

**CONSULTATION ON NORTH WALLS PARK  
10 May to 11 June 2021**



**Response by the City of Winchester Trust**

**THE PARK**

The Park is on the floodplain of the River Itchen. It is bounded to the north by Winchester Football and Rugby Football Clubs, to the east by Winnall Nature Reserve, to the south by the Town Centre and to the west by Hyde. It is a recreation ground with playing pitches, tennis courts, indoor and outdoor bowls, skatepark, play area for children, River Park Leisure Centre (to be closed) and a car park. These activities are bounded by watercourses and rows of trees. It is a functional park of limited visual attractiveness and in contrast to Abbey Gardens with its lawns, flower beds and seating areas.

**THE CONSULTATION**

A consultation event was held in 2018, followed by walking tours with local stakeholders in September 2020. These events produced a number of ideas for improvements to the Park

**THE VISION**

A video promotes a range of ideas. New toilet block, café, reimagined play area, all weather surfaces, drinking fountain, fitness zone, sculptural tower, plaza area and entrance archway.

**RESPONSE BY THE CITY OF WINCHESTER TRUST**

The Trust is disappointed by the limited vision that has been produced by a team of consultants for the future of the Park. Their proposals set out a very limited approach and amount to little more than a schedule of fixtures and fittings. The Trust would expect a Park Plan to be supported by a landscape design and planning framework, demonstrating how proposals for the Park relate to the landscape and the function of the city centre. North Walls Park is an important area of open space for those living, working and visiting Winchester. At present the Park fails to meet its potential and these proposals fall short of realising that potential.

**Landscape Design**

1. A Plan should be based on a landscape strategic design, which recognises that the Park is in the floodplain of the River Itchen and areas of the Park are liable to flooding and waterlogging. Consideration needs to be given to which areas of the Park are maintained as ornamental and sports functions, and areas which could be 'wilded' and treated ecologically to relate to and integrate with the adjoining Winnall Nature Reserve. The condition of trees and watercourses need to be assessed and proposals made for replacement and additional planting, and measures to enhance the role of watercourses.

**Future of Leisure Centre**

2. The major omission of this exercise is the failure to mention and consider the future of the site that will be vacated by the closure of the River Park Leisure Centre, together with the adjacent car parking area. The proposals for the Central Regeneration Area in the city include development for cultural activities. The River Park site is a candidate for such

development, and if pursued would play a major part in future plans for the Park and the City.

### **Indoor Bowls Club**

3. Adjoining the Leisure Centre is the visually intrusive industrial building accommodating the indoor bowls club, that was given planning permission some thirty years ago. It displaced a campsite alongside the willow trees and river tributary that was popular with visitors. Consideration should be given at this stage of producing a Park Plan, that relocates indoor bowls, when looking at the future of the Leisure Centre site.

### **Car Parking Strategy**

4. Future provision of car parking and access to the football and rugby clubs to the north needs to be reviewed and assessed in the context of the Car Parking Strategy for the city centre.

### **Movement Strategy**

5. The Park provides access for pedestrians and cyclists to a number of destinations, including the city centre, as well as for leisure walking and cycling. The role of the park for both pedestrians and cyclists needs to be planned in the context of the Cycling and Movement Strategy.

### **Play Area for Children, café and toilets**

6. The current play area at the south end of the Park is small, dark and dingy. It is adjacent to what will become a development site following the closure of River Park Leisure Centre. Designs for a play area, a café and toilets need to be integrated with future development and the overall landscape of the Park.

## **CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

There is an imperative to carry out some fundamental planning before implementing some of the schedule of ideas that are being promoted, many of which do not reflect or enhance the character of North Walls Park. The consultation provides no indication of how the design process for the Park is to be taken forward. The Trust would welcome the opportunity to collaborate and contribute to the production of a Park Plan, in the context of the issues we have raised.

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