

## Warwick District Green Party initial response to Newbold Comyn masterplan

Overall we welcome the proposals made in the consultation and the vision to create new natural habitats led by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and alongside improved sporting facilities. We think that significant work needs to be done on the access arrangements and have suggestions for improvements in other areas.

This is an initial response designed to create further discussion about this wonderful green space and we look forward to thoughts and responses on the questions raised.

Our response covers four areas:

1. Access - travelling to and from Newbold Comyn
2. Water management and flood alleviation
3. Nature
4. Sport and Leisure

### **1. Access - travelling to and from Newbold Comyn**

Newbold Comyn is within a 20 minute cycle ride for residents within Leamington, Cubbington, Lillington and Whitnash. We are concerned that there are 188 additional car parking spaces proposed – roughly double the current number. This is not consistent with Warwick District Council's climate emergency ambition for the District to be carbon neutral by 2030.

An understanding of how the requirement for this level of provision was determined would be helpful. Presumably it assumes continuing levels of car parking for current activities such as football and parkrun, plus additional numbers for each of the additional activities, such as the proposed visitor centre and high ropes. With this approach, the Council would have to fund mitigation measures for increased road traffic to the site as part of the planning process. Instead the Council should consider how it can reduce the number of car vehicle journeys and only provide car parking for those trips remaining. They should use this mitigation funding to reduce the need for these vehicles in the first place.

Reducing 'peak parking' could happen in a least five ways; (b) and (c) are discussed in more detail below.

- a) Vigorous promotion of active travel to Newbold Comyn within each of the 'communities': for example, use of a car share app by sports clubs.
- b) Improve access, particularly for cycling: some example ideas are given below.
- c) Improving facilities for non motorised modes (see below).

- d) Phasing activities. For example, it may be that football matches start some time after parkrun finishes (with the all weather pitch, it is likely that demand will be more evenly spread across the week).
- e) Parking charges, as is the case at St Nicholas Park in Warwick.

Also, if these car parking spaces are envisaged to be necessary with all the activities in the masterplan up and running, then they should not be created until this happens. (It is quite possible, for example, that the high ropes idea never materialises.)

*b) Improving access, particularly for cycling*

As it stands the Masterplan includes no details of off-site improvements to provide for sustainable transport modes. Yet improvements to the cycle route network from the surrounding urban areas are necessary and could be readily achieved. For example, some key

locations for improvement are suggested on the attached map.



Here are four suggested improvements to walking and cycling routes to improve access into Newbold Comyn:

- i) Create a walking and cycling route out of the Comyn directly onto the canal towpath at the south east end. This would mean that the Sustrans route 41 (Lias Line) would travel the length of Newbold Comyn before heading to Radford Semele, Offchurch and on to Rugby.

ii) Improve the route into the centre of Leamington. Note that this route is also on the Lias Line, which continues onto Leamington and Warwick train stations. It should also be noted that any increase in vehicles accessing Newbold Comyn will reduce the safety and amenity of this access road which forms part of the existing Sustrans route. This is already being discussed within the Climate Emergency working party and so co-ordination between this project and the Climate Emergency plan is essential.

iii) Minor improvements from Lillington.

iv) Minor improvements from South Leamington (sort Radford Rd entrance and link to canal and Sydenham Drive).

v) Access does not appear considered for the north east entrance to the site, that leads to a rural pedestrian path towards Offchurch. Can this entrance be considered for improved access for bike/wheelchair users to enter/leave the site?

#### *c) Improving facilities for non motorised modes*

i) Hire bikes, including electric bikes. The Comyn should be part of a district wide scheme. Electric bikes would make the venue easily accessible on this mode for most of the population centres, especially from places like the train station.

ii) A fully secure covered cycled area instead of some of the car parking spaces would raise the profile and appeal of cycling.

iii) Scooter parking rack - many young people (and some older people too) are increasing their use of scooters, but there is nowhere allocated to leave them. Scooter parking racks could encourage use of this healthy alternative to cars.

iv) Charging points for Electric vehicles

These four steps could significantly reduce travel miles and the need for car parking spaces.

#### *Other points:*

- Good that the surface of the proposed new carpark is not tarmac.
- The old car park next to the current football pavilion is designated as an expanded Maintenance Depot. Clearly it is important to have a space for the storage of goal posts and other equipment needed at Newbold Comyn. However, it would be better that the storage of other materials such as litter bins and rocks is done away from Newbold to

reduce the number of lorries and risk of injury, as well as potentially leaving this space for other activities

**Key question:** Will the Council commit to investigating all these areas before pursuing a 'car parking max' strategy so in conflict with its own Climate Emergency Action Plan?

## 2. Water management and flood alleviation

Management of water on the site needs to be considered. Traditionally golf courses have lots of drainage, but that is now changing.

- a) There is no indication of new ponds – it would be relatively cheap and easy to construct 2 or 3 wildlife ponds, which would contribute to water storage and provide visual diversity and biodiversity.
- b) What thought has there been to improving the area's contribution to the flood plain, reducing the risk of flooding particularly in Leamington town centre?
- c) Increasing the number of trees/expanding the area of existing woody areas at the higher parts of Newbold Comyn (between the leisure centre and the water treatment works and just beyond) would help retain water in the soil through dry summers and also mitigate the extremely boggy conditions experienced during wet periods. Is this being considered?
- d) According to the Environmental Agency, part of the site is in flood zone 3 which is prone to fluvial flooding; so what measures have been taken to mitigate. Also, is the site prone to overland flooding from upper catchment? If so, what measures have been taken?

**Key question:** Can a comprehensive water management plan be provided?

## 3. Nature

We are delighted with the input from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. They are the experts, so we like to see them take a lead in the development of new habitats in the area.

We would like reassurance on the following points:

- a) There needs to be proper consideration given to the interaction of dog walkers and nature. For example, some areas need to be designated as dog-free to protect ground

nesting birds. Can this be built into plans for the paths?

- b) We are strongly in favour of a Warwickshire Wildlife Trust visitor centre. We would also like to see information boards and online communications about developing the new habitats. Some work might mean chopping down trees, ploughing land and excluding people for periods of time. This needs to be explained fully to the public. Will such information boards be budgeted for?
- c) New planting should be predominantly English native and where possible local species, allowing that climate change adaptation means that some alternatives may need to be considered. Please could you confirm this is what is planned?
- d) Thousands of trees could be planted around the perimeter of existing woody areas with little impact on the open spaces; , many of these areas have little value in terms of biodiversity in their present form. There is also potential to connect fragmented wooded areas to improve conditions for biodiversity and enhance protection to the existing trees. Will this be considered please? Is there also potential for a community orchard?
- e) The field on the south east of the site has the southern part of the field proposed for wildlife glades but there is nothing planned for the northern half. The area is currently part of WWT site as 'Hay Meadow,'. What are the plans for this location?

**Key question:** Will the wildlife reserve focus on native species and how will it interact with other uses on the site?

#### 4. Sports and Leisure

We welcome the proposal to put in high quality sporting facilities at Newbold Comyn. However the number and type of these needs to be carefully considered and we think more analysis is necessary:

- a) What user base and catchment is anticipated for each proposed activity? E.g. A 'Go Ape' type offering might draw people from beyond Warwick District to the subregion and therefore have very different access requirements to, for instance Mountain Biking primarily aimed at those within the District.
- b) The number and intensity of different activities needs to be considered. How many different activities can be reasonably accommodated without causing conflict and congestion?

c) What economic model is being proposed for these activities? I.e. relationship between private operators and the Council.

d) The timings of activities need to be considered to spread out traffic across the day.

e) Have light pollution issues from the 3G football pitch and other activities been considered to make sure that they do not conflict with the nature reserve uses for the Comyn?

#### *Other issues*

We note that the current 'football pavilion' is also used by Parkrun, and Royal Leamington Spa Cycling Club for their 'academy' where local young children learn to cycle on the adjacent old car park. Is the plan for the Parkrun to use the proposed new visitor centre? We support the proposal that the former golf building could be used to store the cycling club's equipment as well as provide bike hire. It might be that the current grassland east of the former golf building would be a suitable location for this 'academy' to continue. Alternatively, if either the pitch and putt or the adventure golf proposals are not pursued, then that land could be used.

The proposals appear to identify two buildings that would need staffing: the visitors centre (nature / park run / football) and the former golf club house (cycling, high ropes and golf). For purposes of resilience and economic sustainability is it worth having only one central building which is staffed? Otherwise there is a risk that if e.g. the golf fails the high ropes might fail too.

Walking routes across Newbold Comyn need to be more fully considered, as opposed to just cycling. There need to be some separate walking and cycling routes - this is particularly important for those with visual impairments.

**Key question:** High quality facilities are welcome, but the impact of facilities likely to appeal to a wider subregion need to be carefully considered. Can more analysis be done on the impact of this kind of scheme?

Warwick District Green Party

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