

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook (FCHB) response to Anderson Group consultation on initial scoping ideas on an Urban Country Park for the Cambridge Lakes

Q1. What else do you think could be done to improve the route of the Tins?

The Tins foot and cycle way is proposed to be upgraded by Cambridgeshire County Council along the length of the site to provide a 2 m wide cycle way and a 2 m resurfaced footway. Anderson Group to provide land to enable the Tins link to be upgraded.

FCHB are pleased that the Anderson Group will be providing land to allow the existing Tins foot and cycle way to be upgraded. The documentation provided by AG so far does not indicate whether this proposal covers the entire Tin footpath and cycle way (i.e. from the Brookfields/Burnside junction to Cherry Hinton) and we would like to know more precisely which pieces of land AG will provide for this.

FCHB considers that the priority part of the Tins requiring upgrading is the bridge over the railway, which is narrow, steep, has poor visibility, is unsatisfactory and dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians, and is particularly difficult for disabled users (e.g. wheel chairs and tricycles) and for those with pushchairs. Ideally, a new, wider bridge with more gradual access slopes (the gradient of main railway cycle bridge by the station is a good model) should be installed; the sharp “dog-leg” bend should be removed, and bushes cleared back to provide good visibility

(see also Q2 and the need for a second bridge over the railway, to take pressure off the existing bridge)

Q2. Do you think the proposed pedestrian access points are in the right location?

The section of the Tins next to the lakes is currently bounded by two high fences. A new gateway feature can be created here (i.e. half way along the tins) allowing access to the lakes.

FCHB considers that, in order for respondents to be able to comment on this question, the “proposed pedestrian access points” should have been clearly marked on the proposals. We have requested further information on this but it has not been provided. Since the proposed access points have not been shown clearly, further consultation will be required on this point. Access to the lakes is a critical issue of concern and must be very carefully considered. In general, there should be a strictly limited number of access points which will facilitate management. In considering access points, thought will also need to be given to the “carrying capacity” of the area in terms of the numbers of visitors and their impact on wildlife, recognising that even small numbers of walkers can disturb birds, and sensitive species such as fragile underfoot vegetation.

FCHB’s views on pedestrian access to the proposed urban country park are:

- All access points must be situated to avoid/minimise conflict between those visiting the lakes and cyclists/pedestrians using the public paths for their daily business, and for access to both the lakes and the surrounding areas by the emergency services. Both the Tins and Snakey Path are busy routes for commuters, school children, and residents.
- There should be NO access point at the junction of the Tins with Brookfields/Burnside (proposed as the main entrance with a feature gateway). This is already a busy corner and cars/cyclists/pedestrians/dog walkers need to take particular care here. In addition, the brook runs past this point and this has been identified as water vole habitat. Inside the fence, the area of land available is confined and this part of the lake’s edge is boggy and appears to be prone to changes in water level. It would not be a suitable place for seating and information boards (see next question). Placing an access gate here would increase traffic of all kinds, encourage car parking in Brookfields/Burnside which would cause obstructions given the

narrow width of the road and the fact that Burnside is a cul-de-sac, and obstruct access to emergency services should they be needed by local residents, the dentist at 97 Burnside, or visitors to the lakes.

- An access point along the Tins path opposite the TA lake just before the railway bridge is potentially a good idea provided that sufficient land is made available – the path along the lakes parallel with this part of the Tins is narrow and there is a steep cliff/drop-off into the lake here. Consideration would need to be given to where bikes would be parked. Design of such an access point could be combined with improvements to the bridge over the railway.
- FCHB has always considered that the main access to the lakes should be from the north side, via an upgraded Tins bridge and a **second footbridge over the railway line somewhere in the area of the current leisure centre**; we feel that it would be appropriate for AG to cover the costs of a second pedestrian only bridge.
- Although some people think that public access should be allowed through the current anglers' gate, the majority of FCHB members think this should be for anglers and Council/contractors/emergency vehicles etc only (so that anglers can continue to park there and bring their equipment in). This would also reduce the temptation for visitors to park in the turning point for the Burnside cul-de-sac and reduce aggravation among local residents.
- There should be no access to the lakes along the main part of Snakey Path between Burnside and the St Bede's Crescent area. This is a peaceful part of the brook, with good wildlife, and it borders the St Bede's school playing fields. The area of land is limited and Snakey Path is narrow and there should be no incentives for parking bikes or generally blocking the thoroughfare.
- Access to the lakes will be needed from the Cherry Hinton side. Identifying the access point will require consultation with the Cherry Hinton Residents Group, Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall, FCHB, Blacklands Allotments, etc, as there are many issues to be resolved including the fact that there are existing illegal routes into the lakes for swimming, a history of anti-social behaviour linked with this, disturbance to local residents, and security concerns for the Spinney School. We do however believe that provision should be made for access from the Cherry Hinton Hall end, if this is feasible and can be done in such a way that it meets the concerns of local residents, as it would allow people to walk through the lakes as part of a longer "Green Corridor" walk from Cherry Hinton Hall to Coldham's Common.

Q3. Would you like to see an art feature gateway to mark the entrance to the Lakes?

A feature entrance gateway can be created into the lake site at the junction of the Tins with Brookfields. New areas for seating and information boards can be created here

See response to Q2 above – FCHB does not consider this location to be a suitable place for a gateway into the Lakes and certainly not for the main entrance. We do however think that art feature gateways to the Lakes are a good idea, provided these are in appropriate locations. A feature archway over the Tins path at the Brookfields corner could be considered as well. This issue however is a minor one and time should not be spent discussing this, until the more critical issues have been resolved.

Q4. Should public access be allowed to both lakes?

It is proposed to open the lakes for public access. Recreational paths can be provided around the lakes and areas for picnics or birdwatching and can be created. The existing fishing platforms can be retained.

FCHB agrees that public access to both lakes could be allowed, provided that wildlife is not disturbed, that the needs of the anglers are met, and recognising that some form of zoning may be the better solution to managing the various potential uses of the area. Many people are unaware of the very limited amount of land surrounding the lakes, and the steep cliffs in several places, both of

which will have a major constraint on the activities that can be developed. Furthermore, certain specific areas will need to be closed to the public on account of wildlife interest.

Full discussion of how the different areas of land within the lakes area can be used will need to wait for the results of the ecological surveys as it is essential to understand which are the key areas for sensitive wildlife; e.g. the wetland area in the south east corner near the Spinney is likely to be an important area, but other sites may be ecologically important at certain times of year and seasonal zoning may be necessary. Some areas may need to be closed on safety grounds. We agree that recreational paths and areas for birdwatching should be created where these do not exist already and that the existing fishing platforms should be retained. Given the limited amount of land and the safety concerns relating to the steep cliffs, there are a limited number of locations for picnic areas which will need to be small in size and few in number if considered appropriate.

Q5. Should paths be provided around both lakes?

Public access to the lakes will be provided by a network of recreational footpaths. Potential works to achieve this could include selective clearance of vegetation to create a new footpath loop around the lakes. A series of different characters and experiences can be created along the routes such as areas that are more wooded and areas where there are views across the lakes. Key areas can be created for relaxing, resting and watching wildlife, and information boards can be installed to tell visitors about the wildlife of the area.

FCHB feels that some public access to both lakes will be appropriate (see response above) but until the results of the ecological surveys are known, it will not be possible to make a firm decision on this. It should be noted that it will probably not be possible to provide a path **all** the way round the lakes without building some form of elevated board walk in the south east corner. FCHB, however, feels that this corner of the lake should be closed to the public as it is used by wildlife and particular water birds (this was where there have been sightings of the bittern).

Given the narrow width of the land around the lakes, it would be difficult to see how a “new” footpath loop could be created; consideration must be given to the fact that anglers also use the footpath and that in narrow areas they may need to use part of the footpath for their equipment. Construction of footpaths will inevitably have an impact on wildlife and vegetation and new footpaths should be kept to a minimum. We do not know why the northern part of the eastern lake is closed and even anglers do not have access to this; we would like assurance that this area is being included in the ecological survey. An explanation is needed and any reasons why such closure is required will need to be taken into account.

Q6. Should bicycles be allowed on the paths around the lakes?

FCHB think that bicycles should NOT be allowed within the lake area, given the very limited land area available and the likely conflict that would arise with fishermen, bird watchers and recreational visitors on foot. There are plenty of established cycle paths all the way round the outside of the site (e.g. Tins, Snakey Path). Cycling should be encouraged as a means of transport to reach the proposed urban country park, adequate cycle parking should be provided at the entrances, existing cycling paths should be improved (see response to Q1) and new access cycling paths created on the north side of the lakes particularly across the former landfill site identified by AG as an "opportunity area for formal leisure use".

Q7. Should seating areas and small spaces for picnics be created around the lakes?

FCHB thinks that there should be some seating areas and small picnic sites but very careful consideration should be given to their siting, so that disturbance to wildlife is minimised, and there is no conflict with the footpaths which, in narrow areas, would preclude the installation of infrastructure. A picnic area might be possible in the north east corner but the feasibility of this will

depend very much on access (see responses to earlier questions). The design of picnic sites and seating areas should be in keeping with the naturalness of the area. Seating and picnic areas could be considered for the "opportunity area for formal leisure use"; it is worth noting that this has a view from the highest point, with King's College Chapel and other city landmarks visible from here. Provision should be made at all benches and picnic sites to prevent litter or behaviour that may be contrary to the conservation of the area.

Q8. What do you think the lake site should be called?

FCHB does not have strong feelings about the name but proposes that a competition could be held to find a suitable name; this would contribute to community ownership of the area and create interest in the site. We would like to see the name reflect the history of the area (e.g. the Norman and Saxon cement works) and would also recommend that the terms "Cambridge Lakes" and Chalk Pits are avoided to prevent confusion with other areas that use these terms in their names. As with the art feature gates, we do not consider this a priority issue at present and would urge attention to be focused on the main concerns.

Qx. Do you think areas for swimming in the lakes should be provided?

FCHB would support limited swimming, in a restricted area of one lake only, provided that safe access and life-belts are provided. Access should be limited to a small jetty. The location will need careful consideration and involve close consultation with the fishermen. There are relatively few areas where access to the water would be suitable.

Other points

FCHB would like to make the following points, including a number that were part of our response to the consultation on the Cambridge City Draft Local Plan, August 2014, and that are not covered by the AG consultation questions:

- Given that the area now identified as an "opportunity area for commercial use" (coloured beige on the plan) was previously a City Wildlife Site and also protected open space, the AG should be required to make adequate compensatory ecological improvements in their developments north of the railway line, in the planning of the proposed country park, and where possible in adjacent habitat within the Green Corridor (e.g. Cherry Hinton Brook)
- The proposed urban country park should not be promoted as a large-scale "destination" but primarily as resource for Romsey Town and the adjacent parts of the City which have the lowest amount of public green space available;
- Car access to the urban country park should be **only** from Coldham's Lane on the north side of the railway line and should be on a limited basis, primarily for disabled visitors.
- There should be no motor vehicle access from Brookside and Burnside, given the narrow road and parking limitations, other than for emergency vehicles and for Cherry Hinton Angling Club members, both of which could use the gate at the far end of Burnside.
- Consideration should be given to creating a pedestrian and cycle path running from near the TA/concrete works north of the railway line on Coldham's Lane across the land identified as an "opportunity area for formal leisure use" to the Business Park/end of Tins Path. This would reduce traffic on Snakey Path and provide a much safer alternative than Coldham's Lane for cyclists.
- Sainsbury's should be involved in discussions on access to the urban country park and asked to help improve and maintain the part of the footpath that runs through their car park and alongside the store.
- Recreational activities that require facilities or generate significant noise or disturbance should be confined to the northern part of the area, partly because of the limited land area around the lakes,

and partly to ensure that the nature conservation value of the lakes is retained. Organised sporting activity should be restricted to the "opportunity area for formal leisure use", with access from Coldham's Lane and the Business Park, to minimise disturbance to wildlife and residential areas.

- Motorised boats of any form (other than to address emergencies), and motorised sports of any kind should be prohibited on the lakes, from the point of view of the wildlife, local residents and other recreational activities planned for the area.
- The use of non-motorised forms of boating should be subject to consultation and would need a thorough investigation before being considered permissible; even kayaks and canoes can disturb waterbirds.
- Seaside themed attractions, such as a beach and donkey rides, are not appropriate as these would potentially destroy the peace and tranquillity of the site, where nature and wildlife, and the enjoyment of local people are priorities. The creation of an artificial beach, with the implication of imported sand, is not appropriate and would have implications for the habitats of lakeside fauna and flora.
- Kiosks, ice cream vans, and commercial outlets should be based on the north side of the railway only.
- Cambridge diving clubs may be interested in using the lakes, but the health and safety issues mean that a detailed feasibility study should be undertaken. If diving were to be considered appropriate, it should be managed to ensure that the wildlife both around and within the lakes is not disturbed.
- Limited moored floating structures within the lakes could be considered but their purpose (for swimmers; bird roosting areas etc), location and construction will need careful assessment.
- Recreational activities should be restricted to day light hours only (with the exception of the current occasional night fishing by anglers); no artificial lighting to be installed within the lakes area as this would cause severe disturbance to wildlife.
- Many parts of the area are subject to littering and dumping. FCHB carries out two clean-ups each year which removes large quantities of debris from the brook. Managed public access to the lakes could help to reduce this but could also cause an increase. Appropriate bins and signage would be essential and Sainsbury's should be encouraged to increase their efforts to prevent rubbish reaching the brook and public areas, given that the public footpath through Sainsbury's will be an important access route to the urban country park.
- Sound carries easily over water and is magnified. It will be necessary to ensure that noise levels associated with increased use of the area do not become a problem for residents, hotel users, business people etc.
- Existing vegetation should be kept as undisturbed as possible, although there should be some cutting back to improve views of the lakes
- Developments undertaken by AG in the "opportunity area for formal leisure use", and the southernmost "opportunity area for commercial use" should be in keeping with the country park feel, should avoid generic "landscaping", and should retain and/or choose native, ecologically useful plantings that require minimal "management" and that will provide habitat for native wildlife. There is opportunity for both woodland and chalk-type grassland as appropriate to the needs of the development. It would greatly increase the perceived size of the (very small) park to have the vegetation style continued in adjacent areas.
- Owners of existing facilities in that area should be encouraged to enhance the landscaping under their control to be more wildlife-friendly, such as by the planting of wildlife gardens, wildflower meadows and native trees