

# Pumptrack Project Update

## 1. Introduction

As Council is aware, we held four face-to-face public consultation events on the proposal during 2023 at which a large majority of residents expressed their support. An announcement on our Facebook page on 10/01/2024 similarly confirmed a strongly positive opinion. This was liked by 73 (inc 19 loves, 1 dislike); and in the shared posting on the Kesgrave Community Group page on the same date there were 200 further likes (inc 18 loves (all different individuals) and no dislikes). This post was open to comments of which there were 39 with 15 in favour and none against (the other 24 being non-relevant discourse). Although subsequently met with some scepticism this was the valid basis for our contention that the project is a very popular one.

Written feedback from the landowner was also very positive, however, our initial planning application (received by ESC on 08/12/2023) received exclusively objections to it from residents living, in the main, on roads in the vicinity of the planned site. It is not uncommon in our experience that only those who object to a planning application take the trouble to put their views in writing.

The application also received comments from statutory consultees, in particular, Environmental Protection (on 15/01/2024), a department within East Suffolk Council. Their email stated:

- 1. Due to the proximity of residential properties, a noise assessment should be submitted to consider the likely impact of noise from the use of the development.*
- 2. Where noise is identified as being a potential issue to residents, a noise management plan shall be submitted and agreed with the local planning authority prior to use of the development.*

A noise assessment was therefore commissioned (on 23/01/2024). Before receipt of the assessment report, a number of the concerned residents referred to above attended the scheduled P&D meeting held on 05/02/2024, where the pump track project was on the agenda. The committee was to (and did) consider the pump track application along with other planning applications in the normal way. However, it was felt that the limited time permitted for members of the public to comment (as provided in our Standing Orders) during the actual committee meeting would not meet the needs or mood of the attending residents, therefore an offer was made to have an open discussion outwith and before the meeting itself and this was accepted. Residents were free also to attend the actual P&D meeting but it was pointed out that as it is Council making the pump track application its response to the consultation would obviously be not to object to it, so no-one stayed on for the meeting.

## 2. Summary of Objections

My notes on my introduction to the pre-meeting discussion referred to above to set the context for why Council thinks this is a good (and very popular) proposal have been circulated and made public. In this I also summarised the main heads of objection. These were (in no order of priority):

- **Contravenes the Neighbourhood Plan (NP):** This includes a concern at impacting the essence of green space on Long Strops. Our opinion is that it does not breach any policy within the NP. This does not mean a pump track would have no effect on the aesthetic amenity of Long Strops but this has to be balanced with the positive benefits for our children and young people in making valid and beneficial use from their point of view of the limited space available in town for such a facility. Other site options were suggested, e.g. the Community Centre grounds but this overlooks the point that the land is not available to us and would be, in fact, closer to residential housing. And, in mitigation, it was pointed out that the plan would include blended landscaping. All this said, whether it does or doesn't breach the NP is a matter for ESC to decide in law, not us.

- **Insufficient parking:** there is a justifiable concern about the inconsiderate parking around the streets near the sportsground when certain events take place, specifically Parkrun and Football matches. Council has had limited ability and authority to deal with this but officers have approached the organisers for discussions which are ongoing. However, it is not thought that a lack of parking is an issue for the operation of a pump track per se, especially once the initial enthusiasm settles down, in fact, it is an ideal location from an accessibility viewpoint which is one of the reasons we chose it.

- **Noise:** this referred to the use of scooters etc on the pump track itself and the voices of users, with a specific reference to the potential exposure to the use of strong language. As to the general hubbub from users, and otherwise, it was pointed out that we needed to see what the noise assessment report said, and this was expected within two weeks.

- **Potential as a venue for anti-social behaviour:** the concern here is based largely on the experience nearby residents had before the gates to the car park were installed. There have been isolated incidents since as there have been elsewhere, but there was a strong view that a pump track on Long Strops would resurrect past experiences. This is exacerbated by an expressed lack of faith in the Police authorities to either attend or even answer the phone when incidents occur and attempts are made to report them, and that the relative remoteness of the proposed site would render it difficult for authorities to attend.

### 3. Response to the Concerns

P&D Committee gave an undertaking to refer the residents' concerns to Full Council for consideration which I did at our meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> February. The minutes state:

- The Sound Assessment has been received and is currently being reviewed [this was the update provided at the earlier P&D meeting focussing only on the planning aspects].
- The Clerk and Events & Estate Manager met with the Community Police Officer (CPO) for Kesgrave to discuss the concerns and objections from residents. The CPO has provided some crime statistics at similar sites for the last year; BMX track in Ipswich, Skatepark in Woodbridge and Leiston Skatepark, only a couple of incidents listed. The CPO would be happy to engage with the residents who have concerns.
- The Office have been speaking with both the organisers for Parkrun and Football regarding the parking on a Saturday morning, both are aware this needs to be closely monitored and members reminded to park sensibly and considerately. The office is considering placing traffic cones along some areas on a Saturday morning.
- The location for CCTV would be one camera on the skatepark and one on the entrance/exit of the MSG car park".

When the assessment report was received (on 13<sup>th</sup> February) it was passed to me as the chair of P&D, Councillor Comber as the chair of C&R and Councillor Beecroft-Smith as chair of Council for comment. The suggestions within the report were all based on a "worst case scenario" and implementing them needs to be balanced with the desire to minimise the aesthetic impact on Long Strops. The consensus view in conjunction with the officers was to seek the advice of ESC Planners on what they felt would be an appropriate and acceptable set of mitigating actions. They referred the matter to Environmental Protection and several weeks later we are yet to receive their comments.

In the meantime, there has been action underway in the background to fulfil the commitment we gave to consider and respond to the objections voiced at P&D in early February. The delay in getting a response from Environmental Protection has caused a temporary loss of momentum which we now wish to regain. The purpose here is to summarise the actions that have taken place and gain Council's approval for proposed next steps.

**Police consultation** - Changes had been taking place earlier in the year which caused an initial delay in getting a response to our request for a consultation, however, this was rectified and culminated with attendance at our Full Council meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> March of Seargent Rob Thorn and PC Matt Finch. They confirmed that very few ASB incidents had been recorded at

other similar facilities in the area. They are broadly supportive of any new facility being introduced and were confident they can manage perceived ASB threats. Equally, they admitted that response times on the incident reporting line 101 and the working of the online reporting system had been problematic but were being addressed. They stressed the importance of reporting matters to the Police: if not reported, they don't know about it and can't react or provide resource when available.

**Changes to the track design** - It is now proposed to address local residents' concerns regarding noise/visual issues and the perceived risk of ASB by fully enclosing the track with fencing:

- There will be gates at both ends (mitigates the risk of entrapment permitting escape if confronted by bullying or other threatening behaviour); and at the east end it will be a double gate affording access to emergency services.
- There is a balance to be struck with the impact on visual amenity on Long Strops which will be achieved by using the type of fencing we have around the MJH storage area:



As the photo illustrates this fencing in green with a "see through" mesh has softer visual impact and consideration will be given to "greening" it further with climbers and other suitable shrubbery.

Enclosing the facility will afford us the ability to control access (ensuring it is used only within permitted hours with closing at dusk as it varies throughout the year), erect signage on safety and behavioural guidance and manage the health & safety risk (e.g. by not opening the facility in icy weather).

The fencing introduces an additional cost which is, of course, a consideration (that is addressed in our proposed next steps below).

**Noise** - We have been assured by the construction firm that the proposed design being one of tarmac and not concrete means that it will generate low levels of impact noise in use.

In reference to the noise assessment report, the key recommendation (in a worst-case scenario) is to consider baffling the sound impact with acoustic fencing to the northern side. Such (essentially timber or composite) solid fencing would have a substantially more negative visual impact and would be exposed to graffiti. Therefore, in conjunction with the fencing proposal, it is proposed to achieve the sound and visual screening (whilst minimising the aesthetic impact) by planting laurel hedging next to the fence on the northern side which will be maintained to the height of the fence. This is shown in the slightly amended site plan below which shows the position of the hedging and illustrates where the fence will be erected (black perimeter line). The laurel hedging will grow through the fence further greening the visual impact on that side over time.

The site has been adjusted slightly south to ensure no encroachment on the path, to accommodate the hedging, and to minimise the risk of encroaching on the mast project (see below).



**Parking** - In reference to the intended use of cones mentioned earlier, these have now been put out for some weeks. However, in light of one resident's recent complaint that they're not having the full desired effect we are assessing the situation with a view to further discussions with the organisers as appropriate.

**Risk assessment and monitoring** - Officers are well versed in, and adhere to, best practice in the supervision of all our play areas and facilities to meet legal and regulatory requirements. The pump track will be included in the daily checks carried out by the Estate Operatives and it will be added to the quarterly play inspection audits carried out by our external inspectors. As previously mentioned, the proposed signage will cover safe use guidance and we are liaising with ESC and Leiston Town Council for further advice specific to similar facilities.

**The rationale for deciding on a pump track** - For many years it has been Council's ambition to provide a prominent facility such as this for this particular demographic group that has not been served particularly well. The cost has been an inhibitor (and availability of land) so that when our benefactor came forward with his proposal it was received with enthusiasm.

It has been pointed out that no comparative assessment of other types of facility, for instance a playground, has been carried out. However, having someone offer to pay over £100K on a facility they choose to donate is a persuasive reason to go down this path - provided, of course, that Council agrees with it (and it has repeatedly and unanimously along the way) and so do a majority of our residents. No development is ever universally popular but it seemed when discussed with them there was majority view among the residents with objections that the project in principle is a good one if only it were to be built somewhere else.

- The appeal to us was that project would address the needs of children/young people of all ages in town and fill a recognised gap in our provision to them, and acknowledging many are having a tough post-covid time.
- We feel that providing them with an outdoor facility that promotes healthy exercise in a pastime which many are clearly enthusiastic about, will also help to encourage



socialisation and combat the ever-growing isolationist video game stay-at-home young society.

- Unlike organised sport/team events, which of course have their place, this will promote self-organisation and cooperation among users.
- This all said, as covered earlier, we then proceeded to undertake a programme of extensive resident consultation during the course of 2023 to test out that the proposal is a welcome and appropriate proposition. We have been accused of landing this at short notice without consultation which is simply not the case.

#### **4. Mast Project**

Council is aware, as are the residents who attended the relevant P&D on 19/02/2024, that Telent Technology Services Ltd (acting for EE) approached us earlier in the year with a view to pre-planning consultation regarding their desire to erect a new mast on Long Strops to improve signal strength in the southeastern part of town. This is recognised as weak for some residents and it would be beneficial to them. Therefore, the view we adopted is that it is something we should in principle not object to. Their favoured location, coincidentally, is close to, but not overlapping with, the intended footprint for the pump track. We have since been in cordial discussions with them so that our respective plans can be co-ordinated if they are approved. Whether the mast can go ahead is ultimately a planning decision for ESC the same as for the pump track and out of our hands, however, both ESC and we have pointed out to Telent that the Neighbourhood Plan will be a consideration. Residents will be able to comment on the mast proposal when it goes through the formal application process. In the meantime we have given permission for them to carry out a further survey related dig near the car park (scheduled for 19/04/2024).

#### **5. Further Resident Representation**

To provide a complete picture of subsequent developments, it should be noted that we had resident representation at our Community & Recreation Committee meeting on 08/04/2024. This was a family of three who noticed that the pump track project was on the agenda and they came along to express their support for it. We pointed out that the best way they could do this would be to write to ESC which they and three others have subsequently done.

#### **6. Consultation with Youth Support Agency**

[4YP](#) is a local charity we have been working with and supporting for some years. In their own words "From drop-ins and youth clubs, to outreach and detached work, 4YP provides safe places to be, positive things to do with someone that can be trusted." They have helped transform our youth club participation which had been withering on the vine before we contracted their services.

Their opinion on the pump track in a nutshell was, "It is so positive for young people for something to do... It is needed for the older age group." They added that they will arrange for their detached youth workers to visit the site and chat to young people on behaviour/pump track rules etc.

#### **7. Proposed Next Steps**

These are the proposed actions it is felt need to be taken to move matters forward on which I am seeking Council's approval.

The initial priority is to get our planning re-application submitted and not prolong further the period of doubt for residents or ourselves.

**Project management** - our part time Events & Estate Manager will continue to manage the project but now with close support from me exerting committee chair level Council oversight and co-ordination including with the Town Clerk. As for other current and previous (successful) projects I am asking for Council's delegation of authority to make and implement decisions to that end without further referral (subject always to appropriate reporting and communications). As with these other projects, if there is an unexpected cost issue, appropriate consultation will

take place with the other Council chairs before proceeding and our Financial Regulations will be adhered to regarding any expenditure in liaison with the RFO.

**Planning reapplication** - it is proposed not to engage an architect since the plans provided by the contractor are fit for purpose. This is subject to our recommendation to engage the services of an appropriate specialist agency to produce artists impressions. This will assist planners, town and district councillors and residents alike to get a better appreciation of what we are aiming for. A budget of £2,000 is sought for this purpose which we are confident is a lot less than an architect would cost. Two such agencies have been approached in preparation with a timescale indicated of 10days for producing digital (for use on the website) and printable versions.

Once we know the outcome of our planning application there will then be the following to consider:

**Any conditions attaching to the granting of permission** - obviously at this point this is an unknown quantity, we are simply flagging it as a potential factor that may incur cost and/or delay.

**Other financing** - As we know, the cost of the pump track installation is being met by our benefactor. It is not yet absolutely clear whether they will be prepared to fund the CCTV (quoted at £5,654) or the now proposed fencing. Discussions are ongoing. Our position with the pump track contractor (Clark and Kent Contractors: C&K) with whom we are in direct contact, is that our preference would be to use them to do the fencing too, this just makes practical sense. However, they have said they are likely to cost more than a regular fencing contractor because their pump track specialists who would also do the fencing are paid at a higher rate. If our benefactor is prepared to absorb this cost that will not matter. If not, we have obtained a quote from the fencing company who did the MJH storage enclosure. This is for £11,382 and is our yardstick to judge the cost from C&K which they are working on. Given our main aim of moving on the planning application we will revert to Council on this when we know the benefactor's intentions.

Our working assumption, however, is that if we are to bear the cost, funding will be sourced from our Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) reserve (currently standing at around £34K). According to [government guidelines](#) the levy may "be used to fund a very broad range of facilities such as play areas, open spaces, parks and green spaces, cultural and sports facilities" and this therefore represents a legitimate use of CIL and as such there will be no additional precept charge to residents.

**Operational matters** - We will need to work with and consult our Estate Operatives on how we will manage the closure of the facility when it varies from the normal 10:00pm closure of the MJH and the car park gates i.e. when dusk occurs earlier. I am sure other things will crop up as we make progress, assuming we are able to make progress.

**Co-ordination with the Mast project** - this will be dependent on EE/Telnet obtaining their own planning consent but shouldn't pose us a problem and in the meantime, C&K have been made aware. Subject to this, we are provisionally negotiating a rental fee for the mast presence (likely £1,000pa) with Telnet, and seeking their assistance with the project installation (CCTV electricals).

**Councillor Rod Gibson**

**20/04/2024**