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26 Church Street, Church Piece, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham, GL53 8AR

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7th June 2021

Dear Residents of Charlton Kings Parish

Update on the way forward regarding the proposed exercise path on Grange Field

Background and consultation regarding the project

The Charlton Kings Parish Plan 2017 identified the potential to improve Grange Field to create a “village centre” that will provide good facilities for all its residents and be an outside area for exercise and relaxation and a focus for community activity.

To achieve this vision, and to be able to make improvements for the benefit of the whole Charlton Kings community, the Parish Council took on the lease of Grange Field from Cheltenham Borough Council in 2019. Over the last few years, a range of opinions have been gathered from a wide spectrum of residents and professionals as to what these improvements could be and how they might be funded. In October and November 2020, responses to a consultation with residents demonstrated ongoing enthusiasm in the community for the concept of improving Grange Field, along with a range of possible options.

Following this response, the Parish Council started to investigate an all-weather exercise path around the field, particularly targeted at the needs of the more elderly and the youngest. This project is seen as a foundational element of further improvements. In December 2020 there was an unexpected opportunity to acquire a £20,671 community grant from the Gloucestershire County Council “Growing Our Communities” Fund. A successful bid was made based on the findings from the numerous public consultations and surveys, with a starting date of January 2021. A tender process was undertaken and a preferred tender accepted, although no contract has as yet been awarded.

The current situation regarding the proposed exercise path project

It has become clear that, for at least some of the community, and especially for some of those living closest to Grange Field, the plans for a path are causing significant concerns. A virtual meeting was held in February 2021 with local residents who expressed major concerns with litter, dog fouling and anti-social behaviour. The Parish Council understands these concerns and is liaising with Cheltenham Borough Council to try and address these particular issues and is also engaging in, and financially investing in, a Cheltenham-wide partnership project to deliver outreach youth services from an established professional organisation from summer 2021. It is also seeking to hold a meeting with the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioner.

A recent petition shows increased anger and concerns that the exercise path will be used as a racetrack. Three of the Parish Councilors have met with small groups of those most concerned to better understand their concerns. It has become clear to us that this unease is fuelled by a broader concern about the impact that the path might have on issues such as anti-social behaviour, flooding and by a desire to be more closely involved in the project planning process. For some, the need for a path at all is being questioned and a small minority wants no changes or development of the field.

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The way forward regarding the proposed exercise path project

In recognition of these concerns, the Parish Council has decided to pause its plans and reflect on how we proceed. As a Parish Council we want to represent the interests and needs of the whole community. Getting the balance right is hard - but as restrictions ease, we have an opportunity for better community engagement.

The grant that we have been offered by the "Growing Our Communities" Fund is offered against clear "community benefit" criteria and, unless there are exceptional circumstances, must be used within a year from the date of the award (by January 2022) and cannot be reallocated towards other projects. To correct a widely quoted erroneous impression, this money is not from the Parish Precept. Chances of significant funding like this do not come along often, and may not be available to us again, so we want to find an acceptable solution that meets the "community benefit" criteria and takes into consideration the concerns of local residents. Without this we will be obliged to hand the money back. We are all suffering from the aftermath of a year of lock down and the opportunities for activity outdoors is one way of counteracting that anxiety. We are fortunate to have a green space in the centre of our village and we need to maximize its benefit for all.

How residents can be involved – "Friends of Grange Field" and community meeting regarding Grange Field

"Friends of Grange Field"

We need residents to be actively involved and engaged with the project, and to work in partnership with the Parish Council, in order to make Grange Field an asset for the whole community. We have created a Friends of Grange Field group with the aim that it will represent a cross section of the whole community to help inform us and help plan developments. For that to work we also need principles for how we do this together and to be able to debate and achieve compromise, to have mutual respect and represent the whole community from all age groups. The Parish Council can facilitate and enable this work, but local residents must be involved in shaping the project to ensure that it reflects the needs, aspirations and wishes of the community. **If you are interested in becoming a member of the Friends of Grange Field group, please contact clerk@charltonkingsparishcouncil.gov.uk, call 01242 250087 or visit the Parish Office between 10.00 and 2.00 any weekday.**

Community Meeting regarding Grange Field – 7 pm, 6th July 2021, Stanton Hall

We are inviting Parish residents who would like to contribute positive ideas to help us take this project forward to a meeting in the Stanton Hall, Church Piece, Charlton Kings on 6th July 2021 at 7pm. We are hopeful that by the date of the meeting, all COVID-19 restrictions will be lifted. However, if this is not the case, we may need to limit numbers and members of the public would be admitted to the venue on a "first-come, first-served" basis. We will provide a further update nearer to the time of the meeting. **If you are unable to attend the meeting but want to contribute to it, please set out your comments in an email to clerk@charltonkingsparishcouncil.gov.uk, call 01242 250087 or visit the Parish Office between 10.00 and 2.00 any weekday.**

Further information about the project can be found on the Parish Council website at:

<https://www.charltonkingsparishcouncil.gov.uk/grange-field.html> along with answers to Frequently Asked Questions at: <https://www.charltonkingsparishcouncil.gov.uk/grange-field-frequently-asked-qu.html>

With good wishes from

Charlton Kings Parish Council's Grange Field Working Group

Contact: clerk@charltonkingsparishcouncil.gov.uk

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