

Subject:	Access to green spaces	
From:	Claire Wilding	
Date:	21/3/2022	
For information and decision		
<p>Summary of decisions or actions requested:</p> <p>This note suggests that we work up an application to the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) to improve access to the town's green spaces and provide a noticeboard/sign at Centenary Wood. Councillors are asked to agree to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adopt a general policy of having the least restrictive access points on all our green spaces, taking account of any safety or livestock issues • work up a proposal to improve access to green spaces concentrating on Nine Acres, Ticknell recreation area/Centenary Wood and Blenheim Farm Nature Reserve. 		
<p>Financial implications: None at this stage.</p>		
<p>Communications: None at this stage.</p>		

I've been looking into getting a possible grant from Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) to improve access to our green spaces and also to pay for a new noticeboard for Centenary Wood. TOE asks applicants to put in place the most accessible and non-restrictive access points possible. TOE's first preference is to have a gap (i.e. no gate). Their second preference is a standard gate, and third preference is an accessible kissing gate, which they suggest should only be used when there is livestock in a field.

This is quite different from the situation in Charlbury at the moment, many of our green spaces are accessed by kissing gates even though most do not have livestock. Standard kissing gates are impassable for wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs. They are also difficult for people with restricted mobility or carrying bags/children/kid's bikes.

I'm proposing that we have a general policy of using the least restrictive opening that we can for all green spaces, taking account of course of any issues with livestock or safety. There may be concerns that getting rid of kissing gates could mean our green spaces get damaged by horses, bikes or motorbikes. But we need to weigh this against the need for everyone to be able to use green spaces and our responsibilities under the Equalities Act. We won't be able to change all the town's kissing gates straight away, but we could start making gradual changes.

I gathered some views on where the priorities are for improving access to green spaces. The following areas have been suggested.

Ticknell recreation area/centenary wood: if you are coming from the Slade via Ticknell Lane there is a kissing gate at the western entrance to Ticknell field. This seems like a high priority to change, as it's making it difficult for parents with young children who are trying to access the play park and skate park with pushchairs and children's bikes/scooters. There are other routes in, but they involve a detour through Ticknell Piece. There are other kissing gates around the wood but they are probably lower priority. The land is owned by OCC and they would need to agree any changes.

Blenheim Farm Nature Reserve: not very accessible at present as there's a kissing gate at the western end (needed due to livestock) and steps followed by a kissing gate into centenary wood at the eastern end. Many people squeeze through the gap next to the vehicle gate that leads into centenary wood on the north side of the reserve. It has been suggested that this could be made into an official entrance, with either a wider gap or a pedestrian gate. That would allow pushchairs and less mobile people to access the reserve. It would also help walkers avoid the badger setts and stinging nettles along the official footpath from the wood to the nature reserve. Any changes would need to be agreed by BBOWT (reserve owner) and possibly OCC.

Nine Acres: Nine Acres has a new accessible entrance round the back of the sports and social club. There is a ramp from Enstone Road but it is in poor repair. It is not very accessible at the Enstone crossroads corner, where there is a stile and the jubilee gates which are kept locked. There has been discussion about opening the jubilee gates or installing a new accessible entrance. Safety is an important consideration, with the dangerous crossroads and many children using Nine Acres. At the corner opposite the Scout Hut there is a kissing gate. If this entrance was more accessible it would open up shortcuts across Nine Acres for buggies or people who prefer to avoid the narrow, unlit footpath along the western edge of Nine Acres. It wouldn't really be a wheelchair friendly route unless other changes were made on Nine Acres itself, as there's a steep slope down to that corner.

Wigwell: there are kissing gates at the entrances which are needed due to presence of livestock. We do not own Wigwell so any changes would have to be agreed by Wychwood Trust and Thames Water. The entrance from Nine Acres Lane could possibly be changed to a wheelchair accessible kissing gate if space allows.

Mill Field: The Mill Field already has a wheelchair accessible kissing gate that was recently installed. We've received feedback from wheelchair users that the gravel path can be a barrier to access and that a gap or standard gate would be better than a kissing gate. The gravel path is maintained by Mill Lane residents. We've had some conversations about how we can ensure that it remains accessible for wheelchairs when new gravel is added.

Taking all this into account, I would suggest that the highest priority areas to look at are Nine Acres, centenary wood/ticknell recreation area and Blenheim Farm Nature Reserve. If Councillors agree, can I suggest that I do some more work talking to local groups, land owners and other Councillors and bring back with a more detailed proposal about exactly what changes we should look to include within a grant application. I'd suggest this should include investigating whether we can get grant funding to repair the ramp from Enstone Road into Nine Acres. We can also make a noticeboard for Centenary Wood part of the

grant application. This work can also tie in with work to promote active travel through the LCWIP.