

LANDSCAPING AND LEISURE PROPOSALS

Proposals for investment in
Makins Recreation Ground and
Freemans Meadow

MAKINS RECREATION GROUND

Site Analysis

Makins Recreation Ground on Greys Road is adjacent to the Scout Hut, with which it shares a parking area. The recreation ground serves a large local population.

The leisure area is a large open area of amenity grass. Recreational facilities include a skate park - which there are plans to upgrade - a youth shelter, a children's play area, and a kickabout pitch. Several desire lines from neighbouring residential areas cross the park. There is some provision for seating and bins for litter and dog fouling. There are remnants of outdoor exercise equipment, most of which has been removed. The defining landscape feature of the site is far-reaching views over Henley.

To the north of the site is a steep bank that both the Town Council and users consider dangerous. This is potentially treacherous because of the inherent interest of the woodland as an area to explore as well as unthinking access by children chasing balls. Some fly-tipping reportedly occurs in the woodland.

Survey Analysis

A survey of residents on the neighbouring Gainsborough housing estate was carried out in July and September 2013 and August 2014. Neighbours are largely happy with the site, although feel that the recreational facilities need updating. The main complaints about the site are concerned with dog fouling. By far the largest number of suggestions for improvement relate to greater provision of play equipment for younger children. Other ideas include more seating, outdoor gym equipment, outdoor table tennis, and more planting.

A thoughtful proposal put together by Paula Isaacs of the Gainsborough Residents' Association highlights the above points, and notes additionally that there are 'lots of' children on the estate with physical disabilities and that the equipment is not sufficiently inclusive. She also notes that safety surfacing other than grass would keep the play area looking tidier, and that enhancements to the recreation ground should promote more social mixing, suggesting, for example, that picnic tables are included in any refurbishment.

A Henley-wide residents' survey carried out at the end of 2015 picks up many of the points raised in the earlier survey. In particular, respondents like the views from Makins Recreation Ground, and do not like dog fouling, the lack of interest provided in the current facilities, and the lack of toddler play. There is particularly strong support for proposals for an outdoor gym, for more play equipment especially for younger children, for outdoor table tennis, and for additional seating.

The above ideas are all developed in the proposals that follow.

Proposals

The proposals for investment in the site include:

- Fencing of the northern boundary to impede unauthorized access to the woodland
- Formalisation of the path network across and around the site
- Setting out of a 5-a-side grass football pitch
- Outdoor table tennis
- Outdoor fitness stations
- Extension of the playground, to include a greater variety of both toddler and junior play, and free-play space
- Seating and bins
- Signage and interpretation
- Tree and bulb planting
- Improving the wildlife value of the woodland edge

The locations of leisure activities are shown below (blue is the strip for seating to take advantage of the view).



Aerial photograph of Makins Recreation Ground showing activity locations

Fencing

Residents have expressed concern about the appearance of security fencing along the northern boundary. It is impossible to prevent access entirely, because of the difficulty of securing the bank at its north-easternmost end where the path from the housing estate enters the site. For this reason, something more low-key that prevents children running after balls or dogs, and that discourages fly-tipping will probably be more acceptable.

Install 150m 1.0m high bow-top fencing along the northern boundary, with one matching double access gate for maintenance

£10,000.00

Path

Desire lines cross the site from access points to the park. If these are formalized with a suitable hard surfacing, it will protect the grass and give a better surface for the elderly, people with mobility problems, and those pushing buggies. A path along the northern boundary should redirect pedestrians who currently cross the skate area, and the one that crosses the site will visually divide the football area from the free-play area.

A perimeter path round the entire site could be used as an informal jogging path, with fitness stations positioned along its length. The perimeter of the recreation ground approximates linear 500m, so 100m markers along its length would be useful for joggers and walkers.

It is suggested that the Council consider a compacted Bredon gravel or equivalent as a surface, with a treated timber edging. This has the advantages of being more sympathetic than tarmac in appearance, of being easier than tarmac to repair when damaged. Reinforced crossing points will enable maintenance vehicles to cross the path without damaging it.

£50,000.00

Football pitch

There is both demand and space for a 5-a-side grass pitch to the west of the youth shelter (the area shown in green on the plan). This should be positioned with sufficient space behind the goals to accommodate overshooting balls. It is recommended that aluminum goals be installed to reduce maintenance.

£900.00

Outdoor fitness stations

The proposal is that up to ten wooden adult fitness stations be installed around the perimeter of the site. These will need to stand on safety surfacing, adjacent to the

footpath. Each station will need a sign that instructs users on how to benefit from the equipment.



£15,000.00

Outdoor table tennis and trampoline

Additional activities for all ages, but especially for teenagers includes outdoor table tennis tables and trampoline. These have proved very popular where they have been installed, as well as robust and safe to use. The trampoline is suspended over a pit, which is easy to clear out. The trampolines are sufficiently robust for parents to play with children, which makes them excellent play equipment for children with disabilities. Outdoor table tennis is also suitable for parent-and-child interactive play.

It is proposed that two table tennis tables and one trampoline be located near the scout hut, so that they are easily accessed from the car park, and subject to a degree of oversight by other park users.

Trampoline **£5,500**
Table tennis **£tba**



Trampoline

Play

It is proposed that the play area be extended significantly to include

- the current junior play equipment, with new, exciting additions;
- an entirely new toddler play area;
- a free-play area within the fenceline for children to run around

All play equipment will be on safety surfacing for easy access for children with mobility problems.

Almost all of the new play equipment will be inclusive, so that it can be used by children of all abilities. In addition, some of the new equipment will be strong enough for adults to use with their children, which is particularly good for disabled youngsters, who can be carried on to play equipment.

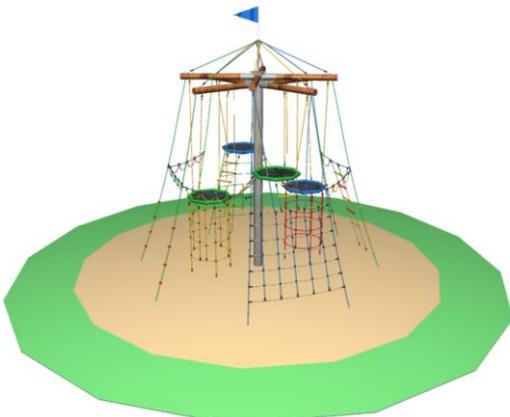
Additional seating will be installed in the play area, and picnic tables and bins will be provided within the free-play area. New trees will be planted for shade.

Some of the proposed new kit is illustrated below.

Equipment	£70,000.00
Safety surfacing	£15,000.00
Fencing	£12,000.00
Furniture	£ 5,000.00



Rope swing - all ages



Bird nest tree -juniors



Multi-unit - toddlers

Seating and other furniture

It is proposed that additional seating be installed where users can best appreciate the view, which is on the lip of land above the skate park. Several woodens seats and a new litter bin should be installed here, and new trees planted that, in time, will give this strip its own sense of place.

There is also a need for additional seating in the play area, for minders of children. It is proposed that picnic tables be located in the freeplay area, so that families can eat outdoors close to play equipment.

The site requires new signage, including signs specific to the fitness stations and to the play area. Some of the existing signs need to be relocated, because vegetation growth now obscures them.

£10,000.00

Planting

Future tree cover has been planned for in the recent past, with the planting of new trees near the scout hut. It is proposed that several new parkland-scale trees be planted along the seating strip, so that some seats are in shade and others in sunshine. In addition, shade trees are needed in and around the play area to provide some shelter on hot summer days.

It is proposed to plant mechanically thousands of bulbs in swathes on the site. This has been done with great success in Reading, and is very popular with residents. It is also possible to plant on the banks along Greys Road, to create an effect similar to that pictured below.



Daffodils planted on a roadside bank in Reading

£10,000.00

FREEMANS MEADOW

Site Analysis

Freemans Meadow on Fairmile is a beautiful grassy meadow surrounded by large mature trees. Recreational facilities include a children's play area, and a kickabout pitch.

The meadow is almost entirely surrounded by housing, apart from an opening on to Fairmile. As a consequence, it is virtually invisible from any publicly accessible space. There is no on-site parking, nor any alternative visitor parking nearby. Access by public transport is good, with a bus stop right outside.

The site is under-utilised. This is not surprising given its invisibility and inaccessibility by car.

Survey Results

A Henley-wide residents' survey carried out at the end of 2015 identifies the main attraction of the site for users as its sense of uncluttered openness and peace. The new play area is well-liked by users. The main problems are dog fouling, the lack of interest provided in the current facilities, and the lack of toddler play. There is particularly strong support for proposals for outdoor gym equipment, for more play equipment especially for younger children, and for additional seating.

Issues and proposals

The brief was to find additional ways to increase visitor numbers to the site. Some of the ideas suggested include:

- Installation of tennis courts
- Outdoor personal training stations
- A picnic area
- A circular path
- Bulb planting
- Signage
- Entrance improvements

It is going to be difficult to increase usage without providing parking for users from further afield. Since there is no obvious parking anywhere nearby on Fairmile, the possibility of providing on-site parking must at least be considered. The two possible locations are in the strip directly off Fairmile or the part of the park adjacent to the access road to the east of the site.

The advantages of providing on-site parking are that the park will be more readily accessible to families with children and to people with mobility difficulties. The disadvantages are the loss of green space, the likelihood that it will be used by local residents to alleviate the shortage of residential parking, and the

implications of on-site parking for the sense of tranquility of the site. It is likely to be opposed.

If there is no proximate car parking available, then user numbers are unlikely to increase substantially by the building of municipal tennis courts on the site. This may mean a costly investment that will benefit primarily local residents.

Another potentially controversial proposal is the installation of a circular path and gym equipment. For some users, this will be very popular, providing additional facilities for adults in particular. For other users, this will conflict with the sense of tranquility of the meadow.

Less controversial, and evidently needed, is the provision of more play opportunities for smaller children. The area of hard standing in the southernmost part of the park, near the main play area, is a good location for several interesting items of equipment for toddlers.

The play facilities will be complemented by additional seating, bins and picnic tables, all of which will enhance leisure use without compromising the appearance of the meadow.

An alternative to increasing use of the site through increasing play and exercise provision is to accept that the site will never be intensively used but that it can be enhanced for wildlife and for the enjoyment of local residents by improving the planting. Several mature trees have been lost in recent years, and should be replaced. Additional tree planting should be considered, including, for example, double planting with existing trees to create a sense of 'avenue', so that the experience of the site changes as one walks around it. The creation of a bulb and/or wildflower area will increase biodiversity, and add to the interest of the site.

Before proposals are developed in any detail, a decision needs to be made in principle as to how the Council sees the future of this site.



Freemans Meadow, showing the possible location of tennis courts.

Tennis courts in this location create a visually coherent strip for parking from Fairmile to the southern end of the courts.



Freemans Meadow, showing the possible location of landscape enhancements.