

REVIEW BY CASTLETHORPE PARISH COUNCIL OF CERDA VISIT REPORT OF NOVEMBER 2016 FOR GOBBEY'S FIELD, CASTLETHORPE

SUMMARY

The Visit Report forms part of a submission made by CERDA Planning on behalf of the landowner Keynes Investments, objecting to the Milton Keynes Council Decision Statement of October relating to the inclusion of Gobbey's Field (the Field) as a Local Green Space in the Castlethorpe Neighbourhood Plan. It purports to throw doubt on the validity of the robust formal public usage survey conducted by Castlethorpe Parish Council in September 2016. The CERDA Visit Report has no value in doing this as it has no viable statistical basis and contains obvious omissions and errors of fact. Also CERDA's interpretation of their own Visit Report and comparison with the formal public usage survey results, contained in their Representation document, contains errors and unsupported assumptions.

THE PARISH COUNCIL PUBLIC USAGE SURVEY

This was a robust formal process, conducted by a public body, which required written, signed attestations by members of the public. Given the current climate of concerns about personal data being made public and the probable need for individuals to support their attestations, perhaps at a public enquiry process, the survey produced a very high response of 213 from a small community. Previous local experience has shown that the fact of having to personally make a written, formal response actually deters many members of the community from taking part in such surveys. The excellent response level in this case is an indication of the value that the Castlethorpe community places on Gobbey's Field as a landscape and recreational resource. Any fully independent review would consider the Parish Council Survey to be robust evidence.

METHOD USED FOR THE SITE VISIT REPORT SUBMITTED BY CERDA

Physical activity sampling by observation is a statistical method which can be used to predict, to given levels of certainty (usually 95% is the target) the whole population of events. It is defined by BS 3138:41008 as:

*A technique in which **a large number of observations** are made over a period of time of one group of machines, processes or workers. Each observation records what is happening at that instant and the percentage of observations recorded for a particular activity or delay is a measure of the percentage of time during which that activity or delay occurs.*

Accurately predicting the population requires a carefully designed study model to be created, its complexity and the number/timing of study visits required being dependent on the overall size and nature of the population being studied and the variables which impact it. In this case, the population (a randomly timed number of public uses of the Field over the whole year) is subject to such a wide range of variables that it would require a very large number of study visits spread across the whole year, including all days of the week, particularly weekends when recreation usage naturally increases, to achieve any level of statistical viability.

The method actually used by CERDA, falls at the first hurdle (**a large number of observations**) and therefore cannot be considered a valid activity sampling exercise as it comprised only three site visits of about 2 hours each at different times of the day on Tuesday 22nd November (11.00hrs to

13.10hrs), Wednesday 23rd November (14.50 hrs to 16.50 hrs) and Thursday 24th November (06.50hrs to 09.00hrs) to record public activity seen on Gobbey's Field. Large parts of the usage day were not covered at all. Such a limited survey has no statistically viable basis as the exact timing of public use of the field is largely a series of random events influenced by a large number of predictable and unpredictable variables such as the time of year, the weather and the personal situation/commitments of the users. For example, a retired or work at home person may normally walk their dog mid-morning or take an exercise stroll at that time, find that the weather is inclement and change their plans to later than normal. A parent from Shepperton Close may normally walk their child to the village school using the Field, but finding it has been raining, expect the Field to be wet and drive to school instead. Such a limited survey, during a time of year with short days and weather naturally discouraging to many outside activities cannot hope to predict the full population of events over a year with any valid statistical accuracy.

Members of the community who completed the Parish Council survey in early September were giving an honest view of their usage of the Field at a time of longer days and more clement weather. Clearly the overall volume of daily usage then could vary from the very limited study periods used by CERDA in November. Rather than focussing on the daily figures which are perhaps the most subject to peaks and troughs (and when looked as a mean figure for the whole year are probably accurate), the whole picture of usage, formally attested by the community, combining daily, weekly, monthly and random returns is the most important view. By any measure, it presents a clear picture of a heavily used recreation resource.

ERRORS AND OMISSIONS OF FACT IN THE SITE VISITS

Site visit report Tuesday 22nd November

This was the first site visit and includes a description of the perimeter of the Field. It states 'the far side.... All fencing is secure and untouched'. This relates to the north eastern corner of the Field that abuts Prospect Place. In fact there is clear evidence that the top corner of this fencing is used to gain pedestrian access from the Field to and from Prospect Place (which leads to New Road where the shop used to be located and the village centre). The square wire stock fencing is (and has been for many years) damaged by people climbing over the fence. See attached photo number 448SM taken 17th December. The report states that the southern perimeter 'is secured by a padlocked gate'. It fails to mention that there is a swing gate to give public access into and out of the Field, this being where the public right of way continues towards the River Tove, Canal and Cosgrove. The report also fails to mention that there is evidence of regular use by foot on the Field's surface from Shepperton Close towards the north western corner of the Field and footbridge over the railway.

Site visit report Wednesday 23rd November

States 'it was getting darker ... left site at 16.50hrs'. This is of course before the majority of the working population arrive home for work and decide to take some exercise and or take their dog for a walk. One of the reasons for the popularity of the Field is that it is a safe, secure, easily accessible area, easy under foot due to being meadow land kept short by constant grazing. It is very suitable for after dark walking with a torch as well as daylight use.

Site Visit report Thursday 24th November 06.50hrs to 09.00hrs

States 'drove to Prospect Road (assumed to be Prospect Place) ... the entirety of the site can be observed from here'. This is not the case as the attached photos 0091SM and 455SM show. The first photo was taken 18th December from the north eastern corner junction of Prospect Place with the

Field and the second is the corresponding view from Shepperton Close. The northern section of the Field is much wider than the southern section creating a 'dog leg' of the wooded southern section and obscuring the view of much of the southern section of the Field. The view is further restricted by a row of low trees across the centre of the field. A photo taken in November, when the site visits were made, would have shown more obscurity as there would have still have been leaves on the trees. Both Shepperton gates are used for access to the Field so a person using the southern Shepperton gate and crossing to the swing gate in the south eastern corner of the Field may not be observable from Prospect Place.

There are further doubts about the accuracy of information in the report. An example is that a couple who live in Shepperton Close have very regular dog walking habits due to working commitments. They confirm they were at home the full working week commencing Monday 21st November. On Mondays and Thursdays the husband walks their dog by entering the Field via the upper Shepperton Close gate, at between 8.00hrs to 08.30hrs. On Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, the wife does the same, between 08.00hrs and 09.00hrs. The couple will give a written attestation of these facts. The CERDA site visit report does not contain any information that reflects the visit of the husband between 8.00hrs to 08.30hrs on that day. It states 'in this time four dog walkers also used the entire field to exercise their dogs....three came from via the play area and one via the footbridge'. No mention of anyone entering via Shepperton Close. If the observer was at the time at Prospect Place, this may be because the view from there of the lower Field is obscured, as mentioned above. Further, a member of the Parish Council walks his dogs daily on the Field, including the timespans covered by the three site visits. He saw no one who appeared to be observing use of the Field.

HOW CERDA HAS INTERPRETED THEIR OWN SITE VISIT REPORT AND THE PARISH COUNCIL SURVEY RESULTS

Para 3.3 asserts that the response level of 213 from a population of 1,045 represents only a small percentage of villagers' views. The reality is that the response level achieved is far higher than normally achieved for such surveys based on our village experience and probably also based on the wider experience of Milton Keynes Council.

Para 3.4 asks why the Council has given weight to the Parish Council survey without seeking corroboration from the landowner. The landowners in earlier representations, claimed that they were unaware of development of the Castlethorpe Neighbourhood Plan, well over a year into its development cycle and despite much publicity and notices to land agents and other local landowners. It seems that the Fields's owners are very remote from activity on their land and we wonder how they could have any substantial knowledge about what happens day to day on the ground.

Para 3.5 of the CERDA representation says 'supposing use is 8am to 6pm this (90 residents claiming daily use) this represents 9 ... per hour'. In reality regular recreational usage of the Field probably spans 06.00hrs to 22.00hrs in the summer and 07.00hrs to 20.00hrs in the winter, so their 'by the hour' calculation is meaningless.

Residents filling in the Parish Council Survey leaflet had the option of selecting daily or weekly (or other frequencies of usage). A little common sense tells you that the responder is telling what they normally do. This is normal limitation of any such survey method. Virtually no one carries out any locally based activity absolutely every day as they will not be there every day! They are telling you

what they usually do, the majority of the time. Again this makes the CERDA 3.5 supposition meaningless.

Para 3.6 mentions future development of the site and 'any development layout' improving access..... by tarmacking footpaths. We assume development layout means for housing.

Para 3.7 says 'the new evidence put forward by the Parish is likely to reflect use of the footpath solely'. Cerda's own very limited Visit reports contradict this. The report of 24th November states 'In this time four dog walkers also used the entire field to exercise their dogs'. The footpath (public right of way) across the Field has never been fully waymarked so many users are unaware of its actual route and have routinely walked the whole Field. Until December 2016 when a sign was put on one of the Shepperton gates, no public attempt has ever been made by the landowners or their tenants to discourage public use of the whole Field. There are a large number of users with over 20 years use who have gained a 'right by prescription' to continue using their habitual routes across the whole Field. The combination of these factors is what led 198 respondents to the Parish Council survey to attest formally that they had seen regular public use of the whole Field, 98 for over 20 years. For some 40 years (when Shepperton was built), users have routinely accessed the Field from the corner of Prospect Place, the two gates of Shepperton Close, the footpath route from the Railway bridge, the swing gate to the play area and the swing gate (previously a stile) in the south eastern corner of the Field.

This para also states that the Parish Council survey 'does not prove that the site is 'demonstrably special to the local community and holds a particular local significance'. How can this be when 213 respondents attested formally 'I greatly value Gobbey's Field as a recreational and environmental resource and want to keep its current unspoiled character. I want it to have the special protection that being designated as a Local Green Space gives against development, reflecting its particular importance to the local community'

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