

Report No. RP01419 Appendix: B Agenda Item: 5	Recreation and Planning Committee 31st July 2019
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OAKHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Report Author: Cllr Clough, Ward Representative	Title: Centenary Field Report
Subject: Maintenance and Development of the Centenary Field	
Applicable Strategy: Improve and Increase Facilities within the Town	

Brief Background

What is now the Centenary Field was previously the property of the Rutland Agricultural Society. It passed from them to the Rutland 6th Form College which was taken over by Tresham College. When they closed down half of the field was sold for development, comprising a Care Village and a housing estate, and the remainder leased for 99yrs at a peppercorn rent to the Town Council. The lease document is very basic.

Description – there is a set of photographs to illustrate.

The playpark and pond adjacent to the estate are the property of Bellway and they maintain and mow that area.

The field is mainly laid to grass, mown by OTC, with a deep band of woodland, planted originally in the 1950s, along the Huntsman Drive edge. There is a small grassy enclave at the SW corner of the field which is also mown by OTC. This area attracts litter.

The woodland shows no sign of recent maintenance, and has a row of concrete posts with wire mesh fencing running through the length of it, the original eastern boundary of the woodland. The fence is broken down and dangerous in places. The western boundary, contiguous with Huntsman Drive, is a combination of wire and timber post-and-rail fencing, some in a similarly parlous condition.

The Town Council installed two bins, and on the field becoming a Centenary Field in 2018, two commemorative benches and an information board were also installed.

The official entrance with vehicular access to the park is off Barleythorpe Road, but it can also be accessed through a gate from the Bellway estate and through a number of unofficial tracks through the wood.

There is a public footpath / right of way which enters the wood at its southern end, and exits back onto Huntsman Drive by the large rubbish bin. This pre-dates the building of Huntsman Drive.

Current Usage

- This is a sizeable playing field although there is little evidence of its being used as such.
- It is used by dog walkers.
- Students from the adjacent school and college cut through the park on their way to and from home, and also to and from the Supermarket across the Barleythorpe Rd. They also congregate and socialise around the benches after school.

- There is a 'wild area' of uncut long grass and brambles in front of the first house on its south side. The resident is happy with this. It deters people from walking across the park and climbing over the fence in front of his house.
- The woodland is scruffy and untidy and is known unofficially as 'the druggy corner'. Access to the woodland from the field is hampered by high nettle and bramble growth, except where the paths go through.
- A dog-walking resident earlier this month came across a gang of hooded youths with a machete chopping down a dead tree.
- Rubbish is an issue, both around the memorial bench and also on Huntsman Drive where the path emerges from the wood. Biffa reported the small bin was inadequate, and OTC paid for an additional larger bin, but, unsupervised, Biffa put it too far away from the footfall route to solve the issue. Observation from a concerned resident is that the large new bin is never more than partly filled and bags of rubbish still collect by the small post bin.

Issues

- Some of the openings through into the wood have trodden-down fencing across them which is a safety hazard. In wet weather the paths through are muddy and slippery.
- Rubbish is currently an issue with no bin in the field by the southern bench, and the most-used bin being too small.
- The woodland is in poor condition and in need of a specialist tree survey and tree works to make it safe.
- The woodland is very shut away and is attracting undesirable activities.
- Although nowadays it would be quicker and easier to simply walk along the pavement, the two public footpath entrances into the wood should still be accessible and the route unobstructed.

Suggestions for consideration

I am assuming we would like the park to be used as much as possible, and the lack of proper entrances from Huntsman Drive is a bar to this. We could identify several suitable, historic access points and open up pathways through, perhaps with bark surfacing. The rest of the Huntsman Drive boundary fencing could then be repaired.

The concrete fence posts and damaged fencing in the wood could be removed if this were permissible under the term of the lease, and the undergrowth thinned to open the woodland to the field. The trees should be surveyed and remedial work done. This would give park users and children the opportunity to walk through and play under the trees. With the nettles and brambles trimmed away the mowers could mow right up to the wood.

We could talk to specialists, eg The Woodland Trust, for advice.

We might look at planting some replacement trees if needed.

Bins could be sited in more appropriate places on Huntsman Drive, especially to take the litter from students returning from the shop, and a new rubbish bin should be sited 5ft (recommended distance) from the memorial bench in the park. Additional simple benches or a picnic table could be installed, perhaps near the wood.

Proposals

1. Agree an approved plan of action.
2. Ensure that any proposals are compatible with the terms of the lease and within the area covered by the lease and its boundaries.