
- 26 July Lords Committee agrees to the June 1899 plan, albeit implicitly ([pdf.60-63](#); LMA, LCC/CL/IMP/01/195). (Parliamentary Archives is unable to locate the signed plan referred to.)
- 6 Aug Royal Assent.

Note on sources: LMA is London Metropolitan Archives. LMA, LCC/CL/IMP/01/048 is a large bundle of miscellaneous papers with no internal numbering. Parliamentary Archives does not have any Commons transcripts from 1900-02, but it does have the Lords transcript for the bill (HL/PO/PB/5/66/15), of which there are also two copies at LMA (at LCC/CL/IMP/01/048, lacking the last day, and LCC/CL/IMP/01/195). The LCC minutes are printed, and available at LMA.

Dorian Gerhold, 4 February 2022