

A community vision for Louie Memorial Fields

This time last year, North Hinksey Parish Council's Recreation & Amenities Committee was analysing the results of a consultation with young people about leisure provision in our community. This is not a new local issue. Around ten years ago NHPC invested in the parish-owned facilities at Louie Memorial Fields off Arnold's Way, securing funding for a new MUGA (multi-use games area) outside the Pavilion and updating the children's play area in the lower field. Following destruction of the Botley Skate Bowl from an arson attack in 2009, the then-Council consulted on plans for a replacement skate park. After the 2011 election the incoming Council did not publish or act on those results. However this period saw the completion of substantial environmental works to the ecologically sensitive Louie Memorial copse and fenland.

In 2012 the Parish Council was presented with a petition of 800+ signatures calling for a new skate park at Louie Memorial Fields. A general parish-wide leisure survey followed, and under the current Parish Council elected in 2015 the improvement of parish-owned facilities has been a key objective. In the meantime a team of dedicated local volunteers who serve as Louie Memorial Pavilion Trustees have done all they can to improve the appearance and functioning of that building – a challenging task, given the relatively poor design and construction that became outdated years ago. Nevertheless, Pavilion and football pitch bookings have steadily increased over the last five years. The 4th Oxford Scout Group, whose neighbouring Hut is similarly in vital need of updating, is growing and meets at Louie Memorial Fields four nights a week. Add in regular usage of the Pavilion by North Hinksey Youth Club, daytime use of the football pitch and MUGA by Matthew Arnold School, and casual use of the open space by walkers and families: it's clear that the facilities at Louie Memorial Fields are a valued hub of community life.

Why go through the recent history? Because it's time to look forward and to secure the value of the fields for the decades ahead. Building on the consultations of recent years and with support from our District Councillors Debby Hallett and Emily Smith, this year Vale of White Horse District Council is funding professional work to develop a master plan for improvements to Louie Memorial Fields. The key focus is on a new building to replace the Pavilion and Scout Hut (both long past their intended shelf life), but plans for future work need to consider the context of the surrounding outdoor space. Eco-friendly design, parking,

accessibility, football pitch condition, additional outdoor fitness or play equipment – before we can invest in any of these, we need a cohesive vision of how the total space can work well for the benefit of the whole community.

In December NHPC appointed Nortoft planning consultants (www.nortoft.co.uk) to carry out the first phase of master planning work. The team is led by Nortoft managing director David O’Neil and works in partnership with SWA Architects (www.swa-architects.co.uk), whose many projects include the design of West Oxford Community Centre. Nortoft have been doing feasibility studies since January, drawing on past NHPC consultations and other research to generate ideas for improved facilities at Louie Memorial Fields. In the coming months they will put forward a preferred option for longer-term development of a new Pavilion building and the surrounding space.

This is where you come in! At the **Annual Parish Meeting on Thursday, 22nd March (7.30pm at Seacourt Hall)**, Nortoft will present its work to date and will launch its public consultation. Please come along and let us know what you would like to see for the future of Louie Memorial Fields. It has taken years of work to get to this point, and for the first time all of the key stakeholders (Pavilion Trustees, Scouts, NHPC and Vale District Council) are aligned in our shared commitment to make substantial improvements to our parish-owned facilities. Everyone is warmly invited to be a part of this process, so that we can all enjoy our valued community spaces for many more years. Help us to develop a vision that the whole community can be proud of!

Cllr Caroline Potter, Chair of NHPC Recreation & Amenities Committee

North Hinksey Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Thursday 22nd March

Seacourt Hall, Botley

7pm for 7.30 pm start