

Pump Track Planning Application

Welcome, I am Rod Gibson, KTC Councillor and chair of the Planning & Development Committee. I am going to refer to my notes to keep me on track, ensure I cover all your main concerns, and so that there is a record I can share with the rest of Council. If you would like, you will be able to download a copy from the website where they will be published once I've briefed the next Full Council meeting which is on 19th February.

I always like to start by pointing out with fellow residents that your town councillors are democratically elected and you can get rid of us every four years and stand to serve on Council yourself if you wish. Or join us any time because we invariably have a few vacant seats and new blood is always welcome.

For the avoidance of confusion, we act in an entirely voluntary capacity - we don't get paid.

Any action we take is based on two things:

1. The law, which includes the many democratic rules we are required to follow. For instance, all Council meetings are held in public, anyone can attend, and the minutes of our meetings must be put in the public domain and are published on our website; and
2. We always try to do the best thing for our town and act in what we see as the best overall interests of its residents, of all ages.

I believe any parish or town council worth its salt should be looking at what it can do to improve things for its residents. Somethings we have the power to do like propose this project - propose it but not authorise it and I'll come onto what I mean by that. Other things we would like to address we have no power to deal with, for example, stop the inconsiderate parking near our schools, make the junction at Foxhall Road and Bell Lane safer and have the grass verges cut more often to name just three.

We don't have a massive budget - and you may be surprised to learn that only around £80 of each household's annual Band D council tax goes toward the running of the town council - nonetheless, we've achieved a lot over the years.

Without us (that is the office staff and the Councillors) and the help of our partners at the local charity SPARK, you would have no free Family Fun Day, no Fireworks Display, no Xmas Ice-skating & Santa's Grotto, no Market and no Millennium Jubilee Hall with all its uses from Toddlers and Parents, to the Army Cadets, to the Seniors' Quarterly T-parties.

This only scratches the surface, and I won't go on, but what I will mention is that our active agenda and track record of delivery gained us recognition in the 2023 Suffolk awards as the runner up in the Best Town category. This is the context for where we are tonight.

Now by no means did this project come out of the blue so far as consultation with residents is concerned. It was first formally proposed and agreed at our Community & Recreation Committee meeting on 5 June, then it was agreed at Full Council on 26 June.

We have held four face-to-face consultation events to ask for feedback on the proposal:

- Family Fun Day on 9th July
- Community Centre football tournament on 13th August
- A wellbeing event at the High School on 8th November
- Kesgrave Market on 20th January

The response on each occasion was overwhelmingly in favour.

We have read all of your concerns and suggestions for alternative siting and land usage. Nothing has come up that we hadn't thought about, and we have taken what we feel are reasonable and appropriate steps in our plan to address them. I accept you may disagree and if I may summarise, I believe the main concerns expressed are threefold, in no particular order:

1. It will be noisy.
2. Fear of the return of ASB.
3. Parking issues.

There are written objections to the planning application on the ESC planning site from 9 residents. To consider with that, when we made the announcement on our Facebook page in December it received 182 indications of support with 39 very largely positive comments. And when we consulted in public a big majority were in favour - I'll give you some detail shortly.

So, across town as a whole, this is a very popular proposal. Now you may say but they won't all be living as close to it as we will. We understand that, of course, but perhaps some of you actually agree with the large majority that it's actually quite a good thing to do for our children and young people, you simply would prefer it was built elsewhere?

Anyway, I'll address each of the three main concerns as I go along then when I'm finished you can ask questions on anything you think has been overlooked. You might be sick of my voice by then so I'll bring in my colleagues to help answer them.

Taking noise first, we're awaiting an assessment report which has been requested by Environmental Protection and this should be with us within two weeks. We'll have to put this issue to one side until the report is received. That is, other than to point out that the location is the furthest possible from residents' housing anywhere in town whilst being accessible and with free and ample parking nearby.

Now some things in the mix here are a matter of opinion, and whether there will be a return of ASB in the area is one of them? And some are a matter of fact and law. I think you'll understand this distinction in a moment.

For example, a suggestion has been made why not put the pump track next to the cycle racing track in the Community Centre grounds? Unfortunately, it's a fact that this location would be a lot closer to residential properties; plus, it's a fact that Council does not own the land there - it's owned by the charity that runs the community centre - and, by the way, there's a cricket pitch next to the cycle track anyway, it's not just open parkland.

Let's park the question of location momentarily, but I will come back to it in the context of the Neighbourhood Plan. First, let me reiterate why we as a Council think this is a good idea (and I should add that at every stage it has come up for discussion the vote in Council to move the project forward was unanimously in favour). There are four main reasons:

1. It addresses the needs of an important section of our community being those of our children and young people. This is not a bad starting point for anyone in town with children or grandchildren who will know the mental health after-effects of the pandemic.
2. I'm sure everyone here is familiar with the problem of obesity in the younger generation everywhere. This project is bringing forward an **active** recreational option for them in a pastime we know is very popular with this age group.
3. We on Council, most of whom are parents and some of us grandparents, feel that providing things for them to do will, overall, be more likely to suppress anti-social behaviour. By the way, we have invested a great deal in youth club projects in recent years with great success. Taken with our stronger liaison with our schools, we feel this has done more to reduce ASB than putting gates up on the car park, although no doubt that played a part. Our thinking anyway is that ASB comes from a tiny minority of young people; yes, it's objectionable but it's wrong to deny the overwhelming majority of good kids in our town because of the bad behaviour of a small minority; and finally...
4. The project comes at no monetary cost to residents as it is being funded by a town benefactor at a six-figure sum.

On the matter of car parking, we understand the concerns related to current problems from inconsiderate parking at Parkrun and football matches. Town Council has no real power to deal with this, and for instance, Parkrun takes place on land we don't own, but with the permission of the landowners. We do though have some influence with Parkrun and the football clubs involved. We are talking to them about the problems being created and the need to exert some control on participants' behaviour. You have to accept though that football spectators are members of the public over whom even the clubs have no control. We are also looking at adding a few extra spaces to those near the MJH.

Not in any way to dismiss the concern but in the context of this project, we don't feel parking will be a major problem. It seems reasonable to anticipate that most of the users of a pump track are likely to arrive on their bikes or scooters. Some will come with parents and grandparents by car but not in the numbers that participate in Parkrun (which gets to 400 runners) or the football. And we have no plans for hosting BMX competitions to answer one specific query.

Legal/technical issues

Returning to the subject of location, a few objections quoted the Neighbourhood Plan suggesting the project goes against it. Having been mainly responsible for writing it, I actually found your references to it very encouraging. But they are misplaced - let me explain.

3.3 Environment and Heritage states:

"When asked what uses could be made of the current public open space, 80% wished to see it protected as such..." i.e. as a public open space. Now my thinking is that a POS is a place for a community to use jointly for whatever recreational purpose it deems appropriate.

But to quote the legal definition, according to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990:

"Public Open Space is defined as land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground. Public open spaces are normally for use by walkers, but may include cyclists and other forms of recreation for instance skate boarding."

As a follow up to the adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan, we published a three year Business Plan 2021-24. That was put out to public consultation in July 2021 prior to adoption by Council in the October. The second strategic objective in it stated:

"To enhance the use of our green spaces by the provision of appropriate additional facilities..." This is entirely consistent with the NP.

The second area quoted from the same section in the NP was:

"...with 62% also wishing it to be maintained to encourage biodiversity and wildflowers."

This is something Council is actively pursuing on many fronts: from acquiring current green spaces from the existing landowners to give us long term control, stop Norse coming in and mowing down planted out areas as they have had a habit of doing, and preventing housing development, through to active support for many conservation, restoration and planting initiatives.

On this project, yes, it is covering a green area with concrete and asphalt but you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs and the total square footage represents only about 2% of the sportsground/bridleway spread of land. And there will be landscaping of the site.

Quoting the E&H section of the NP in isolation is rather cherry picking (if you'll pardon the pun). And I do question the logic of on the one hand of pointing to wildlife and biodiversity then on the other suggesting a better alternative for the site would be to expand the car park. Anyway, if you read on to the next section of the NP...

Section 3.4 Facilities and Well-being explains:

Compared with other similarly sized Suffolk towns Kesgrave has a great lack of recreational and sports facilities but a technical assessment by the local authority published in 2014 stated that these are all available in Ipswich so that's sufficient. Our children can go to Landseer Park and use the pump track there but why should they have to? We're a town of 16,000 residents and the second biggest in East Suffolk after Felixstowe.

It also says: *"The demographic profile in Kesgrave shows a significantly younger population when compared for instance to Woodbridge which is much better off for sports and recreational facilities."* Woodbridge and Melton have a combined population of 11,000.

In the NP, Policy KE5: Local Green Spaces has also been cited. This states:

"Proposals for development on these Local Green Spaces will not be permitted, except in very special circumstances unless it is clearly demonstrated that it will enhance the role and function of the identified Local Green Space."

Whether the installation of a pump track clearly demonstrates an appropriate enhancement to the role and function of Long Strops is a matter of opinion and clearly our view is that it will. As I indicated, we are unanimous in this and our consultations and engagement actions over the past 8mths show there is overwhelming resident support for it.

However, we are not the judge and jury, so to speak. The final arbiter is the Local Planning Authority which is East Suffolk Council. Their Planning Department position will be that if they judge the application to be legally acceptable taking into account of their planning policies, national policies, and our NP, it will get the go ahead. And in so doing will make a lot of kids in town very happy.

Now, have I missed anything important? Please do ask any questions.

RG/5.2.2024