



Little Abington Scout Camp Site – looking towards the river Granta

Abington Woods

Our vision is to acquire and upgrade the old Scout camp site (dating from the 1930s), in order to serve the needs of Cambridge City and the surrounding area, particularly through the provision of education and training facilities with a focus on outdoor, adventurous and woodcraft activities. We will continue to offer safe, engaging and natural camping grounds for use by schools and bona fide youth organisations including, but not limited to, Scouts, Guides, Duke of Edinburgh Award and educational groups.

The site will provide a safe and secluded environment in the conservation area along the Granta Valley, which forms part of the Repton landscape of Abington Hall. While close to the village centre and within easy reach of public transport from Cambridge, it will cater for those who want backwoods camping and camp-fires in a wooded context, but will also have accessible facilities for toilets, washing and cooking!

This project will build on the success of the 2012 Olympics to encourage a more active life-style for the youth of the local community and fit with other initiatives in education and health.



Background

The Scout Camp Site in Little Abington comprises about 6 acres of woodland, on the north bank of the River Granta, with one large and one small grassed area for camping. It was officially opened by the Cambridge and District Local Association on 4th June 1932 and has been run by local scouts ever since. It has also been made available for use by other youth organisations. It provides ‘backwoods’ camping with basic amenities including space for camp fires etc. It has occasionally been used for other activities, such as films and historical re-enactments. Further historical details are available here: <http://www.abingtoncampsite.org.uk/history.html>.

There are three main buildings – toilet/shower block, training room and kitchen/dining facilities. Many activities, such as backwoods camping, require only the toilets but some camps, particularly the larger ones for younger children, require use of kitchens etc. The buildings are between 20 and 40 years old; the older ones have become run-down in recent years and require refurbishment or possibly replacement.

The Cambridgeshire County Scouts acquired planning permission to use some land for development in order to fund this refurbishment. Subsequently, after a review, they decided instead to close the site and sell the land for development. This move will deprive the Abington Scouts of a home in the village and will also affect many other scout groups in the Cambridge area, as well as other users of the site. There is a good deal of opposition to the plans both from local scouts and from the local community. This has been expressed in an online petition, which attracted over 2000 signatures; in open meetings in the village; and in the local press & TV.

The parish council applied successfully for the site to be listed as an Asset of Community Value. It was listed by South Cambridgeshire District Council on 9th May 2013, which gives a 6-month moratorium to enable a bid from a community interest group.

Proposal

The parish council wants to purchase and improve the Little Abington Campsite and Training ground (rather than let it be sold for housing development) before the Community Right to Bid expires on 9th November 2013. We propose that it be owned by the parish council but leased to a charity set up for the purpose of running it. Trustees of the charity would include village residents as well as local scouts and possibly other users.

We will continue to offer it as a camping and training facility to the Cambridgeshire community and expand its use to new groups. Current regular users include Cubs, Scouts, Guides, Duke of Edinburgh Award, school outdoor education and exploration societies. Community ownership will open it up to a wider user community and increase its usage. We have started discussions with proposed new users, including children’s groups (e.g. Forest Schools and TJ Kids) and team building for local businesses. The Cambridge International School is located in the village and has teachers trained in Forest School skills; there are groups in Cambridge who are keen to use such a facility.

Outdoor activities and training could include: Pioneering; Orienteering; Bridge building; Basic survival skills – fire starting, water filtration, finding food in the countryside, First Aid in the wild. In addition, leadership training might include both indoor and outdoor exercises in Problem solving; Team building; Communication.

We are particularly excited by the idea of using the site to further well-being of the local community by providing a safe environment for local children to gain early exposure to the ‘great outdoors’. A recent report shows an increase in children’s mental health problems in Cambridgeshire. The Forest Schools website mentions that “A study done in Sweden over a 13 month period found that children located in urban environments were much less happy than those attending forest school kindergarten in a countryside environment.”

Little Abington, together with Great Abington just across the River Granta, is an active and lively village community with a number of clubs and societies based in the ‘Abington Institute’, a village hall that was recently renovated after local fund-raising and a lottery grant. The building hosts a café several times a week, a fortnightly club for older people and a monthly lunch for residents, all run by volunteer labour.

The parish council includes people with recent professional experience as school head, finance director, accountant, and computer software designer. The parish clerk is a senior Health Service manager. We have consulted with local businesses and potential users. The Scout Camp Site has been maintained in part by volunteer labour. We feel that between us we could manage an expanded usage of the camp site.

Abington is readily accessible by a regular bus service from Cambridge and Cambridge railway station, as it is on a major route to Haverhill. It is also readily accessible by road links from the A11, A505, M11 and thence A14 and A1(M) so is easily reached from most of South Cambridgeshire. It is 4 miles from Whittlesford station. It is believed that this ease of access was instrumental in the decision to locate the camp site there in 1932.

Scouts – continuity of successful local facility

There is good support in the village for continued use of the site – by many local scout troops from Cambridge and the surrounding area, as well as those from the village itself. There is an established and loyal base of Scouts and Cubs who use the site on average 5000 days/nights a year. We would encourage this use to continue and grow to meet local need.

“It is clearly a valuable asset to the local community and the wider Cambridgeshire area. I understand that not only Scouts but many local schools, Girl Guides and other groups use the campsite. It would be a shame to lose the facility which remains popular with the local community.” *Julian Huppert, MP for Cambridge*

Supporting policy initiatives

Our vision reflects the Government’s active citizenship goals, as defined by the ‘Big Society’ agenda and ‘Localism’ Act, through involving local people and organisations in helping to meet identified needs of children and young people in our local area. Working collaboratively, we believe we could contribute to the local delivery of new national policies:

Voluntary & Community sector – delivery of youth services

“Voluntary and community organisations (VCSOs) have an important role to play in providing effective, high quality early intervention services as they are local, flexible, trusted, informal and friendly.” *YoungMinds*

“Children and young people are an integral part of our vision for active and sustainable communities in which everyone is valued and can play their full part. However, we recognise that children and young people – and community organisations working with them – have specific needs and challenges that must be addressed in order to achieve this vision.” *Community Matters / The National Federation of Community Organisations*

‘Positive for Youth’ educational strategy

“The Positive for Youth strategy refers to schools as health promoting environments, and states that the school and college workforce have a role in improving young people’s health and wellbeing.” *Department for Education*

“The broad extent of this inquiry has convinced the Committee that outdoor learning can benefit pupils of all ages and can be successful in a variety of settings. We are convinced that out-of-classroom education enriches the curriculum and can improve educational attainment.” *House of Commons Education and Skills Committee - Second Report 31 January 2005.*

“We would like some classes for our older dyslexic pupils who want an outdoor-based education” *Daniel Sturdy, Director, Cambridge International School*

“We could host staff and children from Early Years Settings, Out of School Providers, Primary and Secondary Schools, Specialist Schools, Private and Independent Schools and Further Education Colleges to increase use of site facilities.” *Tanya Prince, TJ Kids, Cambridge*

Compulsory Education for 16/17 year olds from 2015

From 2015, further education for 16/17 years olds will be compulsory, as referred to under Section 68 of the ESA 2008, and an additional 107,500 16 and 17 year olds will be in the education system in East Anglia. Nationally this could mean that new education organisations are looking to cater for up to a million young people and may be looking for more vocational type training to offer students who may be less motivated by more traditional education offerings. An experienced Fellow of the Institute of Leadership and Management employed locally, believes that a strong case could be made for an ILM accredited leadership training qualification to young Scout leaders in Cambridge in this age group based at this site and could be offered to scouts as part of their normal award program.

“There are positive indications that sixth form colleges are already using this kind of facility and are looking to use them more in the future, especially for the new compulsory 16-18 education which starts in 2015.” *Nick Hindley, Associate Director, Learning and Performance Improvement, PPD, Granta Park, Abington.*

Health and Social Care Act – Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing board strategy for children and young people (2012-2017)

“Applying national data to the Cambridgeshire population indicates a total number of 8000 children between the ages of 5 – 16 have mental health problems.”

“The Cambridgeshire County Council Research Group forecasts that by 2016, the child and young people population of Cambridgeshire will increase by 3.9% from the 2011 baseline, with the largest increases seen in Cambridge City, and a small decrease in Huntingdonshire. By 2021, it is anticipated that South Cambridgeshire will have the largest population of people under the age of 19, in Cambridgeshire County.”

“There should be more service focus on children and young people under the age of 15-16 years”

“More mental health services should be available in local venues.”

Quotes are from: *Draft Cambridgeshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment: The Mental Health of Children and Young People in Cambridgeshire 2013. Dated 16.4.13*

Forest School benefits many children and should be used on a wider basis as a vital part of children’s outdoor learning experience and in order that many more children have the opportunity to experience this as part of their overall education. Where funding is restricted, criteria should be developed to decide which children, in particular areas, would gain most from the experience. These could be kinaesthetic learners, children lacking in confidence, children who are having particular difficulties in coping with learning in a classroom environment, and children in disadvantaged areas who may have little contact with or experience of the natural environment. *‘Such enthusiasm – a joy to see’ An evaluation of Forest School in England, by Richard Murray and Liz O’Brien. October 2005*

Finances

The parish council’s annual budget is around £15000. The local Association of Local Councils has advised us that a loan of £50 000 would be a reasonable commitment. This, together with fund-raising, might suffice for refurbishment but would not be sufficient to cover purchase costs. The estate agent’s particulars suggest a price of £400 000, so a grant is sought to enable this project, to protect and enhance a much-loved site, to go ahead.

The current usage brings in a surplus most years but maintenance has suffered. It is believed that a considerable increase in usage is achievable, in part by using the site for educational purposes during school hours. Other possibilities to support the main objective include management training as a way to bring in income. We have a good deal of data to support our view of the potential. A number of more detailed scenarios are being worked up to investigate different options – different facilities and different usage. We are working with local scouts and other organisations, including various educational establishments.

Further Reading

Offer for sale: <http://www.januarys.co.uk/properties/church-lane-little-abington/>

Listing of Assets of Community Value in South Cambs:

<http://www.scambs.gov.uk/sites/www.scambs.gov.uk/files/documents/SCDC%20Asset%20listing%20table%2008%2008%2013a.pdf>

Friends of Abington Camp Site (FACS): http://www.abingtoncampsite.org.uk/facs_press_release.html

Online petition: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/save-abington-scout-campsite/>

Cambridge academic’s blog: <http://mpfsblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/01/abington-campsite-usage/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Save-our-Abington/421925044567427>

Press articles

<http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/News/Scout-leaders-face-down-protesters-over-closure-of-campsite-20130509104918.htm>

<http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/Education/Education-news/Schoolboy-in-bid-to-save-Scout-campsite-20130422055102.htm>

<http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/Cambridge/Campsite-enjoyed-for-generations-to-be-sold-20130402104848.htm>

<http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/Cambridge/Fight-begins-to-stop-Scout-camp-closure-20130408065411.htm>

<http://www.haverhillecho.co.uk/community/community-news/group-formed-to-oppose-sale-of-little-abington-scout-campsite-1-4981836>