

Steep Common Review

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Parish Plan recommends:

“MODEST CHANGES TO STEEP COMMON

a. Review seating to consider if there should be more and if some modest picnic seating should be available

b. Review the play equipment to consider if it should be further enhanced

c. Explore whether there could be some modest and sensitive provision for parking, given the increased popularity of the Common as a leisure amenity

Action: Steep Common Group report to Parish Council by late 2012”

The group met at “Tithe Barn” to discuss the recommendations of the Parish Plan and then walked the Common to try to understand the implications of any changes.

a. Review seating

Current seating comprises:

- 1) Stone seat to the east of the entrance
- 2) Circular bench around the beech tree
- 3) Wooden bench in the woodland (not really on the common)
- 4) Tree logs between the swings and the climbing frame

It was thought that the stone seat was next to useless in its current location. The entrance rails impose on it and it is the wrong side of the entrance to be of use by adults who are supervising children playing football or playing on the play equipment. No-one knew of the origin of the seat, but it did not look very movable.

The circular bench, commissioned by Kay Bennet, is currently in Alison Crowther’s (the creator) workshop where she is looking to either restore or replace. Her intention is that the bench will be reinstated by the end of the month.

The tree logs form much needed seating by the play equipment. The play equipment is well used at the weekends and especially after school. Adults meet and chat whilst the children play and they currently sit on the grass or the tree logs. They are, however, poor seating and dry very slowly after rain, they are also a little unsightly and make it difficult to maintain the grass around them. It was unanimously agreed that they should be replaced with a purpose built bench, possibly in a similar arc arrangement to the current logs.

Picnic benches – A number of respondents to the Village Plan questionnaire suggested adding some picnic benches to the common. The group looked at where a bench or two might be placed, but we could not find a suitable site. The group were also uneasy about the concept of picnic benches on the common. We concluded that they would not look right on the Common and that it would also raise the issue of litter and therefore we thought that improving the seating would be sufficient and that would be picnicers would be able to improvise.

Our recommendation is for:

- 1) A bench to replace the tree logs by the play equipment. Ideally, the bench would be of quality oak to reflect the sense of rural common.
- 2) A second circular seat to be commissioned for the oak tree to mirror that around the beech.

b) Play equipment

The school village plan questionnaire came out very strongly in favour of more play equipment. It should be noted, however, that the school do not use the equipment. Their own insurance will only cover equipment under the direct control of the school. After school it is a very different story, impromptu football matches break out with pupils and parents, the swings are in great demand and the climbing frame absorbs a surprising number of children. Children naturally congregate at the equipment. I observed play on a number of occasions and it never looked overrun. If equipment was to be added it would impinge on the football pitch or the access points from the school. None of the working party though it necessary or appropriate to add to the equipment.

Our recommendation is for no change to the play equipment.

c) Parking

When the weather is favourable the church often uses the common for parking. A number of people questioned whether the common could accommodate parking on a more regular basis.

The group were unanimous in agreeing that we did not want to see a section of the common given over for parking. The one possibility that we did explore was looking at pushing back the hedgerow to the east of the entrance by approximately 3m to accommodate eight cars on lattice matting between the trees with direct access to the road. We contacted Chris White who came out to look at the feasibility of the scheme. Unfortunately, the site lines were too short and he advised that Highways would not sanction the scheme. He advised that the only way to accommodate any parking was to have cars enter and create a dedicated parking area behind the hedgerow. The area required to have manoeuvring space and drive in would take out a strip of approximately 12m for only a handful of spaces.

Our recommendation is that the gain is not sufficient to compensate for the loss of common and therefore we not suggest providing permanent dedicated parking on the common.

In conclusion it is recognised that the common is a well-used, much-loved part of the village used by all sections of the community in addition to large numbers of visitors visiting the Hangers via the Hangers Way. With the church on one side, the village school on another, and the oak woods making up the other sides it is a very beautiful setting. It is a vital play area for the school in the summer months and it provides an attractive and special setting for village events such as the Jubilee celebrations in June. Any changes to the common should reflect the quality landscape in which it sits. A modest increase in seating as described would benefit users and if it was of a high standard would enhance it.

Jim MacDonald