

Position Statement – Save Werrington Fields 1st October 2022

THE CURRENT SITUATION

PCC propose to fence off 4 pitches of the dual use (community and school) playing fields to the south of the school adjacent to Foxcovert Road, so the land can be leased to the new academy (125years) as a school playing field, with the implementation of a Community Use Agreement (terms to be decided). See map below outlining the two options proposed twelve months ago for Area C (option 2 selected).

Our current understanding is that the council is waiting for consent from the Secretary of State for Education to release the rest of Area C outside the 4 pitches back to 100% public use. Under Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act this enables them to fence the 4-pitch area for school use. However, as the area is dual use, it is also subject to the protections under the Public Open Spaces Act and Planning legislation: hence the council proposes to seek planning permission for change of use of the 4-pitch area to 'educational only' once DfE consent has been obtained.

Option 1



Option 2



WHY WERRINGTON CARES

Werrington's green spaces are among its most treasured assets. In a Werrington Neighbourhood Council's consultation in 2019 (which had over 1200 comments on the 950 responses):

- **96%** said that '**Access to Green Space**' was very important or important for their enjoyment of living in Werrington.
- **89%** said that 'Playgrounds/playing fields around Ken Stimpson and William Law Schools' were very important or important to them.
- **99%** said it was very important or important to '**Ensure the retention of current open spaces**'.
- **75% of people use the fields** (42% regularly, 32% occasionally).

When the Ken Stimpson School / Peterborough City Council announced plans to fence part of Werrington's fields, at the last count our petition against the fencing had 1350 signatures; there was a protest on the fields of around 250 people in October 2020 and there are 600 members on our Save Werrington Fields Facebook group.

The protection of the fields would likely form a key element for the Werrington Neighbourhood Plan – but this is still work in progress.

Given the recent loss of Werrington Leisure Centre to the public, with the school now enjoying sole use, the importance of the remaining open space provided by the fields has become even more crucial. The importance of public green spaces on mental and physical wellbeing is well documented.

If the proposals go ahead as planned for the fencing of 4 pitches, there is likely to be significant opposition in any public consultation for a planning application.

POSITION STATEMENT

While we understand the pressure between providing safe physical education, we ultimately **do not believe that there has been adequate justification that a fence is necessary**. The **increase in the size of the area is greedy, unnecessary and does not balance the needs of the whole community**. The height and style of the 2m mesh fencing **severely damages the character** of the area.

Planning objections

We believe that when the school / council's current proposal goes through the planning process there are some legal requirements that are not met:

- **Paragraph 97 –of the NPP Framework (2019)¹**

This has not been met: this huge area of the fields are **not surplus to requirements**, as is shown by the research by Werrington Neighbourhood Council. With the loss of the Leisure Centre, the fields are even more crucial. No better or even equivalent provisions are being provided to make up for the loss of green open space. Even with a Community Use Agreement, a fence will prevent ALL current public leisure activities that are not part of an organised group which is willing to pay to use the area.

¹ **Paragraph 97 –of the NPP Framework (2019)** "Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless: an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space is surplus to requirements; or the loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use."

- **Peterborough Local Plan 2016-2036²**

There is clear evidence to show that NONE of these criteria have been met. Two-metre high prison-style fencing of such a large area will have a devastating detrimental effect on the local community and the character / appearance of the area, which is by nature, Open Space. There appears to have been no scrutiny on the risks identified by the school and whether a less impactful fence would actually mitigate these risks.

Excessive size

We believe that the 4 pitches proposed are excessive to requirements. In the last planning application 2 pitches was deemed sufficient by the school.

The sudden need for 4 pitches seems to have been justified on the basis of a **once-a-year Sports Day and very occasional inter-school sporting festivals**, which could easily be temporarily fenced if need be.

We suggest that the number of field-based classes that can take place at one time are restricted by staffing. The current school PE curriculum shoes that the school requires use of the fields for 30% or less of its PE lessons, on only 52% of the days of the year due to school holidays and weekends. We believe that the increase to 4 pitches is an opportunistic, greedy and unjustified attempt to increase the amount of land controlled by the school at the expense of the rest of the community.

Community Use Agreement

We fear that a Community Use Agreement would prevent all but paying and organised groups from using the area – further limiting inclusive use of the provision to those less advantaged.

Safeguarding

Risk assessments to look at the risks to students on the fields were urgently required by the Health and Safety officer in April 2021 by July 2021. In September 2022 the council provided a 'risk assessment' by the school (see attached), **however our security expert tells us that this is wholly inadequate. The document merely points out potential risks and lists mitigations. There is no assessment of the severity or likelihood of the risk. No explanation or justification as to why these mitigations are no longer effective. No**

² LP16 – "Development proposals would contribute positively to the character and distinctiveness of the area... improve the public realm... and be accessible to all."

And LP30c that states: "Local Green Space will be protected in line with the NPPF. Development will only be permitted if in addition to the requirements of the NPPF there would be no significant detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding areas, ecology and heritage assets."

reasoning as to why the risk level has changed after 40 years of sharing the use of the fields. We still believe that there are other ways of managing the safety of the students on open playing fields (as other schools do, such as Parkside school in Cambridge and Kings School in Ely), which do not involve the loss of the largest open space to the Werrington community.

Ofsted does not require fencing of playing fields – and this has not been highlighted as an issue of concern in any Ofsted reports on the school.

Given the permanent loss of open space that Werrington faces, and the impact on the students of having been banned from use of the fields during this time, we find it strange that proper, evidence-based justification has not been demanded for these decisions.

SUMMARY

We believe the best solution would be for the council to engage with stakeholders from both sides on how any genuine concerns can be resolved in ways that work for both sides.

We have four key suggestions:

- **A proper risk assessment** looking at likelihood x severity, and a range of mitigations that could adequately safeguard the students.
- If a fence is still deemed the preferred option, **the area to be fenced should not be more than two pitches.**
- **Other fence styles and lower height** (such as that used at Norwood Primary School) **should be considered** to allow for the sense of open space to be better retained, and for the planning guidelines to be adhered to.
- If a CUA is put in place we would ask for an agreement for **the gates to be unlocked for public use free of charge at all times outside school use, and for the responsibility for this to be written into the agreement to ensure it happens.**