

THE VALUE OF NORTH LODGE PARK AS A WHOLE

Summary

According to North Norfolk District Council's own planning requirements, if an area of Open Space is to be lost to development, that open space should be demonstrated to be surplus to the community's requirements. *This has not been done.*

There is considerable evidence that the use of the former children's playground as a regenerated part of the open space of the Park could provide great economic and social value to Cromer. The claims that a car park, which provides a net addition of, at most, 27 spaces above those lost on-street, could bring economic benefits are perception and conjecture, and without evidence could not correctly be a material consideration in a planning decision.

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The current car park proposal is an un-researched project for income generation without considering the potential value to Cromer and North Norfolk of the Park as a whole. One must query why North Norfolk District Council, in the management of this asset, is not considering the recreational opportunities that the old playground provides and is instead promoting a divisive proposition that threatens to fracture the Park and the community it serves.

The Friends of North Lodge Park believe that the Park should be planned as a whole and that there is considerable value in this part of the Park as a contributor to the overall Open Space. Value which would bring economic and social benefits to Cromer and its position in North Norfolk. This value is further examined and evidenced below but includes:

- **Value to Business & Expenditure in Local Economy**
An attractive and vibrant park will bring people to the area, who in turn will spend money in local shops.
- **Value to the Community**
The Park is starting to become a focus for free and inclusive community events and the old children's play area would provide even more opportunity.
- **Value to the Local Authority**
The Friends are planning to invest over £50,000 per annum on the Park and are already spending the equivalent of tens of thousands of pounds in volunteer time on grounds maintenance. There is a danger of this value being lost by the current proposals of commercialisation.
- **Value to Individuals & Society through improved health**
Regenerating this part of the open space as part of the Park would provide opportunities for space & facilities to enable improved physical and mental health and well-being from exercise and relaxation. In turn this reduces the impact on our health service.
- **Value to Cromer's Tourist Offering**
As a quintessential cliff-top park, North Lodge Park is a tourist attraction because of its tranquillity and charm. This could be enhanced rather than broken by the introduction of car-park. The Park should be considered holistically as a tourist attraction and then determine what facilities are needed to support it.
- **Value to the Environment**
It is a paradox that this Council looks to promote a use for this space that encourages harm to the environment rather than considering opportunities to take the considerable environmental opportunities that open space provides.
- **Value to Homeowners & Attractiveness to Homebuyers & Property Investment**
An attractive open space and facilities will encourage homeowners and investors to the area and increase spend on property maintenance & local tradesman.

Introduction

The suggestion that a material consideration for planning permission for a Car Park is the economic benefit it could bring is totally unsubstantiated.

With the loss of on-street parking of at least 20 spaces, it is unclear what economic benefit to Cromer a net increase of a maximum 27 spaces would bring. The suggestion that a car park could be a catalyst for privately financed commercialisation of the Park is pure speculation, regardless of whether such commercialisation is indeed appropriate.

- **The proposal suggests 47 small spaces in the car park**

The proposed spaces are too small for modern cars, and with the poor marking of the spaces it is expected that, at most, 39 cars will ever park in the car park at any time, a net additional 19 spaces (we have used 27 in this report to match the proposal).

- **It is suggested that it would provide a benefit to the East End of Cromer.**

Every single shop & commercial premises from Jarrolds up to and around the corner of Overstrand Road is currently occupied with a wide variety of shops and services. The same cannot be said for the West End of Cromer where the old cycle shop adjacent to the main car park has been empty since 2015, as well as a number of properties on West Street which is between two car parks.

The planning submission does not provide any evidence or substantiation how or what difference 27 additional parking spaces would make. Without any evidence or substantiation how can this be a material consideration?

- **It is intimated that a car park could somehow make North Lodge Park a commercially viable asset to an investor.**

If this is a material consideration to be seriously considered then that investment proposal needs to be established and published before a loss to the Open Space could be permitted. North Lodge Park needs to be considered and planned for as a whole, to do otherwise would be irresponsible management of a public asset and against the requirements of NNDC's core policy on Public Realm. A material consideration cannot be based on pure conjecture and should not be used for the breaking up of a public asset.

- **The revenue from a car park would contribute to the Council's spending cuts.**

Some of the supporters of the Car Park proposal have said that they are in support of the Car Park if the money was used to maintain North Lodge Park but we have been told by Council

The Friends of North Lodge Park are currently in talks with a national charity and local organisations and will be making a proposal to reduce ... that spending burden altogether.

Officer's that revenue cannot be ring-fenced. We have not been informed of the legislation or policy that makes that restriction. We are told by Officers and Councillors that North Lodge Park and its facilities costs NNDC between £70,000 & £80,000 a year to run, even in its current state. The Friends of North Lodge Park are currently in talks with a national charity and local organisations and will be making a proposal to reduce or even possibly remove that spending

burden altogether. This offer would far outweigh the potential revenue from this car park proposal. In the interests of saving public money, *a decision on this planning application should be delayed until the new proposal is examined.*

- **The proposed car park will bring disabled parking to the Park and to the Rocket House and access to the beach and Promenade.**

The Friends recognise the need for disabled parking for access to the park and can see that with disabled parking having been cut as part of the West Prom scheme, further provision might be needed for the beach and promenade. Six disabled parking spaces are provided as part of the current planning proposal. The Friends believe that North Lodge Park could accommodate at least six places currently offered without the loss of potentially valuable open space. Providing a car-park of 47 spaces is not the only possible facilitator to provide six disabled spaces so the provision of disabled spaces cannot be a material consideration for providing a whole car park.

THE POTENTIAL ECONOMIC & SOCIAL VALUE OF NORTH LODGE PARK AS OPEN SPACE

The whole of North Lodge Park is designated as *Open Space and Public Realm*. Although the old children's playground has been left to decay and inappropriate uses have been permitted, this area has always been, and still is, a place for informal recreation and it continues to have the potential to contribute very positively to Cromer's Open space needs.

Since it closed as an organised space, many of Cromer's children have learnt to ride bicycles and play ballgames on this hard standing; some continue to use it to learn to skateboard before they have the confidence to use the skate-park. North Norfolk District Council previously identified it as a place for a playground and adult gym and the Friends of North Lodge Park have made informal proposals that it be a space for teenage play, so that the Park can provide attraction for all ages.

There are many potential recreational uses for this space that could be explored, some could provide or instigate revenue opportunities. This is the only area of hard standing in the Park which could make the provision of some activities easier and more appropriate.

As part of the management of this public asset, the economic and social value of regenerating the old playground for recreational use and as part of the overall open space of the park should be considered before its potential community use is disregarded.

The Friends of North Lodge Park consider that the potential economic and social benefits of making this space a positive part of the open space are significant and are evidenced below.

Value to Business & Expenditure in Local Economy

There are a number of commercial properties near to North Lodge Park, with offices on Church Street, St Margaret's Road, Merchants Court and in the Park itself at North Lodge, as well as the Retail Properties close by in the Town Centre. Staff want to work in premises close to areas available for relaxation. Small businesses choosing a new business location rank open space, parks and recreation as a number-one priority [ref: 1].

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For retailers, a good-quality public environment can improve trading by attracting more people into an area. A CABE report in 2004 [ref: 2] found that well-planned improvements to public spaces within town centres can boost commercial trading by up to 40 per cent and generate significant private sector investment.

The regeneration of open space can have a knock on effect on people spending money on their properties with local tradesmen and on private housing investment. This effect was evidenced in New York [ref: 3] where municipal investment in the restoration of Union Park helped to stabilise commercial and residential property values adjacent to the park.

This research therefore suggests that the economy of East End of Cromer would benefit from the proposed area being regenerated as open space. It is unclear what benefit the net addition of 27 spaces above the loss of on street parking would have on the East End of Cromer, particularly when the pricing is for a Coastal Car Park with all day parking and with the lack of a pedestrian route to Church Street.

Value to the Community

The Friends of North Lodge Park survey of March & April 2015 found an overwhelming view to be *the special character of the Park as a beautiful, peaceful green space in the heart of Cromer which should be safeguarded*, and that the lawns and flower beds of North Lodge Park are an important asset to the town [ref: 4]. The survey report concluded that nothing should happen that is not in keeping with this special character. Respondents to the survey often spoke passionately about their fond memories of the Park throughout their lives and how it provides an 'oasis of calm', particularly at times when the town is very busy during the summer months.

In response to responses in the survey, the Friends of North Lodge Park, have organised a number of events. *"Well managed festivals and other events can have a very positive effect on the urban environment, drawing the community together and bringing financial, social and environmental benefits. They can, in particular, reintroduce the kind of civil society that has been lost in too many of our urban areas."* [ref: 2]. The Friends of North Lodge Park has run a number of successful events in the Park including the Queen's Birthday Party, An evening with Doctor Dance, Outdoor Theatre, Live Music and Children's Craft days

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The area proposed for a car park provides significant opportunities for community events. A net addition of 27 spaces above the lost on-street parking provision is unlikely to offset the loss of community space. The commercialisation of the Park could mean the loss of community managed events.

A study by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister [ref: 5] found that parks contribute significantly to social inclusion because they are free and access is available to all. They provide neutral ground available to all sectors of society and can become the focus of community spirit through the many and varied opportunities provided for social interaction. The proposed commercialisation of the Park, suggested to be catalysed by the car park, puts this under threat.

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to play, recreation and culture. The CAGE report [ref: 2] found that increasing urbanisation has left our children with far fewer opportunities than previous generations to play freely outdoors and experience the natural environment. Good-quality public spaces can help to fill this gap, providing children with opportunities for fun, exercise and learning. Our children deserve places to play and to change the use of a playground to car park, if not a contravention of the rights of our children, is surely a very retrograde step which would be irresponsible to authorise.

Value to the Local Authority

The Friends have built upon the special character of the Park and extended it to the café. The huge success of the café run by the Friends has seen a ten- fold increase in rent to the local authority for

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this small unit. Moreover, all the profits, of over £50,000 per annum, generated by the café will be expended upon the Park. The café also acts as a hub for this community group, where volunteers spend thousands of hours planting and tending the gardens, equating to tens of thousands of pounds of labour. The introduction of a car park not only threatens the special character of the Park but the associated commercialisation threatens this very significant community investment.

Value to Individuals & Society

Open spaces in urban areas provide significant value to individuals and society as a whole. Maximising the quality of open space in North Lodge Park could provide improved physical health and well-being from exercise and relaxation. “Our open spaces are a powerful weapon in the fight against obesity and ill-health.” [ref: 2]. Evidence from Japan emphasises the vital role parks and other green spaces play in our lives. Not only do they enhance our sense of community and our

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attachment to a particular neighbourhood – they can even help us live longer. Of more than 3100 people born between 1903-1918 in Tokyo, 2211 were still alive by 1992; the probability of their living for a further five years was linked to their ability to take a stroll in local parks [ref: 6].

Activities that could be enjoyed in this area if it was not a car park could help us to keep fit by protecting the cardiovascular system and preventing the onset of other health problems. [ref: 7]

Value for Mental Health

A park or green space is a good place to ‘get away from the stresses of life’ [ref: 5]. There is increasing evidence that ‘nature’ in the urban environment is not only good for physical health but also mental health. Natural views promote a drop in blood pressure and are shown to reduce feelings of stress. [ref: 8] A car park would counteract any such effect.

Value to the Health Service

North Lodge Park acts as ‘green lungs’ to Cromer, additionally vital as there is an established link between particulate air pollution and poor health. According to the World Health Organization

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(WHO) outdoor air pollution in both cities and rural areas was estimated to cause 3.7 million premature deaths worldwide in 2012. By reducing air pollution levels, countries can reduce the burden of disease from stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases, including asthma

Increasing access to high-quality public spaces where exercise in a calm, natural environment can take place produces substantial public health benefits and so reduces healthcare costs [ref: 9]. Improving the quality of this open space rather than removing it for alternative use would potentially increase public health.

Value to Cromer’s Tourist Offering

Generations of families return year on year to enjoy the peace, tranquillity and simple past-times of North Lodge Park. The Friends of North Lodge Park Survey of March 2015 [ref: 4] found that visitors came to the Park because of the special character of the Park as a beautiful, peaceful green space in the heart of the Town. The old playground area provides enormous opportunity for increasing the tourism opportunity for the Park without disturbing the peace of other areas which in itself are an attraction. Conversely, the introduction of a car-park would remove both the tranquillity of the space (the reason why visitors use the Park) and the opportunity for making the most of the Park as a tourist attraction.

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Environmental Value

Providing a car park in North Lodge Park would remove the opportunities to regenerate this area to contribute to the green open space, which would have real environmental value. Not only could this opportunity be lost but a car park would bring with it environmental harm.

It is an unusual stance by a modern local authority to promote and encourage the use of motor cars. Considerable research has shown that not only do vehicles bring obvious environmental harm but that cars and traffic erode the sense of community.

The main environmental benefits of urban green space are: contributions to maintaining biodiversity through the conservation and enhancement of the distinctive range of urban habitats; contributions to landscape and cultural heritage; amelioration of the physical urban environment by reducing pollution, moderating the extremes of the urban climate, contributions to cost-effective sustainable urban drainage systems and some influence as sinks for carbon dioxide; provision of opportunities to demonstrate sustainable management practices. [ref: 5] All of these potential benefits from the use of this area as Open Space will be lost for the sake of a maximum of 27 parking spaces.

The addition of a car park in North Lodge Park will increase pollution levels in the Park, where children play. An idling engine can produce up to twice as many exhaust emissions as an engine in motion.

The introduction of a car park in North Lodge Park would not only detract from the quality of the open space but it is irresponsible for this planning application to have been submitted without assessing or even considering the impact of traffic on the surrounding streets and Cromer.

Traffic in and around North Lodge Park would erode the sense of community that has been established around the Park. A classic American study [ref: 10] examined three residential streets, virtually identical except for their levels of traffic – 2000, 8000 and 16,000 vehicles per day respectively. What became apparent was that the heavier the traffic, the more limited the social activities of all kinds in that community.

The introduction of a car park in North Lodge Park would not only detract from the quality of the open space but it is irresponsible for this planning application to have been submitted without assessing or even considering the impact of traffic on the surrounding streets and Cromer. Surely by thinking about the impacts and planning for addressing them is the only possibility of improving traffic flow in Cromer and making it a more attractive place to live, work and visit.

In Copenhagen, Denmark, measures were introduced to reduce traffic and make the city centre more pleasant. A six-fold increase in high-quality public spaces in the city led to a variety of social, environmental and economic benefits. Use of public spaces generally has gone up, demonstrating that if a city is furnished with well-planned, well-managed open spaces, people will use them [ref: 11]

Value to Homeowners & Attractiveness to Homebuyers & Property Investment

It is clear from both surveys undertaken by the Friends of North Lodge Park and from local polls that residents value North Lodge Park as an open space and hold its contribution to their quality of life in extremely high regard. The availability of open space is valued wherever people live and a study in Dallas showed that not only did almost all residents value their nearby parks for recreational activities but they also cited parks as a major factor in their decision to move to the area [ref: 12].

If North Lodge Park was entirely good quality open space not only could it provide recreational space for residents but it could encourage people to move to Cromer to the benefit of its economy.

If the proposed car park area was reinstated to a playground this could increase nearby land values. In Berlin in 2000, proximity to playgrounds in residential areas was found to increase land values by up to 16 per cent [ref: 13].

Conclusion

The current planning application does not substantiate any material considerations that might be of benefit to Cromer. However, removing the potential for use of this part of the park as the Open Space for which it is designated will, as evidenced, provide a detrimental effect to the potential economic and social value of this asset.

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