



ASSOCIATES

communications with impact

PEBHAM
Countryside Park
PROJECT

Notes from Community Workshop

20 October 2005

Introduction:

The following are notes documenting the Community Workshop, held from 18.15 to 20.45 on Thursday 20 October 2005. They are being circulated to the community members and councillors who attended and posted on the Pebsham Countryside Park project web site (www.eastsussex.gov.uk/pebsham) for anyone with an interest to view.

This workshop is part of the consultation programme for the development of Pebsham Countryside Park. Undertaken by TK Associates on behalf of East Sussex County, Hastings Borough and Rother District councils, the consultation seeks to understand the attitudes, concerns and aspirations of local people in relation to the proposed creation of a countryside park.



Meeting notes:

1. Opening presentation:

After words of welcome from Tariq Khwaja (TK Associates), Frank Rallings (Rother District Council) began by outlining the Pebsham Countryside Park project. He explained that the landfill site is due to shut in 2008 and that a 10-15 year programme is being created to develop a countryside park in the 600 hectare area between St Leonards, Bexhill and Crowhurst. It is a big area that takes at least six hours to walk around and therefore it poses a great opportunity. At the same time, there are issues of flooding and people may have other concerns. He stressed that the project team wants to listen to local views and ask people what, if any, park development they would like.

One question was raised: whether the boundaries go both sides of the proposed link road. The response was that they do, but that the boundaries shown are only provisional at this stage.

2. Presentation on ideas from other parks:

Simon Woodward from recreational analysts PLB gave a presentation on great examples of other UK country parks. He outlined the impact they have on the surrounding communities and local economies, with a focus on lessons for the Pebsham Countryside Park project. The presentation slides are available to view on the project web site.

3. Group exercises to discuss concerns:

The attendees were split in to teams of four or five and asked to identify and discuss any concerns about the park project. Each group was then asked to prioritise these concerns, with results as follows:



A. Priority concerns

i. Cost:

Who is going to pay for it all?

What about admission charges? The area must be self-funding and cannot become a burden on the community.

In practical terms, how would Rother and Hastings councils get together to run it?

ii. Safety:

The physical safety of women is key. There is a concern about the lack of lighting for all walkers.

iii. Security of the railway

The railway is open with no fencing in some areas and is therefore dangerous.

iv. Parking

Access must be varied and from all directions to avoid problems.

v. The north/south divide within the park

There should be more interaction with no strict division of areas. We need to integrate and get more people to the northern part.

vi. The name

The name 'Pebsham' is a problem as it is so strongly associated with the waste dump. The right name is important for the whole area.

vii. The interface between private landowners and the general public

This needs to be carefully managed.

viii. Local ownership

How would the park relate to the adjacent communities on the Bexhill side, especially Sidley and Pebsham?

ix. No one group can be allowed to dominate

Facilities must be diverse enough to attract all groups of people, including OAPs, children, extreme sports enthusiasts and the disabled. It must be a pull for everyone.

x. Lack of imagination

Trying to please everyone means we will end up with something bland. We must be bold in our plans.

xi. Innovation

The land fill site must be used as an opportunity for the community to learn about new waste ideas.

xii. Size and scale of park

The examples shown in the presentation have all been much smaller parks. We could have bigger management issues here.

xiii. Transport

There is no mention of public transport apart from Glyne Gap station. How will non-drivers get to the park?

xiv. Competition with Bexhill town centre

There is a danger of drawing people away from Bexhill town centre, which is already hard hit.

xv. The environment

The area must be sympathetic to all. It needs some quiet areas and some noisier areas, which should be kept separate.

xvi. Gases from the landfill

We need signs and education to explain that there are no problems from the waste gases.

B. Other concerns

- Will landowners and farmers embrace the project and enhance the planned activities? If not then will they sell their land?
- There is no guarantee of a financial return. Could there possibly be a rent free period to attract companies in?
- We could lose the link to the sea which is a defining asset of the area.
- The waste tip: who will clear up the site and who will pay for this?
- General health and safety issues.
- Noise – model aircraft and motor bikes are a nuisance and could become worse.

- Sign posting is key.
- Mosquitoes can be a problem, especially around the wetlands.
- There is an issue of urban people out of their comfort zone in the countryside.
- Is there any dangerous wildlife to be concerned about e.g. adders?
- There is the danger of spoiling what is currently a beautiful area.

4. Group exercises to discuss ideas and aspirations:



The discussion groups were then asked to identify and discuss ideas and aspirations for the proposed countryside park and to highlight the top priorities.

A. Priority ideas & aspirations

i. An iconic sculpture to symbolise the park

“The Angel of the South”. Something spectacular to symbolise the whole of the park, to act as its logo. Would need to be placed in a prominent position with the best chance of being seen from all directions. Should be created as part of a high profile sculpture competition.

Could be artistic and functional at the same time – e.g. moving and energy generating. This could attract extra funding.

ii. An events programme

A programme incorporating cultural and educational aspects. Could involve competitions, crafts, light shows, mushroom walks and pop concerts.

iii. Activities

Sports including archery (Olympic opportunities).

Large spaces for groups including model aircraft, water sports, a safari park, a music venue and a visitor centre.

An area for specialised sport and uses including extreme sports and adventure play.

Could have a pets' corner to help familiarise children with animals.

iv. Green Gap Art Park

Or a Green Energy Park – something completely self sustaining for the local communities. Somewhere to educate people on environmental issues.

v. A community land trust

This could incorporate skills development and social enterprise, keeping the money in the local area.

vi. Education

For local schools and youth groups.

Could introduce a Junior Rangers scheme – with paid membership involving newsletters, walks and talks by rangers/wardens, by farmers about farming and local produce and about how farming began. Talks could include the waste story, how it can be done better, plus alternative energy. This could be linked with Bexhill and Hastings schools and colleges. It could train up the rangers of the future.

B. Other ideas

- Walking – different areas to suit everyone – women-only, disabled, families etc
- Invite commercial partners to run facilities on a concession basis, or lease areas of land for pre-agreed activities.
- Outdoor activities could be of a level to include the Duke of Edinburgh training, which could be advertised nationally for wider audiences.
- Recycling – we could show how all the junk bought in the local area is disposed of.
- Disused railway – could it be used for mini railway or a small park-and-ride?
- Family-friendly areas, which are properly policed to keep them safe.
- A themed park – possibly different art areas designed by local artists involving schools. We should make use of local artists to create a sculpture park, possibly with links to the De La Warr Pavilion. The sculptures should include temporary exhibitions made from natural materials as well as permanent hard sculpture.
- Wildlife areas could include fishing, reed beds, bat groups and badger watches.



5. Close:

After the group sessions, a question was raised as to whether there are any star ratings available for the park to strive to achieve. Simon Woodward explained that there are Green Flag awards, which are more about quality than facilities.

Tariq Khwaja thanked everyone for attending and contributing their ideas. He explained that notes from the session would be circulated to all who attended and posted on the project web site (www.eastsussex.gov.uk/pebsham) for everyone with an interest to read. He stressed that this web site is the place to watch for the outcome of further sessions as the consultation proceeds.

He explained that additional workshops were to follow involving interest groups and young people. He asked the group if they would encourage their colleagues, friends and neighbours to attend one of the exhibitions set up to run on:

- Saturday 29 October from 9.30 to 17.00 in Hastings Priory Meadow shopping centre;
- Wednesday 9 November from 10.30 to 17.00 in the newly-opened De La Warr Pavilion on Bexhill seafront; and
- Saturday 12 November from 10.00 to 16.00 in Crowhurst Village Hall.

Tariq also explained that questionnaires would be available for anyone to complete on the project web site and in paper form at most local libraries and information points from 7 November.

The meeting closed at 20.45.

Background note:

The Pebsham Countryside Park Project aims to create a high quality, sustainable park in the 600 hectare green space between Hastings, Bexhill and Crowhurst. It is designed to create a recreational area for local people and to attract visitors, thereby helping to regenerate the area.

The project is a collaboration between East Sussex County, Hastings Borough and Rother District councils. The early stages are part-financed by the European Union's ERDF fund, with the project run in partnership with French countryside initiatives in the Lille region and the Somme.



Further information about the project can be found at www.eastsussex.gov.uk/pebsham or by contacting Toni Roberts at troberts@hastings.gov.uk or 01424 451432.

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