

Woodlands Walk Open Space

Background

In the early 2000s, following the building of 21 houses in Woodlands Walk, Mannings Heath, part of the development site was established as Public Open Space. This was by agreement between the developer and Horsham District Council. The ownership of the site itself was transferred to Horsham District Council (though another option considered in the relevant committee report was transfer to Nuthurst Parish Council). A sum of money was also transferred to offset the costs of maintaining the site for a period of time. The site, which lies between Lime Kiln Road and Woodlands Walk and is not visible to any except direct neighbours, has remained ever since as open grassland with one pedestrian-only access point from Woodlands Walk. It is used for informal leisure and dog-walking purposes by its most immediate neighbours, who value it highly; it has limited signage and residents from other parts of the village have said that they did not know of its existence, its public ownership nor its availability for leisure use.

Current Situation

Parish councillors have had concerns raised with them that there is no facility in the village for the use of older children, that use of the village green or the village hall for informal leisure activities is either restricted or expensive and that this is an issue that should be addressed by the parish. In the context of seeking improvements for all local children, the parish council has been scoping what might be possible in particular on the village green and through upgrading the play equipment already available there for younger children. As part of the same process, councillors have visited the open space at Woodlands Walk on a couple of occasions to scope whether there are possibilities that could be appropriate there.

When this early activity was reported through the minutes of the Open Spaces and Maintenance Committee, some residents local to the site attended the next meeting of the committee to express their concerns about increased use of the open space. The members of the committee listened to these and the chair stated clearly that it was early in the process, no decisions had been made and gave a firm commitment to consult further before any were considered. This will be fulfilled in the next parish consultation, which has been somewhat delayed by the current pandemic.

In the meantime, the local District Councillor has also received correspondence from a young local resident calling the area “the secret field” and asking what might be possible there. In order to clarify some of the possibilities for the open space, the Parish Council approached Horsham District Council and asked a number of questions. After some delay, these have now been answered and the Parish Council needs to agree any next steps that are appropriate.

Information Provided by HDC

- Use of the field behind Woodlands Walk is restricted by covenants but could involve play equipment, benches or similar. Subject to the covenants mentioned and good

access and safety arrangements, football, a multi-user games area, a trim trail, an exercise gym, running/jogging, benches or a small orchard are each possible in principle if positioned carefully.

- HDC would consider entering into a licence or lease or transfer arrangement if NPC wished to explore this.
- There are no known unallocated s106 money to maintain this site, but it is part of HDC's programme and this will continue.
- Currently insurance liability is with HDC, unless the land is transferred.

Options for Ways Forward

- No further action at this point, or
- Await the results from the Parish Consultation which is due soon before further discussions with HDC;
- Confirm for all residents that no decisions have been or would be reached by the Council without such consultation.

Link to map here:

<https://goo.gl/maps/HwmpkjbMSnBJfoU9>

Dated 2nd December 2020