

Response to consultation on Newbold Comyn draft masterplan from the Leamington Society

Introduction

The Society's considers the primary use of this area of the Comyn should be to extend the nature reserve and to encourage local residents to enjoy walking in peaceful green surroundings to improve both their physical and mental health. This seems particularly important as we adapt to a post Covid world.

We recognize that sporting activities are important for physical fitness. There is also a need to attract people of all ages and appeal to a wide variety of interests, but this should not be allowed to interfere with the opportunities for peaceful walks enabling residents to appreciate their natural surroundings.

Sports

Golf

Golf was already suffering from over-capacity and reduced demand before this plan was drawn up. The council are likely to face similar difficulties with a 9-hole course as were faced with an 18 hole course. Pitch-and-put may well offer some recreational benefits and would not occupy a large area of the site.

Football

The Society recognizes the value of an artificial turf football pitch. This could be extremely popular with local players and be well used.

Cycling

The complex and extensive layout is far in excess of demand and it threatens to disrupt the nature reserve element. It was emphasised in the public response that what was valued most was the peace and sense of undisturbed nature.

The Society supports the idea of family trails and the link with Route 21, but feels shared walking and cycling routes would be unpopular as the sense of peace for the walkers would be lost. We would also wish to see cycling activities restricted to the north of the site so as to protect the nature reserve further to the south.

Activities

An outdoor activity area could be of value and exercise equipment would be good for fitness exercise for all ages. Adventure play would attract younger people and encourage outdoor activity for this age range.

The Park Run has been very popular locally and it is important to provide good surfaces on all paths to enable this activity to continue. It attracts families as well as individual runners and provides regular physical activity which benefits the health of the participants.

Nature Reserve and Visitor Centre with meeting spaces

The plan shows a range of habitats which could be developed over time with the help of Warwickshire Wildlife. This will depend on ensuring that specific areas are not subject to disturbance and connectivity between them is maintained.

As stated above, the cycle tracks are the main concern and it is not clear how running and walking paths will be incorporated without clashing with the cycle tracks. It is interesting to note what natural re-wilding has taken place in the area while it is subject to current random human activities!

A visitor centre and café would be a welcome addition to the facilities at Newbold Comyn. It is recognised that any additional meeting rooms would be of use to wider interests and could be used to promote health and wellbeing. This new building complex would also include the new facilities for the football area, but there is a concern that it is distant from some of the sports pitches.

The nature hubs are disconnected to main activities and may be prone to vandalism.

Access

Newbold Comyn is not easily accessible by public transport. A very low cost shuttle service from the town centre would discourage the use of cars. There appears to be a lot of additional car parking but this will only relieve local residents if it is free or relatively cheap. Rather than encouraging car use, it would be better to concentrate on cycle parking which does not currently seem to feature in the plan.

The Radford Road access does not allow access for those on mobility scooters. As this is the nearest access for a large area of south Leamington, this seems an omission.

Conclusion

This draft masterplan is 'pre-Covid' thinking and from a narrower sport/leisure only perspective. Post-Covid thinking should require a much broader and more innovative approach to deal with quite different financial situation and the much higher public concern over future health and wellbeing. Making that happen will require a more integrated social, economic and environmental approach for the whole District area, particularly in relation to the use of unspoilt green space and the other natural resources. Not only will better planning be required for future pandemics (which will almost certainly occur), but society will also need to deal with both the climate and ecological crises.

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