

Open Spaces, Local Green Spaces, Green Belt and Playing Fields

1. THE RETENTION AND UPKEEP OF ALL GREEN SPACES ARE IMPERATIVE FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THE COMMUNITY

I think that the Open Spaces, Local Green Spaces, Green Belt and playing fields need to be included, defined and stated more strongly in the WNP. It was always a disappointment for me that the playing fields at Holton and at Oxford Brookes were not included in the area of the WNP.

2. BACKGROUND

In the early/middle 1970s, the community of Wheatley had access to two playing fields through an agreement (JUA) with Oxfordshire County Council. The Parish Council's playing field at Holton, purchased in 1966, offered:

- 2 football pitches
- 1 newly levelled rugby pitch
- 1 combined football/rugby pitch
- All-weather pitch (Red-Gras) - 9 tennis courts in summer and, a hockey pitch in winter
- 1 cricket square
- 1 artificial cricket wicket
- 4 cricket nets
- 1 running track marked out around the rugby pitch
- 2 long jump pits
- 2 high jump fans

In addition on the Wheatley Park Upper School campus there were:

- 2 hockey pitches
- 6 tennis courts (some of which were marked out for netball)
- A small swimming pool (not available for community use)

The Littleworth Road field (then Wheatley Park Lower School) was marked out with:

- 2 football pitches
- 2 hockey pitches
- 1 rugby pitch.
- 6 tennis courts (also marked out for netball)
- 1 running track
- 1 cricket square
- 1 artificial wicket
- 2 long jumping pits
- 1 high jump area.
- A small swimming pool (not available for community use)

Today, the Holton Playing field has retained the rugby and main football pitch. The combined pitch is now used solely for football and the second football pitch is now a

floodlit training area. The Red-Gras all-weather area was resurfaced with tarmac in 2001 and is still marked out with 9 tennis courts with the addition of 2 netball courts. The cricket square has deteriorated to such an extent that it is no longer useable by the community. The artificial wicket is totally unusable and needs removing. The cricket nets have long been out of use and the concrete bases need removing. The long jump pits still are used but need some refurbishment. One high jump fan has disappeared and the other is used as an athletics throwing area. More recently, two areas have been marked out with a number of training grids.

Of the 6 tennis courts on the Wheatley Park School campus, two were built upon, one was given to the John Watson School as a play area and the other three have not been used for a number of years. The latter courts are now overgrown on one side and the surface has badly deteriorated. The swimming pool was filled in during the 1980's.

The Littleworth Road field has now only one small football pitch remaining. This is in a very poor condition with little on-going maintenance being carried out other than grass cutting and line marking. The cricket square was not maintained or used for many years and has now disappeared. The artificial cricket wicket is no longer fit for use and should be removed. The cricket nets and long jump pits have also gone. There is some marking of a short straight running track in summer for the Primary School. This, the latter, reflects the change of school from secondary to primary.

Table showing the changes in sporting facilities since the 1970s by location:

LOCATION	FACILITY	1970S	2017	CHANGE
LR	Football	2	1	-1
LR	Hockey	2	0	-2
LR	Rugby	1	0	-1
LR	Tennis	6	0	-1
LR	Cricket square	1	0	-1
LR	Artificial wicket	1	0	-1
LR	Cricket nets	2	0	-2
LR	Long jump pits	2	0	-2
LR	Athletics track	1	0	-1
LR	High jump	1	0	-1
H	Rugby	1	2	+1
H	Football	2	2	No change
H	Combined pitch	1	0	-1
H	Training pitch	0	1	+1
H	Tennis	15	9	-6
H	Cricket square	1	1	No change
H	Artificial wicket	1	0	-1
H	Cricket nets	4	0	-4
H	Hockey	3	0	-3
H	Athletics track	1	1	No change
H	Long jump pits	2	2	No change
H	High jump	2	1	-1
H	Swimming pool	1	0	-1
H	Pavilions	1	2	+1
H	Clubhouse	0	1	+1

LR - Littleworth Road field. This was part of Wheatley Park Lower School in the 1970s. Now Wheatley Primary Academy.

H - Holton Playing field including Wheatley Park School campus

In addition, there is one small pavilion on the Littleworth Road field that is barely fit for purpose and two ageing pavilions at Holton that need replacing. These will all require significant funding if they are to be replaced. Table showing the changes in facilities in Wheatley by sport:

SPORT	1970s	2017	CHANGE
Football	4	3	-1
Rugby	2	2	No change
Hockey	5	0	-5
Training pitch	0	1	+1
Tennis	21	9	-12
Cricket square	2	1	-1
Cricket nets	6	0	-6
Artificial wicket	2	0	-2
Long jump	3	2	-1
High jump	3	1	-2
Athletics tracks	2	1	-1
Swimming pools	2	1	-1

Whether the dramatic decline in the number of facilities reflects the lack of suitable maintenance or upkeep or a decline in interest and participation in sport is a matter for debate. However, without maintaining facilities to a good/high standard, there will be little interest shown in using them. This particularly applies to the Littleworth Road field, where, with the lack of appropriate changing facilities and pavilion coupled with the extremely poor grass pitches, have discouraged use of the field.

SODC published their consultation document “Open space, sport and recreational facility assessment” in April 2008. The various users of the Holton Playing Fields have replied to SODC, stating that the pitches are in a poor condition.

Unfortunately, the final report has not yet been published, as its findings have still to be confirmed.

Advice has been sought from the Institute of Groundsmanship and also a recent visit to the Holton Playing Fields by the RFU head groundsman have confirmed that the pitches are in a poor condition.

3. THE OXFORD BROOKES SITE

Finally, and as part of the OB site is included in the area of the Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan, mention should be made of the future of its playing fields, tennis courts and all-weather floodlit pitch on its campus.

As an example, BMW’s pitches on the Horspath Road are being redeveloped as a new press shop. As a consequence of which, BMW have to replace these pitches elsewhere. The tennis courts and all-weather pitch on the OB site are included in the

area that is designated for redevelopment. Is there any way their replacement could be included in the WNP?

Furthermore, the grass pitches and cricket field on the OB site are either no longer hired out or will only be hired out for a short time - at best until the site is vacated in 2022. Maintenance is now kept to a minimum and all surfaces are deteriorating. Both Wheatley Tennis Club and Wheatley and Holton Cricket Club have met the Trust and expressed a desire to move to the Holton playing field as soon as possible. This will require significant funding to bring the facilities for each up to an acceptable standard.

The following questions need to be raised/stated:

- Can the playing fields on the OB site be allowed to further deteriorate so that it will become impossible to maintain them for sport?
- Will the developer maintain the playing fields for sport and build suitable facilities such as changing rooms and pavilion?
- Otherwise will the developer, as part of planning permission, invest in playing fields elsewhere if the current ones are allowed to disappear?

See the SODC report extract, in the section covering OBU – Proposal, which states that ‘Off site mitigation required if site developed.’”

In conclusion, I am sure that there are many more questions that will arise in the coming years but I think there needs to be some sort of foundation laid in the WNP to protect all our outdoor resources both for the future and for the community.

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