

Lowton East Neighbourhood Development Forum (LENDF)

Contact Email Address: lendf99@gmail.com

Minutes of meeting held on Monday 14 November at Lowton Social Club

Secretary (Chaired the meeting)
Covering Chairperson/Treasurer
Minutes Secretary

Liz Brown (LB)
Irene Thomson (IT)
Gill Turner (GT)

Councillors

Kath Houlton (KH)
Maire Cooper (MC)

Apologies

Deputy Secretary
Councillor

Julie Shawcross (JS)
Edward Houlton (EH)

No. of attendees = 34

1. Welcome and previous minutes

Minutes not read out at meeting, but copies have been sent out by email and posted on the Facebook page and put on the LENDF website.

New visitors and guests were welcomed to the meeting.

2. Update

- Purple crocus bulbs planted on Hesketh Meadow Lane. Thanks to LB and Christine for planting and Alan Percival and the Rotary for providing bulbs. Still awaiting council permission to plant elsewhere.
- Thanks to Sally Walker, Kath Houlton and Lowton Social Club for helping to provide a fabulous Night at the Proms. Also, the Three Towns Choir and Golborne Brass Band for providing quality rousing music! It was a full house; Ed Thwaite would have been proud!
- Storm grids bar 1 (car parked on it) have been cleaned on Hesketh Meadow, more to follow soon on Oaklands. Action: KH to chase up broken grid outside no 12 HML.

3. A580/Newton Road left turn

- There will be a more in-depth meeting about this on Monday 21st Nov at 7pm at the Travel Lodge Conference Room at Lane Head run by LHSRG. We ask affected residents to attend this meeting for an update.
If possible, check your house insurance to see if you have legal cover. If you have your deeds, check for land references.

1. Presentation by James Ridyard

The chairman of the East Leigh Junior Football Club presented details regarding the suggested plans for a permanent new clubhouse on the Meadows, the playing fields behind Hesketh Meadow Lane:

- The Clubhouse plans/drawings shown at the meeting are fresh off the press (and given out with the agenda) **and are just a starting point to generate discussion**. Residents are the

first group to be consulted. The club welcome suggestions from residents and will incorporate feedback where possible.

- The plan is to develop a club house including showers, toilets and changing rooms for male and female players. They would like an office and the facilities to socialise including a kitchen, bar and community room. They want to develop girl's teams for all ages and this process has already begun. They also want to develop open age teams, as some members/players have been playing for 12 years but can no longer play once they reach 19 years old.
- Wigan Athletic will link up with the club in a two way process to provide training towards becoming a professional footballer if exceptional talent is shown.
- The club began leasing the pitches 9 years ago from Wigan Council and have already invested £35,000 to develop and maintain the field/pitches.
- They plan to spend £150,000 over the next 5 years from funding schemes such as Sport England. They currently have on site temporary containers for toilets/changing rooms which use 1000 litres of water every 2 weeks. This water currently has to be transported from site in specialised lorries.
- There are two old apple trees near the current carpark with tree preservation orders on them; the club will take advice on how to proceed with them. The current plans show 89 car parking spaces in total and it is designed to be one way, coming in via the lay-by and out via the existing exit. The turning circle on the map will be used for parents to drop players off so they are not holding up traffic on Hesketh Meadow Lane and the players can alight safely, their cars can then exit via the carpark. The turning circle at the club house will also allow housekeeping and emergency vehicle access.
- They would also use the club as a classroom for theory sessions for players. They also wish it to be used by the club for social activities and to be booked by the wider community. They hope it will be an environmentally friendly building and based around the needs of children. There will be a place to tie push bikes securely.
- Most other football, rugby/cricket clubs have clubhouses with similar facilities.
- In a few years time, (**but not yet**) the club wish to build a 3G/4G pitch with flood lights. This will save them the rental of all evening winter training done elsewhere. Summer evening training is already done at the Meadows.
- **Contact James with suggestions or questions via: Facebook - East Leigh Junior Football Club; or email EastleighjrcChairman@gmail.com**

James then opened the floor to questions regarding the presentation:

Right to public access to the Meadows:

- Public rights of way are a council issue and walkers can use the field.
- Dog walkers will not be stopped from using the field but owners are asked to pick up dog mess at all times. It is a serious health and safety issue if children playing football are fouled in this way. Likewise, if players are anywhere on the field, either training or in matches, then all dogs should be kept on leads. If there are no players anywhere on the field then a dog can run free if safe to do so.
- Rounders, cricket practice and golf practice – would not be a good idea as the club might be liable for any damage.
- Horses – photographs were shown of serious pitch damage caused by horse hooves. The pitch could not be played on for 3 months because of health and safety concerns over the uneven pitch surface causing matches to be postponed. The club do not want horses on the section of the field they rent. The area from the marked bridleway to the Newton Road steps is not rented by the club. The bridleway access across the field to Hesketh Meadow Lane was debated as

- some people thought it was an official bridleway and some people didn't think this was the case. There is an outline of a section of hardcore across the field used currently by some horses which is a disused track for the farmer. It was thought that the Meadows was part of Greenheart.
- If passed through planning and built, the 3G/4G pitch would be open for other clubs to rent. Other sports such as rugby could use it too.
 - Some of the field might eventually be fenced off eg the 3G/4G pitch to protect it. Currently they are thinking only of metal bars similar to the ones at the edge of the carpark (but at waist height)
 - The club have a number of young Lowton players within their membership already as the club have been using the site for 9 years and it's very convenient for these youngsters and their parents. The club have also tried to involve other Lowton young people by offered them free football to try it out. The club liaise with a local charity called WN7, they go out to speak to local young people (who are around the streets/rebellious) to try and get them involved. *(For those with facebook, look at the WN7 Outreach CIC page)*
 - Could the football club be a social assess to the area? Yes, there isn't a sports club in Lowton at present. They previously asked for S106 money from the Council but could not apply due to the threat of HS2. They could try retrospectively but the S106 money has now been allocated although there is still some debate about the councils choice of road alteration.
 - Light Pollution if pitches floodlit? True but this lighting is regulated and will be discussed with the community in a few years time.
 - Rubbish – is it being left behind after matches now? No, the pitches have to be cleaned before and after Saturday match day. James couldn't comment first hand on Sundays games but all managers should check for rubbish before leaving the site. Most rubbish appears to be tipped by a small but persistent number of other field users. Fly tipping near the new builds (mattress, motorbike, blankets) and smashed and empty bottles were reported tonight. Smashed glass bottles are particularly dangerous. Action: Councillors will report the fly tipping.
 - How will they police the clubhouse for vandalism? The clubhouse has been designed with small high windows and has been designed with possible vandalism in mind. There will be roller shutters on doors. If the clubhouse goes ahead then they will have CCTV put up on the building and the whole site where possible.
 - What will happen if club house is build, will there be a trigger clause for the club to get a 25-year lease for the club and fields? Yes.
 - If the clubhouse is built in Lowton, will they keep the East Leigh name or change/add Lowton to the name? Lowton is rapidly losing its identity because of the destruction of its farming community, old halls, grand old houses, pubs and green fields. Residents are extremely concerned that Lowton has become one big housing estate with little reference to its name and heritage. East Leigh football club officially taking over the only large playing field left in Lowton is yet another example of the encroachment of Leigh and Wigan on the village. (The same could be said of Leigh Judo club, housed in the old Lowton Youth Club with some of Lowton's S106 monies) It was noted that the football club was not a housing estate (a big positive) but changing its name to Lowton would go some way to easing the resentment to being swallowed up by bigger towns. James will discuss this with the football team Managers, but some might want to keep the East Leigh name as this is where the club started.
 - This is the largest open access playing field in Lowton and you want to eventually restrict access via fencing, building and a rule book? The Government took over this green space for the war effort and it has been in council hands from the 1950s as open access playing fields. The council have a recent habit of selling any 'surplus' council land for housing to make money. A football club would be a better option than a housing estate. The Club itself has 3 sites and are struggling for space. There is very little space, even in Leigh. The Meadows in Lowton is by far the biggest of their 3 sites and has become their main address over the last 9 years.

- The land for the car park is looked after by Wigan Council. Currently kids mess about here and throw carpark stones at signs and houses, it also looks untidy. The club want the site to be as green as possible and would like to use grid footings for the car park so grass would grow through it. They are trying to get the Council to cut the grass and look after the trees. The grid footings are 2.5 times more expensive than tarmac but the club would prefer the site to allow rainwater to drain away and look more natural. It would also prevent the carpark being used as a skate park! If residents set up a 'friends of the meadows' group then the friends of group might be able to access funding that the football club cannot, and improve the green space further.
- It was suggested that the extended carpark still might not be big enough to prevent poor on-street parking. Would 89 places be enough? It was pointed out that the carpark would have to be extended to incorporate most football related cars before the council would consider putting extra double yellow lines where double parking is currently an issue.
- Will the club make enough money to make it a viable concern?
 - ✓ Leigh East's ground was near B&Q Leigh and was given a lease to use Leigh Sports Village when the pitch was taken for housing. This was the reason for the move.
 - ✓ All roles have to be voluntary, they cannot employ anyone. They can hire outside contractors for items like cutting the grass. They will have to pay gas/electric etc.
 - ✓ If they have a 3G/4G pitch they will save money spent on hiring other clubs pitches.
 - ✓ There are projects from the Football Foundation being rolled out in different areas.
 - ✓ Deliveries to site, waste/recycling will be put in the building regulations/permissions.
 - ✓ The club can 'match fund' volunteers' hours and £76,500 has been calculated this year.
 - ✓ Planner, builders/estimators, accountant – they have club volunteers who can help with these areas.
 - ✓ There are bodies outside the club that guide and support the club on finance and legislation such as 'Club Matters Sport England'.
 - ✓ Could get 80% back/reduction as community asset (Community Association Sports Club)
 - ✓ The club could become its own entity with a £1 liability.
 - ✓ The club could have charity status.
- Who will own the building if the club house is built?
 - ✓ They will find out about this as not sure.
- Will this be a public/private field?
 - ✓ The public cannot be stopped from using the field as it is open access but if they break the law they can be stopped. They want people to be law abiding.
 - ✓ They are trying to educate children and WN7 Outreach CIC are trying to target these children and try to help them.
- Training nights on site – no opposition teams just particular club age groups. Only on match days will there be a lot of vehicles in the area.
 - ✓ Car shares happen already and the club will continue to push multi car shares.
 - ✓ There are always issues around dropping off children in all sites like the Leigh Sports Village. But should this be a reason to put up with it?
- What benefit would the clubhouse be to Lowton?
 - ✓ The large Civic Hall was demolished, only a housing estate replaced it.
 - ✓ The field is in the best condition it has been for 9 years.
 - ✓ The local community could use it for a youth centre, groups, clubs etc. when not in use by the football club.
 - ✓ As a football club they want to understand what local people want from it.
 - ✓ The residents point of view is that they do not want to lose the Lowton Social Club facility due to customers being poached by the new clubhouse. The social club is run

partly by local volunteers who feel as passionately as the football volunteers in the work they do in keeping the social club open.

- ✓ The football club hires other venues for charity nights/parties/presentations and will start using the Lowton Social Club for some of these now they have seen the good quality of the large room at the Lowton Social Club.
- ✓ The club have no intention of taking people away from using Lowton Social Club. Their experience is a lot of people are unable to book facilities in the area for functions (including themselves) and so the clubhouse could be an extra venue for local people.
- ✓ There will be a café for match days so dog walkers and spectators can buy refreshments.
- ✓ If a 3G/4G pitch then could hire out to other groups to use.
- ✓ Some residents stated that their children had already benefited from the club as they were team players and enjoyed this physical exercise and working together with friends. One dad stated that his son was now a football referee because of the club.
- ✓ It will prevent the field becoming yet another housing estate.
- Will the all-weather pitches replace the other pitches in the future?
 - ✓ They will only need 1 pitch for this, mainly for winter training with floodlights.
- Does the club intent to include local schools to recruit new players?
 - ✓ There are already a lot of children in the teams from local schools of all ages. Volunteers work in schools and a lot of it is word of mouth about the club. A manager from the club stated that his team had 40% of Lowton players in his team.
 - ✓ The club will look at liaising with local schools such as J&I (infant and junior school) at the top of Hesketh Meadow Lane. Gilded Hollins, St Catherine's, St Luke's and Lowton West are other local primaries. Local secondary schools include Lowton High and Golborne High school.
- Why are floodlights needed?
 - ✓ They are only needed for training over winter as it goes dark around 16:00. If they can train on their own site, it would save costs of using other sites. Have to train outside work/school hours.
- Noise at night near the new builds was discussed with evening training and evening social activities. The social activities are currently an unknown quantity. Any activity would be much smaller than at the old Civic Hall but the new housing is now closer and the number of houses has doubled in the immediate area.
- Traffic and parking were discussed as above.

What happens next?

- As a club they want to try and understand what the community wants, and work with them but that it was a two way process, and good communication was key.
- The plans are a starting point for discussion for the future and they will now be taken to the Committee, Coaches, Managers and other people/associations for ongoing feedback and suggestions. They cannot see this plan being the final draft.
- The club will send out a survey and request additional ideas.
- The next visit to LENDF will be arranged in the New Year.
- Residents can contact James directly with suggestions or questions via: Facebook - East Leigh Junior Football Club; or email EastleighjrcChairman@gmail.com

Next meeting: Monday 12 December 2022 at 19:30 at Lowton Social Club.