**Leighton Linslade Parks Masterplanning**

Client: Leighton Linslade Town Council

Project commencement date: September 2011

Task:

To undertake a consultation exercise about what improvements are needed to Pages Park and Mentmore Road Memorial Gardens. The Town Council are to reviewing the facilities offered in both of these parks which will inform the production of a long term plan for the next 20 years for future leisure and recreational development at these locations.

Methodology:

The Planning for Real community planning process was used.

Some modifications were made to the basic PFR process in order to deliver this piece of work namely, rather than using a 3D model of the parks an aerial photograph for each of the parks was mounted on to polystyrene, this provided people with an opportunity to see an exact photograph of the park and where existing facilities are sited. In addition we did not use the standard set of ideas and issue cards but focussed on those that were relevant to an open space consultation. To support the exercise and to ensure that we were able to gather all the information required we used additional tools such as questionnaires for the interest groups and large visual pin board questionnaires for members of the public. A facilitated stakeholder workshop was also held on Saturday, 17th March, to look at the findings in more detail and develop a way forward rather than a prioritisation and action planning session.

Promotion & Publicity:

The Town Council promoted the consultation events on our behalf. Events were publicised using the local paper and the Town Council’s website. In addition leaflets were distributed for some of the events. Interest groups were personally invited to the event on the 19th November 2011 which was held at the White House.

Visioning Event with Town Council Members:

A visioning workshop was held at the beginning of the process with Town Council members on 25th October 2011. The purpose of the workshop was to give Town Councillors the opportunity to identify some of the issues that needed to be addressed and the potential that both parks could offer in the future. We also took the opportunity to explore how the improvements could be funded given the current economic situation.

Consultation events:

A number of consultation events were organised to maximise participation in the consultation process:

19th November 2011 – event held for interest groups who use facilities in both parks. As well as gathering their views about improvements to the parks they were also asked them what facilities their clubs needed to achieve their potential.

25th November 2011 – first public event – staff at a Craft Fair organised as part of the Christmas Lights celebration.

3rd December 2011 – stall at the Rushmere Park Christmas Fair.

20th January and 21st January 2012 – held at the White House at the same time as Central Bedfordshire Council were holding their own events to inform residents about proposed changes to Billington Road (we had already received a number of concerns about Billington Road at previous consultation events).

24th January 2012 – a meeting held with the Management Group at the Wharf development.

2nd February 2012 – an event held with parents and carers whose children attend the playgroup in Mentmore Pavilion.

8th February 2012 – an event held with members of the Youth Club who meet in the Pavilion at Pages Park.

17th March 2012 – final event at the White House to provide local people with an opportunity to look at the issues raised and think about what the priorities should be. Again this event was organised to coincide with a consultation about Astral Park.

Conclusions:

* It was apparent during the consultation events that residents and park users were very concerned about the future of both of these parks.
* The consultation has included many of the user groups and sports organisations who use the facilities in both of these parks. It is evident that all of the groups have additional needs and some have very ambitious plans for the future. The sports facilities in Mentmore Road Memorial Playing Fields are well used bringing a lot of footfall into the park.
* Whilst sports facilities should not determine the total future development of these Parks it is crucial that their needs are considered as they attract many people to their activities. It has also been suggested during the consultation that young people need to be encouraged to participate in sports facilities and a good range should be offered in each of the parks.
* Before any decisions are made about how to improve facilities at both of these parks a Sports Strategy needs to be developed for the Town. This could take a more holistic view and look at all the Parks in the Town and decide which facilities are best sited where, what facilities already exist and what improvements need to be made to achieve everyone’s aspirations.
* Anti social behaviour was identified as an issue in both parks and is largely concentrated at specific locations.
* Concerns were expressed about access into Pages Park. Some improvements to Billington Road have been proposed by Central Bedfordshire Council at a consultation in January which brought about a mixed reaction from residents, many of them using our consultation to highlight their concerns.
* It is apparent from the consultation that many people appreciate the trees in Pages Park, however concerns were expressed about the safety of some of the old trees and 2 or 3 of them have fallen down recently.
* Parking in both parks was highlighted as a concern.
* Concerns were expressed by residents living near Pages Park that the car parking contained in the park is insufficient to meet demand, particularly on Sunday mornings when football games are being played. This causes problems for residents living in the surrounding streets because people park there. It was suggested that the car park should be extended to meet the demand.
* Many people believe that both parks would benefit from a café and toilets. Once decisions are made about the Pavilions then this could be looked at.
* It is evident that for many of the people who attended the consultation they are happy with the parks as they currently are apart from some of the key issues that we highlighted.
* Many people do not want to see the spaces over developed and like them having some open space and opportunities for informal activities.
* Some improvements have been highlighted to improve the play facilities in both parks and to make some environmental improvements such as more planting and flower beds.
* Suggestions were made for events such as a music festival and having bands playing in the parks during the summer months that would increase the usage of them.