

Leighton Linlade Partnership Committee

15 April 2021

Tiddenfoot Waterside Park

Report of: Howard Hughes – CBC Active Lifestyles Manager

Purpose of this report

To introduce the idea to the committee for developing visitor facilities at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park. This includes the potential to bring the site of the derelict stable block (Black Barn Stables) in to use. The report summarises initial feasibility work undertaken in 2020 to identify options that would be optimal for visitors and whether that would be best provided on the site of the stable block or elsewhere in the park.

The report identifies a preferred option (2d) at this stage as well as others that have been considered as part of the work to date. The report also identifies potential build costs and income generation opportunities that could be achieved through annual rents.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the contents of the report including initial study work and development options.
2. Consider in principle support for developing visitor facilities at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park and to add this project to Big Plan 2 and the partnership project list.
3. Consider in principle support for the preferred Option 2d.
4. Consider use of S106 funding identified for south Leighton Buzzard towards the construction of the new facilities.

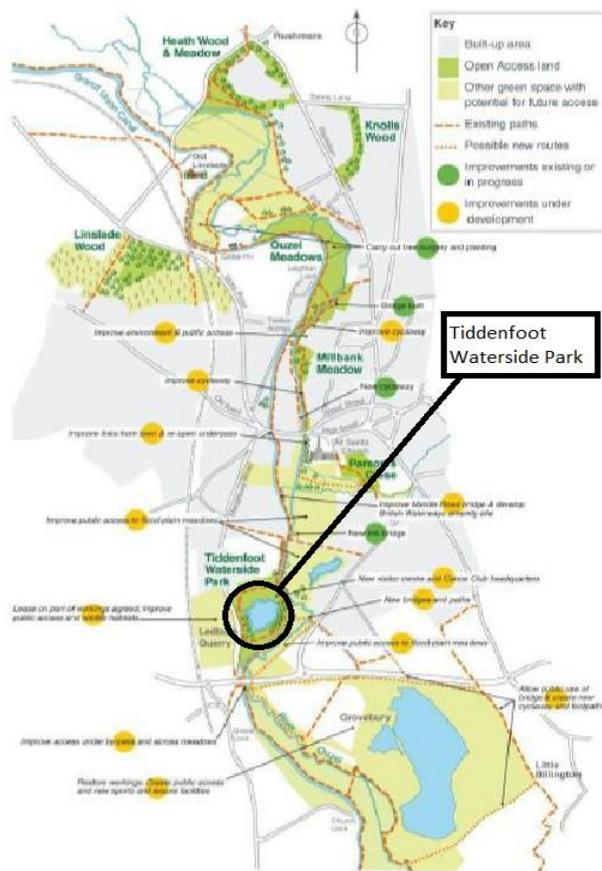
Background information

1. Tiddenfoot Waterside Park is a former sand quarry on the southern edge of Leighton Linlade. The park is 32-acres (c.15 ha) in size. The main feature of the park is an 11-acre (4.5 ha) lake with paths around it that also connects to the Grand Union Canal and other nearby open spaces. With exception of the grass paddock on the northern boundary, it is part designated a County Wildlife Site (CWS). It has a mix of acid and neutral grass, open woodland and scrub, and dense woodland. The lake has many species of wildfowl and other water birds, amphibians and invertebrates. It has a good stock of fish, including wells catfish, and is known for the quality of its angling. There is

a small play area, exercise stations form a fitness trail around the perimeter route and picnic tables in the wooded areas.

2. The waterside park forms part of the wider Ouzel Valley Park and following recent improvement works is now connected through improved paths to Southern Meadows and the western section of Grovebury Quarry.
3. Tiddenfoot Waterside Park is well-used and provides a tranquil setting in which to see a wide range of birds and wildlife in a lakeside environment. The park does not however currently have anywhere people are able to take shelter, obtain refreshments and use toilet or baby change facilities.
4. The park is also home to the annual canal festival organised by Leighton Linlade Town Council. Taking place annually on the last Saturday in July, the festival is a popular event. The 2019 festival was a huge success with over 9000 visitors attending to enjoy great entertainment, good quality stalls and view the boats on show.
5. Within the park is a derelict stable block known as Black Barn Stables that is located alongside the park's car park and has been derelict and boarded up since 2004. The barns provide an ideal opportunity to bring an unused area of the park in to public use, supporting new visitor facilities.
6. Since 2011 Tiddenfoot Waterside Park has had a very active 'friends of' group. Formed from park users and based on the membership of a former group, the Friends of Tiddenfoot are a non-profit, community volunteer group, formed to advance the development of the Park for community use while maintaining, improving and creating wildlife habitats within it. They support increasing awareness of conservation issues, enhancing community cohesion through involvement and understanding of local wildlife, conservation and heritage projects. The group have successfully achieved 'Green Flag Community Award' status for the park for six consecutive years, achieved as a direct outcome of their engagement in the management of the site.
7. The park forms an important part of the Green Wheel master plan and is identified as one the key leisure 'trip generators' in and around the parish that will contribute to providing coherent, accessible and enjoyable alternatives to using the car for a range of journeys. Developing visitor facilities at Tiddenfoot provides an ideal opportunity to develop/enhance wider green infrastructure assets and engage people with them as part of the Green Wheel framework.

8. Location map of Tiddenfoot Waterside Park



Feasibility Study

9. Foster Wilson Architects and Colliers International were appointed by Central Bedfordshire Council to develop feasibility stage proposals for visitor facilities at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park. The report, which was completed in 2020 describes the architectural proposals and options that have been developed in response to the brief.
10. The work undertaken to date aims to assess how and what facilities might be provided and which of the options identified is most feasible to explore in greater detail in order to deliver and maintain a sustainable and supported community asset.
11. The study included looking at the character of the space that might be created given the constraints of the location i.e. the physical context plus the character of the site and how it could be used to create attractive interior and exterior facilities. Factors like views, accessibility to people, accessibility to services, exposure to sun at different times of year, and proximity to play areas were considered as part of the study.
12. The viability of possible uses, how the space (interior and exterior) might be used and who might use it was also considered as part of the study.
13. Socio-demographic data, updated to 2019 shows there is a good family-oriented market for the park with about 1,650 people living within 10-minute walk of the car park at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park that can be considered "local". A further c.48,000 live

within 10 minutes' drive. The age profile is slanted to under 60s, with about a quarter under the age of 19. That is a normal pattern for a suburban area with relatively high appeal to families. Two neighbouring schools, with 1,900 students between them, are likely to generate business for café and community facilities from parents and children.

Survey

14. The feasibility work included an online survey of residents. It was placed online and publicised by the Community Intelligence team of Central Bedfordshire Council. It had 294 responses, most being users of the park. There were 20 respondents who said they never visited the park, 132 who said they occasionally visited the park and 142 by people who said they often visited the park. Perusal of the postcodes of respondents indicates that there were only a few instances of more than one response per household.
15. Analysis of the context, which included an informative survey of local people, ascertained the following:
16. The park is predominantly a local facility and is likely to remain that way even with the addition of visitor facilities. The park attracts people from all over Leighton-Linslade and is a valued recreational resource. The visitor survey indicates that the lack of facilities limits access for many users, who would find their visit easier and more enjoyable if these facilities were available.
17. Dog walking is a main reason to visit, and a substantial number of dog owners are frequent visitors. Response suggested that the addition of a café should be dog friendly. A number of respondents also suggested that an area where dogs can roam leash-free would be helpful. Dog mess is also noted as an irritation to many visitors.
18. People otherwise mainly visit for walking, socialising and something to do. The number of visitors is not known, but the 274 people who responded to the survey and use the park (representing 0.7 % of the population within 10 minute drive) probably account for about 25,000 visits a year, so it is likely to be a quite substantial number.
19. The survey showed high support for a café. One is likely to attract a substantial number of additional visits if the offer is of good quality. About 25 respondents to the survey indicated an interest in running activities of different sorts at Tiddenfoot if there was appropriate space to hire. This included a not-for-profit organisation providing performing arts workshops for people with disabilities that are seeking a permanent base from which to deliver activities in Leighton Linlade. Others included children's soft play group, art and craft classes, support groups and meeting space for specific groups, cycle rental, dog day care/grooming, keep fit classes and music recording/lessons and a repair café.
20. Opinions on possible improvements from the survey shows that toilets were the facility that respondents said they were most likely to use. Tea / coffee / refreshments is not far behind, with slightly more appeal to occasional users than regular users. Substantial numbers envisaged having breakfast and lunch at the park. Substantial proportions envisaged using improved playground facilities as well as community event and exhibition space.

Facility Options Considered

21. Three main options for what might be done at the park were explored in the study, with variations under each. It should be noted that these are at feasibility study stage only and any of the options taken forward will require further detailed survey work.

OPTION 1 – REBUILDING BLACKBARNES STABLE BLOCK

22. The first was rebuilding Blackbarns stable block (a better option than reconstructing the existing building) to provide a café and range of other of spaces around an attractive courtyard.



23. The café would be dual facing, looking into the courtyard on one side, and over the paddock on the other, with external seating on either side. The other spaces could be hired to people wanting to put on activities, either on a one-off basis (eg childrens parties) or on a regular basis (e.g. weekly exercise classes). They could be divided between “clean” (for activities like dance and meetings) and “messy” (for activities like painting and repairing). They would best be managed by the café operator. The response to the survey suggested there would be strong demand for this. It would have the advantage of attracting a substantial number of people to the facility, which would make the café more sustainable. The spaces could alternatively be let for workspace of different types. The activities centre option seems to have most potential both financially and in terms of contribution to the community. The courtyard itself is suited to regular small scale activities.

OPTION 2 – SMALL CAFÉ

24. This would be a new building immediately adjacent to the car park. It would include public toilets which would be run by the café operator. Three variations of this are explored;

- A kiosk without internal seating.
- A small café with internal seating.

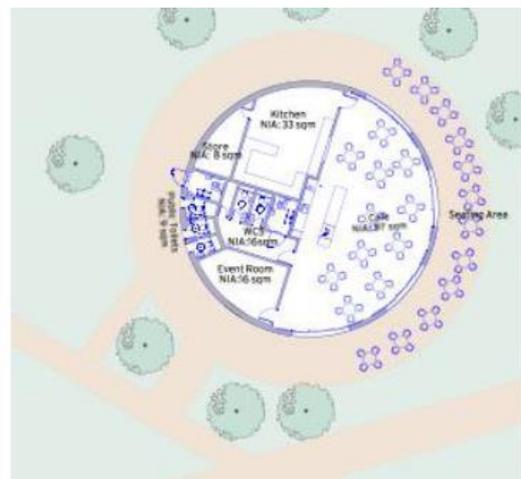
- A small café with internal seating and a community events room.



25. The various option 2 designs could be achieved using modular construction, made in a factory and transported to the site. This could cost substantially less, although the overall cost may not be much different to new building of lower specification, matching that of the modular form.

OPTION 3: LARGER CAFÉ

26. This would be a new building in the paddock, below gives an idea of what it could look like.



27. It could also be modular, but that would probably not be optimal from an architectural perspective in such a prominent location.

28. It is envisaged that, under any of the options, the property would be let to one or more organisations and they would pay rent. It may be preferable, given the uncertainty of how well they might do, for rent to be a base plus a percentage of turnover that escalates as turnover increases. That would make it more likely that the business is sustainable while giving CBC higher return should it do well.

29. Table showing feasibility stage construction costs and rental income potential for options 1ab,2abc and 3.

Option	Construction Costs				Base Rent	Expected Rent	Landlord costs & long term maintenance 15%	Net Rent	Return on Invest
	GIA (sq m)	Building	Café Fitting	Total					
1a Rebuild stables as café and activities centre	285	£1,223k	£106k	£1,329k	£30k	£45k	(£7k)	£38k	2.9%
1b Rebuild stables as café and lettable work units	285	£1,228k	£132k	£1,360k	£29k	£34k	(£5k)	£29k	2.1%
2a Kiosk & Public Toilets.	62	£309k	£87k	£396k	£7k	£10k	(£2k)	£9k	2.1%
Kiosk & Public Toilets. Modular or Lower Specification	62			£289k		£9k	(£1k)	£8k	2.6%
2b Small Café & Public Toilets.	102	£442k	£97k	£539k	£13k	£20k	(£3k)	£17k	3.2%
Small Café & Public Toilets. Lower Specification	102	£314k	£80k	£394k	£11k	£17k	(£3k)	£14k	3.7%
Small Café & Public Toilets. Modular	102	£361k	£31k	£392k	£11k	£17k	(£3k)	£14k	3.7%
2c Small Café, Community Room & Public Toilets	132	£541k	£106k	£647k	£15k	£22k	(£3k)	£19k	2.9%
Small Café, Community Room & Toilets Modular or Lower Specification	132			£472k	£12k	£18k	(£3k)	£15k	3.2%
3 Larger Café	186	£769k	£102k	£871k	£24k	£36k	(£5k)	£31k	3.5%

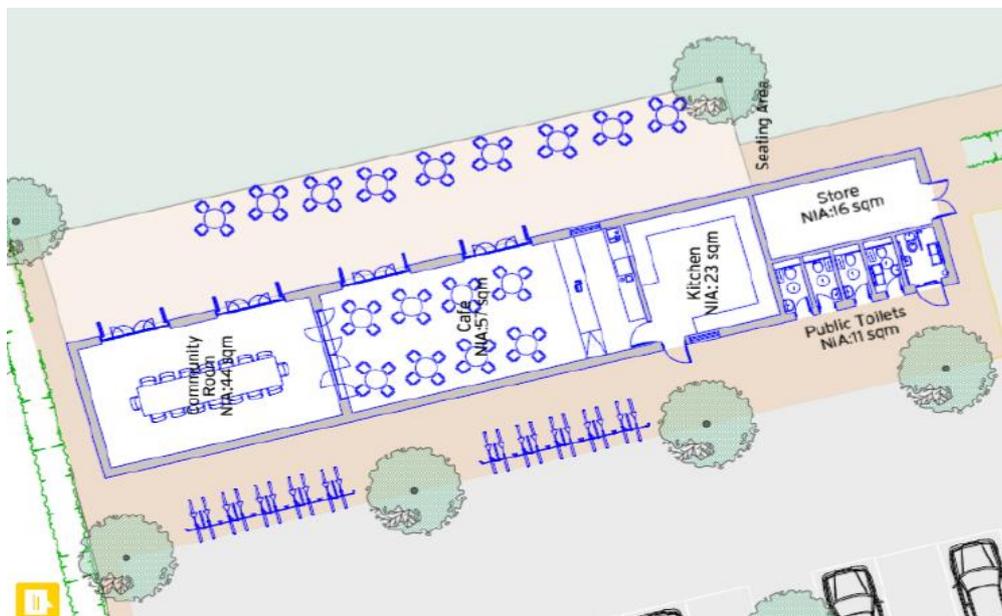
30. Options 2 and 3 would allow the stables to be demolished and the car park extended, adding about 37 spaces. The estimated cost of that is c.£503,000.

31. The study considered the possibility of locating a café alongside the lake. A small café of similar size to option 2b might be possible on the west side. While however there would be the advantage of views over the water, the site would be constrained and access difficult. There would be disturbance to wildlife and anglers and greater risk of vandalism. Location alongside the car park is considered a better option.

MORE DETAILED OPTION 2d (preferred option)

32. More work was done on Option 2c – small café, community room & public toilets after the draft report, creating Option 2d. As well as increasing the footprint and flexible use of the building, the proposed location was moved so that the development is on

brownfield land of the existing car park and stables block without encroaching on the field. The design is for a café that has an internal and external seating area with an extended community room. The community space has folding doors to the cafe, so can provide additional cafe seating if required.



33. The new building and planting will help to screen the car parking from the park. The cafe has views over the field and provides a sheltered space for children's play away from the car park. It is intended that the cafe is a bespoke design of timber frame, timber cladding and a green roof to emphasise the environmental intent of the park. The building will have a low outline against the sky and a very minimal impact in the landscape. Overall the scheme will greatly improve the visitor experience to the park and provide the facilities identified as necessary within the visitor survey.

34. Construction costs and rental income potential for option 2d is detailed on the following table;

Option	GIA (sq m)	Construction Costs			Base Rent	Expected Rent	Landlord costs & long term maintenance 15%	Net Rent	Return on investment
		Building	Café Fitting	Total					
2d Large Events Room	158	£630k	£116k	£746k	£16k	£24k	(£4k)	£20k	2.7%
Car Park		£503k		£503k					
Total Scheme:		£1,133k	£116k	£1,249k	£16k	£24k	(£4k)	£20k	1.6%

Observations from the initial options

35. Option 1 (developing the stable block) was initially identified as potentially the best way forward as it provides the greatest opportunity to extend use of the site. The location and ability to attract park users however is not ideal as it is tucked away in the corner of the park and unless arriving by car will be less accessible. It is the largest but also most expensive option and providing visitor facilities using the existing footprint removes the ability to increase parking capacity without encroaching in to the paddock area. Reconstructing the stables would also not offer enough space to be able to create an arts / artisan hub of significant size.
36. While Option 3 creates an iconic destination building, the option was dismissed as it still means developing on fresh ground within the park, affecting the County Wildlife Site and leaving the current derelict stable block unchanged. It also means extending utilities further into the site creating extra costs regarding sewers, power and water supply etc.
37. Option 2 (a,b and c) are more affordable and possibly more accessible in location – it was felt a further option (2d) should be developed and investigated further. While the other versions of option 2 are not dismissed at this stage it was thought that building on fresh ground within the park should be avoided if possible and instead utilising part of the current derelict stable block. We dismissed the option of having a lakeside option, as this would be directly impact on the Country Wildlife Site (CWS) acidic grasses area and lakeside vegetation, also extending the utilities services further into the site.
38. It is felt that option 2d gives a better location regarding impact on the overall site, uses the derelict space for car parking and potentially more acceptable to Planning. It also provides scope to consider wider community engagement opportunities with groups looking for activity space. This provides the potential for generating more income and financial sustainability.

Feedback from Planning

39. The options outlined in this report were submitted for initial feedback from the Planning Department. The main points are:
- (i) Any expansion on the site into greenbelt will need to demonstrate very special circumstances.
 - (ii) A planning application would need to explain (in relation to issues of sound and wildlife disturbance) the reasons that building a cafe next to the lake itself is not considered a better option.

- (iii) Improvements to the car park, including planting and some expansion to meet anticipated demand should be considered as part of the proposals for the cafe.
- (iv) Site clearance of the stables structure should be considered to offset the construction of the new cafe.
- (v) A building in this setting should be of high-quality design.

Feedback from Ouzel Valley Park (OVP) Steering Group

- 40. An outline report on the feasibility study to develop visitor facilities at Tiddenfoot was presented to the OVP Steering Group on 1 February 2021. The report focused on the preferred option 2d.
- 41. While members of the steering group were generally supportive of the idea in principle, it was noted that this is not currently identified as a partnership project or in Big Plan 2. Members also requested more detailed information including the alternative options that were included in the feasibility stage report. The OVP meeting proposed that a more detailed report be included at the Leighton Linlade Partnership Committee.
- 42. Other comments included the need for any development at the site to maximise the opportunity for promoting and supporting walking and cycling, particularly as cars travelling to the site must use Mentmore Road which is a no through road in a residential area.

Link to strategic priorities

- 43. The Leisure Strategy Chapter 2: Recreation and Open Space Strategy assesses the provision of and need for open spaces in terms of their recreational usage and value.
- 44. The strategy seeks to ensure that all residents of Central Bedfordshire have good access to a range of high-quality recreation and open space. The provision of new facilities or the enhancement of existing facilities that take into consideration the accessibility, quantity, and quality of facilities for residents.
- 45. The Strategy identifies Tiddenfoot Waterside Park as a location that would benefit from enhanced facilities.
- 46. The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan (OAIP) sets out how Central Bedfordshire Council will manage access to the countryside to make Central Bedfordshire a great place to live and work. This includes increasing use and enjoyment of the countryside for fresh air, relaxation, recreation, health and exercise. The OAIP identifies that existing sites will be enhanced to complement the intrinsic qualities of the landscape, its history and biodiversity whilst meeting the demands of local communities and the growth agenda.
- 47. The project is however not currently included as a Leighton Linlade Partnership Project or listed in Big Plan 2.
- 48. The South Bedfordshire Local Plan seeks to improve and protect existing facilities to ensure access to informal recreation in the countryside by:
 - (i) making provision for additional informal countryside recreational facilities and spaces.

- (ii) improving access for walkers, horse riders and cyclists to the wider countryside for recreational purposes.
- (iii) enhancing the landscape, improving habitat management, resolving problems of public access and increasing the informal recreational and amenity value of the countryside - particularly close to urban areas.

Costs and Funding options

49. Using option 2d, the construction cost at this stage is estimated at £1,249K. This includes a budget figure of £503K to demolish the stable block building and improve the car park. There are also likely to be additional fees. If the proposal to develop facilities at the park is approved, a more detailed cost analysis would need to be undertaken as part of detailed design work stages of the project (RIBA stages 2-4).
50. In terms of funding opportunities, Tiddenfoot Waterside Park is in the vicinity of the Grovebury Rd 17a 17b site and fits the definition of those S106 agreements. There is currently circa £1m of unallocated S106 Community facility funding available, the majority of which are funds relating to 17a and 17b. While this funding has been earmarked for Tiddenfoot Waterside Park it is subject to further discussion and engagement before it can be confirmed.
51. Even if all the potential S106 funding is allocated to the project, option 2d will still require additional funding. One option could be external grant funding, this will be dependent on available grants which are also likely to be competitive and at this stage none have been identified although further investigation is still needed. The other option is to submit a detailed business case as part of the MTFP process (Medium Term Financial Plan) to seek funds from the council's capital programme. The next opportunity to do this will be for the 2022/23 financial year. This is likely to require more detailed analysis of the costs and sustainability as well as input from the council's Assets team to take a bid forward.

Conclusion and next steps

52. The feasibility study indicates that there is a good catchment in the area, especially for a park café offer of good quality. The immediate proximity of schools is likely to provide opportunity for families local to the area. It is likely that an attractive café would become a popular social hub.
53. The response from the survey supports this. It indicates a high level of interest in a café and there was also a good level of response to a community space. This provides opportunities for further engagement with specific user groups to support an extended range of activity in the Leighton-Linslade area.
54. There does not seem to be an attractive option for locating a new café close to the water. The north and east banks are the only possibilities. The north would be far from the car park, making access for supplies etc difficult and creating security problems. It would have the advantage of being south facing, but the view is not exceptional because of the impact of the power lines. The east would have a better view and perhaps could have access from Mentmore Road, but there is only a narrow band of space in that area. There would be disadvantage of disturbance to wildlife and anglers and possibly greater risk of vandalism. A location by the car park, looking over the paddock, seems better on balance.

55. Clearly there are pro's and cons for all options. The café with no internal seating isn't ideal as it doesn't allow for use in bad weather. The rebuilt stables with multi activity facility is expensive and offers no space for additional parking. The café with internal seating and additional flexible activity room appears to offer the best option.
56. Should the committee agree that developing visitor facilities at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park is worthy of further development and financial support can be secured from available S106 funding, the Council's Assets team will be engaged to identify the process and information needed to develop a business case in order to seek the additional funding required.