

**Excerpt regarding Freeman's
Meadow**

LANDSCAPING AND LEISURE PROPOSALS

Proposals for investment in
Makins Recreation Ground and
Freemans Meadow

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.