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Ullesthorpe Parish Council

Development of Disused Railway Cutting

SECOND DRAFT PROSPECTUS

September 2021

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PLANS/DRAWINGS

Present Railway Cutting
Zone Overlay
Proposed Railway Cutting development
Proposed Platform configuration - graphic
Proposed Platform configuration - schematic
Photographs (taken in March 2021) - 8

Site

See Plans and Photographs (taken March 2021)

Nearest Post Code: LE17 5BJ

Map Reference: Eastings – 450750

Northings - 287750

The area extends from the bridge at Main Street, Northwards to join the public footpath that follows the old railway line, crossing the golf course.

The railway line was closed in the Beeching era in the 1960's, and has been left fallow and largely untouched since then. It has become very overgrown with pernicious and well-established brambles, nettles, larger weeds, saplings and ivy. Self-sown trees have matured during this time, to be nearly fully grown with a high-level cover. Most of them started out coppiced, and many of them are choked with ivy. None of them are what you might call Specimen. Trees at the top of the cutting, particularly on the West side are poorly rooted, ivy infested and beyond worthwhile saving.

The land was acquired by Ullesthorpe Parish Council (UPC) in 2018 and is owned outright. Some clearance along the path of the old track was carried out in 2019. A cinder track was roughly laid. Ascending steps were also built at the bridge end to allow pedestrian access. A swinging pedestrian gate and limited ranch fencing were installed at the Green Gardens level. Plans to cut a descending track were abandoned on the advice of the contractor that the slope of the cutting would degrade. A certain amount of tree felling was carried out, but the trunks were left more or less where they fell.

The general condition of the ground and area is, frankly, very bad. There is a lot of stone, brick and general rubble on the cutting bank, accompanied in various places by the inevitable fly tipping and general litter.

Access to the area by anything other than foot is problematical. It might be possible to bring wheeled equipment in from the North, by agreement with the owner of Ullesthorpe Court Hotel and Golf Course that we can gain access along their road and pathways. It is most unlikely that heavy equipment could be brought into use.

The Vision

UPC would like to improve the amenity value of the Railway Cutting, to the benefit of the village and its inhabitants. The obvious decision would be to leave it to nature, but that would pass up on an opportunity to create something appealing, useful and appreciated by the villagers.

It is pleasing to see that the area is being used modestly by dog walkers and runners. It is our intention to enhance the area for general amenity, reflection and visual and sensory enjoyment.

The length of the cutting has for convenience been divided up into Zones of roughly 20 metres, which at this stage extend only as far as the sloping Southernmost pedestrian access from Fairway Meadows.

The intention is to commence primarily at Zone D where the heart of the project will be concentrated. The other Zones will be tackled – not necessarily in sequence - at future dates as time and resources allow, but will also require a blueprint plan that will stay relevant in future years.

General Work within the Cutting

Paths and Fencing

The cinder paths need to be edged with tanalised wooden planking. This includes the whole of the trackway from Zone A onwards. It also must include the short track to the roadside on Green Gardens.

The surplus finings can be used to bulk up and compress out the packing in the steps and some retained for similar use in future.

The ranch fencing needs to be extended as far as the Bridge, and to the boundary of the house immediately adjoining the cutting. The fence needs to be robust enough to deter youngsters who are currently sliding and cycling down the steep bank. It is fun for them, but fundamentally dangerous and antisocial.

A planting solution needs to be suggested for the top of the bank in Green Gardens. We would prefer trees or largely non-pruning shrubs

Power and Water

Both will have to be installed on site. The suggested entry point (marked on Plan 3) would be on the top of the bank to the North of the steps in Green Gardens, inside the boundary line. The take-off points of each of the utilities need to be in robust, lockable cabinets.

This has not been researched by UPC. Fortunately, there is a Street light in Green Gardens which may provide a suitable take off point for electricity. Water may well require road excavation. Monopoly suppliers will be Western Power Distribution and Severn Trent.

The routing of the power and water lines are illustrated in the Plans

Security and Lighting

Full height street lighting needs to be installed in the well of the cutting as per the recommended distances, as far as the exit/entry onto Fairway Meadows. We also require buttress lighting alongside the steps. We have specified Noral equipment, which is stylish if expensive. We are open to other suggestions on this.

The street lighting is to be controlled by a timer which a UPC official will set as appropriate. The system must be governed by a photo eye so that the lights only come on at the onset of darkness. Furthermore, the whole system must allow to be overridden by a master switch within the distribution cabinet, again by a UPC official.

Power to the platform will normally be “off” with, again, access to an override switch in the cabinet. Power will never be generally available for use on the platform unless a special or particular event has been arranged.

The water system will normally be left on at all times, primarily to feed a cistern to the ponds. Again, there needs to be an override stopcock for UPC use.

Power Sockets and Tap/Cistern outlets to be recessed in the decking with lockable access covers. Single standardised key for all covers.

Platform and Amphitheatre

See Plans

This will be the centrepiece of the area.

We would like to incorporate rising chairs, tables and a serving/control panel from the floors. Units to be flush with flooring. Suggested platform to have a steel base and stringers so that a conventional decking floor can be built. The decking will have to be faced off in places underneath the platform with 15mm marine plywood, as we cannot have opening hatches to chairs, etc venting directly into the pond. We would also propose a (possibly rising) notice board in appreciation of Terence Muschialli whose bequest helped bring about the opening of the railway cutting. The Notice will also include statutory warnings. We have prepared possible examples of this, but do not have any monopoly about the best way to do this and would welcome alternative and more efficient ideas.

We are specifying tanalised softwood timber and similar treatment for the internal stringers, with the decking layer protected with heavy duty Yacht varnish. We recognise that this will probably require reapplying every 2-3 years, but believe it will give a better finish and prove less resistant to mould and moss than tanalised. The option of inserted anti-slip strips to be considered and advised. The possible use of compound decking instead of wood to be considered and advised.

Note power and water lines for services use. Power rating to be sufficient for floodlighting, audio-visual equipment, food re-heating equipment, hot drinks. We do not require full kitchen facilities, however, as there will be no foul drainage or flushing water supply.

The amphitheatre on the West side of the cutting should allow approximately three tiered rows, or more if practical. We anticipate these being largely constructed and bolstered by cut trunks from trees that have been cut down either recently or as part of the development of the area. Trunks to be secured by stakes, and the style would give seating space only.

The intention is that small musical events, plays, talks and other events can be performed on the platform, addressing the audience on the other side of the cinder track.

Note the two platform bridges across the water strip to the West side of the cinder track. Both of them to be wide enough to park wheelchair for the disabled if necessary.

Pond

Platform to be built out over a pond, roughly as per Plan. This will require a cutting back into the Eastern side of the cutting, by approximately 3 metres. The exposed water should just too wide for anybody to easily cross, even if that doesn't stop the adventurous.

We anticipate partial excavation allowing a maximum depth of 60cm/2 feet, with a sump near the Northernmost corner of the platform for draining by submersible pump. Pond liner to be used, overlaid with Butyl rubber. Butyl to be feathered into the ground and the pondside area made ready for aquatic and semi-aquatic planting. Oxygenating plants to be deployed in the waterways, and small lilies.

Pond to be stocked with a suitable fish – advice considered.

Note the large bore/diameter pipe that must run under the cinder track linking both sides of the water features to maintain an even height of water. This must be at least 30cm in diameter to allow fish to swim through. Nature hopefully will follow up with amphibians, aquatic insects etc, but one of the functions of the fish will be to keep mosquito larvae and pondweed down.

Although there must have been some sort of drainage in the cutting, even if rudimentary, we have no idea what if anything remains. It follows therefore that the ponds will be unpumped, and not fitted with bottom drains. Periodic cleaning out of the ponds will be a maintenance item every 5 or so years.

Plantings

Pond

Small-scale aquatic plantings, i.e., small iris (not flag yellow iris), diorama, primulas. Oxygenating plants. Avoid any bullying plants that will come to dominate.

Zone D

The idea is to afford a panorama of plants for people to enjoy from the platform and, in part, from the amphitheatre.

Close to pond

Small plants

Iris (small), Eremurus, Peonies, Campanula,	Rogersia, Astilbe dicentra, Acanthus	Agapanthus, Hemerocalis	Anemone, Primulas ,Leucanthemum
Eryngium, Stipa, Miscanthus	Hakonechloa, Ferns	Dierama, Crocosmia	Tulips, Fritillaria
Cyclamen(miniature)	Water Lilies	Oxygenating plants	

Middle ground

Cornus, Philadelphus, Acers	Prunus, Cercis, Enkianthus	Berberis, Kolkwitzia	Euonymus Europaeus, Amelanchier
Hamelis, Camelias	Mimulus, Daphne Mezerium	Bulbs: Snowdrops	Bulbs: English Bluebells

Top/Back ground

Oak	Beech		
Magnolia	Catalpa	Davidia	

In every case we are looking for “plant and forget” plants wherever possible. We do not require plants and shrubs that require high maintenance such as annual pruning and control. We also would like a spread of plants which are at their best at different times of the year, both in display and scent.

We would anticipate the West side of the cutting behind and around the amphitheatre to be Rhododendron, Crinodendron and Azaleas.

Plant selection will be a key part of this project and close liaison will be required on this issue. All plants to be staked, labelled and guarded, as required

Arboreal Planning and Planting

Our thinking is that the successful contractor will be required to map out in full all the major trees and features of the whole Cutting, Zones A onwards. This will then set out the under-planting of replacement specimen trees that will be planted in due course, in the anticipation that in, say, 30 years or so the existing trees can be cut down and the new ones will take their place in time and grandeur.

We would favour British stalwarts such as oak, beech, chestnut, willow etc which (hopefully) will not fall prey to disease. We would accept Scot's pine, but do not want a high coniferous content. We particularly like the use of tree cover at Coton Manor, and even more so at the Dorothy Clive Gardens, where – over time – lower branches are pruned to ultimately give high level leaf cover but allowing space and light for underplanting with different specimens.

Trees to be staked, and guarded and securely labelled.

We would like to get the school children of Ullesthorpe Primary School involved in this when the time comes. Each tree to be planted by a school child and their name inscribed on a metal plate. It will be quite an achievement for them to be able to say to their grandchildren 60/70 years on that this great tree was planted by them when they were their age!

Quoting and Contracting

It should be recognised that the successful contractor must prepare working drawings and assessments in the fullest possible detail, and to a standard that will stand the test of time.

It is recognised that this will be chargeable to UPC before the project commences. However, the point to be borne in mind is that this work is taking place within the village Conservation Area and will require formal Planning Approval. We will also be applying to Harborough District Council for the release of Section 106 monies that are owing to the village. Plans and documents need to be of the highest standard to pass scrutiny in official quarters. We will also have to display the plans for local scrutiny by Parishioners, as part of the democratic consultation process.

The usual estimates covering the time required to complete the project, possible starting times etc and itemised costings will be anticipated.