Authors:

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Dear Council

RE: Mill Meadows and Marsh Meadows: Finding ways to keep our park clean, tidy and safe.

24/05/18

Summary

Over the last three years or so, the park has been getting busier and is drawing many visitors from outside Henley. At weekends and bank holidays, on warm and sunny days, the park does not currently have the facilities or resources to manage this influx of people.

Henley residents have been repeatedly upset by the amount of detritus left behind by visitors, which, as well as the insult on the eyes, poses a threat to dogs, children and wildlife. There have been household items left behind, damage has been caused to the meadows from BBQs and hot ashes and even human faeces has been reportedly seen.

Due to the lack of communication from Henley Council, by way of assuring residents that any solution is being considered, discussed or actioned, it was agreed by two Henley residents that a survey could be carried out to gather public opinion and suggestions for ways to better manage Mill and Marsh Meadows during peak season. That this survey would be presented to the council by way of a plea to action.

339 people completed the online survey between the 18th and 24th May

It created an emotive and defensive response on several online platforms.

Subsequently, or coincidentally, the councillors have been summoned to a meeting of The Recreation and Amenities Committee on 29nd May. The letter was dated the 22nd May.

Objective:

- To provide a solution to existing problems and be pro-active in dealing with arising problems.
- To identify and publicise on-going solutions.
- To find a way of communicating with residents that keeps them informed as well as providing a way for them to put forward their complaints and suggestions.

The document outlines existing and interim solutions

On-going solutions identified:

- Signage is currently being updated throughout Mill and Marsh Meadows, including the Welcome Wall (agenda item)
- BBQ stumps are provided at the far end of Marsh Meadows. These are made by Park Services from trees removed from council land and placed away from the wildlife area. They were originally put in place due to the increasing scorch marks from unauthorised BBQs in previous years.
- 3 large wooden bins have been placed in Marsh Meadows to help with rubbish left by boat owners as well as BBQers and picnickers. One bin is situated in the space between Mill and Marsh Meadows, another in the middle of Marsh Meadows and a third by the Mill Lane Carpark. These bins are larger than the bins along the tow path but due to their design, take more time for Park Services to empty.
- Black bags are given out by Park Services where possible to large groups picnicking and BBQing.
- Investigating the possibility of permanent toilets in the 'third field' behind Marsh Meadows or visitors having access to the toilets in Henley Town Football Club

Interim solutions:

- Temporary signs have been placed on the bins along the tow path asking people to take their rubbish home with them because of the impact leaving them by our bins has on wildlife and the area.
- A meeting at Mill Meadows with the Mayor (at the time), Chair of R&A, Committee Administrator and Assistant Parks Manager to discuss issues and

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the practicality of some of the suggestions put forward by councillors and members of the public.

- Increased bin runs and litter picking by Park Services depending on weather and the impact the weather has on the volume of visitors to the riverside.

The document goes on to highlight suggestions arising from 'social media'.

Suggestions arising from social media and internal meeting;

The full list of suggestions, which are being taken into consideration, on the 29th are copied at the bottom of this document. On the next page is the summary of the survey data that the Henley residents populated, with their suggestions, through the power of social media. They are interestingly and reassuringly similar!

Public Online Survey

BBQ's

The most surprising result is that only 37% of respondents thought that BBQ's should be banned altogether. 49% thought that they should be allowed but in designated areas and 34% thought they those having BBQ's should be charged – the money to go towards the park upkeep. Some respondents suggested asking for deposit, to be given back, if the space has been left as it was found. One respondent suggested that visitors could book their BBQ and pay a deposit on-line.

It is clear, from the damage caused, that the park is not set up for managing BBQ's effectively and consideration needs to be given about how this could be improved. Meanwhile, as these solutions will take time to orchestrate and will incur costs, it could be considered, given that we are already in summer season, that BBQ's could be banned for the remainder of 2018.

4. What do you think would be the most effective way/s of managing BBQ's (tick all that you agree with) Create Chart

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	BBQ's to be allowed, only in dedicated area/s	48.38%	164
2	Ban BBQ's altogether (Picnics only)	38.35%	130
3	Ban BBQ's at the weekends	4.13%	14
4	Charge per BBQ (Money to go towards managing the park)	33.04%	112
5	Not sure	1.47%	5
Comments: (79) View			
		answered	339

Communicating Park rules

In terms of instant and actionable solutions, respondents were overwhelming in favour of communicating park rules by way of 'large signs at the car park entrances' and 'a designated park ranger to enforce sociable behaviours'. Respondents did not like the ideas about leaflets or plaques.

Whilst enforcing fines for littering would require some support from the police, which in itself could present a challenge, in the first instance, simply educating park visitors about the park rules is a step in the right direction.

7. In order of importance, please say what you think would be the most effective way of communicating park rules?		
Item	Total Score [1]	Overall Rank
Large signs at car park entrances	1116	1
Designated Park Ranger to promote and enforce sociable behaviours	975	2
Plaques on trees	714	3
Information leaflets handed out by park staff and /or volunteers.	584	4
Comments: (50) View		
	answered	339

[1] Score is a weighted calculation. Items ranked first are valued higher than the following ranks, the score is a sum of all weighted rank counts

Volunteering

14% of respondents offered to volunteer to support park staff in keeping Mill meadows clean. It would need to be made clear that this is a litter picking and support role not a vigilante role!

*respondents emails not for public domain.

8. Would you be interested in volunteering to assist the park team in keeping Mill Meadows clean?If so, please leave your email in the comment box so we can contact you. Create Chart			
		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	13.92%	44
2	No	86.08%	272
Email Address (45) View			
		answered	316
		skipped	23

Sponsorship

3% are local businesses that have said they would be interested in sponsoring signage.

*respondents emails not for public domain.

9. If you run a local business, would you be interested in sponsoring any relevant signage?If so, please leave your email address so we can get in touch. Create Chart			
		Response Percent	Response Total
1	N/A - I don't run a local business	80.63%	254
2	Yes	2.86%	9
3	No	16.51%	52
Email (10) View			
		answered	315

Toilets

50% of respondents said the toilets facilities were ‘Adequate’ and 30% ‘Poor’ with many comments about them not being open often enough or not being clean.

Some respondents have suggested asking for permission to use the Football Club and River Rowing Museum loos or Portaloos at the weekends.

The requirement for more, permanent, toilet facilities, only to accommodate sunny weekends, could be considered as a reason NOT to allow BBQ’s if the cost out ways these benefits.

2. How do you rate the toilet facilities at Mill Meadows Create Chart

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very good	7.96%	27
2	Adequate	50.44%	171
3	Poor	29.79%	101
4	Don't know / not used them	11.80%	40
Comments: (60) View			
		answered	339
		skipped	0

Mill Lane Car Park

Over 50% of respondents agreed that charging for the car park would be reasonable. Some respondents commented that charging for stays longer than 2 hours would be more accommodating to those who wanted a quick stroll or swim. Some respondents expressed concern for the lack of enforcement on cars parked on double yellow lines along down Mill Lane and blocking emergency access.

3. What action do you think would help to reduce the traffic at Mill Lane car park at the weekends? (excluding football club members) Create Chart

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Shut the car park after 10am on Sat, Sun and bank holidays	5.90%	20
2	Charge for parking after 10am on Sat, Sun and bank hols (Money to go to Mill Meadows)	51.62%	175
3	Neither	13.27%	45
4	Don't know	15.93%	54
5	Other (please specify): View	13.27%	45
Comments: (64) View			
		answered	339

Rubbish

Over 65% of respondents agreed that the addition of commercial bins and/or asking visitors to take their rubbish home could reduce waste left in the park. Whilst fewer respondents favoured adding more smaller bins, nearly half think that emptying them more often would reduce them being left full and overflowing. Respondents comments suggest that signage is key to communicating the park rules on rubbish. One respondent suggested asking local children to design posters.

5. What could help manage the excess, weekend rubbish? (tick all that you agree with) Create Chart

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Large commercial bins in the car parks	69.62%	236
2	Ask park users to take their rubbish home with them	65.78%	223
3	More smaller bins	24.19%	82
4	Empty the small bins several times a day	42.18%	143
5	Don't know	0.59%	2
6	Other (please specify): View	10.32%	35
Comments: (69) View			
		answered	339

Dogs

Comments suggest that enforcing fines may be difficult with some dog owners reluctant to keep their dogs on leads in certain areas of the park. Comments suggest more poo bins with bags could be useful and some businesses who work with dogs have offered to sponsor them. There was one rather clever idea from one respondent: Instead of fining dog walkers, who haven't got poo bags on them, the park staff could randomly ask if dog owners have enough poo bags on them and sell them. A much gentler way of making dog walkers aware that they are being monitored.

6. What do you think would help to reduce dog waste in the park (tick all that you agree with) Create Chart

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Dogs to be kept on leads in Mill Meadows (the bandstand field to Hobb's boats) April to October	41.30%	140
2	On the spot fines by park rangers for walkers without poo bags on them.	55.75%	189
3	Not sure	11.50%	39
4	Other (please specify): View	15.93%	54
Comments: (63) View			
		answered	339

CCTV

Half of respondents would like to see CCTV cameras installed, with comments about it being a deterrent for antisocial behaviours. There are some comments around CCTV installations looking unappealing in situ and others have expressed concerns about who would monitor the footage and how it would be used. Some respondents have highlighted that they are already cameras in the Mill Meadows area of the park.

1. How strongly do you agree with the possibility of having CCTV installed at Mill Meadows? Create Chart

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Strongly agree	55.03%	186
2	Somewhat agree	27.51%	93
3	Somewhat disagree	5.62%	19
4	Strongly disgree	6.51%	22
5	Not sure	5.33%	18

Comments: (61) Hide

Example of Park Signs.

The sign in the image below allows for changes to be made cost effectively.



Continued….


Welcome to
Windsor Great Park


Horsenden Hill


Horsenden Hill


Severn Park


Planet Friendly
Poo Bags Direct
www.poobagsdirect.co.uk

Examples of park BBQ's

Consideration could be made about the safe disposal of hot ashes.











Continued on next page…

Council recommendations to be discussed on the 29th May 2018

COUNCILLORS ARE HEREBY SUMMONED TO A MEETING OF THE RECREATION AND AMENITIES COMMITTEE

to be held on

TUESDAY 29 MAY 2018
AT 7.30 PM

in

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HALL
HENLEY-ON-THAMES

Mrs J Wheeler
Town Clerk
22 May 2018

Suggestions arising from social media and internal meeting;

- **Bins (Tow Path)** It was recognised that the bins along the tow path are more present in Mill Meadows than in Marsh Meadows (12 compared to 5) meaning that there is plenty of room for more bins to be placed along the tow path in Marsh Meadows.
- **Big Bins** – It was recognised that the current big bins in situ are not used to their full potential and if they are it takes a long time for Parks to empty them. They are not very practical but their design is in keeping with the area because they are not obtrusive and are made from wood. There is room in Mill Lane Carpark for a bigger skip-style bin with a lid to be placed by a contractor but this would be dependent on the contractor being able to get a suitable vehicle down Mill Lane in order to empty it (eg over the railway bridge which has a weight limit). It was also recognised that the area between Mill and Marsh Meadows, where the first big wooden bin is situated, could be the home for another skip-style bin but would need to be in a purpose-built container to be in keeping with the location.
- **Signage** – On top of the on-going signage project, discreet plaques could be placed on all tow path bins in either Marsh Meadows or both meadows asking As part of the signage project Welcome boards are planned for each of the 4 entrances (towpath by Hobbs and Marsh Lock, Meadow Road and Mill Lane Car Park) based on the Welcome Wall design and map, which could have could have clear picnicking and BBQ rules listed along with location of bins and toilets.

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- **Visitor Information** – Kiosk staff could have a stock of bin bags and information/safety leaflets that are available from the kiosk on request. Kiosk staff could also become 'hosts' of Marsh Meadows and on busy days venture out in to Marsh Meadows to give out information and bags to large parties. This would not be a security role and we cannot expect our Visitor Information staff to stop people BBQing or picnicking. If there is an aggressive situation, the police must be called to deal with it.
- **Communication/Mill&Marsh Meadows Forum** – Similar to the working relationship between this committee and Friends of Freemans and the Gainsborough Residents Association, a small user group of residents could be set up. This would not only help HTC consult with the wider public as we have seen on our other recreational sites but would also help HTC better communicate what is going on. As many have been vocal on social media, it could be used as a tool in getting people together in a group. This would most likely need to be facilitated by the Council in the first instance but could then run independently.
- **Licensing BBQs** – The idea was put forward to issue large parties a license, at a cost, to be able to BBQ on Marsh Meadows. Any monies raised could go toward the cost of managing the issues raised. Unless the Council employed a warden to issue and enforce the licenses, this would not be a feasible way forward.
- **Security** – At certain times of the year (religious festivals, regatta, etc) a security company could be brought in to ensure public safety. There would be costs to this that is not currently in the budget.

Recommendations to consider:

- Install two extra bins, similar to the existing bins but slightly larger, along the tow path to increase number of bins from 5 to 7. Exact positions to be decided by Park Services. These will be emptied by Park Services. This would be a

capital expense (approx £450 per bin and would require approval from the Finance Committee).
- Investigate the cost and feasibility of removing the large wooden bin between Mill and Marsh Meadows and replacing with a skip style bin to be emptied regularly by a waste removal contractor.
- Investigate the cost and design of temporary signs for the entrance to Marsh Meadows from Mill Lane carpark until the Welcome boards are in place
- Investigate the cost and design of plaques to be placed directly on the 17 bins along the tow path (19 if first recommendation passes)
- The Chairman to gauge public interest in forming a Mill Meadows User Group by posting on social media and in local news.
- Investigate the cost of having a security company attend high volume weekends to manage crowds and anti-social behaviour.
- To supply the Visitor Information Kiosk staff with bin bags and information flyers (printed at the Town Hall)
- Additional consideration; to give delegated powers to the Town Clerk, Committee Administrator and the Assistant Parks Manager on some of the recommendations above to have them implemented before the busy summer season. (Bin plaques, entrance sign)

Report by Janet Wheeler, Becky Walker, Karl Bishop, Kellie Hinton and Sarah Miller for R&A Agenda 29th May 2018.

End