



Guilden Sutton Green Space

School Lane Fields Proposal
V1.2 July 2019

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1 Project Background

Introduction

Although surrounded by farmland, the residents of Guilden Sutton have very limited access to natural green space. In fact, the area of informal outdoor green space in Guilden Sutton is significantly smaller than both the national guidelines produced by Fields in Trust and the areas available in neighbouring villages.

Guilden Sutton Green Space (GSGS) was formed in July 2018, with the aim of addressing this issue; specifically to explore whether it would be possible to purchase a piece of land as a community asset, and to use it to provide recreation and leisure facilities.

The objective was to find somewhere within easy reach of the centre of Guilden Sutton that could be owned, managed and enjoyed by the community, for mixed uses such as play, woodland, community growing, cycle-riding, wildlife habitats, bee-keeping, nature trail or dog walking.



Where will the Green Space be?

The proposed site is just off School Lane, behind the old school building, as outlined in yellow on the following plan. The total area is 8.34 acres.

Access is via the short track from School Lane, and also via Green Lane Bridleway - shown in red along with other public rights of way.



What sort of Green Space?

Guilden Sutton enjoys a rural setting with open countryside views. The fields surrounding the village form part of Chester's Green Belt.

The vision is to create a natural green space that sits seamlessly within its rural setting, in which residents of the parish will be able to find space to play, exercise, gather and enjoy nature.

The fields off School Lane already provide varied habitats for wildlife including birds, insects, and mammals. The development of the pond area in the back field along with some wildflower meadow area will provide perfect habitats for bees and other insects in the face of the intensively farmed areas surrounding Guilden Sutton.

The aim is to nurture and protect this natural environment making it a place for people of all ages and abilities.

Initial design proposals are being prepared by a landscape architect.



Guilden Sutton Green Space - indicative layout, July 2019

-  Access points
-  Open space
-  Football field
-  Woodland planting
-  Natural pond
-  Path routes
-  Mature boundary hedgerows



Indicative layout – description

Access points

Access is via the track from School Lane. Further access points could be made from Green Lane Bridleway

Open Spaces

A – area of approximately 2.25 acres. Subject to further consultation, feasibility work and funding it could be developed to include for example: picnic benches, seating, play facilities, wild-flower meadow, community garden, orchard, open space to play, etc.

B – narrow piece of land on which trees have been planted by the current landowner

C – area features long grass, a few trees/bushes, and a natural (seasonal) pond. It could form a clearing at the end of the woodland trail

Woodland

D – woodland planting, of approximately 3.5 acres, would be native, predominantly deciduous trees, and a very small percentage of coniferous trees. Within the woodland area, 80% of the land would be planted, with 20% being 'open space' in the form of paths & clearings

Creating a woodland is a long-term project. Photographs on page 15 indicate the likely appearance of a woodland in its first 18 years, and information about long-term woodland management is available in appendix 4.

Initially, for the first 3-5 years, the young trees would need to be carefully protected, possibly even by fencing, to ensure that they grow successfully. However, access through the woodland would still be provided via clear paths until the trees are properly established.

The path through the woodland shows some wider sections. These would be created to form 'play-bys' – places along the route where there is space to install natural play features - for examples, see pages 15 & 21.

What will the benefits be?

As the following message from a local resident makes clear, there are many wide-ranging benefits of the project:

'The benefits of easy access to green space span across the generations; the fantastic young people in GS desperately need access to outside space to safely explore and play and develop their independence. It hardly needs stating but the physical and mental health benefits are huge...

...For adults a community space where people can connect informally will help address the loneliness and isolation inherent in a semi-rural community.

Exercise equipment, community veg garden, or just a place to sit, GS really needs a community focal point.'

Other benefits will include;

- Creation of 3 to 4 acres of new woodland in line with current political/social policies: for physical and mental wellbeing and quality of life, and contributing to carbon capture
- Encouraging people to be active and lead healthier lifestyles
- Developing our sense of community by bringing people together and creating emotional ownership of the local area
- Creating opportunities for local volunteering
- Providing an outside space for our young people to safely explore and play.
- Linking with the local footpath network, including the Millennium Greenway way leading to Chester and beyond into North Wales
- Encouraging people from the wider area to see Guilden Sutton as a 'destination' for recreational walks and rides, with the knock-on benefits this could bring to local businesses such as the village shop, the Bird in Hand, and Meadow Lea Café

Stakeholders

1. Local residents

Local residents are the primary stakeholders. For the project to be successful and to have long-term sustainability, it must belong to, engage and be valued by the local community.

Public engagement to date has included:

- Stands at local fete and village events
- Leaflet drop to every household in the parish
- Launch meeting attended by over 110 local residents
- Supporters mailing list - 120 households to date
- Design project with local primary school (see website)
- Parish Council consultation Jan 2019
- Facebook group of 50 members
- Green Space website – number of hits average around 50/day
- Parish Council consultation asking for Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) approval resulting in a spike in the website hit rate (from 50 to 1361/day)
- Info on the Parish Council website and Facebook page

The response of the local community has been overwhelmingly positive. Attendance at the launch meeting was well above the average for village meetings of this type (www.gsgreenspace.org.uk/docs/Launch_event.pdf). Feedback in consultations has been strongly in favour, with just one or two concerns or negative comments being received on each occasion, versus the high numbers of positive responses.

2. Guilden Sutton Green Space (GSGS)

Guilden Sutton Green Space is a charity registered with HMRC and with Companies House. Its charitable objectives are:

- (a) to promote for the benefit of the residents of Guilden Sutton Parish (including Pipers Ash) and the neighbouring area the provision of facilities for recreation and leisure time occupation for all residents in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the conditions of life of the said residents, in particular, but not exclusively, by securing, developing and managing green space with open public access; and
- (b) to advance the education of the public in land management, wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

Since its formation in July 2018, a relatively small group of people has worked hard to drive the project and bring it to this stage.

Going forward:

- GSGS anticipates continuing and widening community engagement through public events and consultation, through links with the primary school and other local educational and recreational groups and by seeking support from local businesses, etc.
- GSGS anticipates reviewing our steering group and membership structures to ensure that these are fit for purpose for the next phase of the project: it will soon be time to involve a much wider membership of the local community in shaping and creating the green space that they would like to see.
- Once the land is in community ownership, it is proposed to launch a publicity and fundraising campaign - within the local community, via grant applications and by seeking sponsorship.

3. Guilden Sutton Parish Council (GSPC)

Parish councils have a variety of powers and duties, all of which impact directly on the community (www.localgov.co.uk). Of potential relevance to this project these include: Recreation – provision of recreation grounds, public walkways, pleasure grounds, open spaces, village greens, gymnasiums, playing fields, holiday camps and boating ponds; Allotments; Rights of Way – footpath and bridleway maintenance; Neighbourhood Planning.

The Parish Council in Guilden Sutton has, over several years, recognised the need for local recreational space. It has set aside reserves, and has sought opportunities to purchase land for this purpose.

The Parish Council has already supported the development of the Green Space project in several ways, for example by approving the inclusion of Section 106 monies, allocating money from parish reserves, and funding a report from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

They have recently formed a joint working group with Guilden Sutton Green Space and Guilden Sutton Community Association that has been:

- a) researching the feasibility of achieving full community funding for the land purchase and some initial costs, via a loan from the Public Works Loan Board. This would complete a funding package for the full site to be purchased. Repayment of the loan would be via the parish precept over a 20-year period. The loan would be repaid collectively, by the current and future local community i.e. the people who will benefit most from the new green space – see Appendix 3, Public Works Loan Board Calculations
- b) exploring how the future ownership and management of the site might best be organised – see Section 2, Green Space Proposals, Proposals A and B.

4. Guilden Sutton Community Association (GSCA)

Guilden Sutton Community Association is a charity, set up in 1980 with two stated objectives:

1. To promote the benefit of the inhabitants of Guilden Sutton, Pipers Ash and the neighbourhood.....to advance education and to provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation and leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life of the said inhabitants and to provide facilities for the social welfare, recreation or leisure time occupations of those inhabitants.
2. To establish or to secure the establishment of a village hall. A Village Hall for activities promoted by the Association.

Both of these objectives have been and remain the centre around which the Association is run.

GSCA is a well-known organisation with the local community. It has a clear structure and a proven track record - having fundraised, planned, built and successfully managed the village hall. GSCA runs the village lottery, organises village social events including the annual fete, and prints a village newsletter, The Marigold, three times a year.

GSCA's objectives are aligned closely with those of GSGS, and GSCA has already provided valuable support to the Green Space work through use of rooms at the village hall and temporary use of the Community Association's banking facilities.

There may be potential for future joint working between GSCA and GSGS, on this or other projects.

5. Mersey Forest Project

The Mersey Forest (MF) is a growing network of woodlands and green spaces across Cheshire and Merseyside (www.merseyforest.org.uk). It is the largest of 12 Community Forests designated in the 1990's as a focus for long term tree planting and forms part of the Northern Forest project.

The Mersey Forest Project channels woodland funding from multiple sources. Guilden Sutton Green Space will receive a contribution to the planting of up to 4 acres of new woodland. The Mersey Forest Project support will include funding, design, advice and practical planting support. The new woodland will be registered as woodland with the Forestry Commission (and therefore could be subject to future claw-backs in the event of it being removed).

6. Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC)

Cheshire West and Chester Council is the Local Authority responsible for a wide range of services including: planning; leisure, parks and events; streets and open spaces; health and social care.

GSGS has drawn advice and support from the following groups and individuals:

- Elected Representative – The elected representative for Gowy Rural Villages is Councillor Margaret Parker. Cllr Parker is fully supportive of the project. She has offered advice, made enquiries and also allocated funds from her Member's Budget which was used to finance the launch event in November 2018.
- Localities Team – The localities team have offered advice and support in relation to possible funding sources, land ownership and designation, and other issues relating to local green space.

Planning department – GSGS has liaised closely with planning officers in respect of the Section 106 funding which has been allocated to the project.

6. Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC)

Documents and policies of particular relevance include:

- The THRIVE objectives – the project supports all three outcomes: Thriving Communities, Thriving Residents, and Thriving Economy.
- The 2016-2030 Local Play Strategy indicates a lack of youth play provision in Guilden Sutton.
- Climate Emergency – CWAC recently declared a climate emergency, and is setting up a cross-party working group to help tackle climate change.

Other Consultees

GSGS has consulted the following organisations:

- CWAC Planning Department – Pre-application advice on Change of Use of proposed site
- Cadent/National Grid – Advice relating to gas pipeline running beneath proposed site: planting restrictions, access requirements, exact location-marking, specification of pipeline
- Health and Safety Executive – Advice relating to land use within consultation distance of gas pipeline: Pre-application report
- Landowners – advice re. nature and condition of land, drainage, etc.

Developing a Green Space for the Community



Year 0



Year 1



Year 5



Year 10



Year 18



Forever

2 Green Space Proposals

A purchase proposal is required by Rostons, the Land Agent, by 24th July.

All land purchased to remain open to the public for the purpose of recreational and amenity use.

Proposal A

Land Purchase

- GSPC purchase the total area of 8.34 acres, facilitated by GSGS; GSGS to provide contacts and introductions and liaise as required in order to facilitate the purchase being actioned by GSPC.
- Financial information can be found in **Appendix 1**
- The initial budget for the land purchase includes an allowance of £15K for tree safety checks, main access via a suitable gate, ground preparation and woodland planting (essential as it is a condition of the Mersey Forest funding). These are the minimum costs required to open the site.

Site Development

- On completion of purchase, GSPC to lease around 6 acres of the site to GSGS on a long-term basis for a peppercorn rent of £1
- For proposed terms of lease, please see below
- Area to be leased - Subject to final landscape drawings, an indicative area is shown in green (Area 1) on the following plan



- GSGS to develop Area 1 as follows:
 - Within the terms of their lease, GSGS would take responsibility for developing this area in line with the vision outlined above: for example including tree-planting, paths, natural play, wildlife habitats, creating wild-flower areas, etc.
 - GSGS would operate independently from GSPC in developing and managing area 1
 - As stated above, a sum of £15K forms part of the land purchase budget in order to carry out essential works immediately after the land is purchased
 - Substantial further funding will be needed for the type of green space we hope to create, for example to include: signage, path treatments, fencing (to protect young trees), play features, seating, habitat

improvements, etc. (The cost of woodland maintenance in particular, although relatively low in the long term is much higher during the first 5 years). We propose that the primary source of funding for these items would be through fundraising.

- GSGS consider that community fundraising is particularly suited to raising funds for development and one-off projects; it is not suited to providing ongoing routine maintenance costs. It will not be sustainable to rely year-on-year on community fundraising to cover the routine maintenance costs of the site.

- As GSGS will not have any ongoing source of income to pay for routine maintenance, it is proposed that ongoing maintenance be funded by the parishioners, via the parish precept. Further work is required to specify this cost, but an indicative figure would be around £650 per acre per annum – this being transferred to GSGS annually on behalf of local residents. GSGS would operate an 'open book' financial policy, where all accounts are shared with GSPC, and would return any unused funds at the end of each financial year. (This funding arrangement is in line with equivalent schemes in Christleton and Tarvin, where funding of c £1300 per acre is transferred to cover the cost of maintaining recreation grounds - these having higher maintenance needs than the proposed woodland, hence the higher cost).

- There are several maintenance items where economies of scale are likely to be achieved through delivery of services across the full site, and these will need to be explored further. They include, for example, bins and bin emptying, grass cutting and hedgerow maintenance.

- Area 2 – Development and funding by GSPC. GSGS would be able to provide support with development if required, but will initially need to prioritise the development of area 1.

Long-term Management

Area 1 – managed by GSGS, supported by ongoing annual financial contribution from GSPC, as outlined above.

Area 2 – managed by GSPC

Proposal B

1 Land Purchase

- GSGS purchase the rear field, of 4.64 acres, together with:
 - a. permanent right of access to the rear field, via the front field
 - b. an option to purchase the front field by 2020 (or 2021 subject to further negotiations), and the right to transfer that option to another organisation (for example GSPC) should they wish to purchase the land within that timescale
- Financial information can be found in **Appendix 2**
- The initial budget for the land purchase includes an allowance of £12K for tree safety checks, main access via a suitable gate, ground preparation and woodland planting (which is essential because it is a condition of the Mersey Forest funding). These are the minimum costs required to 'open' the site for public use.



2 Site Development

2a Rear field

- GSGS would develop this field in line with their vision outlined above; for example including tree-planting, access paths, natural play provision, wildlife habitats, creating wild-flower areas, etc.
- A sum of £12K forms part of the land purchase budget in order to carry out essential works immediately after the land is purchased.
- Substantial further funding will be needed to create the type of design indicated above, including signage, possible path treatments, fencing (to protect young trees), play features, seating, habitat improvements, etc. (The cost of woodland maintenance in particular, although relatively low in the long term is much higher during the first 5 years). We propose that the primary source of funding for these items would be through fund-raising.
- GSGS consider that community fundraising is particularly suited to raising funds for development and one-off projects; it is not suited to providing ongoing routine maintenance costs. It will not be sustainable to rely year-on-year on community fund-raising to cover the routine maintenance costs of the site.
- As GSGS will not have any ongoing source of income to pay for routine maintenance, it is proposed that ongoing maintenance be funded, by the parishioners, via the parish precept. Further work is required to specify this cost, but an indicative figure would be £650 per acre per annum – this being transferred to GSGS annually on behalf of local residents. GSGS would operate an 'open book' financial policy, where all accounts are shared with GSPC, and would return any unused funds at the end of each financial year. (This funding arrangement is in line with equivalent schemes in Christleton and Tarvin, where funding of c £1300 per acre is transferred to cover the cost of maintaining recreation grounds - these having higher maintenance needs than the proposed woodland, hence the higher cost).

2b Front field

To be confirmed at a later date, subject to purchase arrangements.

3 Long-term Management

Rear field – managed by GSGS, supported by ongoing annual financial contribution from GSPC, as outlined above.

Front field – To be confirmed at a later date, subject to purchase arrangements.



Appendix 1

Proposal A - Project cost estimates, and funding, as at 8/7/19

Purchase of both fields in a single transaction

Project costs

Estimated purchase cost (including fees and set-up costs)	£117,500
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Funding

Section 106 funding	£24,000
Mersey Forest Grant *	£27,000
Community contribution, via Parish Council – reserves *	£66,500
TOTAL	£117,500

* Figures are subject to final layout plans, land negotiation and parish council decisions

Appendix 2

Proposal B - Project cost estimates, and funding, as at 8/7/19

Purchase of the rear field ONLY for tree planting and leisure

Project costs

Estimated purchase cost (including fees and set-up costs)	£70,600
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Funding

Section 106 funding	£24,000
Mersey Forest Grant *	£20,000
Funding shortfall – fundraising, loan, crowd-funding *	£27,000
TOTAL	£71,000

* Figures are subject to final layout plans, land negotiation and parish council decisions

Anticipated costs of front field (purchase only) during option period ie before April 2020

Estimated purchase cost (including fees)	£50,600
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Appendix 3

Indicative PWLB calculations

<i>Open space acres</i>	<i>Woodland, acre</i>	<i>No planting zone of 1.85 acres plus boundary areas</i>	<i>£106, £</i>	<i>Mersey Forest, £</i>	<i>GSPC PWLB loan</i>	<i>Repayment per annum over 20 years, £</i>	<i>Repayment per annum over 20 years, £</i>	<i>Project balance, £</i>	<i>Balance with additional £10K from reserves</i>	<i>Balance with additional £18K from reserves</i>
2.25	3.6	2.49	24000	27000	60000	3627	5.36	-7000	3000	11000
			24000	27000	50000	3022	4.46	-17000	-7000	1000

Appendix 4

Long term woodland management

From year five onwards the trees will require little annual maintenance, but associated paths or visitor features may require continued attention.

A tree should survive and flourish without pruning; however, formative pruning may improve its form and produce better timber in the long term, if this is one of your objectives. If trees are snapped off, singling of leaders in any re-growth might be necessary.

Tree shelters, stakes and tree ties should be removed when they are no longer needed for support and protection. Over time blocks of trees will thin naturally or can be thinned manually to leave one or two specimens of each species in a block. At around year 15-20, trees can be thinned to open up dense stands and let more light on to the woodland floor.

Log piles can be created to encourage dead-wood insects and other wildlife, while income can be generated by selling the wood for firewood or stakes.

Appendix 5

Gas Pipeline

A gas main runs beneath the site, roughly parallel to the Green Lane Bridleway, and approximately 7 metres from the field boundary. The pipeline has implications in terms of access (for maintenance), planting, and public safety.

- Access - The field is subject to an easement of 6 metres on either side of the pipeline, in order to allow maintenance access in the future.
- Planting - Planting restrictions apply in the vicinity of the pipeline. Detailed information has been provided by Cadent, and will be followed in the woodland planting, where certain species carry different restrictions, based on the extent and depth of root growth.
- Public Safety - As part of the application process to change the use of the fields from Agriculture to Public Open Space, the planning department at CWAC is obliged to consult the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in relation to public safety in the proximity of the pipeline.
- A full review of the site has been carried out by the HSE. The outcome of the review is that, subject to certain conditions (relating to the precise location of public facilities such as play equipment, allotments, picnic areas), the HSE does not have any objection to the change of use of the fields to outdoor amenity space.

Appendix 6

Site details

The site (both fields) comprises cultivated pasture land and has been used in the past for grazing livestock (horses) and cropping grassland as hay. Both fields are bordered on all sides by mature hedgerow interspersed with occasional mature oak and ash trees. There is a gated access to the front field via a small lane (ownership?) and the rear field has three gated access points leading into each of the adjacent fields to the south and east. Both fields are bordered along their North West flank by the Green Lane restricted bridleway which contains some of the trees and hedgerow of the fields in question. A drainage ditch for the field area extends along the whole length of the Public bridleway. Three access points are proposed from the bridleway into the fields. This will provide a useful link with the footpath, bridleway and Greenway network in the locality.

Soil

The soil is classified as Soilscape 18 according to the Cranfield Institute for soil classification (www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes/index.cfm) ie Slowly permeable, seasonally wet, slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clay soils. The soil type gives rise to seasonally wet pasture and woodland habitats.

Drainage

Via ditches which will require occasional maintenance.

Acknowledgements

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- Guilden Sutton Community Association
- Guilden Sutton Parish Council
- Cllr Margaret Parker
- The children and staff of GS primary school
- Nikki Hills, landscape architect
- John Daines, Tarvin Woodland Trust
- Chris Matheson MP

Useful Links

Mersey Forest www.merseyforest.org.uk

Community Woodland www.communitywoodland.org

Woodland Trust www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

More Trees More Good www.sitesplus.co.uk/user_docs/1140/File/creating-small-scale-native-woodland.pdf

Wychwood Project www.wychwoodproject.org

Smallwoods <http://smallwoods.org.uk>

The Land trust <https://thelandtrust.org.uk>

Northern Forest www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2018/01/new-northern-forest/

Landlife wildflowers www.wildflower.co.uk