



Date: 19 December 2018

Email: [dontwreckourrec@outlook.com](mailto:dontwreckourrec@outlook.com)

Dear Wigan Council,

Please find enclosed our response to the Final Draft Standish Neighbourhood Plan.

Don't Wreck Our Rec is a single issue, non-political pressure group. It was set up to oppose proposals to change the use of Standish Recreation Ground on Southlands Avenue.

Also enclosed is one of the documents we submitted during the Regulation 14 consultation on the draft plan. We are resubmitting this as it was not included in the published responses. This was flagged up at the time with Standish Voice but we have had no explanation as to why it was not published or whether it was taken into account when the draft plan was reviewed.

If you require any further information or clarification from me then do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Chair Don't Wreck Our Rec

# Don't Wreck Our Rec



“Standish Rec is not just part of our past, it is part of our present and must be part of our future”

Response to the final draft  
of the Standish  
Neighbourhood Plan

## **Background**

1. Standish Recreation Ground is an area of 0.784 hectares close to the centre of the designated neighbourhood area. It is adjacent to the conservation area and the area designated as the village centre. It is referred to in the plan as Southlands Recreation Ground but is known locally as Standish Recreation Ground or The Rec. It is currently a playing field and was categorised as an outdoor sports facility in the Wigan Borough Open Space, Sport and Recreation Provision and Needs Assessment of February 2017. The Standish Neighbourhood Plan includes a proposal for it to have Local Green Space status (policy OS2) and convert it into an “urban park” (policy SLC2).
2. The land is in the ownership of Wigan Borough Council as a result of being gifted to Standish with Langtree Council in 1923 “for the purpose of a children’s playground”. It has not been used formally by a football club since 2011, but since the final draft plan was written, it has been booked by Standish Panthers Junior Football Club from March to October 2019. The club intend to use it on a similar basis in future years. It has an active “Friends” group who help maintain it and promote community use. It is regularly used for informal play and recreation.
3. The Rec is currently protected as an Asset of Community Value. In the Wigan Borough Playing Pitch Strategy of August 2017 the aim for the Rec pitch was to “protect and enhance”. The strategy identified a number of single pitch sites that were “suitable and feasible to be lost for development”. The Rec was not one of these. The pitch was rated as “poor” quality in the assessment. Wigan Council’s Playing Pitch Strategy makes it clear that pitch quality is greatly influenced by the level of pre-season preparation and regular maintenance. The Rec pitch quality has improved recently with more regular maintenance and will improve further as it is prepared for regular use from March 2019.
4. DWOR support LGS designation but are opposed to the Rec being changed from a playing field into an urban park. This change of use is not aligned with current national and local planning policies and priorities and does not have popular support within the community. This document provides evidence to support this view.

## **National and Local Planning Policies and Priorities**

5. The NPPF policies covering the protection of playing fields are clear; as are the aligned policies of Sport England. The Standish Neighbourhood Plan does not address how creating a park and any subsequent loss of playing pitch capacity will be addressed. The section of the Wigan Playing Pitch Strategy which relates

to the Rec also makes it clear that “should any playing field land be lost that development is able to evidence ability to meet National Planning Policy”. The fact that the Rec pitch has now been booked for use makes this even more critical. The plan should clearly state that any development on the Rec must not detract from the pitch capacity. If it does then the plan must demonstrate how it will comply with the NPPF and Sport England policy on the loss of sports pitches.

6. At para 15.14 the Plan uses the Wigan Borough Open Space, Sport and Recreation Provision and Needs Assessment of February 2017 as evidence for the need to convert the Rec into a park. This paragraph misleads people in the way it has been drafted. It claims the assessment “identifies a shortfall in quality parks and gardens across the borough, including Standish.” This is accurate only in as much as Wigan Borough has a shortage, and Standish is part of Wigan Borough. What the assessment actually says specifically in relation to Standish is “There is a gap in provision in the north however other open space is provided by the semi-natural open space at Former Robin Hill Colliery”. The assessment does not identify or support the need for a park in the centre of Standish.
7. Para 15.14 also seeks to use the assessment to justify the need for a play area on the Rec. The assessment actually says there are already seven high value equipped play areas in Standish and a further nine not equipped. It concludes “There is sufficient catchment coverage from the existing play areas however more small equipped sites are needed to raise the level of provision in the area.” The assessment also points out that there is an unequipped play area at Byley Rise. This is on the Southlands estate and only 0.2 miles from the Rec. It is currently unused. This indicates that either there is no demand for play provision in this location, or if there is, there is a ready-made play area going to waste which is available to be equipped. It could be brought into use to avoid the loss of playing pitch space on the Rec. There is also a large play area on Woodhurst Drive a short walk from the Rec. It has been refurbished and become well used since the plan was first drafted
8. Para 15.19 of the plan sights Wigan Councils Playing Pitch Strategy. It claims the Rec “is one of the pitches identified as not worthy of investment to bring it up to proper playing standard”. It goes on to say, “If it were not protected with Asset of Community Value status, the strategy suggests it could be considered for sale as a development opportunity in the future”. This is a misrepresentation of what the Playing Pitch Strategy says about the Rec. Some single pitch sites were “considered suitable and feasible to be lost for development”, but the Rec is not one of them. The strategy does not “suggest” or make any reference to the Rec being at risk of being sold off.

9. The Wigan pitch strategy is aligned with Park Life and seeks to create multi-pitch hubs, but it also recommends that other pitches of standard or poor quality are prioritised for investment or have improved maintenance regimes to improve their quality and bring them up to standard. We cannot find any reference in the strategy to the Rec being identified as not worthy of investment or improved maintenance.
10. A more worrying distortion of the status of the Rec as a sports pitch was published by Standish Voice on their Facebook page on 24 November 2018 in a post about the Sport, Leisure and Community element of the plan encouraging people to support the plan in the Council Consultation exercise. It read:

*“The Rec playing field has been declared not fit for purpose for clubs by Wigan Council and Sport England and reports into the borough's playing fields suggest it could be sold off for development by the council”.*

This is a serious and irresponsible misrepresentation of the situation during an important consultation exercise. The fact that Wigan Council were in the process of agreeing a deal with Standish Panthers JFC to use the Rec makes it even more concerning. It could have jeopardised the agreement. The statement undermines the credibility of Standish Voice and the Neighbourhood Plan.

11. Policy SLC2 in the plan says a park could provide “community growing areas and/or orchards, sensory wildflower spaces to increase biodiversity and to encourage community activity.” These are all fantastic community activities but are already available locally and should not be at the expense of a sports pitch. In terms of food growing, there are thriving allotments less than 600 yards away run by Standish Community Allotment Society. Plots regularly become available. The most recent Council Assessment from February 2017 shows “There is a major gap to the south and east of the settlement. Further provision should be sought through new development”. So, it is clear there is no shortage in the vicinity of the Rec. The major gap in the south and east of Standish would be better met with food growing in Ashfield Park or the Victoria Pit area.
12. There are examples of community allotment schemes in the borough where the initial surge of interest and volunteers have quickly disappeared leaving the land as a liability that is poorly maintained. Effectively sustaining food growing requires some commitment and infrastructure. This is already in place at the allotment society location. Sadly, there have been recent examples of food planted around Standish but being left to rot or fall onto the pavement unused.

13. Since the plan was first drafted Standish Methodist Church have created a large community garden next to the Rec which runs the full length of one side. This includes biodiverse areas and food growing and it intended to be accessed by other members of the community, particularly Scouts and Guides. Also, since the Final Plan was drafted the Friends of Standish Recreation Ground have been working to maintain and increase biodiversity on the Rec. They are safeguarding over 40 metres of existing mature hedgerow. They recently got local brownies and cubs to plant 50 feet of new hedgerow using native plants supplied by The Woodland Trust. They also have plans to plant wild and meadow flowers around the margins of the field.
14. Policy SLC2 refers to “New informal footpaths within the park”. These would be helpful to improve access but again should not encroach on playing pitch space. The policy mentions “ball games” but makes no reference to a playing pitch. Our view is that the ongoing provision of playing pitch facilities should be the priority. There could be little room for the other proposed uses. The Rec is big enough to accommodate a FA standard 16/17-year-old youth pitch or a slightly smaller FA standard 9 versus 9 pitch. Annex 1 shows a scale diagram of these pitches and how much room they would take. It is clear that space for other uses is limited.

## **Community Consultation**

15. Para 15.16 of the plan claims there is strong community support for a new park. It refers to a consultation in March 2017. This was an exercise during which the community were told for the first time that the Rec could provide a solution to car parking problems in Standish. Standish Voice were proposing a car park be built on the Rec and their preferred option was for a car park and park. All the sophisticated communications during the exercise conveyed the impression that the Rec was “redundant” as a playing field and was at risk of being built on if it was not turned into a park/car park. An anonymous poll was conducted through survey monkey with no audit trail to prevent people voting more than once or prevent votes from outside Standish. People were strongly advised to support the Standish Voice recommendation and not vote to keep the Rec as a playing field. DWOR raised numerous concerns about the exercise with Wigan Council and Lisa Nandy MP. An extract from a letter outlining these is at annex 2.
16. Following the exercise, which lasted three weeks and was closed before most of the community understood what was happening, Standish Voice claimed to have overwhelming support for a car park and park on the Rec. They ran a subsequent exercise in June 2017 presenting the car park and park as a fait accompli and inviting views on how the space for a park could be used. The results of this exercise were not made public until after the draft plan was

published. An analysis of the responses shows over 80% of respondents were opposed to the plans for the Rec. Only 19% made suggestions for how a park could be used.

17. The statutory Regulation 14 consultation process should be auditable, and all submissions should have been published. One of the documents submitted by DWOR was not published. We asked for an explanation, but none was given. The document is attached to the email containing this document. That fact that it was omitted from the published responses raises the question as to whether it was considered as part of the consultation exercise or whether it was ignored.
18. Standish Voice published their responses to the submissions. However, there is no evidence that a quantitative analysis was done. This would have revealed that the vast majority 134 (65%) of the 207 published submissions were concerning the Rec. Of these 93 (69.4%) wanted the Rec to continue in its current use as a playing field. Only 14 responses during the Reg 14 exercise supported the Rec being converted into a park. Scrutiny of these responses shows they were from one of the councillors, his associates, and members of the Standish Voice Committee. There is a real concern that Standish Voice failed to properly analyse the Regulation 14 responses and reflect the outcome in the final draft of the plan. This means that on the issue of the Rec the plan reflects what a handful of people close to Standish Voice want, rather than what the community would like to see. It is clear from a proper analysis that there is little support for a change of use for the Rec. Our analysis of the published Reg 14 consultation responses is attached at annex 3.
19. The consultation responses included a letter from Standish Panthers JFC who made it clear they wanted to make use of the Rec as a playing field and what their likely requirements would be. This is a thriving club with 15 teams and over 180 players. It should have been given considerable weight in forming the final draft of the plan. Standish Panthers have since made a firm booking with Wigan Council. A copy of their letter is at annex 4.

### **Gaps in the Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base**

20. Further evidence of genuine community concern over the Rec was the reaction to the proposals for its future. There is little or no evidence of the scale of the community reaction in the published Evidence Base to support the Neighbourhood Plan which includes a detailed Diary of Plan Preparation. The reaction included:
  - The setting up of two separate protest groups with over 800 active supporters;
  - Several hundred people turning up at Standish Voice meetings usually attended by a handful of people;
  - A bitter feud played out on social media;

- A petition against a car park signed by over 1700 residents submitted to Wigan Council and Standish Voice;
- Parliamentary correspondence on the future of the Rec;
- The expulsion and threatened expulsion from Standish Voice of six members of the DWOR committee.
- Freedom of Information Requests to Wigan Council to get information that should have been made readily available to the community by standish Voice.

21. It is concerning that all this activity appears to have been airbrushed from the process. Much of this would have been unnecessary if the process had been as open and transparent as portrayed, and if there was a culture of listening to the community. Standish Voice tried to pass off the protestors as NIMBYs rather than accepting there was genuine and wide spread concern over a precious community asset that many have an emotional attachment to. Pressing ahead with plans to convert the Rec into an urban park would indicate that the views of a significant proportion of the community are still being ignored.

## **Conclusion**

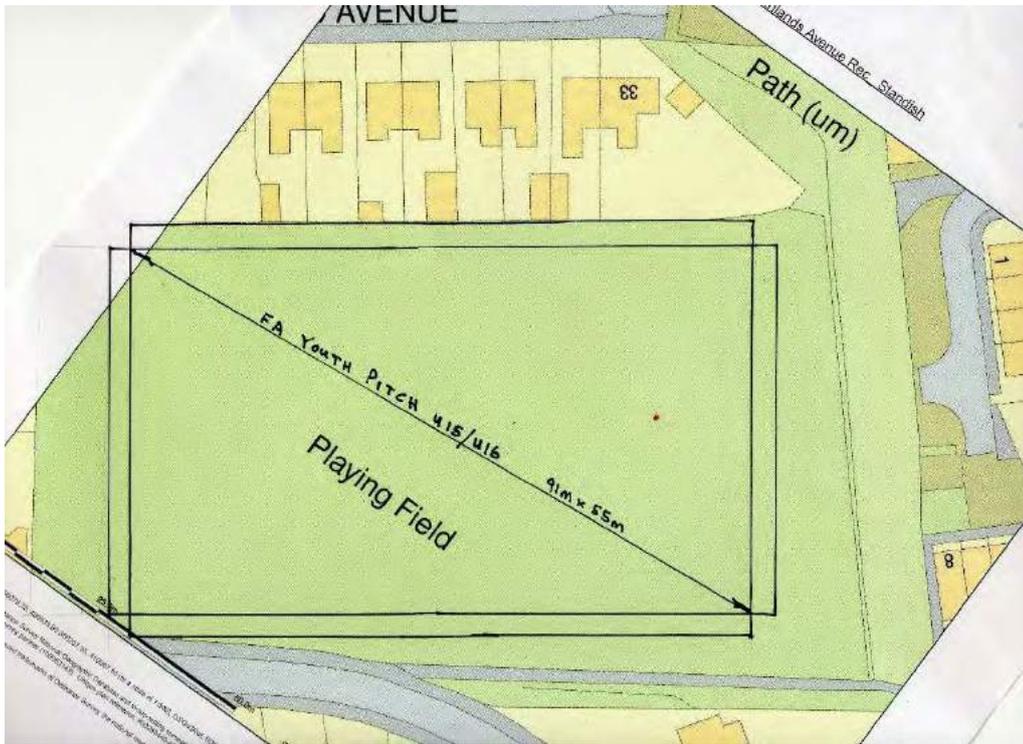
22. The case to turn the Rec into a park was built on the myth that it was “redundant” and not usable by “organised football clubs”. It was also built on the myth that if it was turned into a park it would be protected from development. People were told that if it remained a playing field it would be “lost to the community forever”. We now know that the Rec is usable as a playing pitch and has been booked for that purpose by a major junior football club. The plan proposes that the Rec has LGS status which will give it a high level of protection from inappropriate development. In planning terms parks carry no more protection than playing fields and there are numerous examples across the country of parks being sold for development.
23. There is little justification for a park, or the components of a park described in the Final Draft Plan, based on current planning policies and priorities, and based on Wigan Council’s most recent and relevant assessments of needs.
24. The claim that there is popular support for a park is highly questionable. There was no quantitative analysis of the Regulation 14 consultation responses. As a result, the Final Draft Plan does not reflect the views of the community on the future of the Rec. It has been a recreation ground since 1905 and there is a deep affection within the Standish community for it. It is our belief that most people want it retained as a playing field and public green space.
25. Policy SCL2 should be changed to say the Rec will remain a playing field and the priority will be to ensure it is properly maintained to provide an opportunity for

youth and junior football to be played on a traditional grass pitch. Biodiversity should be increased in the areas around the edge of the playing field without encroaching on pitch space. Any footpaths must not encroach on pitch space.

26. The narrative in this section of the plan must be amended to remove inaccurate and misleading references to the Rec, and inaccurate interpretations of the Wigan Borough Playing Pitch Strategy (September 2017) and the Wigan Borough Open Space, Sport and Recreation Provision and Needs Assessment (February 2017).

**Annex 1**

**Scale drawing of FA 15/16-year-old Youth Pitch on the Rec - with run-off**



**Scale drawing of FA 11/12-year-old Youth 9v9 Pitch on the Rec - with run-off**



## Annex 2

### **Concerns expressed to Wigan Council and Lisa Nandy MP about the initial consultation on the future of Standish Rec**

Our main concerns about how the exercise was run are:

- The consultation was only open for three weeks. A more realistic timescale would have been three months. It takes time for public awareness of an issue to grow, for people to assimilate information, and then to form a view. We asked for the period to be extended but this was refused. In fact, the exercise and voting closed a day earlier than publicised on 26 March.
- The current consultation over the secondary issue of how to use remaining space for a park will be open for over six weeks. More than twice as long as consultation over the primary issue of the future of the Rec.
- Some people found out about the exercise through social media, but the majority were unaware until a leaflet was distributed only 10 days before the exercise closed. Many reported not receiving a leaflet.
- The main channel for the exercise was through a digital vote. There was a facility to make a comment, but not vote, by collecting a form from the library and returning it to the library. We are aware thousands of Standish residents do not use online services, particularly older people. As a result, a disproportionate number of older people and those with disabilities, were disadvantaged or excluded from the exercise. Far more should have been done to reach out to all sections of the community and provide an opportunity for them to give input.
- Standish Voice provided misleading information to people and made a firm recommendation for the car park option rather than presenting balanced factual information and letting people decide. This is covered in more detail below. The information provided no argument against putting a car park on the Rec and there was even a heavy recommendation to vote for a car park immediately above the online voting buttons. The way the question was framed would not pass any test of objectivity and was clearly aimed at achieving a particular outcome.
- Standish shopkeepers and traders are an important part of the community, but they had a disproportionate influence on the consultation by lobbying customers and using social media to campaign for the car park option. When our group formed and started to put counter arguments SV told us we were distorting the exercise and that people should only make their decision on information sourced from them.
- The digital vote was not secure. Multiple voting was possible which led to many votes being discounted by SV including some legitimate votes. Multi-occupancy households were limited to one vote. Votes from outside the UK were discounted but not those from outside Standish.

The information SV gave to people during the exercise was misleading. The most serious examples of this are:

- The Rec was described as redundant and unsuitable for use as a sports pitch. In fact, the Rec is regularly used by children and residents as well as scouts and

brownie groups. There was a Wigan Council assessment done in 2013 that made it clear it could be made suitable for junior sports pitches.

- There were contradictory statements about the number of car places. Up to 80 spaces was proposed and there was reference to using only 20% of the Rec. People were led to believe these two figures were compatible which clearly, they are not. 50 or so places were shown on an indicative plan and the whole car park frequently referred to as small yet at 80 spaces it would be by far the largest public car park in Standish.
- The indicative plan showed walkways to access the car park running along privately-owned land and failed to show any disabled spaces. In fact, there was no reference made to provision for disabled people until we prompted SV to recognise this requirement.
- Threats were made in the leaflet about the Rec being used for housing if its use was not changed. It would be “lost to the community forever”. There is no evidence that the Council would break the restrictive covenant requiring the land to be used as a children's playground, and the Rec qualifies for other forms of protection.
- The traffic impact was described as “minimal” on the Green Lane junction. Given this was the only proposed access route for an up to 80 space car park this cannot be true. The junction is already severely congested at peak times.

Important relevant information that Standish Voice failed to disclose included:

- The Rec was left to the community by a benefactor and is covered by a restrictive covenant that requires it to be used as a children's playground.
- There are other forms of protection available that the Rec would qualify for.
- The level of ongoing usage of the Rec and Council assessment from 2013 that made it clear it could be used for junior pitches.
- The true traffic impact and resultant impact on air quality adjacent to a primary school.

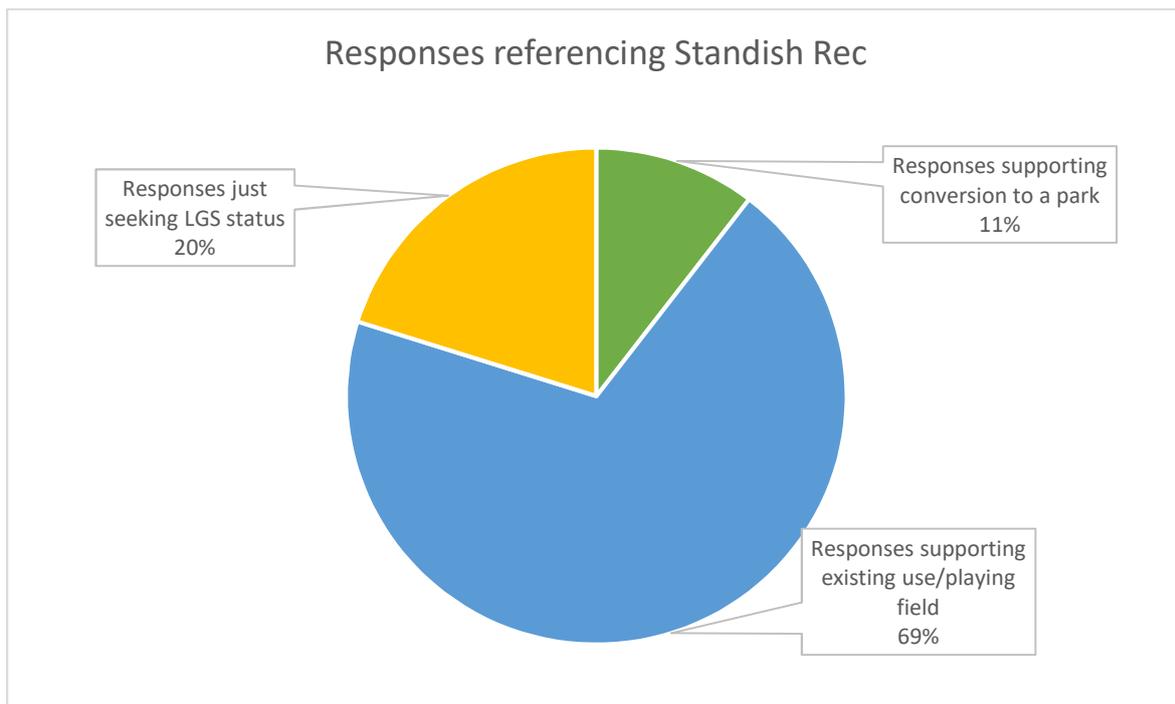
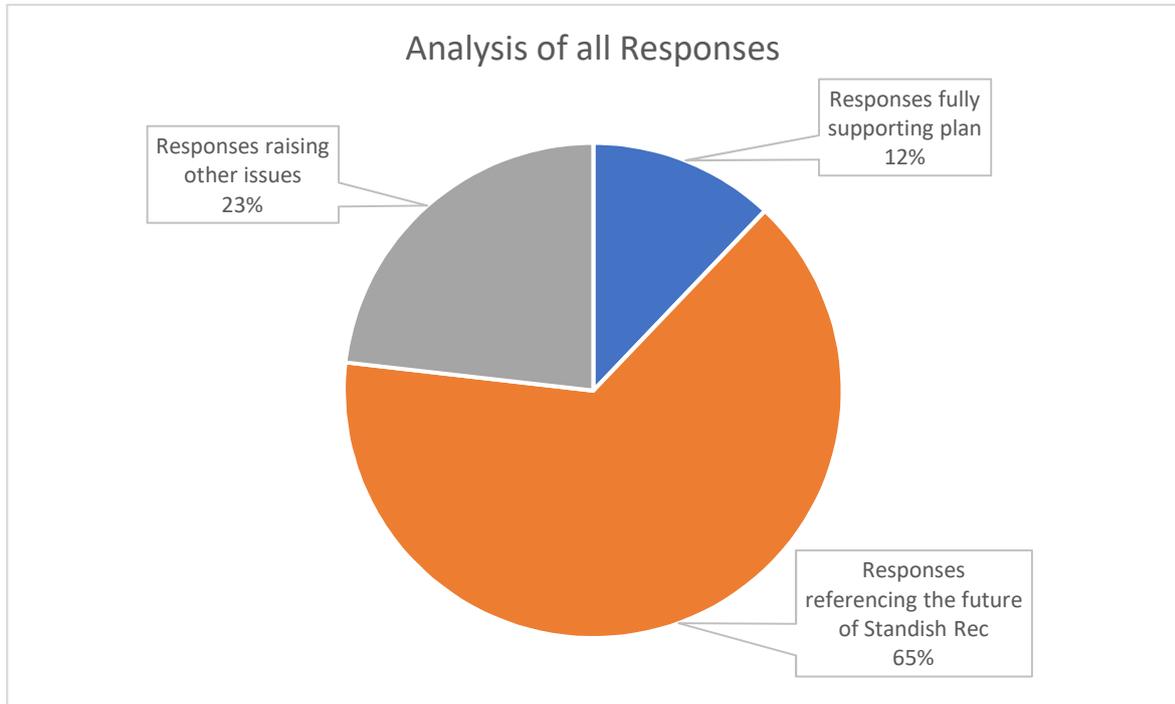
**Annex 3****Standish Draft Neighbourhood Plan – Quantitative Analysis of Regulation 14 Full Consultation Response.****Analysis of all responses**

Content of responses	number	Percentage of total
Responses fully supporting the plan	25	12%
Responses referencing the future of Standish Rec	134	65%
Responses raising other issues	48	23%
Total published responses	207	100%

**Analysis of responses referencing Standish Recreation Ground**

Breakdown of responses referencing Standish Rec	number	Percentage of total
Responses supporting conversion to a park	14	10.4%
Responses supporting existing use/playing field	93	69.4%
Responses just seeking LGS status	27	20.2%
Total responses referencing Standish Rec	134	100%

**Standish Draft Neighbourhood Plan – Quantitative Analysis of Regulation 14 Full Consultation Response.**



**Letter submitted by Standish Panthers JFC during the Regulation 14 consultation period**

To: Standish Voice



Date:08/11/17

Dear Standish Voice,

**Re: Draft Neighbourhood Plan Consultation – Policy 6.2 - Southlands Rec**

As you know we are a thriving and growing Junior Football Club. We have teams ranging from under 7s to under 15s. We currently have over 157 players across 14 teams and those numbers continue to increase. We have a growing number of female players and could be looking to create female teams in the near future.

Our growth means we are constantly reviewing the availability of playing pitches, not only for playing matches but also for training and practice. As part of this we are keen to make sure we maintain our roots in Standish. I am sure I do not need to spell out the benefits to Standish of having a club like ours and the impact it has on the health and wellbeing of young people.

We have seen the proposals and policies in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan concerning Southlands Rec. We are pleased that there is no longer a proposal to put a car park on the Rec which would have reduced the potential area available for pitch sports. We are also pleased to see that there is reference to the possibility of a playing pitch on the ground. Although we notice this is not actually captured in the policy.

Given our growth and the finite availability of pitches in the area we are keen to make use of Southlands Rec. This is most likely to be for training and practice. For us to make regular use of Southlands Rec we need a reasonably well-maintained pitch area. The most important factor for us though is the size of the playing area. We need a pitch to support practice for our full range of teams. It will therefore need to be large enough for under 15s. It is always possible to mark out smaller areas for the younger age groups, but it is not possible to easily expand a playing area if it is

set up for younger age groups. As you are probably aware pitches set up for under 12s and below cannot accommodate 11-a-side.

The ideal size of the playing area would be 100 yards by 60 yards. The addition of a regulation safety run off would increase the total space requirement to 106 yards by 66 yards. We would like to see the provision of a pitch of this size built into the relevant policy for Southlands Rec in the next version of the Neighbourhood Plan.

We can see that the draft plan talks about other uses for Southlands Rec. We believe the number one priority should be the provision of a playing pitch large enough for under 15s youth football.

Standish Panthers is a rarity in that we are experiencing a growth in interest from young people who want to participate in outdoor sports. It is vital that we have the infrastructure we need to support this or any other group that may benefit from the green space, we hope you will take our views onboard and adapt the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

**Standish Panthers JFC**

**Don't Wreck Our Rec**

## Background Information and Body of Evidence

Compiled By: DWOR

30<sup>th</sup> Oct 2017.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND BODY OF EVIDENCE**

### 1. Introduction

Don't wreck Our Rec (DWOR) is a single-issue pressure group concerned about the way Standish Voice (SV) has dealt with a proposal to redevelop Standish Recreation Ground in Southlands Ave (commonly referred to simply as The Rec) under the proposed Neighbourhood Plan.

DWOR believes that the whole of The Rec should continue to be used as a children's playground, including ball games, and protected by Local Green Space designation.

DWOR has over 700 members and raised a verifiable petition with over 1700 signatures, supported by addresses, post codes, email addresses and/or phone numbers, against a car park on The Rec. SV frequently issues statements which claim that DWOR is a small group of residents living the Southlands area near The Rec who don't want change. This is not true. DWOR has members from all over Standish and many of them reside in the outlying area and, specifically, the chair and secretary do not live in the Southlands area.

### 2. Evidence in this Submission

DWOR has tried to put together information that is as accurate as possible. Unfortunately, DWOR has been obstructed by SV which have consistently refused to answer questions that DWOR believes are entirely reasonable. On 25 April 2017 DWOR wrote to the Chair of SV asking for information and below is the letter and SV's unhelpful answer.

#### ***Don't Wreck Our Rec***

*"Dear Gill,*

*I am writing to you on behalf of the Don't Wreck Our Rec group which is supported by several hundred ordinary Standish people. You have previously received emails and written requests for information from members of our group which you have not replied to. Below is a summary of the important questions we have asked and would like to have answered. Could you please reply to the address above preferably within 14 days.*

*The questions relate to what we see as some key facts relating to the Rec issue:*

- Fact 1: The Rec was given as a children's playground (1)*
- Fact 2: 80% think Standish needs more open space (2)*
- Fact 3: 76% think Standish needs more sports facilities (2)*
- Fact 4: 74% think the centre of Standish more parking (2)*
- Fact 5: 73% think the centre of Standish needs a park (2)*
- Fact 6: Wigan Council identified that there is a shortage of junior sports pitches (3)*
- Fact 7: Wigan Council identified that the Rec was a suitable place for 2 junior sports pitches (3)*
- Fact 8: Wigan Council identified that the fund for bringing the Rec up to standard for junior sports pitches was available from the developers (3)*
- Fact 9: A children's playground identified as suitable for junior sports pitches cannot be described as redundant nor inadequate (common sense)*
- Fact 10: The Rec has been used for football matches until recently (personal observation)*

*Sources of information  
(1) Land Registry*

- (2) SV's website  
(3) Wigan Council's "Standish Infrastructure Assessment"

Firstly, questions regarding SV's policy regarding the Rec.

- Question 1: Why did SV concentrate on the need for car parking at the expense of the other needs identified, particularly the need for junior sports facilities?  
Question 2: Why did SV not tell people that the Rec was given by a benefactor for a children's playground?  
Question 3: Why did SV not tell people that Wigan Council had fully funded plans for junior sports pitches on the Rec?  
Question 4: It was known that Wigan Council had fully funded plans for junior sports pitches on land given for that purpose so why did SV not put that option in the recent ballot?  
Question 5: Similarly, why did SV say, "The Rec is seen as an inadequate site for organised team sports"?  
Question 6: Similarly, why did SV say, "there would be increasing pressure to turn this redundant area into a housing development"?  
On the issue of the vote on the 3 options for the Rec, specifically the SurveyMonkey vote.  
Question 7: Were there any independent observers involved in counting votes?  
Question 8: What was the total number of votes for each option cast on SurveyMonkey before any were disallowed?  
Question 9: What is the total number of SurveyMonkey votes rejected for each option?  
Question 10: How was it decided whose votes should be rejected?  
It has been suggested the multiple votes were cast from the same IP address.  
Question 11: Was there a cut-off at a particular number of votes per IP address and if so, what was that number?  
Question 12: Given that there are households with several adults living together, what steps did SV take to ensure that all legitimate votes were counted?  
Question 13: What steps were taken to ensure votes were not counted from outside of the Standish area?

Turning now to the paper votes for the options for the Rec.

- Question 14: What was the total number of paper votes for each option, including those deposited at the library and those collected in shops and businesses shown separately?  
Question 15: Were any votes from these papers included in the total votes cast? If so, how many for each option?  
Question 16: Were any paper votes excluded and if so, what is the total number of votes given for each option that were excluded  
Question 17: If so, what were the grounds of exclusion?

Questions regarding due process in the running of SV.

- Question 18: Has SV expelled anyone from membership and if so, how many people?  
Question 19: Was the decision to expel made by the full committee? If not, who made it and is that person/ people authorised to do so? Please say where that authorisation is recorded.  
Question 20: Were those people who were expelled told the reason?  
Question 21: Does SV have an appeals procedure for those expelled? If so where is it published?  
Question 22: Has SV any proposals to widen its ability to communicate with those in the community who do not use computers? What are those proposals?  
Question 23: Does Standish Voice have a complaints procedure? If so where is it displayed?  
Question 24: How does Standish Voice allow members to present views opposing those of its committee? If so where and how are these views recorded?  
Question 25: Why have the activities of sub-committees not been recorded in the management meeting minutes since 21 June 2016?  
Question 26: Are minutes taken and recorded for sub-committees? If so where are they available for public inspection?  
Question 27: What is the procedure for members having items placed on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting?

I would very much appreciate your early and full reply to these questions. Thank you in anticipation.

Your sincerely,  
Don't Wreck Our Rec

*25 April 2017"*

DWOR consider that the questions were legitimate and deserved a proper reply. The following was received: -  
from SV.



Speaking up for Standish

Don't wreck our Rec

Dear

Thank you for the letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> April 23017. The contents are noted.

1. Questions regarding the policy regarding the Rec.

Standish Voice is looking at a wide and diverse range of issues that have been raised by people across Standish in accordance with the neighbourhood planning process and relevant information will be considered as part of policy development.

2. Questions regarding voting for option 3 and use of Survey Monkey.

A statement is being issued on this matter by Standish Voice.

3. Questions on paper votes for the options for the Rec.

This is addressed in the statement being issued on this matter.

4. Questions regarding due process in the running of SV

Those people whose membership has been rescinded have been written to and SV do not intend to discuss this matter further.

We seek views from people within the NP area and will listen to those views when put in a polite and constructive manner and we have developed consultation processes in accordance with best practise. Members of SV are able to raise matters directly in a variety of ways with the committee and those issues are addressed in the most appropriate way.

Yours sincerely.

Standish Voice Committee.

5/5/17

In an attempt to understand how SV operate, questions were asked by DWOR and residents at monthly public meetings. SV has shown a cavalier disregard for these questions which have gone unanswered.

Furthermore, SV do not publish minutes of their sub-group's meetings. The sub-group meetings are held in private and these meetings must be where decisions are taken because representatives of DWOR have attended every monthly public meeting since April 2017 and no decisions have been taken at the public meetings.

Because of the lack of openness by SV it has been impossible to verify all the information presented in this submission to the highest standard DWOR would have wished.

**DWOR has experienced very real difficulties researching the activities of SV, never-the-less, DWOR still believes sufficient evidence exists to raise genuine doubts about the conduct of SV in respect of proposals contained in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan relating to The Rec.**

### 3. Background

The Rec is an important piece of land in the centre of Standish. It can clearly be seen from the Village Centre Map A4, in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan, that it is the only public open space large enough (0.784 hectares) to be used for public recreation, particularly ball games, in the village centre. All other recreation facilities of suitable size for ball games are on the fringe of the Neighbourhood Plan area. The Unique position of The Rec puts it within walking distance of a large proportion of the residents which is particularly relevant because of the traffic congestion in Standish and the need to reduce car dependency. The public playing fields at Ashfield Park are about 900m from The Rec in a straight line and much further using practical walking routes.

The Rec was given under a covenant in 1923 to Standish UDC as a "Children's Playground" when the Standish Estate was being wound-up. There are records that show that prior to 1923 Standish UDC rented the land from the Standish estate for use as a playground. The Rec was used for children's sports and games throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century including Sports Days for the various schools in Standish.

The Rec is currently used by children for informal ball games throughout the school holidays and on light evenings it is normal to see small groups of children kicking a football or rugby ball. The Rec is used by the local Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorer Scouts for ball games and they check and practice erecting their tents there prior to camps. Two guide companies of Rainbows, Brownies and Guides have also specifically been observed using The Rec for ball games during the spring and summer of 2017. An adult charity football match was held during September 2017.

SV argue, that because The Rec is not used regularly for adult football, another purpose should be found but DWOR believe this is not relevant because it is a children's playground not an adult football ground.

### 4. Proposal for a Car Park on The Rec

In order to understand DWOR's concerns it is necessary to understand that a meeting was held between Wigan Council's Leader and Chief Executive, SV and a number of local traders in January 2016. At that meeting traders expressed concern that their trade was suffering because of a perceived shortage of parking in Standish centre. Further it was suggested that The Rec was underutilised and that it could be used as a car park. The Council Leader and Chief Executive are reported to have offered funding of £150,000 to pay for a car park on The Rec. DWOR finds it implausible that the Leader and Chief Executive would have known that The

Rec was protected by policy CP2 and that it had been given, under a covenant, as a children's playground. Also it is unlikely that the Leader and Chief Executive would have known how much the Rec is actually being used particularly if The Rec had been inaccurately described to them as an unused football ground.

DWOR concedes that The Rec is convenient for a central car park but other sites are equally convenient and The Rec's only unique quality is that it is owned by Wigan Council and is likely be the lowest cost option – DWOR believes that the fact that it is the lowest cost option and owned by the Council is not a valid reason for turning it into a car park.

DWOR considers that some members of SV committee were so "blinded" by the offer of money to fund a car park specifically on The Rec that they did not properly consider the other options which DWOR believe better meet the needs of the residents.

**DWOR poses the question: Was the offer of funding for a car park on The Rec prejudicial to the consultation process regarding the use of this land?**

Arising from the meeting mentioned above SV held meetings and had email correspondence with Wigan Planners about the proposal to put a car park on The Rec. It is important to say that these meeting and emails were confidential, and SV did not disclose what was being discussed to the residents. DWOR obtained copies of some of the emails between SV and the Planners under a FOI request and DWOR believes that the proposal to put a car park on The Rec – the only publicly owned open space in the centre of Standish large enough for ball games etc – should have been made public knowledge at the earliest possible date so that a proper consultation and debate could be held.

**DWOR believes that the following email (obtained under FOI) between (SV vice chair) and Robert Owen (Wigan Planning) shows that SV were aware of the covenant on The Rec and that they were trying to keep the proposal to put a car park on The Rec confidential. DWOR considers that the only likely reason for this secrecy is that SV knew the proposal would be controversial and they did not wish the opposition to have information which would allow time to properly prepare the case against the proposals. The relevant sections are underlined by DWOR.**

*From:*  
*Sent: 27 September 2016 11:19*  
*To: Owen, Robert*  
*Subject: Standish parking*

*Hi Rob,*  
*Thanks for the update at the meeting the other week. I relayed to our committee that things are looking positive and we'd like to thank you and Heather for the hard work you are putting in on this.*  
*Are you any nearer an answer on the question of the covenant on the Rec? Obviously, if this is a major stumbling block we will have to rethink and the deadline for our Neighbourhood Plan is approaching.*  
*On that point, we have, through Locality and DCLG, engaged the services of Aecom to produce a masterplanning/placemaking report for the centre of Standish.*  
*As part of that, we discussed parking with the consultant, Tom Johnson, from Aecom's Manchester office, who visited Standish last week.*  
*Tom is not specifically looking at the parking issue (we obviously have that in hand) but he would like to see the draft diagrams we have for The Rec and Quaker's Place.*  
*He knows this is confidential and only draft solutions at this stage.*  
*Therefore, is it possible to forward me those plans for him?*

*Best wishes, Paul*

**DWOR believes it is reasonable to suspect that the information in the emails was deliberately withheld because SV knew it would be controversial and to prevent the opposition from having time to prepare a case against the proposals.**

**DWOR believes that the above information shows that SV failed to meaningfully consult on the question of putting a car park on The Rec and did not comply with the requirements of Neighbourhood Planning – GOV.UK Consulting-on-and-publishing-a-neighbourhood-plan-or-order. Paragraph: 047 Reference ID: 41-047-20140306, which gives the following advice.**

**What is the role of the wider community in neighbourhood planning?**

**A qualifying body should be inclusive and open in the preparation of the neighbourhood plan or Order and ensure that the wider community.**

- **Is kept fully informed of what is being proposed**
- **Is able to make their views known throughout the process**
- **Has opportunities to be actively involved in shaping the emerging neighbourhood plan or Order**
- **Is made aware of how their views have informed the draft neighbourhood plan or Order**

5. Leaflet – “Future of The Rec”

DWOR believe SV failed to hold what any fair-minded person would call proper consultations about the proposals for The Rec.

On 10 March 2017 a leaflet entitled, ‘Future of The Rec’, was delivered in Southlands Ave on behalf of SV. This was the first indication most residents had that there were any proposals to change the use of The Rec. There was the opportunity to vote for one of three proposals but no opportunity to ask questions, discuss options or to properly debate this matter of vital importance to the people who live in the centre of Standish.

A copy of the leaflet follows.

SV claim that the leaflet was distributed to all homes in the Neighbourhood Plan area – some people dispute that.

SV claim to have given three weeks to respond to the leaflet’s proposals in the leaflet but the leaflets were only distributed in Southlands Ave, the road most affected by the proposal, on the 10 March 2017 just 17 days before the deadline for voting. DWOR did not exist at that time but it subsequently discovered that the leaflets had been delivered in other parts of Standish before that date. Voting was therefore taking place before those most affected even knew about the issue.

**DWOR believe this was a cynical attempt to prevent any opposition to the proposal and to force through the views of SV’s committee without giving a chance for proper debate.**

DWOR believes the leaflet contained confusing, inaccurate, misleading and contradictory statements.

- Right from the start SV refer to the fact The Rec “has not been used by sports clubs for a number of years”. This may be true, but it is not the point. The land was given under a covenant as a children’s playground and it is much used for exactly that purpose a fact which the leaflet does not mention.
- The indicative drawing of the proposal does not even correctly identify the boundary and incorporates adjacent land owned by the Methodist Church making the “land-take” for the car park look less than that actually needed.

- The proposed access road to the car park is shown unrealistically narrow and encroaches on the public footpath on the southern side of The Rec
- The only number of parking spaces actually mentioned in the leaflet is “up to 80” yet elsewhere the leaflet makes the contradictory statement that “Only around 20% of The Rec would be used as car park”. DWOR’s qualified survey has calculated that 80 spaces would need about 40% of The Rec taking into account the access road that would be required.
- The leaflet frequently refers to the proposed car park as small – in the Standish context an 80-space car park cannot be considered small. DWOR believes that it is reasonable to assume this statement is deliberately misleading.

## Question and Answer information

changing facilities and is in a residential area. It is also not the right size for league games. Sports clubs now play elsewhere. We believe a park with a small car park would create an improved recreational facility for the whole community and help to solve the parking problem.

### What would the park look like?

In Standish Voice's Neighbourhood Plan survey, 79% of people strongly agreed or agreed Standish centre needs a park. What the park would consist of would be for discussion with the community, including nearby residents. How the park looks would also depend on the amount of money available over time. However, we think a park with fruit trees and community growing areas linked to Standish in Bloom and Standish Incredible Edible, as well as some children's play provision, would be ideal.

### What happens now?

Standish Voice is carrying out a consultation to see if Standish people want The Rec to be either a park and small car park, to be park only, or to stay as it is. The result of the consultation will become a policy in Standish Neighbourhood Plan, which will be consulted on again before going to a referendum of people in the village. We are asking what you want to do with The Rec, which is a valuable community facility. Our consultation asks - What should happen to The Rec in Standish centre?

- 1. Be turned into a park with a small car park**
- 2. Be turned into a park only**
- 3. Stay as it is**

Standish Voice recommends people vote for option 1, to turn The Rec into a park with a small car park. This would create a new park for our village to benefit shoppers, visitors and nearby residents. It also is the best chance in the foreseeable future to create a car park which the whole village would benefit from.

Standish Voice would also be happy to put option 2 - to turn The Rec into a park - into the Neighbourhood Plan, but this would mean any realistic chance of new public parking in Standish centre is lost.

Standish Voice would not recommend option 3. The Rec is seen as an inadequate site for organised team sports and Standish Voice is concerned that over the lifetime of the Neighbourhood Plan - up to 2030 - there would be increasing pressure to turn this redundant area into a housing development, which would see this site lost to the community for ever.

### How can I take part?

A digital vote has been launched which we want you to take part in and you can also email and post your views to us. The consultation will run until March 27.

Email your views to [standishplanconsultation@gmail.com](mailto:standishplanconsultation@gmail.com) and you will receive a reply to ask you to take part in the digital vote. You can go to the vote directly through our website - [standishvoice.co.uk](http://standishvoice.co.uk) - or via Facebook and Twitter. You can post your views in a consultation box at Standish Library, on Cross Street. You can use computers there to take part in the vote.

### What will happen then?

Standish Voice will analyse and publish the results and the most popular option will become a policy in the Neighbourhood Plan, which will go out for further consultation before being put to a referendum. To change The Rec into a park or park and car park could also need a planning application, which people could also com



## Future of The Rec

Standish Voice wants YOU to decide what happens to The Rec playing field in the centre of Standish. It has not been used by sports clubs for a number of years and Standish Voice believes it should be turned into a village park and small car park.



Standish Voice, your Neighbourhood Forum, is asking for YOUR opinion. Please read this leaflet before you give us your view and vote in our online poll. The vote and your views will be used to decide our policy for The Rec - on Southlands Avenue - in the new Standish Neighbourhood Plan.  To vote, go to [standishvoice.co.uk](http://standishvoice.co.uk)

## Question and Answer information

Standish Voice's consultation showed people want a new park in the centre of the village and the lack of parking in Standish centre is a major concern for many people. We believe turning the playing field into a leafy park with a small car park on part of it, nearest to the village centre, would be good for residents, shoppers, visitors and businesses.



This is how a park and car park could look. The final design would be subject to further consultation. Please read the information in this leaflet, then send your opinion to Standish Voice and vote on whether you want The Rec to become a park and small car park, a park only, or to leave it as it is.

### Is there a parking problem in Standish?

Yes, Standish Voice - the village's Neighbourhood Forum which formed in 2015 to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for Standish - has been approached by residents, visitors, and shop and business owners about the lack of parking in the village centre.

This problem has become worse since Aldi car park's restrictions changed.

The consultation for Standish Neighbourhood Plan asked questions about the village. 74% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed Standish centre needs more parking.

Last January, 1,300 people signed Standish Voice's petition: 'Do You Think Standish Needs More Public Car Parking?' A survey we carried out found ideally there should be up to 150 new parking spaces in the village centre.

### What has Wigan Council agreed to do?

In response, the council and Standish Voice agreed a 12-point plan to improve parking. This included the council pledging to pay for a new public car park and improving existing parking.

### How has this been implemented?

A sub-group, formed by Standish Voice and Wigan Council to look at this issue, held meetings about the parking problem. Access, highways issues, land availability and closeness to shops and other facilities - including schools and Standish Health centre - were taken into account when considering the various sites within 400m of the village centre for a new public car park. Two areas in Standish centre have planning permission for private car parks linked to shopping developments - Chatswick's land and a diesel area on Preston Road, close to Aldi.

But these areas are not likely to be developed in the near future or may not have car parks at all. Standish Voice believes residents and businesses cannot wait as the parking problem is getting worse, especially as 1,630 new homes have permission to be built in the village.

### What has been concluded?

The Parking Subgroup concluded that the best, most realistic site for a new public car park is a small part of The Rec, on Southlands Avenue, linked to a new park on the rest of the playing field. This would benefit people using the new park and those visiting Standish's shops and businesses. This car park, on part of the field nearest the village centre, would also benefit people using the medical centre, where there is virtually no public parking, and ease parking problems at Wood Fold primary school.

The car park would have up to 80 spaces, including disabled ones, would be free of charge, and initially would not be time limited, so workers in Standish centre could use it, freeing up spaces in the heart of the village for shoppers, residents and visitors. This could also reduce the number of workers' cars parked all day on residential streets.

Only around a 20% of The Rec would be used for the car park, with 80% becoming a new park. Footpaths to the village centre via Squires Hey and Greenfield Avenue would be improved.

Wigan Council believes the car park, with vehicle access from Southlands Avenue, would have minimal traffic impact on the Green Lane/School Lane junction. The council also believes the football field can legally be turned into a park and car park.

### Will The Rec still be a recreation ground?

That is for you to decide. The Rec has not been used by organised football clubs for at least five years as it is so inadequate. It is on a slope, has poor drainage, has no parking or

**PLEASE TURN OVER**

- The leaflet assumes that two sites with planning permission for supermarkets with car parks “are not likely to be developed in the near future”. In fact, one of them (Chadwick’s) has recently been developed purely for parking. (DWOR concede that there are planning issues relating to this development but believe Wigan Council has no grounds for refusing consent now that a retrospective planning application has been made. The site has the benefit of an out-of-date planning consent for a supermarket including a car park. The Chadwick car park is likely to be pay-and-display but with the price of land in Standish this is inevitable and DWOR believes this would not be an impediment to its use.) Chadwick’s had previously proposed a pay-and-display car park on this land and this was not mentioned on the leaflet.
- The leaflet states that The Council believes the football field (sic) can legally be turned into a park and car park. DWOR can find no such statement in emails (obtained under FOI) between SV and the Planners, in fact the Planners state that the only way to find out would be to submit a planning application.
- Nowhere in the leaflet is it disclosed that The Rec was given under a covenant as a children’s playground, a basic fact which DWOR believe the people of Standish were entitled to know before making a decision about its future.
- According to Sport England, Wigan Council’s *Sports Needs Assessment* is incomplete and is under review. The incomplete assessment (February 2017) identifies The Rec as one of several places that could be considered for a junior sports pitch of which there is a shortage – the very purpose for which The Rec was given in 1923. There is no mention of this as an option in the leaflet.
- The leaflet states correctly that The Rec is not the right size for (adult) league games. It is true that sports ruling bodies have tightened rules about the size of pitches in recent years, but The Rec is large enough for a junior pitch – the very purpose for which it was given. There is no mention of this in the leaflet.
- The leaflet refers to The Rec as a “redundant area” which is clearly not true.
- The leaflet uses ‘scare tactics’ saying “there would be increased pressure to turn this redundant area into a housing development” but fails to say that this should not happen because it is protected under policy CP2 of Wigan Core Strategy.

**DWOR believes there are too many confusing, inaccurate, misleading and contradictory statements in the leaflet ‘Future of The Rec’ for this to have happened by accident. DWOR believes it is reasonable to suspect the leaflet was deliberately designed to persuade people to vote for the option favoured by SV, i.e. a car park.**

For a consultation to be considered “meaningful” there must be a genuine exchange of views with the objective of influencing decisions and policies. While SV carried out some meaningful consultations with a small section of the population in 2015 there is no evidence that any meaningful consultation was undertaken regarding the major proposal to put a car park on The Rec. It is an enormous jump, from 1300 residents saying they want more car parking, to a proposal to put the car park on land given as a children’s playground which is also the only public green space in the village centre large enough for ball games.

DWOR believes that SV did not carry out the required meaningful consultation, on the contrary it was clear that SV did not intend to allow any prospect of residents influencing policies. By springing a vote SV clearly

intended to prevent debate and present just three options that SV had proposed and to heavily weight the argument in favour of SV's committee's chosen option.

DWOR believes that the failure of SV to carry out a meaningful consultation on this matter was a major departure for good neighbourhood planning practice.

**DWOR believes that if a proper consultation had been held, over a period of say six weeks, the facts could have been established and a decision made which truly reflected the views of the residents of Standish.**

***DWOR poses the following three questions: -***

***Was SV open with residents about its discussions with the Planning Officers regarding putting a car park on The Rec?***

***Did SV carry out a proper consultation regarding the proposals for The Rec?***

***Was the leaflet 'Future of The Rec' a fair representation of the facts?***

## 6. Digital Vote

The vote to which reference is made in the "Future of The Rec" leaflet was carried out on SurveyMonkey. Some individuals who opposed the proposals in the leaflet tried to warn SV that Survey monkey was unsafe due to the ease with which it was possible to multi-vote. These warning were in posts on SV's Facebook and were swiftly deleted by SV.

Three members of SV had their membership rescinded after criticising the choice of SurveyMonkey. SV does not have an appeals procedure and DWOR are unable to find any minutes which indicate that it was properly discussed by SV's Monthly public meeting and, as the sub-group meeting minutes are not published, DWOR can find no record of any discussions on this matter.

In the event, the warnings proved be true as SV admit multi-voting took place. DWOR can categorically say it did not orchestrate the multiple voting and consider it could equally have been done by persons in favour of the car park in an attempt to discredit the campaign against the car park which was just starting to have an effect. On-line votes of this sort are very difficult to verify and there is anecdotal evidence of traders encouraging customers from outside Standish to vote for the car park.

SV have been unable or unwilling to answer DWOR's question regarding the SurveyMonkey poll and the numbers of votes cast for each option have not been announced. SV have refused to answer questions about multiple voting on the pro-car park side. SV admits to have only allowed one vote from any IP address with multiple votes but refuses to say how it knows that this did not discriminate against households with 2 or more adult occupants.

In DWOR's opinion a result which, after the discarding of an undisclosed number of votes, comes to 60% in favour and 40% against lacks credibility.

SV have said about 1000 votes, which they regard as legitimate, were cast. Although SV refuses to say the actual number in favour of the car park, simple maths would indicate this to be about 600. This is hardly a resounding vote in favour from an electorate of 9525 in the Standish-with-Langtree ward particularly as DWOR's petition against the car park raised more than 1700 verifiable signatures.

DWOR cannot recall any other public vote on any matter where the actual result has not been announced. With the air of secrecy that SV's failure to properly announce the results of the vote it is easy to see why this make DWOR suspicious that SV has something to hide

**DWOR believes that, because what it regards as a proper consultation was not carried out, and that SurveyMonkey is not a safe way of measuring opinions, all reference to the results of this vote should be removed from the Draft Neighbourhood Plan**

#### 7. SV's Exclusion from the Record of Legitimate Protest

DWOR contends that SV has shown a determination to exclude from the record that there is a large part of the local community which is opposed to a car park on The Rec. Examples include:

- In its Body of Evidence SV states, it "*organised a petition, which gathered 1,300 names*" in favour of more parking but it does not mention that DWOR organised a petition against the proposal to put that car park on The Rec which gathered more than 1700 signatures. Copies of this petition were presented to SV and Wigan Council.
- Up to 200 people attended the monthly public meetings of SV every month from April 2017 to October 2017 to question the policy of putting a car park on The Rec and to protest against it. This fact is ignored in the minutes of the meetings.
- Members of the local community protested on SV's Facebook about the use of The Rec as a car park and in particular about the perceived errors in leaflet entitled, 'Future of The Rec'. Many of these comments were deleted from the Facebook which stifled debate.
- SV attempted to deny that there is a covenant on The Rec.

As late as June 2017 misleading statements were still being issued including the following one on Facebook: -

- *There is no 'covenant' in legal terms on The Rec "(Standish Voice Jun 2017)*
- However, Wigan Council's legal department had answered questions in a letter to DWOR and said, "*Turning to the Rec, the land was gifted and there is a restrictive covenant setting out that it was so gifted for the purpose of a children's playground"* (Wigan Council May 2017)

**DWOR finds it implausible that the SV spokesman on Facebook was not fully aware that there was a covenant on The Rec particularly as SV's Vice Chair had discussed this very point with the Planners in the emails obtained by DWOR under a FOI request. (See section 4 of this document)**

#### 8. Consultation on the Use of The Rec

After the disputed vote regarding the proposal to put a car park on The Rec, SV carried out a six week's consultation regarding the form "*the park*" should take. In a letter from The Council to Lisa Nandy MP emphasis is placed on this consultation which was extended to adults and young people. The Draft Plan states "*Standish Voice has also attended meetings of youth organisations to get first-hand the views of younger people during one of the consultations*".

The results of this consultation have not been published and DWOR has asked SV why? There is no official explanation given but one SV committee member has said “off the record” that “They didn’t publish any of it because it wasn’t favourable to them, they had a lot people saying, “we want The Rec left as it is”. Bear in mind SV’s tendency to ignore anything that does not support its case, DWOR believe this has a “ring of truth”.

It is important to note that because SV have not published the results of the only consultation it has conducted regarding The Rec it cannot demonstrate any support for a “park” on The Rec.

**DWOR believes changing The Rec into a park is a huge step not justified simply by quoting the results of a survey in 2015 which asked if “*The centre of Standish needs a park?*”**

**DWOR considers that is reasonable to suspect that SV may be hiding information that does not support its case.**

**DWOR poses the question: why have the results of the six week’s consultation on the park not been published?**

#### 9. Treatment of DWOR by SV

DWOR believes it represents the honestly held views of a large proportion of the population of Standish that The Rec is an important asset as a playing field for ball games and is particularly well placed to meet that need particularly as it is within walking distance of many homes. DWOR has tried to represent that view to SV and the public of Standish in a truthful and accurate way.

DWOR has invited SV and members of the public to say if they believed information it put out was not accurate. SV has never approached DWOR with information to deny any statements made by DWOR.

DWOR’s truthfulness has been met by aggressive opposition by SV. A number of emails were sent to SV members, including those people who are members of both DWOR and SV and these contained unfounded allegations about the way names had been collected on the petition of more than 1700 people opposed to a car park on The Rec.

DWOR has a membership of over 700 people from all over Standish yet SV has repeatedly referred to DWOR as a small group of individuals from Southlands Ave who oppose changes to The Rec.

“However, we continue to receive reports from the public who say false information is being circulated about The Rec and wildly inaccurate claims are being made about Standish Voice itself, designed to discredit the Neighbourhood Forum by people whose sole intent is to keep The Rec as it is. This is highly disappointing.” (SV newsletter 2 June 2017)

“We are aware two campaign groups have been established in relation to The Rec.

Unfortunately, both groups have been putting out misleading information ...

(SV newsletter 13 May 2017)

**DWOR cannot speak for the other group referred to but it can say that DWOR is proud of the way it has campaigned and all the information it put out remains on the DWOR website for all to see.**

Copies of emailed newsletters were posted on the SV website but were deleted during October 2017 after DWOR protested about their tone.

Ever since the leaflet "The Future of The Rec" was distributed, posts on SV's Facebook that opposed SV's committee members' views have been routinely deleted frustrating any debate. The act of deletion obviously destroys the evidence that there is opposition to SV committee members' views. These deletions were often accompanied by aggressive comments from SV.

In its emailed newsletter of 13 May 2017 SV stated "... committee members of Standish Voice have been subjected to verbal abuse at recent Standish Voice Committee meetings from some supporters of these groups ...." DWOR can find no evidence to support these statements.

Members of the local community, including members of the DWOR committee, attended all monthly SV public meetings from April 2017. DWOR drew the attention of members of the local community to their rights to attend the SV meeting and express their views about any issues. DWOR did not orchestrate protests they were entirely spontaneous and under the extreme provocation of SV's Chair and Vice Chair's comments the protests were remarkably constrained.

There is no doubt that tempers became frayed as frustration at SV's refusal to listen to the protest and to answer questions bubbled over into non-aggressive protest. Despite the fact the SV were clearly annoyed by the interruption of their meeting none of this was recorded in the SV minutes.

It is clear that SV is in the practice of making decisions at un-minuted meetings a fact confirmed by the low attendance of SV committee members at the monthly public meetings. The decisions of these un-minuted meetings have not been discussed, or confirmed, at any of the monthly public meetings since April 2017. DWOR feels justified in questioning whether all matters relating to The Rec were only discussed in closed meetings to ensure no opposition to SV's views.

**DWOR considers that SV has treated persons with views that oppose those of SV's committee in an inappropriate way and this shows contempt for the standard of behaviour expected from a forum set-up specifically to draft a neighbourhood plan.**

#### 10. Complaint to Wigan Council

DWOR made a complaint to Wigan Council because it felt so strongly that SV had not behaved properly in respect of: -

- the failure to disclose that it was in discussion with Wigan Council about putting a car park on The Rec,
- springing a vote without a proper consultation period and a local debate and the use of SurveyMonkey
- failure to answer legitimate questions

The complaint was made to Wigan Council as the planning authority which had authorised SV. A copy of DWOR's letter to Wigan Council follows.

Wigan Council chose not to investigate as requested.

**DWOR considers that Wigan Council did not give sufficiently serious attention to DWOR's case and rejected a request for an independent person to look at SV's behaviour. DWOR considers that if this had been done the whole issue of The Rec could have been resolved long ago.**



*Date: 7 June 2017*

*Email: [dontwreckourrec@outlook.com](mailto:dontwreckourrec@outlook.com)*

*Dear Peter Smith and Donna Hall,*

*I am writing to you on behalf of a community group that has been set up to ensure Standish Recreation Ground is maintained as green space. We want to make sure it can continue to be used for children to play on. The Rec, as it is known, is one of the few green spaces left in Standish and the only public green space near the centre of the township.*

*Our community group already has over 680 members and continues to grow. We are ordinary residents and have no connection with any other groups involved with this issue and have no councillors, past or present, in our membership.*

*This letter is to express our grave concern at the way Standish Voice have developed proposals to put a car park on the Rec and run a consultation exercise that was seriously flawed in a number of ways. We firmly believe that the majority of Standish people think it would be wrong to put a car park of any size on the Rec.*

*The consultation exercise run by Standish Voice was not run in a fair and objective way. Much of the information provided was misleading, important information was not shared, and the methods used to record views were inadequate and discriminatory. As a result, the outcome failed to capture the real views of the people of Standish.*

*We recently learned that Wigan Council offered £150k to fund a car park on the Rec but required Standish Voice to run a consultation exercise on the issue before it could be included in the Neighbourhood Plan. We believe SV and Standish traders were so attracted by this offer that the exercise was not run objectively.*

*Our main concerns about how the exercise was run are:*

- *The consultation was only open for three weeks. A more realistic timescale would have been three months. It takes time for public awareness of an issue to grow, for people to assimilate information, and then to form a view. We asked for the period to be extended but this was refused. In fact, the exercise and voting closed a day earlier than publicised on 26 March.*
- *The current consultation over the secondary issue of how to use remaining space for a park will be open for over six weeks. More than twice as long as consultation over the primary issue of the future of the Rec.*
- *Some people found out about the exercise through social media, but the majority were unaware until a leaflet was distributed only 10 days before the exercise closed. Many reported not receiving a leaflet.*
- *The main channel for the exercise was through a digital vote. There was a facility to make a comment, but not vote, by collecting a form from the library and returning it to the library. We are aware thousands of Standish residents do not use online services, particularly older people. As a result, a disproportionate number of older people and those with disabilities, were disadvantaged or excluded from the exercise. Far more should have been done to reach out to all sections of the community and provide an opportunity for them to give input.*
- *Standish Voice provided misleading information to people and made a firm recommendation for the car park option rather than presenting balanced factual information and letting people decide. This is covered in more detail below. The information provided no argument against putting a car park on the Rec and there was even a heavy recommendation to vote for a car park immediately above the online voting buttons. The way the question was framed would not pass any test of objectivity and was clearly aimed at achieving a particular outcome.*
- *Standish shopkeepers and traders are an important part of the community, but they had a disproportionate influence on the consultation by lobbying customers and using social media to campaign for the car park option. When our group formed and started to put counter arguments SV told us we were distorting the exercise and that people should only make their decision on information sourced from them.*
- *The digital vote was not secure. Multiple voting was possible which led to many votes being discounted by SV including some legitimate votes. Multi-occupancy households were limited to one vote. Votes from outside the UK were discounted but not those from outside Standish.*

*The information SV gave to people during the exercise was misleading. The most serious examples of this are:*

- *The Rec was described as redundant and unsuitable for use as a sports pitch. In fact, the Rec is regularly used by children and residents as well as scouts and brownie groups. There was a Wigan Council assessment done in 2013 that made it clear it could be made suitable for junior sports pitches.*
- *There were contradictory statements about the number of car places. Up to 80 spaces was proposed and there was reference to using only 20% of the Rec. People were led to believe these two figures were compatible which clearly, they are not. 50 or so places were shown on an indicative plan and the whole car park frequently referred to as small yet at 80 spaces it would be by far the largest public car park in Standish.*
- *The indicative plan showed walkways to access the car park running along privately-owned land and failed to show any disabled spaces. In fact, there was no reference made to provision for disabled people until we prompted SV to recognise this requirement.*
- *Threats were made in the leaflet about the Rec being used for housing if its use was not changed. It would be "lost to the community forever". There is no evidence that the Council would break the restrictive covenant requiring the land to be used as a children's playground, and the Rec qualifies for other forms of protection.*
- *The traffic impact was described as "minimal" on the Green Lane junction. Given this was the only proposed access route for an up to 80 space car park this cannot be true. The junction is already severely congested at peak times.*

*Important relevant information that Standish Voice failed to disclose included:*

- *The Rec was left to the community by a benefactor and is covered by a restrictive covenant that requires it to be used a children's playground.*
- *There are other forms of protection available that the Rec would qualify for.*
- *The level of ongoing usage of the Rec and Council assessment from 2013 that made it clear it could be used for junior pitches.*
- *The true traffic impact and resultant impact on air quality adjacent to a primary school.*
- *That funding had been offered by Wigan Council specifically to create a car park on the Rec; subject to public consultation.*

*We also believe that the proposal to put a car park on the Rec conflicts with a number of local and national strategies and planning priorities; particularly the views of Sport England on the need for more sports pitches. We would be happy to outline these in more detail should it be necessary at the stage of the Planning Inspector's scrutiny of the Neighbourhood Plan.*

*We also believe there are potential alternative solutions to the car parking problem which have not yet been fully explored. It would be wrong to even think about putting the Rec at risk whilst alternatives remain to be explored. We have offered to work with Standish Voice and the business community on alternatives.*

*We believe that SV have handled this issue in such a way that an investigation by an independent person should be started by Wigan Council immediately and work on the plan suspended until this is completed and any shortfalls have been recognised and corrected. Their behaviour also raises concern about how further consultation and voting over the Neighbourhood Plan will be managed. SV claims "it wants people to challenge our policies on the forthcoming Neighbourhood Plan" however, they regularly delete posts from their Facebook page purely because they are critical of their policies thus stifling debate*

*I would be grateful if you would confirm that such an investigation will be made as a matter of urgency and that steps will be taken to ensure Standish Voice behave in a more representative and inclusive way.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Chair Don't Wreck Our Rec*

#### 11. Need for Junior Playing Pitches

Wigan's playing pitch needs assessment states that there is a shortage of junior sports pitches. Sport England has informed us that they are not satisfied that Wigan's assessment has been carried out in accordance with their requirements. DWOR's investigations appear to support Sport England's dissatisfaction.

Research by DWOR has discovered that the existence of Standish Panthers Junior Football Club, with about 130 members, has not been recorded by Wigan Council in the assessment documents so it appears highly likely that junior sports pitch requirements have been under estimated. Also, Standish Panthers JFC usual playing and practicing pitches are entirely outside Standish supporting the argument that there is a shortage of

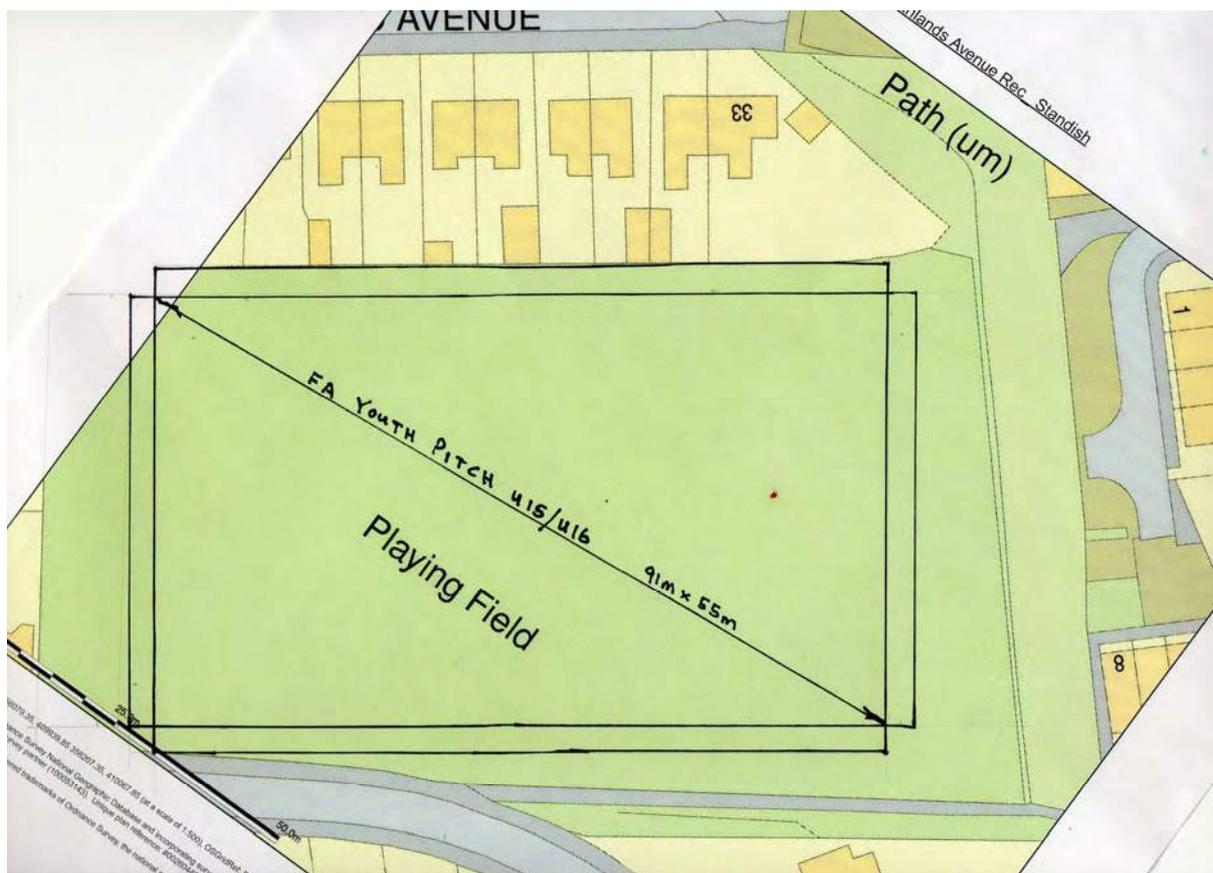
pitches within the neighbourhood plan area. The Rec, as has been previously stated, was given under a covenant for precisely this purpose.

The Rec has more residents within easy walking distance than any other sports pitch in Standish. The Rec is thus an ideal place for development as an “under 15’s/16’s” pitch. There is room on The Rec for changing facilities (which are typically provided on such sites in ISO containers) and, as an alternative, the adjacent Methodist Church has indicated that it would be prepared to discuss the provision of changing facilities on its land.

Developing an under 15’s/16’s pitch would not preclude the use of The Rec for other activities such as those of the Scout Troop and the Guide Companies mentioned elsewhere in this document – Rounders and other ball games, practising erecting tents, etc. Nor would a junior football pitch stop local children playing informally which is important as this is the only space suitable for this purpose in the Green Lane/Southlands area – and within walking distance of the housing in Standish centre. Amateur Rugby League is particularly popular in Standish and it would be possible to erect dual purpose posts to permit both games to be practised.

The attached plan shows that there is only just enough space for an under 15’s/16’s pitch.

**DWOR believes that, in the absence of Sport England’s approval of Wigan’s sports pitch needs assessment, and with a clear proven need for junior pitches, it would be inappropriate to consider any change of use on The Rec. DWOR considers that work should be undertaken to improve drainage and an “under 15’s” pitch provided.**



Layout drawing of U15/U16 FA soccer pitch.

12. Local Green Space.

13. DWOR believes that The Rec closely meets the LGS status requirements and has prepared a document to take up this case forward.

A member of SV committee indicated, off the record, that Wigan Council believe that LGS status was not appropriate for The Rec. DWOR could not find the document containing this advice in SV's body of evidence and DWOR requested a copy which has not been forthcoming.

**Under the circumstances DWOR believes that the only reason SV did not include The Rec in the list of sites to be given LGS protection was that SV's priority was to have a car park on The Rec.**

14. A Car Part on Southlands Rec is Not Desirable.

On page 33 of the Draft Neighbourhood Plan (Objective 2: Reduce Traffic Congestion and Better Parking) SV states that a car part on Southlands Rec is not desirable. DWOR, of course, supports this view and has explained in this document why The Rec should be used as children's playground not a car park.

In the supporting documents on its web site SV still proposes to include The Rec in the consideration for provision of a car park.

DWOR believes this shows inconsistency.

**DWOR considers that it has demonstrated a lack of meaningful consultation by SV and that the SurveyMonkey vote was unsafe and that all references to SurveyMonkey "results" should be excluded from the Draft Local Plan.**

**DWOR believes that the reason SV has said it is not desirable to put a car park on The Rec is that it has realised that so many residents feel strongly against the proposal that SV is likely to lose the referendum. DWOR feels justified in being suspicious the SV has left the door open to allow a car park on The Rec at some future date. DWOR has proposed amendments to the Draft Local Plan in an attempt to stop this from happening.**