

## Analysis of responses to Open Space consultation

In allocating the Church Road site for development, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) set a number of requirements (see box below). The Local Plan says that approximately one fifth of the total area should be informal public Open Space, accessible from the Village Hall and car park. That amounts to 15000 square feet or 1350 square metres, equivalent to five full-size tennis courts.

SDNPA requirements relevant to the Open Space:

- Site boundaries sympathetic to the local landscape
- Retention and protection of existing mature trees
- A proportion of the site should be provided as public open space directly accessible from the village hall and car park
- Minimise hard surfaced areas on site
- New planting should be suitable for pollinating species

The Parish Council has owned and been responsible for the maintenance and improvement of Steep Common as an important community asset since the 1970s. In the same way, the Council expects to be the long-term owner of the new Open Space, and so earlier in the autumn we sought views from the Village on how it might be used. Although no final decisions have been taken about the development, we wanted to understand what people want to see there in order to shape the design of the Open Space, including where it is located within the site.

The consultation was not a poll, nor did it give people a detailed set of questions to answer. It was designed instead as an open opportunity to comment on suggestions that have come out of previous discussions (see below) and to put forward new ideas. In all we received over 90 responses and we are very grateful to everyone who took the time to respond to the consultation.

Suggestions generated through previous discussions:

- Simple grassed area without any furniture
- Footpath and benches
- Children's play area (possibly with swings and slides)
- Covered shelter/meeting point
- Re-siting of the Steep War Memorial in a suitably respectful location
- Visitor centre/information board
- Pond with seating
- Meeting room for the various clubs
- Coffee shop

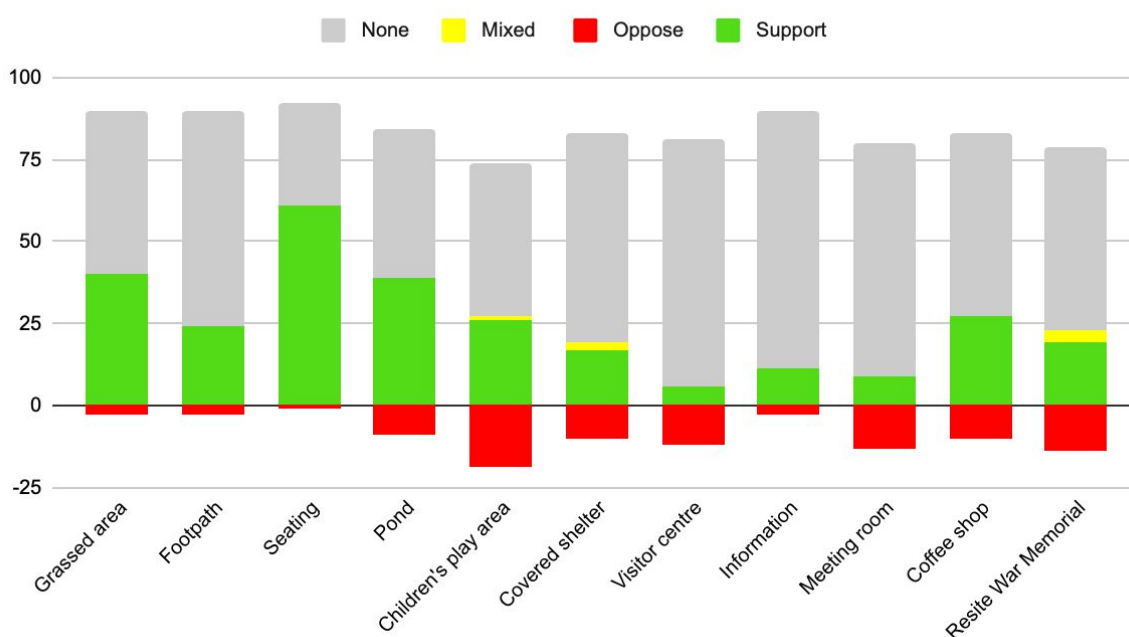
In responding, some people gave a single preference from the list of existing ideas while others provided detailed submissions discussing a range of possible options for the Open Space. A number addressed the wider context of the Open Space in relation to the Village Hall and car park, and the Common. Several people drew on experience of equivalent spaces, and their facilities, in other nearby villages.

## Sharing the results of the consultation

The consultation document said that we would analyse the responses received and produce a summary to share with the Village. Because the responses were so varied, the analysis could not be a highly scientific process. We have given each response equal weight and captured as far as possible all the points made.

We have analysed the points made for and against the suggestions listed in the consultation document. These are shown in graphical form below and referred to in the following section. The proportions and percentages give an indication of the level of interest in particular ideas but should be treated as approximate rather than precise.

Responses to list of suggestions



We also received new ideas for potential uses of the Open Space. These are summarised below, with the number in brackets indicating where ideas were suggested in more than one response.

|                       |                      |                                |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Wildflower meadow (9) | Allotments (6)       | Community shop (7)             |
| Wildlife area (4)     | Produce exchange (5) | Picnic tables (2)              |
| Garden (4)            | Community garden (4) | Space for community events (2) |
| Village green (3)     | Orchard (4)          | Barbecue facilities            |
| Flower beds (2)       | Specimen trees (3)   | Clothes recycling              |
| Nature trail (2)      | Woodland (2)         | Fitness equipment              |
| Paved area            |                      |                                |

The fuller detail provided in responses will all be taken into account in shaping the design of the Open Space.

## Key points from consultation responses

There was a clear consensus that the Open Space should offer **seating**. Overall, nearly two thirds of responses included a positive comment on providing places for people to sit, often linked to a wish for the Open Space to be a peaceful area suitable for reflection. A number of responses made specific suggestions including support for the use of local wood, a feature bench or incorporating seating into raised flower beds. There was some interest in having communal seating such as picnic tables, potentially under cover. A few responses asked for benches to be placed at the perimeter of the Open Space.

A smaller but still significant number of responses mentioned **footpaths**. There was less detail here but several responses commented on footpath surface, favouring mown paths or the use of shingle or gravel over tarmac. Other suggestions included nature trails and a reminder of the need for footpaths to be accessible to those with a disability. It's worth noting that the SDNPA conditions include minimising hard surfaced areas on the site.

Nearly half of responses supported the idea of including a **grassed area** as part of the Open Space, with some specifically suggesting a village green. There was a lot of interest in making space for nature, with support for maintaining an uncultivated feel. The most popular new idea overall was a **wildflower meadow**, with other responses suggesting a wildlife area and nature trails. Many responses agreed that a **pond** would be an asset in attracting wildlife. However, a significant minority opposed this due to the implications for maintenance, pointing out that a pond would have to be fenced on safety grounds.

A few responses favoured a more formal **garden** with flower beds, which might also provide additional seating. One new suggestion was for a paved area with low maintenance plants and trees. Another was for a competition among local garden designers. **Woodland** came up as an alternative suggestion and several people mentioned **specimen trees**, possibly oak or field maple. There are existing mature trees, including oak, on the site which will be retained and protected as part of the SDNPA conditions for any development.

One group of suggestions related to the idea that the Open Space could be a **source of produce**, used as allotments, a community garden or orchard. One response proposed that allotments could be provided for residents of the new houses in the development. In the same vein, some responses suggested that the Open Space could host a produce exchange scheme, plant sales or simply a table where people could bring fruit and vegetable samples.

Opinion was divided on the merits of including a **children's play area** as part of the Open Space. Around half of all responses commented on this, with 60% in support and 40% opposing the idea, mainly because there is already play equipment on the Common. Among those in favour of providing a play area, several responses suggested that it should be aimed at young children, with simple apparatus, creating a space where parents could be confident that their children could play safely.

Proposals for buildings likewise had a mixed reception. A number of responses said that any permanent structures would be incompatible with the principle of an Open Space, while others welcomed the amenities that they could provide at the heart of the village. Around a third of responses commented on the idea of a **covered shelter**, with two to one in favour.

Responses included design suggestions ranging from a barn-like structure to an open-sided gazebo, with perimeter seating or a long table and benches.

Among the quarter of responses that commented on the idea of building a **meeting room** there was a small majority against, partly because it was felt to duplicate facilities in the Village Hall. A number of responses highlighted the lack of access to the Village Hall during the day due to its historic use as a pre-school. The suggestion of a **visitor centre** attracted very little support but there was support for enhancing, and possibly relocating, the **information board** among those who commented on this.

There was considerable interest in the idea of a **coffee shop**, although a significant minority of responses were opposed to this. Among those in favour, some supported a temporary coffee cart or 'pop-up' of the kind currently being provided on Saturdays at the Village Hall. Others saw a role for a cafe as part of a **community shop** with a range of facilities providing a nucleus for the Village, as has been the case in Milland.

Finally, there was no consensus on whether it would be preferable to re-site the **War Memorial** to the Open Space, should this be possible. Around 40% of responses commented on this suggestion, with views fairly evenly balanced. Some felt that it would be disrespectful to move the War Memorial while others felt that a suitable setting at the visible heart of the village would enhance the Memorial as well as making it easier for people to pay their respects. A number of responses stressed that, should the War Memorial be moved, it must remain visible from the road. One noted that opening up the area on the bend immediately opposite the War Memorial would bring it into the village centre without needing to move the Memorial itself.

### **The wider context for the Open Space**

Many responses noted that Steep is a linear settlement without an obvious focal point. There was a strong desire for the Open Space to create a centre for the village, particularly given the position of the site at the junction of Church Road and Mill Lane, opposite the War Memorial and at the end of the view from the Hangers. Suggestions ranged from creating something with the feel of a traditional village green to remodelling the junction to open up the sight lines.

Proximity to the Village Hall and car park, which is part of the SDNPA requirement, further enhances the potential of the Open Space. Several responses suggested that we should take the opportunity to think holistically about the Open Space, the Village Hall and its surroundings. This might include rethinking the entrance to the Village Hall, moving or rationalising the car park to avoid it being a dominant feature in the landscape.

The Village Hall does, or could, provide some of the amenities that have been suggested for the Open Space and some responses suggested that more use could be made of it to meet local needs. Conversely, a number of responses specifically said that duplication of facilities with the Common should be avoided.

## **Next steps**

This document is being made available through the Parish Council website. Printed copies can be requested from the Clerk to the Parish Council.

A Working Group of Councillors and community members has been established to help translate the views expressed through the consultation into the design of the Open Space. The Working Group will look in detail at the ideas generated alongside the conditions that have been set by the SDNPA, possible locations for the Open Space and constraints on what may and may not be permitted there. The Group will develop options for the Parish Council to consider, which will then form the basis for further engagement with the Village.

If the planned development goes ahead the developer, working closely with the Trustees of SIN and the Steep War Memorial Village Club (the charity looking after the Village Hall), will also involve and consult the Village throughout the process of developing the planning application.

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