

Culm Garden Village Stakeholder Forum

Notes of meeting held on 25 November 2020 via Zoom

Country Park

1. Welcome and introductions

The purpose of the workshop was to explore the potential location, extent, and scope of the Country Park, in the broad area to the north. The early exploration of ideas will allow us to ensure the Country Park is guided by locally led ideas. This will ultimately allow us to create a set of working principles to guide further design work.

2. Presentation

The Culm Garden Village project team gave a presentation covering purpose of the purpose of the session, a summary of previous thinking, some inspirational examples, and a virtual site visit (see slides on the Culm Garden Village website: <https://culmgardenvillage.co.uk/decisions/>).

A discussion took place on the presentation materials:

- a. The area is already popular with local people for swimming and picnics in the summer, although there is no official public access to the site.
- b. From a wildlife perspective, the river habitats are poor and the fields have little wildlife value at present. There is considerable scope to increase the value of the habitats.
- c. The country park will need careful thought and planting to increase its amenity and wildlife interest, although people would value it even as it is now.
- d. Opportunities for small-scale hydroelectric power generation would need to be investigated. Certain mill owners on the Culm are interested in the idea but as yet there is no detail of what might be possible.

3. Interactive whiteboard session

The group were invited to make comments and suggestions on a virtual “whiteboard”, answering the following questions:

- Question 1: Leisure, what should the Country Park include to encourage a healthy and active lifestyle? Where should facilities these be located?
- Question 2: Green and environment, how should we promote green and environmental factors at the Country Park, and what should our priorities be?
- Question 3: Building and Development, what types of development should the Country Park contain?
- Question 4: Movement and Connections, what links are important to provide or enhance?

The whiteboard with all the comments can be viewed on the Culm Garden Village website: <https://culmgardenvillage.co.uk/decisions/>. A high-level summary is provided below.

3.1. Question 1

Respondents to Question 1 provided a range of ideas, many of which supported routes for walking, cycling and wheelers (buggies, wheelchair users and mobility scooters). This was

coupled with a need to link such into wider routes and areas. Inclusivity was raised on numerous notes, outlining the need to ensure routes are provided for all capabilities.

Making the most of nature was expressed through providing spaces for wildlife watching, wild swimming, natural play, a sensory area, and educational trails. The danger of cramming too many activities into the space was highlighted and the need to consider any conflicting ambitions, for example, avoiding lighting to maintain nocturnal spaces was mentioned.

Activities such as water sports, zip wires and outdoor gyms were highlighted, as well as a potential opportunity for Diggerland to be a key gateway into the Country Park.

3.2. Question 2

Responses to Question 2 primarily consisted of creation and conservation – retaining trees, planting tree, providing a mix of habitats, and keeping areas ‘wild’, designated just for wildlife. Integration into the existing landscape and how proposals would be managed sustainably was queried.

Harnessing the River Culm and consideration of water features was raised, including the need to consider how beavers could be a feature of the park.

Sustainable travel to and from the park was encouraged. This linked into a wider question of who the park might be for – is it a space for locals or will people passing through (i.e. travelling down the M5) be encouraged to stop here?

3.3. Question 3

Many different types of development were suggested as potentially suitable within or on the edges of the Country Park – educational facilities/a field study centre, a café, work hubs, toilets, a visitor centre, shelter for outdoor activities, activity hire, outdoor gym, event space and housing that responds to the setting.

That said, some attendees were concerned if the space contained too much development, it would no longer be rural in nature. This was based on the potential to provide housing within the park and if a tourist attraction were provided, the place would no longer be primarily for local people.

The need to provide safe bike parking and a train connection to the mainline was highlighted. Concerns over the provision and management of car parking was raised.

3.4. Question 4

Attendees expressed an interest in providing walking, cycling and potentially horse-riding routes within the Country Park. Adult trim trails, educational routes, maintenance access and loop type networks were suggested.

Sustainable travel to and from the Country Park was highlighted by many, including the provision of links to nearby settlements and communities, the new train station, existing train stations, Cullompton town centre and existing long-distance routes. Water connectivity and bridges over existing infrastructure was suggested too.

The provision of adequate infrastructure to support sustainable travel was conveyed through suggestions of direct non-car links to residential areas and the need to provide electric charging points.

Discussion

Following the interactive session, the group discussed the topics together. Points raised included:

- a. Consideration should be given to providing walking and cycling routes to Killerton/Ashclyst Forest to join up with the facilities being considered within the Clyst Valley Regional Park consultation document: <https://eastdevonnews.co.uk/2020/11/15/consultation-launched-over-masterplan-for-new-clyst-valley-regional-park-in-east-devon/>.
- a. A walking and cycling link should be provided to Willand to connect into the route to Tiverton Parkway and to provide easy access to existing employment site in and around Willand.
- b. Opportunities to link the Garden Village with surrounding communities should be explored.
- c. The Country Park should have a walking route with points of interest for children, for example, a big tree to play on, a slide or roundabout etc.
- d. Horse routes should be kept separate from pedestrian routes.
- e. Consideration should be given to flood management within the Country Park, in consultation with the Environment Agency and the Connecting the Culm team.
- f. Providing space for the river to naturally move and shift is important.
- g. There are opportunities to relate to the landscape setting, e.g. providing orchards and parkland and relating the open space to the built form.
- h. There needs to be adequate facilities such as cafes, toilets, car parking.
- i. Consideration needs to be given to how the park is looked after, e.g. rangers to manage and ensure safety, and funding for long term maintenance.
- j. There are several options for managing and funding, for example a roof tax, governance by an outside organisation, a community interest company, and/or providing revenue generating assets. There is a need to ensure that the community understands how the funds will be raised, including if there is going to be an increase in the precept.
- k. The use of service charges should be considered carefully as some groups would not be able to afford to pay, such as those occupying affordable housing. Following discussions, Tad Pole Garden Village example was provided, where the management costs are affordable.
- l. There could be a local pass, with visitors from outside the area paying a small entrance fee.
- m. Whoever manages the Country Park could also manage all the green links through the Garden Village.
- n. It is important to decide who the Country Park is for: the local community or a wider tourist attraction. Dawlish Country Park at 65 acres had 85,000 visitors in the first 6 months. How the Country Park is developed and managed will affect the type of visitors it attracts. If it is going to be a tourist attraction, it will need more parking and toilets.
- o. Any organisation that takes on the Country Park (e.g. Devon Wildlife Trust or National Trust) will need it to be viable in terms of revenue streams etc. The more visitors it attracts, the more it will cost to manage.
- p. The need for development within the Country Park was questioned, although there was recognition that there is a need to incentivise landowners to provide the land.

4. Next steps

- a. The whiteboard remained open for a further week so that participants could add further comments. Comments were also be accepted by email to the project team.
- b. The slides and whiteboard will be published on the Culm Garden Village website.
- c. There will be further workshops and meetings to take the ideas further, and also to consider other public green spaces in the Garden Village.