

Schoolfield



Location:

An area of approximately 10 acres adjacent to Gallos Brook (the Mill stream) at the north-west of the village settlement. Crossed by two public footpaths, one of which is part of the Oxfordshire Way, the Schoolfield borders the Old School at the western end of North Lane and was used as an informal recreation space for pupils when the School was in operation. There is no vehicular access to the Schoolfield.

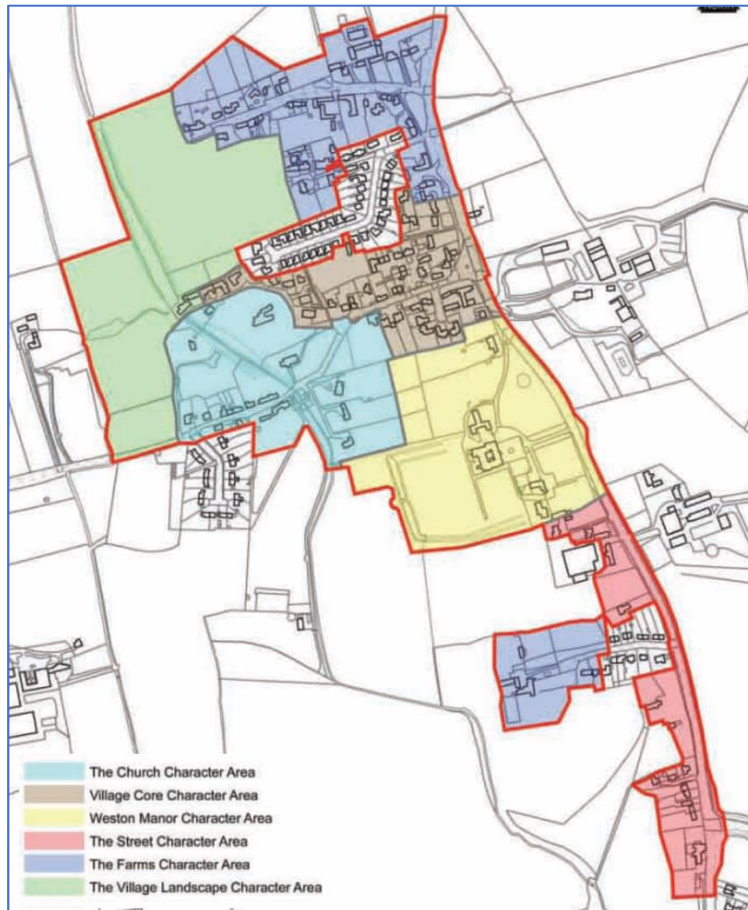
Background:

The land is zoned for agricultural use, but has been recently used for animal grazing. An historic ridge and furrow ploughing pattern can be identified on 2/3 of the field area. The dimensions indicate an early 19th century steam plough pattern probably overlaying an earlier pattern. The remaining area was backfilled as part of the Westland Avenue development.

The Neighbourhood Plan and the Schoolfield:

The Schoolfield is the largest open green space within the Weston on the Green village settlement boundary and forms part of the Village Landscape Character Area identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal 2009, lying adjacent to the northern section of the Farms Character Area of North Lane.

The Plan identifies important views from the village settlement out to rural vistas beyond to the north and west, and the Schoolfield contributes a number of these views, maintaining the context of the village in its rural landscape.



For these reasons, the Schoolfield was designated as a Local Green Space in the Neighbourhood Plan, along with seven other important green areas. Local Green Space designation protects areas of special importance to local communities.



Issues about use:

In the recent past (last 20-30 years), stewardship of the Schoolfield has been poor and the value of the land as a natural source of wildlife biodiversity has waned. Overgrazing has diminished the number of natural flora and consequently much of the insect and bird populations as well. The area has been variably fenced, weed control has been poor and the footpaths have been regularly overgrown or badly eroded on the ridge traverses.

Current situation:

The land is in the current ownership of Lagan Homes (<https://www.lagan-homes.com/>) which initially proposed developing the site for residential properties. A number of iterations of the development proposal have been suggested over several years, but no formal proposal has been forthcoming for planning consideration.

The owners are now interested in selling the property back to the village, either as small parcels of grazing land or as a single piece. A number of villagers have registered an interest in purchasing parcels of land. An appropriate acreage price has not been put forward, but negotiations are possible.

Selling the land in smaller grazing parcels would bring collateral issues of fencing, access, stabling, water and fodder provision which could cause conflict amongst owners and villagers and may need some community management group to collectively oversee the use of the field as a whole.

Proposal:

The Parish Council proposes to register an interest with Lagan Homes in acquiring the Schoolfield as a single purchase of the whole land available. The purpose would be to make the field available to villagers and visitors as a passive recreation space for the appreciation of the rural space. The intention would be to progressively revitalise the area to re-establish native flora and fauna species, thereby enriching the biodiversity and contributing to a biodiversity corridor which connects to neighbouring areas around Bletchingdon, Kirtlington and Otmoor.

The initial registration of interest would be on a no-commitment basis to initiate a discussion with the owners to establish an acceptable price. Opportunities for funding the purchase would be explored: these might include donations, grants, loan. Full due diligence would be undertaken and approval of the Parish Council would be sought at every milestone decision point.

Proposal to the Parish Council: To approve an approach to Lagan Homes by letter, indicating an interest in acquiring the Schoolfield.