

14 Harleston Street Playing Field



Introduction

The sites of many urban soccer pitches have little ecological interest but the Harlestone Street site is different despite its location near land long used for industrial purposes.

Once this site had roads and rows of terraced houses. Edgar Street and Thorndon Road no longer exist and Harlestone Street itself is now a mere track between this site and the neighbouring Petre Street Urban Wildlife Zone.

After the demolition of the housing in 1970s the land remained undeveloped until 1987 when Sheffield City Council apparently bowing to local pressure agreed to develop the site for a football pitch. This was unfortunate as brownfield sites if left undisturbed can become botanically interesting areas sustaining urban wildlife. This was the case here. But despite the efforts of local naturalist Douglas Jones and the Sorby Natural History Society who argued for its conservation, the plans for siting the new soccer pitch went ahead. However the remainder of the site was landscaped intelligently. Along Petre Street broadleaved trees were planted screening the site from the main road. Below the soccer pitch a wide belt of native trees typical of English hedgerows was planted atop the grassy bank that slopes down to Earsham Street. Both of these wooded areas are maturing nicely.

This site has once again attracted the interest of developers. In the autumn of 2003 a local soccer club of under-seven year olds formally began to use the soccer pitch as their home field. Club organisers pushed for site improvements so that the area would be more presentable to visiting teams from neighbouring cities.

Consultants were also hired using New Deal monies to explore the possibility of building a sports complex on the site. Despite the topography of the area and the location of a dump on Earsham Street immediately across from the proposed building site, plans have been put forward to build a sports complex on the corner of Lyons Street and Earsham Street. This would mean the removal of part of the hedgerow woodland. A cricket pitch has also been proposed which would entail taking out another chunk of this woodland.

Site details

Site name

Harleston Street Playing Field

Location

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference SK366 890

Land owner

Sheffield City Council

Nearest road/street

Petre Street

Lyons Street

Earsham Street

Harleston Street

Adjacent land use

Petre Street: adjacent land uses are urban park, urban wildspace, green space and housing.

On the same side of Petre Street as the Harleston Playing Field:

- The Petre Street Urban Wildlife Zone is to the west – Harleston Street separates the two sites
- The first section of the Petre Street Landscaped strip is to the east - across Lyons Street.

Directly across Petre Street is Ellesmere Park north. A housing estate begins at Lyons Street, but it too is fronted by a grassy bank and scattered trees.

However, to the south of the Harleston Playing Field, the land use is industrial. There is also industry directly across from this site on Lyons Street.

Size

2.83 hectares

Present management

There is an obvious grassland management plan in place that stipulates which sections of the site are mowed and how often during the course of the growing season (April – October), but no annual management plan could be detected for the wooded areas. Many trees along Petre Street, especially the

willows were arching too far towards the pavement. However, in autumn 2003 as part of the Burngreave Green Environmental Project some maintenance work was undertaken as part of a Community Forest Project.

The grassland management plan appears to differentiate between different types of amenity grassland. The sports pitch is mowed frequently, perhaps once a month; whereas the adjacent lawns that slope down towards Harleston Street & upwards towards Lyons Street are mowed every other month. The strip of grassland between the fence and the hedgerow shrubbery is probably mown at the same time as these lawns. Thus these grasses remain relatively short. The grassy bank along Earsham Street and Lyons Street are mowed perhaps only once or twice during the summer season. Consequently flowering herbs are allowed to flower on this grassy slope. Perhaps due to the terrain there are stretches along Earsham Street, including the junction of Earsham Street and Harleston Street, that are not mowed at all and tall grasses grow here. On the slope above the sports pitch there is a relatively large area of unmowed neutral grassland and scrub before the woodland along Petre Street.

In autumn 2003 the following maintenance work was undertaken after sufficient notice was given to the public forewarning them of the work:

- Forage harvest up to the tree line around football pitch area and the removal of litter / rubbish from the site.
- Removal of the bund and backfilling of the ditch (Lyons Street boundary).
- Installation of a 40 metre barrier, barrier gate and an 'A' frame along the Lyons Street boundary.
- Area at back of chain link fence to be flailed and light flailing of overhanging branches to facilitate future maintenance.
- Soil and seed depression to be filled in on football pitch
- Tree work will be carried out along Petre Street and Lyons Street boundaries and the Harleston Street entrance. This will include the following work: crown lifting, prune clearing and cut back from street furniture and clear sight lines.

Vegetation that was growing up along the metal fence that separates the sports pitch from the hedgerow woodland was not removed. This vegetation includes tall ruderals (mugwort, ragwort), climbers (*Solanum dulcum*), and saplings of elder, golden-leaved elder, sycamore, hazel, rose, and Swedish whitebeam.

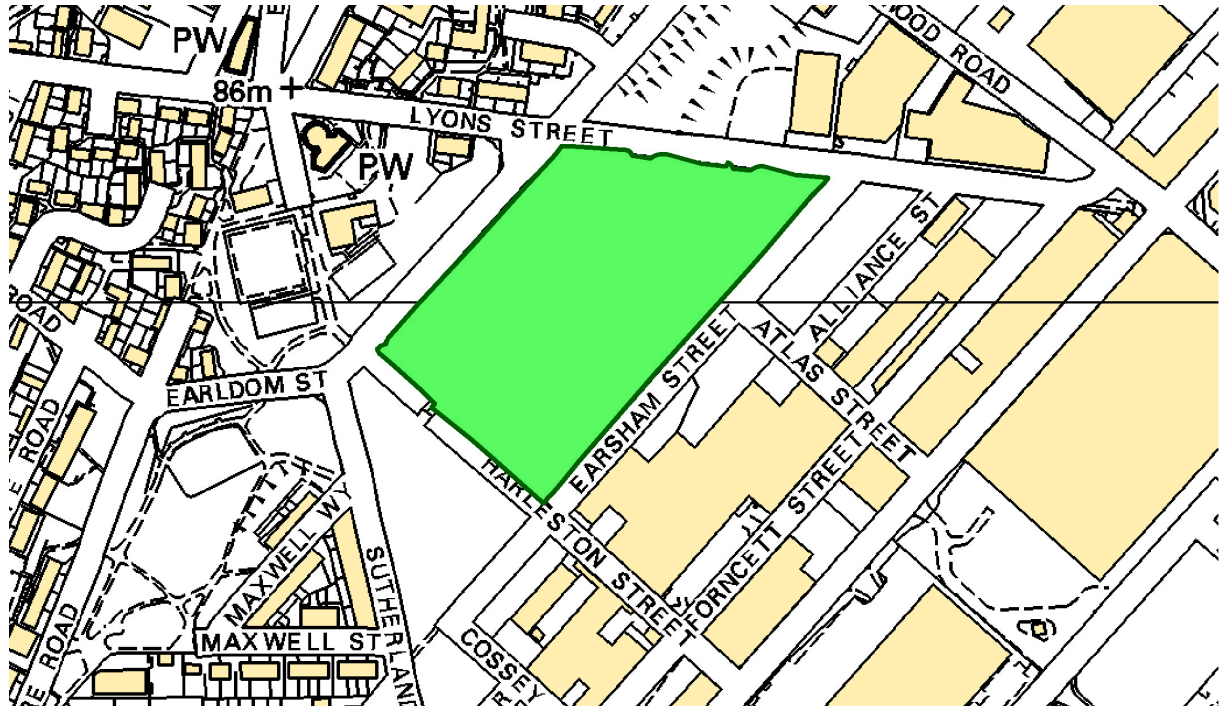
Flail mowing was carried out in the hedgerow woodland. This is not an ideal method of hedgerow management.

Dealing with the Japanese Knotweed that has taken hold on the southern side of hedgerow woodland and is spreading further down the grass was also not included in the job schedule.

UDP designations

Recreation ground

Location map



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Ecology

Phase I ecological survey

Site description

There is a large expanse of amenity grassland bordered on all sides by trees. Harleston Street which marks the western perimeter is a mere track separating this site from the Petre Street Urban Wildlife Zone. Norway maples, well separated, line both sides of this track. Along the northern perimeter there are closely planted broad-leaved trees that screens the site from Petre Street. Inside this tree line is another one so that when viewed from the playing field the outer line of trees forms the canopy and the inner, the understorey. Along the southern and southeastern perimeter of the playing field there is a small dense woodland composed primarily of native species typical of hedgerows. Along the eastern perimeter there is approximately a 30 metre break between the hedgerow woodland and the trees along Petre Street allowing access to playing field from Lyons Street.

Very little of this site is on level ground. The land slopes down from Petre Street to Earsham Street. Below the wooded area along Petre Street there is a south-facing embankment of bramble scrub and rank grassland. Comfrey also grows plentifully here. The grassland gently slopes upwards away from the level playing field towards both the eastern and western perimeter of the site. The hedgerow woodland is situated on top of the grassy bank which slopes down towards Earsham Street.

The mowing regime of the grassland varies which results in swards of different heights. This makes an excellent habitat for invertebrates and they are often seen flitting between the tall and short grass. The playing field is mowed frequently producing a short sward with few flowering herbs, although swathes of field speedwell flower well here in springtime. The northern embankment is not mowed at all. Tall grasses can also be found along edge of hedgerow woodland and lining part of Earsham Street and the Harleston Street track. The grassy bank below the hedgerow woodland is mowed only occasionally so that the grass is cut short, but flowering herbs such as clovers, ragwort, vetches and hawksbeard are allowed to flower.

Along Petre Street there is a narrow strip of grassland between the pavement and the trees. The white poplar seeds itself prolifically in this strip of grassland. Some of these seedlings are eventually mowed down during the summer.

Habitats of interest

Old species rich hedgerows are considered to be of high conservation importance in biodiversity action plans, unfortunately the one at Harleston Street is quite young as it was only planted in the 1980s.

Because of its width, it should probably be treated as broadleaved woodland, but as it shares properties of both, the new designation hedgerow woodland may be appropriate. It is composed primarily of

native species that are typical of hedgerows, such as hawthorn, hazel, elder, field maple, and dog rose. All have matured nicely and are now a source of food – berries, haws, hips and nuts – for wildlife. In fact people are even enjoying eating the hazelnuts that are produced.

The hedgerow woodland is located at the top of a grassy slope over a ditch. These characteristics would earn it valuable points in an evaluation survey if the hedgerow were in the countryside as it is potentially good habitat for a badger sett. None exists, although an old scratching post that had healed over was found.

The wooded strip along Petre Street is also excellent for wildlife providing nesting cover for birds and mammals. Tree Cotoneasters (and elders) are a rich source of winter berries. The understorey scrub is good nesting cover for the site's fox population.

The grassland is not limited to the short amenity grassland sports pitch and the adjacent lawns. There are also areas of rank neutral grassland. Having grass swards of different heights is good for invertebrates.

Surprisingly, despite the mowing of the grassy slope below the hedgerow woodland in mid summer, there was an incredible number of cinnabar moth caterpillars feeding on tiny ragwort plants. Some had even strayed from their foodplant and were in the short grass.

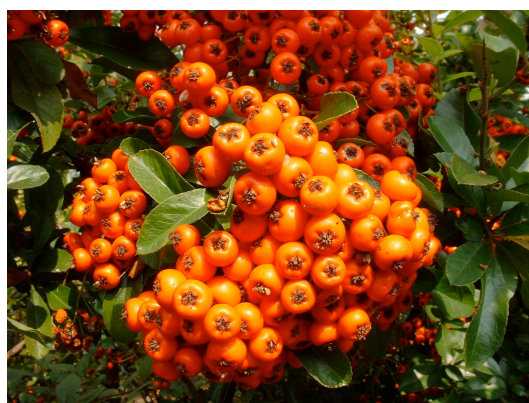
Between the sports pitch and woodland along Petre Street, there is a wide bank of neutral grassland and bramble scrub. Bramble flowers are a rich source of nectar for invertebrates and the berries are food for both invertebrates and vertebrates.

Species of interest

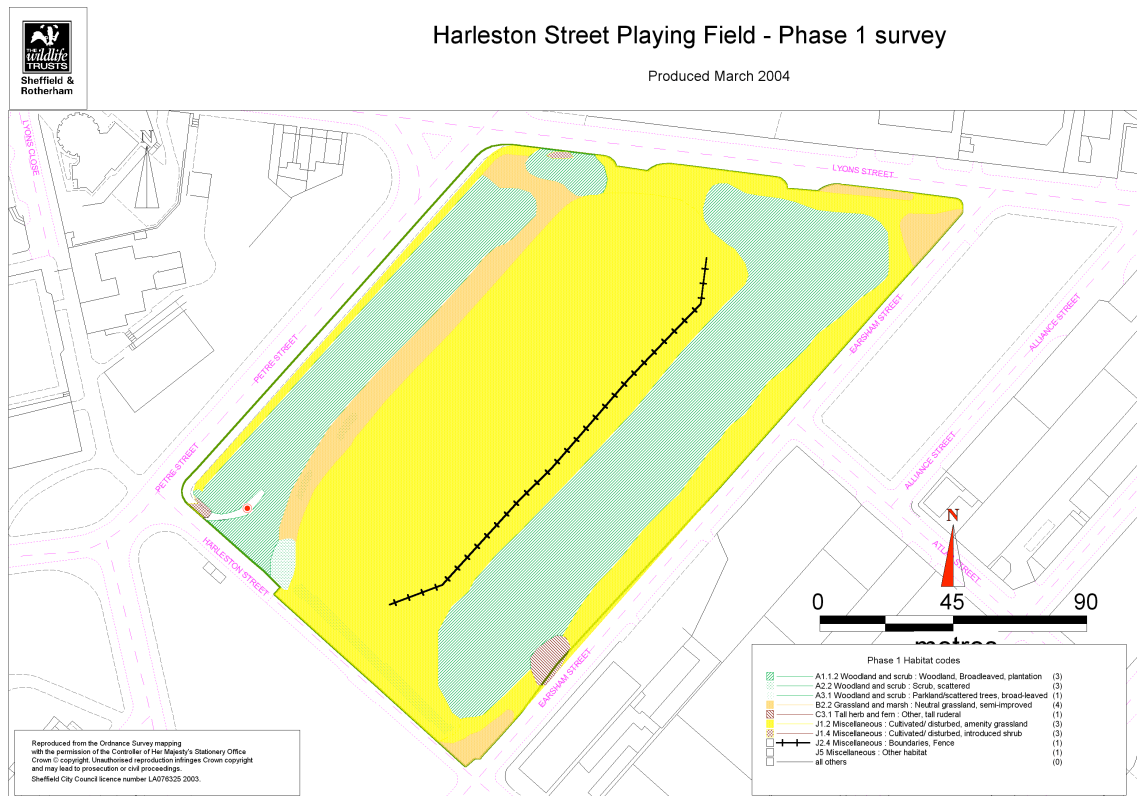
Species of high conservation value are listed in the Appendix.

Many of the shrubs planted on the site bear fruit. The firethorn bushes planted along the short paved walk off Harleston Street bore an abundance of colourful berries in the autumn of 2003.

The hedgerow woodland has a large number of native species, but it also contains a few cultivars such as golden-leaved elder, the holly hybrid *Ilex x altaclarensis* 'Wilsonii' and a shrub rose.



Phase I habitat map



Target notes

1. Paved walk

Invertebrates

Noted on site

Coleoptera

Seven spot ladybird

Diptera

Hoverfly

Gastropod

Snail

Lepidoptera

Cinnabar moth caterpillar

Specialist Lepidoptera survey

Large skipper

Large white

Small white

Green-veined white

Common blue

Holly blue

Red admiral

Painted lady

Small tortoiseshell

Speckled wood

Gatekeeper

Meadow brown

Burnet moth

Cinnabar moth

Vertebrates

Bird survey

SPECIES RECORDED ON AT LEAST ONE OCCASION DURING THE BREEDING SEASON	<u>POSSIBLE</u> BREEDING SPECIES 1	<u>PROBABLE</u> BREEDING SPECIES 2	<u>CONFIRMED</u> BREEDING SPECIES 3	NUMBER OF TERRITORIES HELD BY SELECTED SPECIES
Blackbird Dunnock Goldfinch Magpie Robin Starling Thrush, Song Tit, Blue Wren	Magpie	Blackbird Robin Wren	Tit, Blue	Wren - 2

1 Evidence: present on more than one occasion in suitable breeding habitat.

2 Evidence: singing/displaying male in suitable breeding habitat on more than one occasion; pair in suitable habitat showing courtship or territorial behaviour; bird visiting probable nest site; nest building; anxiety calls; recently used nest.

3 Evidence: Adult carrying food or faecal sac; adult sitting on nest; nest with eggs/young; eggshells found away from nest; recently fledged young.

Mammals

Foxes

Grey squirrel

Unidentified bats

Evaluation

Because of its name, this site could easily be written off as having no ecological value. But this would be wrong. Yes, there is a large expanse of amenity grassland, and yes, a large portion of that amenity grassland is a sports pitch. But the amenity grassland is representative of only a part of the whole site – just the centre in fact.



Most of the perimeter except for Harleston Street and approximately 30 meters along Lyons Street is woodland. (Even Harleston Street has a line of well-spaced Norway maples.) Not only does this woodland create a lovely setting for the playing field, but it also provides protective cover for nesting birds and mammals.

The wooded landscaped strip along Petre Street deserves conservation status. The section between Harleston Street and Lyons Street should not be looked upon as a separate entity. It is part of the green corridor which stretches both sides of Petre Street and helps link the open spaces of Burngreave with the open spaces of Grimesthorpe.

The hedgerow woodland should be kept intact as it provides food as well as protective cover for birds and mammals.

The bank of rank neutral grassland and scrub between the playing field and the woodland of Petre Street is also worth preserving as a buffer zone for wildlife.

Fly tipping is a problem on this site and the adjacent Petre Street Urban Wildlife Zone. Black plastic bags are thrown into the woods and garden refuse is dumped along Lyons Street. There is blatant dumping of unwanted household goods on Harleston Street. People have even driven onto sports pitch to dump their waste as Roger Butterfield's photo taken on July 11th shows. Although the removal of rubbish was listed on the schedule of jobs in autumn 2003, little seems to have been done towards achieving that objective.

Vandals set fire to the hedgerow woodland in the summer of 2003. Even conservation status will not protect this from happening in future.

Protective actions:

- Seek conservation status for the hedgerow woodland and the woodland along Petre Street
- Prevent any further flailing of the hedgerow woodland. Choose an alternative method for managing this woodland that is less destructive and is less likely to pose a health and safety risk to the public.
- Regularly clear site of any fly tipping.
- Retain current grassland management plan which allows for grass swards of different heights , i.e. sports pitch is mowed more frequently than surrounding lawns, northern embankment is not mowed at all.
- Eradicate the Japanese knotweed from the hedgerow woodland

Potential improvements:

- Have proper woodland management, rather than the occasional quick fix of clearing sight lines and street furniture
- Prevent vehicular access to Harleston Street to cut down on fly tipping along this "street". The stone barriers that are there now are ineffective as they are too small and don't prevent traffic from turning off Petre Street onto Harleston Street.

Species found

A (tree or shrub)

<i>Acer campestre</i>	field maple
<i>Acer platanoides</i>	Norway maple
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	sycamore
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	alder
<i>Betula pendula</i>	silver birch
<i>Cornus alba</i> 'Elegantissima'	dogwood, variegated hybrid
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>	dogwood
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	hazel
<i>Cotoneaster</i> sp.	cotoneaster
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	hawthorn
<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	broom
<i>Fallopia japonica</i>	Japanese knotweed
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	ash
<i>Hedera helix</i>	ivy
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	holly
<i>Ilex x altaclarensis</i> 'Wilsonii'	holly hybrid
<i>Populus alba</i>	white poplar
<i>Prunus avium</i>	wild cherry
<i>Prunus lusitanica</i>	Portuguese laurel
<i>Prunus</i> sp.	cherry
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	blackthorn
<i>Pyracantha rogersiana</i>	firethorn (orange berries)
<i>Quercus petraea</i>	sessile oak
<i>Rosa canina</i> agg.	dog rose
<i>Rosa rugosa</i>	Japanese rose
<i>Rosa</i> sp.	shrub rose species
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.	bramble
<i>Salix alba</i>	white willow
<i>Salix capraea</i>	goat willow
<i>Salix fragilis</i>	crack willow
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	elder
<i>Sambucus nigra</i> 'Aurea'	golden-leaved elder
<i>Sorbus aria</i> agg.	common whitebeam
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	rowan
<i>Sorbus intermedia</i> agg.	Swedish whitebeam
<i>Tilia x vulgaris</i>	lime
<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	guelder-rose

B (herb)

<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	yarrow
<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>	garlic mustard
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	cow parsley
<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	mugwort
<i>Aster novi-belgii</i>	michaelmas daisy
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	daisy
<i>Calystegia silvatica</i>	large bindweed
<i>Chamerion angustifolium</i>	rosebay willowherb

<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	creeping thistle
<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	smooth hawk's-beard
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	foxglove
<i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>	great willowherb
<i>Galium aparine</i>	cleavers
<i>Geranium dissectum</i>	cut-leaved cranesbill
<i>Geranium sp.</i>	cranesbill
<i>Lamium album</i>	white dead-nettle
<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	meadow vetchling
<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>	ox-eye daisy
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	common bird's-foot trefoil
<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	black medick
<i>Melilotus altissima</i>	melilot
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	ribwort plantain
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	tormentil
<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	meadow buttercup
<i>Rumex crispus</i>	curled dock
<i>Sedum album</i>	white stonecrop
<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	common ragwort
<i>Sisymbrium officinale</i>	hedge mustard
<i>Solanum dulcamara</i>	bittersweet
<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>	smooth sow-thistle
<i>Stachys sylvatica</i>	hedge woundwort
<i>Symphytum officinale</i>	common comfrey
<i>Tanacetum parthenium</i>	feverfew
<i>Taraxacum officinale agg.</i>	dandelion
<i>Thlaspi arvense</i>	field penny-cress
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	red clover
<i>Trifolium repens</i>	white clover
<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	colt's-foot
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	common nettle
<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	great mullein
<i>Veronica persica</i>	common field-speedwell
<i>Vicia cracca</i>	tufted vetch
<i>Vicia hirsuta</i>	hairy tare
<i>Vicia sepium</i>	bush vetch
C (grass)	
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	false oat-grass
<i>Bromus hordeaceus</i>	soft-brome
<i>Bromus sterilis</i>	barren brome
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	cock's-foot
<i>Festuca rubra</i>	red fescue
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire fog
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	perennial rye-grass
<i>Poa annua</i>	annual meadow-grass
<i>Poa pratensis</i>	smooth meadow-grass

Habitats/ species of nature conservation importance

UK BAP Priority Habitats

None

Sheffield LBAP Priority Habitats

Species rich hedgerow

Grassland

UK BAP Priority Species

Song thrush

Sheffield LBAP Priority Species

Song thrush

UK BAP Species of Conservation Concern

Blue tit

Wren

UK Red List Birds

Song thrush

UK Amber List Birds

Duncock

Local Red Data Book Species

Lepidoptera Grade A Species

Holly blue

Speckled wood

Previous Surveys

None found.

History and Geology

Geological survey

The solid geology of the site lies within the Lower and Middle Coal Measures of the Upper Carboniferous period and is characterised by mudstone and siltstone. The boundary between the Lower and Middle Coal Measures is defined by the Clay cross marling band.

Archaeological survey

No archaeological or historical features were identified within Harlestone Street Playing Field in the South Yorkshire Archaeology Service SMR, English Heritage NMR or on historic Ordnance Survey maps. Twenty-three features, however, were identified from archive records within the immediate vicinity (i.e. 500m) of the site. These included two Roman hoards (SMR 888 and SMR 889), a find spot of an Iron Age quernstone (SMR 882) and a large number of buildings associated with industry along the River Don.

Historical survey

Harlestone Street playing field was created on the site of former terraced housing. This housing was first shown on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map. The site of the playing field is previously shown as part of Hall Carre Wood on Harrison's maps of 1637. By 1795, the extent of Hall Car Wood shown on Fairbank's map had greatly decreased and the eastern extent of the site had become agricultural land. Subsequently, the woodland was cleared and residential development would appear to have encroached upon the site.

Recommendations

Harlestone Street Playing Field is of limited archaeological or historical significance. It would appear to have been used for housing during the early to mid twentieth century. Following the demolition of the housing, the site remained undeveloped and has since become one of the many open or green spaces in the Burngreave NDFC area. Consultation of census records will help identify former residents Earsham Street, Edgar Street, Lyons Street, Petre Street and Thorndon Road. This information may help improve understanding of local social history.

Notes from ecologists

The 1905 Ordnance Survey map shows that terraced housing did not quite cover the entire site. Houses did not extend the full length of Thorndon Road and there appears to be a green space here.

Community

Harlestone Rd open space is a large open playing field with a football pitch and goal posts. The site is surrounded by three roads and a tall dense hedge along one side. The survey received a good level of response from the visitors using the site. People who were interviewed on the site are proud of its wildlife and greenery and enjoy the space and wild blackberries but they are also angry about the increasing levels of fly tipping.

User Survey Results

The user survey showed that the most popular activity taking place on the site was dog walking. Other activities included playing golf, walking, playing football, jogging and playing. Friday was the most popular day with the daily AM surveys showing most visitors were adults and teenagers. The MD surveys showed mostly adults and elderly visitors and the PM survey showing again the majority of visitors were adults. Low numbers of children visitors were recorded but no infants.

Site Problems

Drug abuse

Local people feel there is a problem with drugs on this site especially at night and used needles have been found. The site is hidden and way from the roads providing shelter and privacy for both users and dealers.

Litter and vermin

The dense overgrowth surrounding the site particularly the hedge that runs parallel to Ellesmere road is badly affected by household rubbish dumping that attracts rats.

Fly tipping

There is a lot of broken glass, discarded electrical items and building goods right next to the entrance points which make it dangerous for both people and dogs to walk across.

There is also fly tipping left in and amongst the dense hedgerow and around the site in general.

Dogs

There is a problem with dog mess on the football pitch with dog walkers not clearing up after their dogs and not considering it important.

Dog walkers worry that it is unsafe due to the broken glass, needles etc.

Landscape and access

The entrance points are as mentioned badly affected by fly tipping but they are also overgrown and uneven.

There is an abandoned pathway that leads to a dead end as it has become overgrown.

There are no signposts near the road or entrance points to indicate that the space is there.

Facilities

There is no seating on the site only the remains of some old seating around the edge of the football pitch that has been burnt away.

Maintenance

There is no evidence of maintaining the site or clearing the fly tipping regularly as some rubbish has been there for some time.

The goal posts are old and easily knocked over or moved.

Site solutions

- Clear areas of rubbish, broken glass and fly tipping regularly.
- Install barriers to prevent cars stopping and unloading rubbish on to the site.
- Clear and maintain hedgerow growth so that rubbish cannot be hidden amongst it.
- Create and maintain a path network clear of overgrowth.
- Make entrance ways more noticeable with a sign.
- Install well spaced sustainable seating around the football pitch and / or footpaths.

Community Suggestions

From the options provided within the questionnaire the most popular suggestions to improve Harlestone Rd open space were;

- Entrance ways improved
- More events and activities
- Litter control
- More places to sit down

Community suggestions for changes to improve the site focused mainly on clearing up and maintaining the abundant growth of the hedges. The most popular responses were to;

- Put up floodlights
- Add more seating
- Stop the fly tipping
- More maintenance
- Tidy up the area
- Clear the paths and entrances

Question 7 provided an insight as to what people would ideally like to be able to do on Harlestone rd open space and the response focused around wildlife provision and more events and activities. The following suggestions were made.

More organised activities

A lot of people stated that they thought the site was ideal for small events and festivals but no suggestions as to a theme.

Build shelters for wildlife

Become involved in the design, creation and management of wildlife shelters, nesting sites and habitats.

A swimming pool

Create an outdoor swimming pool on the site.

A café

Build a café and run in the summer months to compliment sports and festival activities.

A bowling club

Create and run a bowling club for local residents. A managed and protected bowling green, club house and facilities.

Football matches

Sit and watch organised football matches between local teams, schools, and under 12's. Play on a properly marked out and maintained pitch with nets.

Dog walk

Visit the site and exercise my dogs.

A playground

Create a playground on the site with provision for toddlers and older children. Include soft surfaces and gates to keep children safe.

Mini golf course

Create small putting greens and other small golf course features on the site.

Toilets

Installed as part of the other facilities such as the bowling club.

More maintenance

Have a warden or park keeper on sight to maintain the area and reduce its problems such as fly tipping.