

REPORT TO A MEETING OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE TO BE HELD ON 10TH JUNE 2020

NEWBOLD COMYN MASTER PLAN

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To consider a response to the final consultation on the alternatives for land at Newbold Comyn.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Committee will be aware that at the end of 2017, Warwick District Council, which owns and manages the open land at Newbold Comyn, agreed to the closure of the 18 hole golf course. This followed the decision by the operator to terminate the agreement under which the Golf Course was maintained and managed.

2.2 Since that time Warwick District Council has been working with residents, stakeholders and Sport, Leisure and Culture Consultancy (SLC) to consider potential options for the future of Newbold Comyn.

2.3 Through two surveys with over 6,500 responses, along with consultations with stakeholders and local councillors, the Council has now developed a draft masterplan that shows the proposed mix of sport and physical activity facilities at Newbold Comyn.

2.4 The Town Council initially considered proposals for the re-purposing of the site at a meeting on 4th November 2019 and resolved as follows:-

“that the District Council is advised that this Council favours options that will protect and enhance the use of Newbold Comyn as a place to appreciate biodiversity, wildlife and activities associated with appreciation of a unique environment.”

3. NEWBOLD COMYN MASTERPLAN

3.1 The District Council is now inviting final observations on the Masterplan and the future of Newbold Comyn. The Masterplan is divided into five sections, each dealing with a separate aspect and detailing where facilities will be located individually, and cross the entire site.

3.2 The Masterplan and accompanying survey can be obtained via the District Council website at https://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/info/20820/the_future_of_newbold_comyn

3.3 It carefully balances the affordability of each facility, how they meet local need, and the impact on the local area. The draft Masterplan shows that Newbold Comyn has:

- an extension to the nature reserve
- a revised golf offer, with adventure golf and pitch & putt

- high ropes, outdoor climbing and zip wires
- a new visitor centre and café with football pavilion
- a variety of cycle tracks across the former golf course

3.4 The Masterplan is not a planning document; its purpose is to provide a vision for the future of the site. The results from the consultation will inform a final review before an updated version is approved by the District Council later this year.

3.5 Each facility will be progressed individually and be subject to its own planning application which may differ in detail from what is included in the Masterplan.

3.6 This report summarises the main proposals within the Masterplan for discussion.

4. SPORTS FACILITIES

4.1 Golf

Newbold Comyn has previously been home to an 18-hole golf course, however a decline in the number of people using the course led to its closure in 2017. By providing an alternative golf offer there is an opportunity to provide an accessible introduction to the sport which will support its long term sustainability.

An adventure golf course could be used all year round and is suitable for all ages and so is attractive to families. The course could be managed from a reception point located in the repurposed former golf shop. The proposed location is within an area of existing grassland east of the Newbold Comyn Arms pub.

The former 9-hole pitch and putt could be re-instated to provide an informal introduction to golf as well as a shorter game area for more experienced golfers.

These golf offers would be easily accessible from the existing car park and close to the main site entrance point and Leisure Centre.

4.2 Football

Newbold Comyn is already home to 16 non-floodlit grass pitches which are well used by local clubs and the general public. The district has over 272 teams, which is higher than local areas of a similar size, so new and improved facilities to meet the demand of these teams is a high priority for the Council.

This strong demand is evidenced further through the Warwick District Playing Pitch Strategy which has identified a shortfall of Artificial 3G pitches across the district. An artificial pitch would provide an area that can sustain heavy use for training on weekdays and evenings (with floodlights) and provide a surface that is less affected by inclement weather conditions. This would reduce the wear on the existing grass pitches, allow for games to proceed when the grass pitches are closed for unplayable conditions and reducing the fixture congestion toward the end of the season.

One full size 3G Artificial Turf Pitch could be located on an area of the playing fields closest to the existing car park and proposed visitor centre and changing rooms. This has been located here due its close proximity to parking and access routes.

The artificial pitch is marked out for small-sided and junior football games. In addition to the full size pitch.

4.3 Cycling

Cycling is already a popular activity at Newbold Comyn with established clubs using the site to carry out their activities. Cycling is also a common form of transport used to get to Newbold Comyn which provides a greener alternative to driving.

The Masterplan suggests some beginner and family trails which would link up key facilities on the site and would provide shared pedestrian access around the site. There could also be cross country and skills based trails which would make use of the natural gradients of the site and would also link to existing cycling trails.

The disused former golf shop and changing rooms could be re-purposed and used as a facility to support cycling (amongst other activities) such as a cycle hire or storage units.

5. ACTIVITY AND PLAY

5.1 Activity centre

An outdoor activity centre could provide a range of activities which promote non-traditional forms of physical activity and would be attractive to young people and families. The course could be partially integrated within existing woodland to create a route made up of high platforms, climbing walls, ropes and zip wires.

The proposed location is North East of the former clubhouse which makes use of the woodland and gradients and benefits from natural high-points and valleys. It would also enable supervision from the re-purposed clubhouse.

5.2 Play areas

There are already two existing play areas at Newbold Comyn, a toddler area near the Newbold Comyn Arms pub and an all age area near the Observation Hill car park.

The Masterplan proposes a refurbishment to the existing all age play area with a provision included for adventure play. This would increase the play offer at Newbold Comyn and would be designed to appeal to older children. Play areas designed in this way can be a great way to get children active and promote exercise and engagement through play.

6. NATURE RESERVE

6.1 The draft Masterplan shows an extension to the nature reserve across the former golf course which could be managed in partnership with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

The proposals include creating new natural habitats on the former golf course which, subject to further detailed scientific surveys, might include wildflower glades, species rich meadows, wet scrapes and ponds, planting of native trees and dry habitats such as heathland.

6.2 The Masterplan proposes an extension to the Leam Valley Nature Reserve into Newbold Comyn. The purpose of this would be to enhance biodiversity of grasslands, woodlands and pond habitats and to improve the overall ecological connectivity of the site. This should not restrict any other facilities included in this study and would potentially increase interest and engagement with the Nature Reserve.

7. CAFÉ AND VISITOR CENTRE

7.1 The draft Masterplan includes a proposal for a Visitor Centre and Café that would also include the football pavilion. This would be a new building which would support both the nature reserve and football facilities in one place although there would be separate entrances for the different uses. It would replace the current football pavilion which is dated and not fit for purpose.

7.2 This is proposed to be located in the south of the site adjacent to the existing car park and play area. The design would need to be sympathetic to its surroundings and would also need to consider its environmental impact. It would provide a number of opportunities for the wider site including:

- creating a place for visitors which enhances their experience of Newbold Comyn which can promote engagement with the nature reserve
- meetings rooms for the public to engage and support other activities such as health, wellbeing and education
- leisure facilities such as toilets and a café
- changing rooms and lockers for use of sports clubs who use Newbold Comyn

8. PUBLIC ACCESS

8.1 The draft Masterplan retains all of the public access routes at Newbold Comyn, including the footpath around the boundary that is used by dog walkers and the weekly Parkrun. The main vehicular access route to Newbold Comyn is via Newbold Terrace East, which enters the site by the Leisure Centre and continues past the existing car parks to the football pavilion. There is an alternative access route via the Radford Road however this provides a much smaller area for car parking.

8.2 The proposal is to increase the parking capacity with an additional 188 parking bays and 9 accessible bays, to reduce the impact on local residents and support popular events such as Parkrun, Cross Country and weekly football matches. This provision has been calculated by looking at the activities proposed in the draft Masterplan. If the facility mix recommended for the final Masterplan changes as a result of this consultation, the level of parking required will also need to change.

8.3 Any new car park would be constructed using a permeable reinforced ground system to retain a more natural appearance and would be screened by additional

planting. Water run-off must be considered adjacent to the River Leam and any designs done so appropriately.

9. RECOMMENDATION

9.1 The Council has previously supported a view that proposals for the future use of Newbold Comyn should be biased toward maintaining biodiversity, wildlife and activities associated with appreciation of a unique environment. However, it needs to be borne in mind that the Newbold Comyn site fulfils a range of uses and the task of the District Council is to balance the competing demands of such users in a way that does not detrimentally affect the natural environment of this area of open space.

9.2 The views of the Committee are invited.