

HOTON PLAYING FIELD COMMUNITY PROJECT

A potted history of a project to be proud of.

History

The playing field has been leased by the Parish Council for free use by the village's residents. Sadly, the humble parish precept does not extend to equipping this space and over the years the area has become run-down and the few items of existing equipment have decayed. The football posts have rusted and a ditch has appeared along the length of the football pitch. To make matters worse, right in the middle of the field is a large concrete area, which has become weed-ridden and fragmented. It lies at the bottom end of the mile long Wymeswold air-strip and was a turning circle for bombers in war time, and is reported to be over 1 metre deep, thus removing it would be a costly option. It is currently a health and safety hazard.

Parish Council Plans

On a number of previous occasions, the Parish Council has looked into redeveloping the space. However, efforts have always come to nothing due to limited funds. Startled by the prohibitive costs of play equipment, plans were shelved.

Hope

In November, 2005 the lease for the land was renewed for 20 years. With this a renewed interest in the area was seen. Advice was sought from Leicestershire County Council and Charnwood regarding the environmental aspects of this space. Under the guidance of Mark Graham, wildlife conservation officer for Charnwood, a highly successful volunteer day was held on 25th November, 2006 creating a wildlife area at the rear of the field. This saw over 20 villagers giving up their Saturday to strim back weeds, pollard trees, create wood piles for hibernating animals and tame the brambles. It was obvious from this day that the residents really cared about their village, wanted to see the space improved and were prepared to put in the effort to make it work.

The creation of the Community Project group

The then Chair of the Parish Council, Brian Griggs, called a meeting to discuss the future of the playing field in April, 2007. Michelle Parsons, Heritage Warden for Hoton, and Cheika Kennedy, now Project Co-ordinator took on the project and conducted a series of site visits to neighbouring villages to see what could be achieved on a small budget.

The committee

Calls were made for interested parties to join the group, suggest designs and lead the project. Representation was made from various parts of the community; mothers and children, heritage, a village hall representative, Parish council representative, youth representative and sports. A treasurer, chairperson and secretary secured the posts without contest. Many more people expressed an interest in getting involved in an ad hoc manner, but not in the formality of the organisation.

Village survey

After initial site visits and ideas a village survey was undertaken in July 2007. This proved widespread support for the project, but also raised some excellent suggestions, which have been included in the final design. These included an improved entrance to the area, a cycling proficiency track and an orchard. It also demonstrated which aspects should take priority: 67% wanted to see a village tennis court and 47% a community garden. But nearly all wishes have been accommodated.

Quotations and designs

A frenzy of site visits, quotations and contractors designs ensued over the coming months. Our dream appeared to becoming reality. Then the rain clouds appearedthe cost!

Grants and sponsorship

Luckily for us, we had a contact in a neighbouring village who had undertaken fundraising and knew of many grants available. Cath Thomson, of Burton-on-the-Wolds, has been a font of knowledge and shared her expertise and time. With renewed vim and vigour early applications to East Midlands Airport, Pedigree Masterfoods and AstraZeneca were all successful, providing funding for the community garden and a notice board.

The Leicestershire 'Shires' grant scheme, Charnwood borough council community grants and Awards for all remain in progress.

Village consultation

September 2007 and with all the quotations and designs in, the village were again invited to comment and influence outcomes. All the proposals were laid out in the Village hall and the committee present to discuss the plans and answer queries. Many villagers turned out and new funders were discovered that day. A list of volunteers and contact numbers was drawn up. Keeping the community involved at every stage has been our ethos.

Volunteer day

A true test of the villages commitment to the project – one cold, drizzly October morning and 21 volunteers arrive with their shovels and croppers to help clear the access to the field to permit delivery of free subsoil and topsoil, pledged by a local building company and delivered free of charge. Due to the good turnout, within one and a half hours the work was done, a village bonfire created and a sense of pride and community spirit instilled.

Donations

Subsoil and topsoil, wildflower seeds, shrubs and roses, joinery, picnic tables, time!

THE MASTER PLAN

TENNIS COURT

The large area of concrete will be resurfaced, line marked and fitted with a rigid, vandal-proof net to provide a much wanted village tennis court. It is intended that this be open access and free of charge to villagers. The resurfacing will also lend itself to other sports.

PRACTICE WALL

At the rear of the court is an existing practice wall. The basketball hoop will be attached here and the wall marked up for football goal shooting and with cricket stumps. The rear of the wall will have climbing traverse holds inserted. To make the whole thing more aesthetically pleasing we propose to invite Loughborough art students to come and spray a mural. This will have the dual effect of improving its appearance and reducing vandalism. We intend for them to create this with the village's youth.

COMMUNITY GARDEN

Adjacent to the tennis court an observation and relaxation area is proposed, with compact Breedon gravel pathways, raised bed planters and seating. The garden will be augmented by scattered large tubs and spring bulbs throughout. We will favour native herbs and plant species. This will be maintained the village gardening club, free of charge.

WILDFLOWER MEADOW

The far end of the field will see the creation of a wildflower meadow through the use of the free imported subsoil and native species wildflower seeds, sourced from Naturescape locally.

ORCHARD

The playing field contains an area of ancient orchard, which has kept the village in Apple pie for the autumn months. Sadly, the wet windy summer has brought one of the largest trees down, its tap root rotted by honey fungus. This has prompted the villagers to suggest we start creating a true legacy and create a new orchard. This aspect of the project is intended to be cost neutral, with each family pledging and planting a native species fruit tree.

LIVING WILLOW TUNNEL

In keeping with areas green credentials a living willow tunnel is a cheap and beautiful structure. We are to create it on another volunteer day with the assistance of a willow worker, John Shone, based in Rutland. He will teach us how to maintain it and weave in branches as it grows and evolves. These structures prove very popular with the younger park user.

PLAYGROUND

New equipment meeting European safety standards and with a 25 year guarantee has been chosen, in an enclosed area with self closing gates. Safety matting, which permits grass to grow through, has been selected to keep the area as natural as possible. Further equipment suitable for older children will be sited at the perimeter of the field, outside of the toddler area.

GROUND IMPROVEMENTS

Our regular volunteer days will provide free labour to undertake clearance and maintenance tasks. The wildlife area was created through free labour on the first volunteer day.

THE FUTURE.....

The design, enthusiasm and commitment is in place, all that is needed now is the financial support!