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## Wimbledon cannot expand onto parkland, the court hears

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The High Court has heard that land approved for the Wimbledon tennis complex expansion is protected by law and cannot be built upon. Campaign group Save Wimbledon Park (SWP) is challenging last year's decision by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to approve nearly tripling the All England Club's footprint.

Second image suggestion (mid—article): An aerial shot showing the boundary between the current All England Club site and the adjacent parkland.

SWP claims that the proposed development of 38 new courts and an 8,000—seat stadium on the former Wimbledon Park Golf Club is unlawful. Lawyers representing the group argue that Wimbledon Park, a Grade II\*-listed heritage site co—designed by Lancelot “Capability” Brown, is subject to strict use restrictions.

SWP is urging the court to overturn the decision and return the matter to the GLA for fresh consideration. Sasha White KC, representing the group, described the plan as covering a “remarkably large area of land” equivalent to around 50 football pitches. The scheme would increase the current 41 tennis courts to 80. He added that the All England Club must meet a high burden to justify the expansion.

The application was first lodged in 2021 with Merton and Wandsworth councils, Wimbledon Park straddles both boroughs, and soon after the All England Club bought out golf club members and acquired the lease. The comprehensive scheme includes seven maintenance buildings, access infrastructure, and public—accessible parkland. It also features a boardwalk around Wimbledon Lake.

Merton Council approved the proposal; Wandsworth Council rejected it. The GLA then assumed responsibility. Mayor Sadiq Khan recused himself from the decision in 2023, despite having previously voiced support for the scheme. Planning permission was granted last year by the Deputy Mayor for Planning, who judged that the proposal’s benefits “clearly outweigh the harm”.

According to Mr White, the All England Club has held the freehold since 1993 and the leasehold since 2021. However, he argues that the land is bound by a statutory trust ensuring its continued availability for public recreation. A deed of restrictive covenants, signed during the freehold acquisition, maintains the land's openness, prohibits development, and restricts use "so as not to impair the appreciation of the general public of the extent or openness of the golf course land."

Mr White confirmed that separate High Court proceedings are underway to determine the existence of the statutory trust. He criticised the GLA for allegedly neglecting the potential legal implications of the trust and covenants on the proposals. According to him, this oversight invalidates the GLA's approval.

The High Court must now determine whether the GLA properly considered these restrictions before granting planning consent. The outcome could have lasting ramifications for the future of Wimbledon Park and the All England Club's expansion ambitions.

In a recent interview with Sasha White KC, he commented: "The covenants maintain the openness of the golf course land; prevent development... so as not to impair the appreciation of the general public..."