

Subject:	Access to green spaces	
From:	Claire Wilding	
Date:		
For information		
<p>Summary of decisions or actions requested: The Town Council is asked to agree to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consult residents on a number of access improvements as soon as we have agreement of OCC and BBOWT. • put together a formal grant application by October if possible (or January if more time is needed) • Provide up to £1K matched funding towards signage and information boards 		
<p>Financial implications: £1K match funding from the Town Council requested.</p>		
<p>Communications: Once we have feedback from OCC and BBOWT, we can go ahead with public engagement to seek views. We will need to demonstrate community support for the project to get funding.</p>		

Since my previous update to the Town Council, I have written to OCC and BBOWT to seek their views on the proposed access improvements and new noticeboard. At the time of writing I am awaiting their response.

Janet Burroughs, Lisa Wilkinson and I met representatives of the Nine Acres Management Committee to discuss ideas for improving access that had been raised as part of the local transport consultation and in other discussions. Access has already been improved by the new entrance and sloping footpath behind the sports and social club. Wheelchair users can and do use this route to access Nine Acres from Spendlove car park and Nine Acres Lane. However we felt more could be done to improve access for people with disabilities or buggies coming on foot from the main areas of housing.

A detailed note of the ideas that were discussed is at the annex. The conclusions were that we should:

- Seek grant funding for a new accessible pedestrian access off the vehicle access ramp from Enstone Road. This is a more straightforward and practical option than widening the existing ramp or creating a new entrance towards Enstone road crossroads.
- Make Enstone Road and the entrance behind the Sports and Social Club the “official” entrances to Nine Acres, clearly marking them with new signs and information boards. A TOE grant could pay for some of this signage but it is likely to also need some match funding from the Town Council.

- Improve the footpath from Nine Acres Lane to the new entrance behind the sports and social club by cutting back overhanging trees, removing ivy and resurfacing. The clerk will approach OCC in the first instance.
- Look into the likely costs of an all weather track around the perimeter of the Nine Acres football pitches. The grant we are considering applying for is unlikely to cover the full costs of this, but we will explore further.

Next steps

I would like the Council to agree that we can go ahead and consult the community as soon as we have responses from OCC and BBOWT. The consultation would include the changes at Nine Acres listed above as well as the changes around Ticknell Field/Centenary Wood covered in my previous note (unless OCC and BBOWT disagree).

We would aim to complete the application in time for TOE's 2 October deadline. This may not provide adequate time to get all the necessary quotes, in which case we would need to apply in January.

I would also like the Council to agree that we should provide match funding towards the cost of signage and information boards. TOE guidance suggests that signage and information boards should make up no more than 20% of the total grant application. TOE will also look more favourably on our application if we can provide some match funding. I suggest this would be up to £1K, and we can confirm exact figures once we have quotes.

Annex: Review of access to Nine Acres

Access to Nine Acres is located at several different points, although not all allow easy pedestrian access, buggy access or disabled access:

1 The Millenium Gates, and nearby stile

The Millenium Gates are located on the north east corner of Nine Acres, at the Enstone Road crossroads. These gates are currently kept locked so general access is not possible. The stone stile is a short distance away on Enstone Road. This provides access for some, but not for buggies or those who are frail/have disabilities.

Suggestion: gates to be left unlocked or open

Issues:

- Safety concerns, particularly re young children, as exiting via the gates would take them straight out to Enstone Cross Roads. In addition, pedestrians would need to walk close to the edges of a football pitch to reach the main part of Nine Acres, which would not be ideal when training or matches are in progress.

- Practical concerns – the footpath from the gates down past the football pitches is quite narrow in places and uneven, not suitable for wheelchairs/mobility scooters.
- Concern that this would allow access to bikes and could encourage activities that could cause serious damage to the pitches.

Suggestion: install a pedestrian gate in the wall a little further down Enstone Road.

Issues:

- This would be safer than having a main entrance right on the crossroads.
- There is significant shrubbery/tree growth in this area that would need to be removed to allow access.
- There is a more suitable access point further down Enstone Road, which gives more direct access to the play park and community centre.

2 Main Enstone Road entrance

Suggestion: re-configure the access from Enstone Road near the surgery.

This entrance involves 3 access routes:

1 Steps

2 A pedestrian slope, wide enough for buggies, but not currently suitable for mobility scooters/wheelchairs due to narrowness, steep slope and poor condition.

3 Vehicle access with a gate

Re-configuring the step/slope area to allow a wider access to accommodate disabled residents would involve significant work, and so significant cost. One of the retaining walls would have to be removed, soil removed, and then the wall re-built and the new access would need a proper surface.

It would be possible to install a new pedestrian gate to the side of the vehicle gate. Some shrubbery would need to be removed, and some debris (stones from a previous wall). But work involved would be modest. And the existing entrance, which is circa 4 metres from road, has a suitable surface and is not as steep as the pedestrian ramp. This would be a practical, cost-effective solution which provides direct access to the play area and other main areas of activity.

3 Entrance from spendlove car park behind sports and social club

The new accessible entrance between the sports and social club and the tennis courts has made a big improvement to disabled access. A footpath leads directly from the disabled parking at the front of the community centre to the accessible entrance, and this stretch of the path is in good condition. Inside Nine Acres, a new sloping path takes you to the club, pavilion and community centre. No improvements are needed in this area.

4. Entrance from Nine Acres Lane, either via kissing gate or footpath to sports and social club entrance

A recently installed disabled access route from Nine Acres Lane to the footpath running along the west side of Nine Acres has improved access, bypassing the steep steps. The kissing gate in the corner of Nine Acres is not accessible to wheelchairs or buggies. Those who cannot use the kissing gate can walk down the footpath to the accessible entrance by the sports and social club. The footpath is tarmacked so is a good surface. But in some places tree routes are causing tarmac to buckle creating a potential trip hazard. This needs to be addressed. There is also significant branch overhang from trees in neighbouring properties that makes the footpath dark at night and slippery in the winter. The footpath is sufficiently wide, but overgrowth of ivy and other plants makes it seem narrow. Access here is satisfactory if the condition of the footpath can be addressed.

Suggestion: remove kissing gate

- This would not be of great benefit, because beyond the kissing gate there is a steep slope to negotiate. It would take significant work to make this accessible to wheelchairs/those with disabilities, which does not seem cost effective when we have another accessible entrance nearby.

Suggestion: improve footpath from Nine Acres Lane to accessible entrance by sports and social club

- This would seem a better solution as it links up with the existing accessible pathways

- Would need to cut back trees and ivy and resurface the footpath. This work would not be covered by the TOE grant.
- Would also improve the walking route from Nine Acres Lane to the town centre

5. All weather walking/running track

Nine Acres Management Committee are interested in creating a track round the perimeter of the football pitches. We are investigating whether this could be covered by the TOE grant. It is likely that it would be too costly to be covered by this bid and additional funding would be needed.

Conclusion

Having looked at the existing access points and discussed the options, we propose the following solutions to improve access at Nine Acres.

- Bid for grant funding to create a new pedestrian access gate adjacent to the vehicle entrance from Enstone Road, for use by residents with disabilities/pushchairs.
- Improve the condition of the footpath leading from Nine Acres Lane to the accessible entrance behind the sports and social club. This would need to be done by a combination of OCC and the Town Council.
- Establish the Enstone Road and sports and social club entrances as the main entrances to Nine Acres, by installing signage (to be paid for by the TOE grant if possible)
- Make no changes to the Enstone Crossroads entrance or the kissing gate by Nine Acres Lane.