

INFORMATION NOTE: BANCROFT GARDENS UPDATE

THE HEAD OF LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

The Stage one submission for a £2,647,000 investment for Bancroft Gardens. Listed has been completed on schedule. Below are the key messages that came out of the consultation and the Council's responses to them.

Some of the key messages heard during consultation included:

- **Tennis** – there is a passion for the existing tennis club, there is also a view that public tennis courts should be made available;
- **Bowling** – dedicated parking in close proximity is required;
- **Play area** – needs to be enhanced;
- **The buildings** - disappointed to see that the Hall was to be removed;
- **Toilets** - much needed in the park;
- **Maintenance of the park** - considered to be not currently good enough;
- **Trees** - mature trees considered an asset to the park;
- **The River Hiz** – would like to see it as a part of the park;
- **Safety** – lighting is needed, feels unsafe at night, antisocial behaviour a problem;
- **Vegetation and shrubs** - could be improved.

Responses to key messages heard during consultation:

- **Tennis** – agreement needs to be made regarding the club and public court provision –we believe that there are too many courts in total for this park –NHDC will continue talks with Hitchin Tennis Club to find an amicable solution for public as well as club use;
- **Bowling** – agreement needs to be made regarding car parking arrangements –we do not agree with car parking within the park, NHDC will review how this can be accommodated;
- **Play area** - This needs to cater for all ages and be more inclusive including water play, natural play and traditional play. This should be a focal point in the park and needs to be a larger area than present;
- **The buildings** - The Pavilion building needs to become a more useable space for the users of the park and those groups who would benefit from a facility in the park, this includes extending it to provide a cafe facility and a multipurpose space for new and existing users;
- **Toilets** - need to be incorporated in the Pavilion;
- **Maintenance of the park** – A new long term plan needs to be put in place, involving a park ranger and volunteers;
- **Trees** - Unfortunately a lot of the mature trees are coming to the end of their life, therefore a plan needs to be put in place to ensure the future of the trees within the Gardens;
- **The River Hiz** – Lots can be done to improve and integrate the river into the park, this will require removing some of the lower value trees to open the area and re-grade the banks;

- **Safety** – We need to improve the entrances exclude vehicles, make the sightlines into the park better, improve the layout of the paths, add lighting and ensure the spaces are designed to discourage antisocial behaviour;
- **Vegetation and shrubs** - We need to sensitively review the planting along the road frontage to the gardens.

The Council have made the HLF aware that there are some user groups who have expressed their opposition to the development and have done much to ensure these views have been expressed in the consultation exercise to date and the local media. Whilst we recognize these legitimate concerns we also recognize the need to encourage new users and the community more generally to use the gardens and believe that our research has provided compelling evidence that this is the correct approach. Councillors, in confirming this view, also stressed their commitment to work with existing user groups to identify practical ways of accommodating these needs without jeopardising the groups survival.

Based on the information supplied the HLF will make their decision in June 2014 and if approved the next stage will include:

- Continue talks with Hitchin Tennis Club to find a solution that provides public access;
- Further studies to identify the full potential of the Pavilion;
- Continue talks with the Bowls Club regards alternative parking;
- Carry out more user surveys in the summer of 2014;
- Continue to gather historic records of the park;
- Develop a balanced Friends Group for the park;
- Develop the design towards a round 2 HLF submission.

The resulting scheme will provide Hitchin with a much improved facility that will be of benefit to the whole community for many years to come.

Images demonstrate what could be achieved in a refurbished site will be handed round at the meeting.

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