

Dereham Town Council

Extraordinary Recreation Committee meeting

Agenda Notes.

3. To discuss merits of purchasing additional land around the Neatherd and create a Country Park for Dereham.

The purpose of a country park is to provide an environment that is natural or seminatural, where visitors can enjoy a public open space with an informal atmosphere.

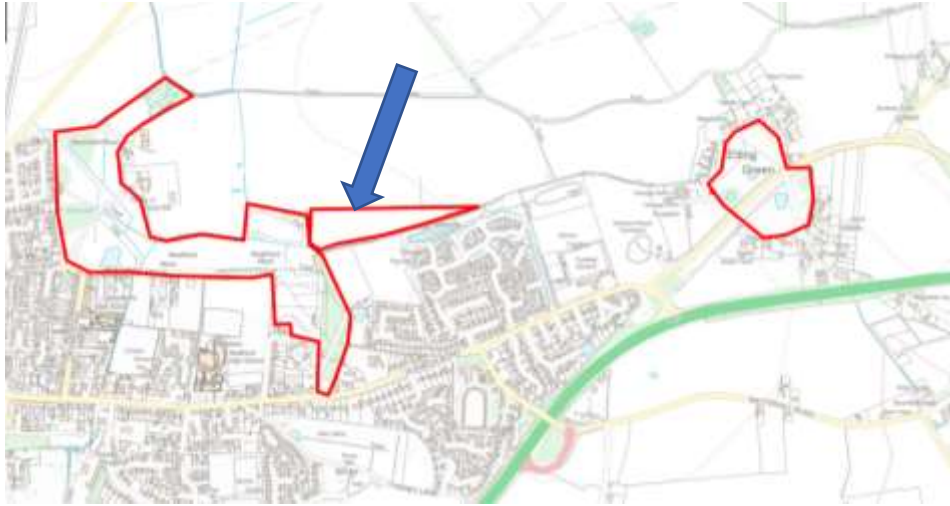
The Neatherd already provides some aspects of a country park, and is enjoyed by many hundreds of people every day. With population growth however, the pressure on the Neatherd has increased. More people enjoying the natural environment that the Neatherd provides could lead to a decline in the value of the Neatherd as a resource for wildlife.

Dereham Town Council has been developing a vision for the Neatherd for some years. In 2008 the Council owned two parcels of land in this area, Neatherd Common and Abbots Field in the west and Etling Green Common in the east. Both Neatherd Common and Etling Green had great value for wildlife and have subsequently been designated County Wildlife sites.

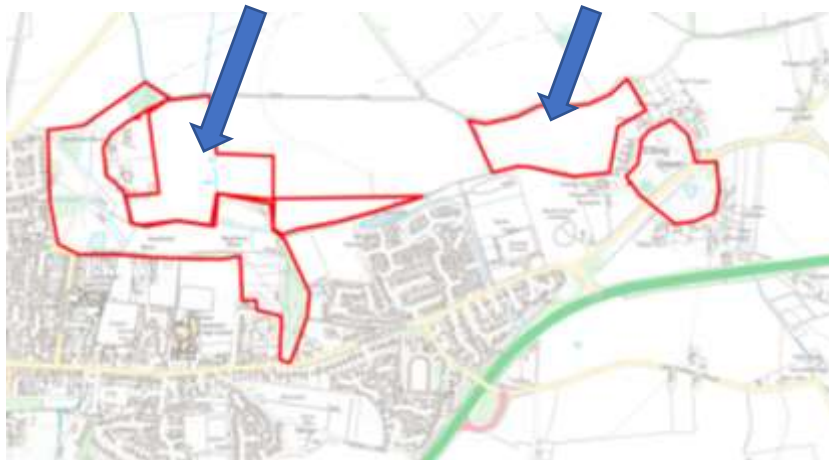


In 2008 the Town Council commissioned a Green Infrastructure Study; one of the findings of this study identified the benefits to wildlife in creating linkages between the two commons. These linkages would allow species to move between the two County Wildlife sites, rather than having isolated populations.

Shortly after this report was completed, the Council took the opportunity to purchase an additional small piece of land running along the northern edge of Shillings lane. This was purchased to try and create a link between the two commons; this land is indicated by the arrow below and has been open to the public since it was purchased.



As other pieces of land came up for sale the Council was able to purchase these also. These are indicated with arrows on the map below. Both pieces are about 22ha combined and both pieces of land have been rented out since they were purchased with the intention of introducing public access in the future. The most recent purchase at the western end was made in 2015.



In the last year, the Council has commissioned the Norfolk Wildlife Trust to produce a management plan for all the land in the Town Council's ownership around the Neatherd. The Management Plan looked at these areas in terms of wildlife benefit and climate change and concluded that while these areas can play a role in terms of carbon sequestration, their main role should be habitat creation to enable species to adapt to climate change.

Following on from the Management Plan the Council has agreed bring the land currently rented out into public open space and apply for funding to implement the management plan. The management plan includes planting hedges along historic hedge lines restoring the landscape to how it would have looked 100 years ago, creating additional ponds and wetlands and allow natural rewilding and the regeneration of the landscape to take place.

While this would create two areas which are beneficial for wildlife, the connections between the two are still limited.

In recent weeks another parcel of land totaling 22ha has come on the market – outlined below. This is the central piece completing the connection between the two County Wildlife sites to the east and the west. The Town Council is considering purchasing this piece of land.



If purchased this piece of land would create a Country Park for Dereham totaling 66ha (132 acres), outlined below. The whole area could be restored to how it would have looked in 1900 with small fields surrounded by hedges. The whole area could be returned to wildlife, for future generations to enjoy and value.



Supply of Open Space in Dereham.

The Breckland Council Open Spaces Assessment identified a deficit of Out Door Playing Space (Children's Play and sports) of 38ha. The Town Council's Play and Open Spaces assessment identified a shortfall in Outdoor Playing Space equivalent to 22ha. The Town Council's Assessment looked at wider typologies than the Breckland assessment and included Natural Green Space and Access to Natural Green Space.

Provision of Natural Green Space is benchmarked in two ways; an amount per head of population and by access to particular sizes of natural green space. In terms of amount per head of population Dereham currently has more than the average by 24ha. See below, as can be seen the greatest deficit is south of the A47.

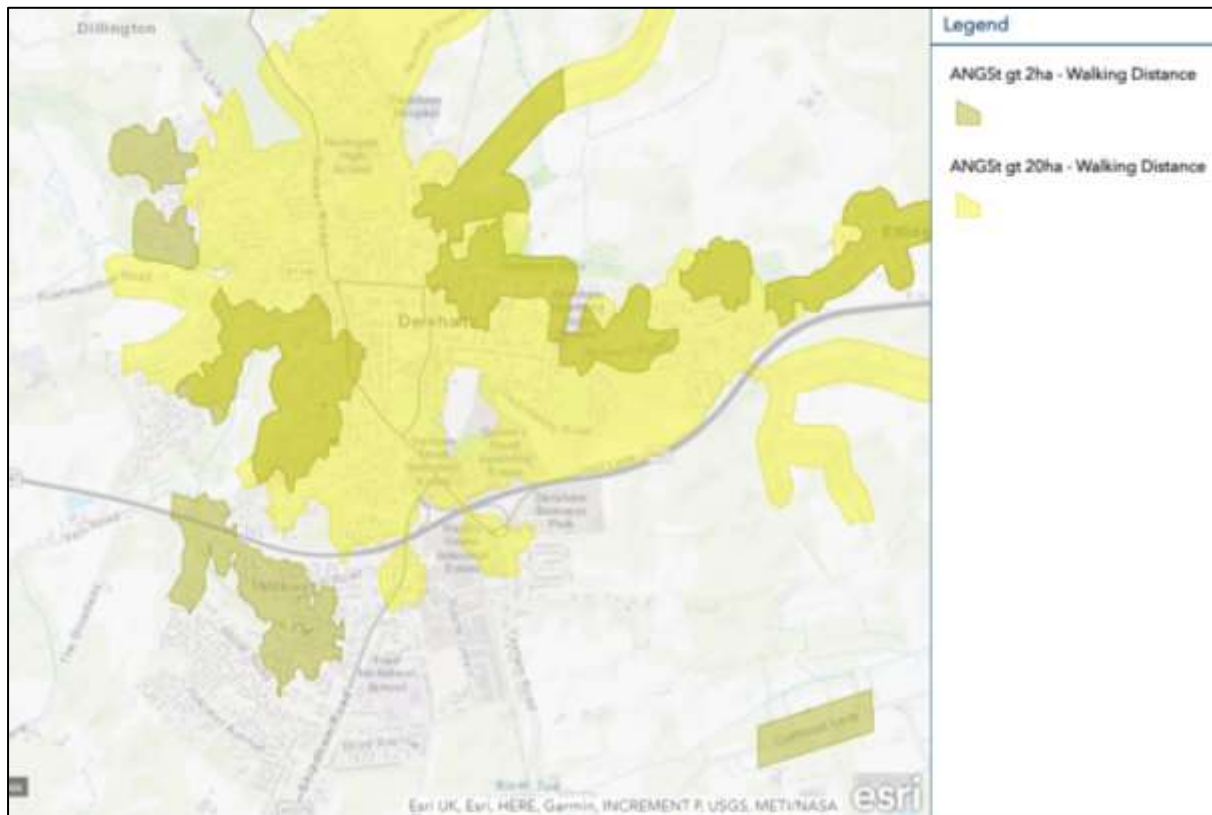
Provision type	North A47			South A47			Combined balance
	Actual provision	Benchmark provision	Balance	Actual provision	Benchmark provision	Balance	
Amenity	2.93	8.11	-5.18	1.70	3.59	-1.89	-7.07
Natural	56.46	24.34	+32.12	3.40	10.78	-7.38	+24.74
Parks and gardens	3.91	10.82	-6.91	-	4.79	-4.79	-11.70
Play provision	3.50	7.44	-3.94	2.70	3.29	-0.59	-4.53
Outdoor sports	12.45	21.63	-9.18	1.50	9.58	-8.08	-17.26
Total	79.25	72.34	+6.91	9.30	32.03	-22.73	-15.82

Access to Natural Green Space Standard (ANGST) was established by Natural England. This categorizes sizes of natural green spaces which people should have access to.

The ANGST standards are:

1. no person should live more than 300m from their nearest area of natural greenspace;
2. there should be at least one accessible 20ha site within 2km from home;
3. there should be one accessible 100ha site within 5km;
4. there should be one accessible 500ha site within 10km

As can be seen below, Dereham has patchy coverage in terms of the first Standard and the North of Dereham is quite well catered for with regards to the second Standard, but no parts of Dereham meet the third or the fourth Standard.



The additional land would not enable Dereham to reach the Third Standard it would be moving in the right direction.

While there are various benchmarks and standards, these are at the end on the day benchmarks, Councilors will need to form their own opinion as to the worth of any land purchase, after considering all the facts and the public consultation.

Cost of purchase.

This will need to be considered by the Finance and Governance Committee members and the tender bid will need to be kept confidential.

Risks

The Council has set a long term aspiration to address the shortfall open space particularly outdoor playing space, in the south of Dereham. Is there a risk that purchasing this land would jeopardize any land purchase in the south of Dereham?

- 1) Provided the Council factors this into its deliberations over the financial considerations, then from a financial perspective the purchase does not need to put this aspiration at risk.
- 2) It might be harder to justify purchasing natural green space in the south of Dereham if there was such a large block in the north, but it should not affect the justification for Outdoor Playing Space as this is a very different and specific typology.
- 3) While the Council is aspiring to have additional open space in Toftwood, no land is yet available in this area, but land in the north has become available.

Timings.

The deadline for submitting a tender is 23rd July. If the Council wished to bid to purchase the land then it need to call an extraordinary meeting for the 6th July.