



new Leaf
STUDIO

Staddlestones Riverside Park Masterplan

Provided for
Bath & NE Somerset Council

January 2024 Rev B 27.03.2024



New Leaf Studio Ltd

Suite 1, 821 Bath Road, Brislington, Bristol BS4 5NL

Tel: 0117 300 5330 www.newleafstudio.com e-mail: info@newleafstudio.com

Registered in England & Wales No: 11256995 Registered Address: 7 Regent Street, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 6JX

CHARTERED
LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTS

Staddlestones Riverside Park - Masterplan

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	SITE SURVEY AND DESKTOP STUDY	2
2.1	Base plan	2
2.2	Walkover survey	2
2.3	Desktop study	2
3.	MASTERPLAN PROPOSALS	8
3.1	Entrances	8
3.2	Paths & Access	9
3.3	Seating	11
3.4	Play Area	12
3.5	Community Orchard	13
3.6	Football / Sports Pitch	13
3.7	Boules Court	13
3.8	Existing Vegetation	14
3.9	Proposed Planting	15
3.10	Signage and Interpretation	16
3.11	Antisocial Behaviours	16
3.12	Boundaries	17
3.13	River Somer	18
3.14	Lighting	18
3.15	Health & Safety	18
4.	PROGRESSING THE PROPOSALS	20
4.1	Further Investigations	20
4.2	Permissions	21
4.3	Costs & Phasing	21
4.4	Technical Design and Procurement	22

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Drawing BNES762/Drg01 P2 - Site Survey & Analysis

Appendix B - Drawing BNES762/Drg02 P4 - Masterplan

1. INTRODUCTION

This 2-hectare site is located along the banks of the River Somer, between Staddlestones and Cutlets Close on the south east edge of Midsomer Norton. The site is owned by Bath & North East Somerset Council and managed by their Parks Department as an area of public open space, primarily comprising amenity grassland.

New Leaf Studio Chartered Landscape Architects were commissioned by B&NES Council in Spring 2023 to prepare a masterplan for the improvement of the public green space / park.

The site comprises amenity grassland, spread across three fields with dividing hedgerows. One hedgerow includes a very large veteran Oak tree. The River Somer (a tributary of the Wellow Brook) runs along the western boundary of the park. The Somer corridor and adjacent field to the north (in private ownership) are designated as Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI).

As part of the commission New Leaf Studio undertook a detailed walkover survey of the site, a brief desktop study of its history, planning and other designations, before then preparing a survey drawing and masterplan proposals.

The proposals were then taken to public consultation during the summer of 2023, with a consultation event held on site on 10th June 2023.

This document and the accompanying survey and masterplan drawings have been updated to encompass adjustments to the proposals having reviewed the feedback received, and thus provide a finalised masterplan for the site.



Figure 1: Site location

2. SITE SURVEY AND DESKTOP STUDY

2.1 Base plan

The site has not been covered by a detailed topographic survey, so the survey and masterplan drawings are based on Ordnance Survey mapping data (provided under licence by B&NES) This data was then supplemented by site notes and reference to online aerial photography.

2.2 Walkover survey

A walkover survey of the site and its surroundings was undertaken on 13th March 2023 with detailed notes of features and record photographs taken. This was followed up by a further visit on 17th May 2023 to check details and visually test emerging proposals.

Notes gathered during the walkover survey have formed the basis of the survey and analysis drawing, Drawing BNES762/Drg01, a reduced size copy of which is provided as appendix A of this document.

2.3 Desktop study

A brief desktop study of the site was undertaken, largely making use of information available online.

2.3.1 History

Reference to historic mapping reveals that the site was open farmland until the surrounding Riverside and Staddlestones housing developments were built. Field boundaries shown on the 1840's tithe map correspond with the alignment of the current hedgerows dividing the site and the hedge along the northern boundary adjoining the SNCI site, suggesting that these hedge lines are at least 170 years old (depending on exact date of the tithe map covering this site).

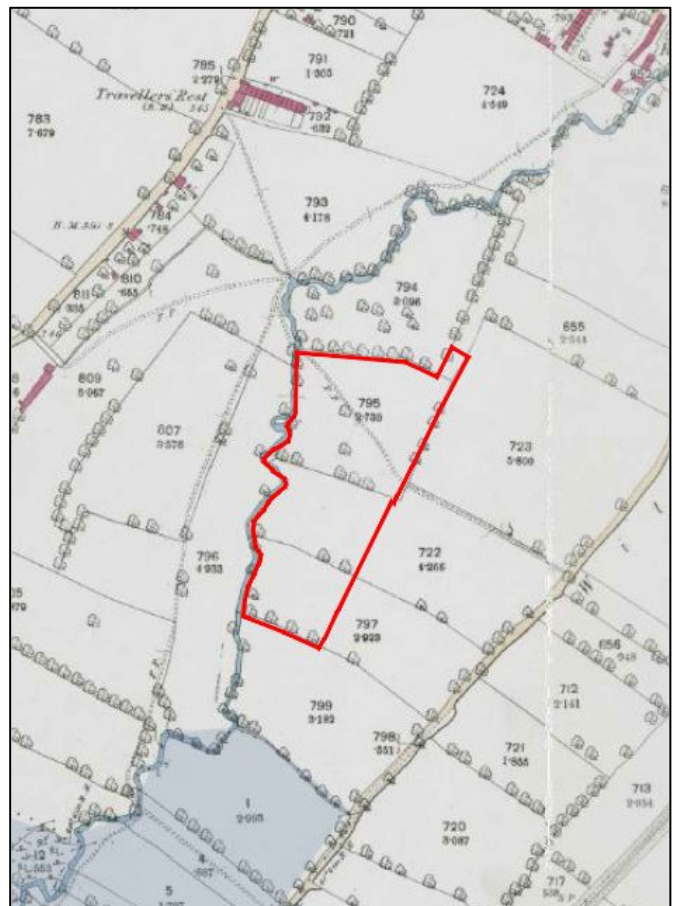
The nearest farm identified on the 25 inch 1st edition Ordnance Survey (1844-1888) is Redfield Farm, to the north of the site, on what is now Steam Mills. It is not clear whether these fields belonged to or were tenanted by Redfield Farm or others. Further research into the tithe map and accompanying apportionment documents would reveal more about owners, tenancies and land use, which may be of value to development of interpretation information for the site.

Within the limited scope of the study, nothing has been found to suggest any historical relevance of the names "Staddlestones", "Withies Park" or "Riverside" and it is thought likely that these names originate from the surrounding housing developments, chosen then as marketable names for the roads.



**Figure 2: 1840's tithe map
site outlined in red**

**Figure 3: First Edition 25" Ordnance Survey
(1844-1888) site outlined in red**



2.3.2 Planning & Local Authority Designations

Under the current Development Plan the following designations are noted in relation to the site (N.B: some designations unlikely to be relevant to any proposals for the park are not included):

Landscape Setting of Settlements (*Policy NE2A*): the whole park plus greenspace to the north and south are covered.

Ecological Network (*policy NE5*): The entire park (apart from a small area south of the play area) and the river corridor extending both north and south are covered.

Green infrastructure (*Policy NE1*): The entire site and most of the river valley either side and extending north and south is included.

Wetland Strategic Network (*Policy NE5 NRN*) – most of the park covered.

Woodland Strategic Network (*Policy NE5 NRN*): the whole park and SNCI site to the north are part of a larger designated area.

Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (*Policy NE3*) – the river corridor and the entirety of the green space between the park and Cautlets Close are covered. See map below:



Figure 4 – Extent of site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) shown by bright green outline

Local Green Spaces (*policy LCR6A*): The whole park plus the SNCI site to the north are covered.

Safeguarded Land for Sport & Recreation Facilities (*policy LCR5*): Whole park covered.

Tree Preservation Orders: none within the vicinity of the site. (note that trees within the local authorities' ownership and control are often not covered by TPO's)

Housing Development Boundary: The park and SNCI site to the north are outside of the housing development boundary.

The following designations also apply:

Adopted highway: Stadelstones, Cautlets Close and Riverside Walk, together with the land between riverside Walk and the river are adopted highway. The footbridge from Riverside Walk leading into the site is also noted on the highway inventory, so is presumably the responsibility of the Highways Department at B&NES.

Play Area: this is designated as a play are within the local plan and is also a proposed Dog Control Zone.

Public Rights of Way: The footpaths running to the west of the river, connecting Riverside Walk to Riverside Road and on to Cautlets Close are designated Public Rights of Way, but the path through the park is not.

2.3.3 Environment Agency, Main River & Flooding

The site is unsurprisingly within a flood zone, with the immediate margins of the river being at high risk of flooding (flood zone 3) and part of the northern area of the site, flood zone 2.

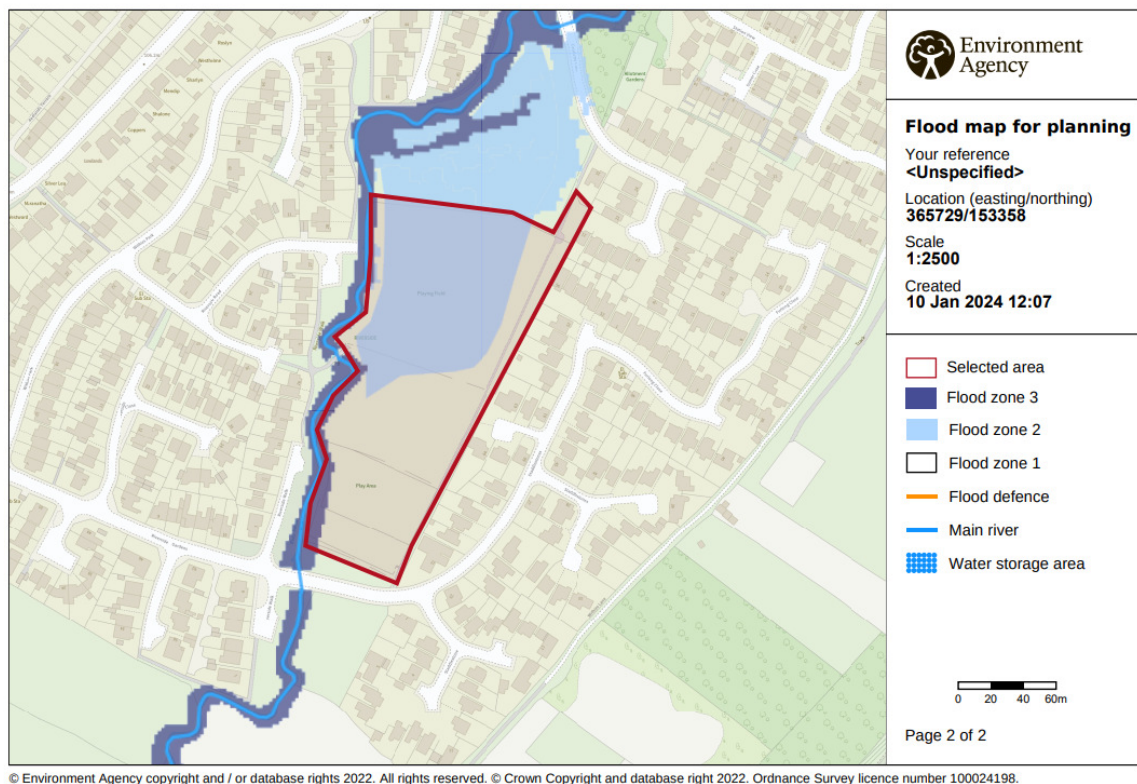


Figure 5 – Environment Agency Flood Zone Map

The river Somer is also designated as a Main River which means it is under the control and jurisdiction of the Environment Agency (rather than the lead local flood authority (in this case B&NES)).

As such, proposed work within 8m of the top of the bank of the river may require an Environmental Permit from the EA. Some works within or near to the river are exempt but some of these still need to be registered with the EA. The rules are quite complex to navigate, especially in applying them to relatively minor works and determining what applies.

2.3.4 Land Registry and surrounding ownership

The park is covered by Cadastral Parcels 20204201 and 20210048. See map in figure 6 below.

This also shows that the path linking to Cautletts Close is unregistered, but the adopted highway search suggests that this path may not be under highway control. Thus the ownership of this path is not clear.

The land registry boundaries show an anomaly at the eastern end of the boundary between parcels 20204201 and 20210048, where a rectangle of land, encompassing the path seems to be either unregistered or registered to an adjacent property.

The small piece of land between the park and Staddelstones / Riverside Gardens is separately owned (Parcel 56025491) and B&NES have a right of access over it to the park.

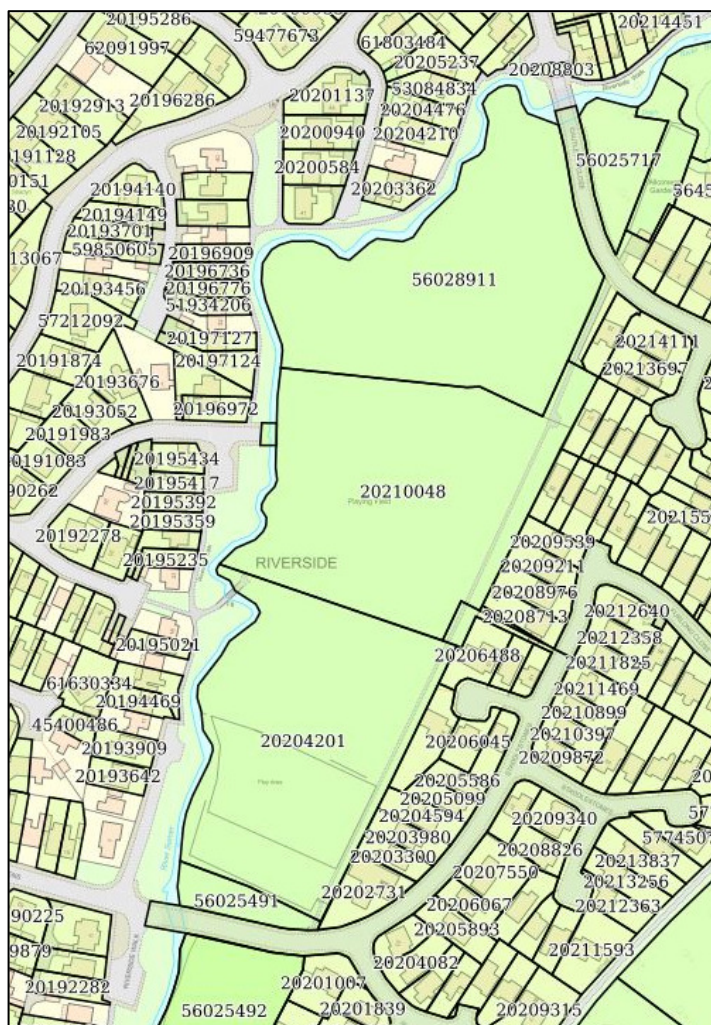


Figure 6 – Land Registry Cadastral Parcels

2.3.5 Services / Utilities

Utilities searches have not been made, so the presence of underground services within and crossing the site is not known. However, a line of inspection covers running just to the west of the main north-south path indicates presence of a drain here.

Any other services are unlikely to have an impact on the viability of proposed works to the park, but a full services search should be undertaken to ascertain the location of services.

3. MASTERPLAN PROPOSALS

3.1 Entrances

3.1.1 South Entrance from Stadelstones / Riverside Gardens

Access control: It is proposed that the current kissing gate is removed. Although theoretically an “accessible” kissing gate, it still causes access difficulties to users with pushchairs, prams, wheelchairs and larger mobility scooters. Combined with the extent of fencing around the play area, which forms a bottle neck, the current arrangement has a very unwelcoming air.

Consideration was given to simply having a removable bollard at the entrance (to prevent unauthorised vehicle access, whilst facilitating maintenance access). However, in consultation, concerns were raised about the risk of children or dogs running into the road, as well as over potential motorcycle access (see 3.11.2 below).

Entrance feature: The proposed solution is a chicane provided by removable or hinged panels, that will slow “escaping” dogs or children while not hindering general pedestrian (pram, wheelchair and mobility scooter) access. To maintain a welcoming approach and add to “sense of place”, the design of these panels needs to be carefully considered, to provide an attractive appearance, whilst facilitating ease of maintenance access. The panels could be the subject of an arts project, to be ornamental as well as functional. The panels could include decorative “gate posts” or maybe an archway over the entrance. They could be made in metal or timber.

Path width: The access path will be widened to 3m, to allow for maintenance access (minimum of 2.4m width required by B&NES Parks team) plus 0.6m for a pedestrian to pass maintenance vehicle. (see also 3.2.3 below).

It is noted that the first part of the entrance path is across land not owned by B&NES, but with access covered by a legal agreement. The new entrance feature should be located within B&NES ownership boundary.

See 3.10 below regarding signage and interpretation.

3.1.2 North Entrance from Cautletts Close

Existing entrance: This entrance is narrow with little visibility of the park beyond. The first approx. 37m of path from Cautletts Close is in unknown ownership. This may be highway land, land retained by the developer of the adjacent housing development or in private ownership. Review of land Registry Cadastral Parcels suggests that this land is unregistered (see Figure 6 above).

Access control: There is currently a kissing gate and fence about 25m into the B&NES owned land, which strangely separates off this neck of land. As outlined in 3.1.1 above, this kissing gate does not provide full accessibility, being discriminatory to some user groups. It is proposed that this gate and fence be removed.

The end of the path at Cautletts Close has a hedge to either side and is quite narrow, about 2.7m width, hedge to hedge. The hedge to the west is withing the adjacent SNCI land and that to the east is part of the curtilage of No. 25 Cautletts Close. Thus, regardless of ownership of the path, the ongoing existence of both hedges is within the control of other parties.

With the hedges in place, while theoretically the corridor is wide enough for a car to pass, it seems unlikely that anyone would try to drive in from this end. However, addition of a removeable or fixed bollard could be considered here if vehicle access is considered or later found to be a problem. Otherwise, this entrance could be left open.

Highlighting the entrance: Being relatively hidden this entrance would benefit from addition of a sign or some other feature, indicating that it leads to the park. In the absence of knowledge of ownership of this land, it may have to be a simple finger post type sign, placed with the risk of objection if the owner should come forwards. However, if ownership can be established and permission gained, it could be something with a bit more presence such as gate posts or an archway, possibly including some artwork based elements.

See 3.10 below regarding signage and interpretation.

3.1.3 Middle Entrance from Riverside Road / Riverside Walk

This entrance is marked by the footbridge and there is good visibility of the park from Riverside Walk (which includes the footpath running along the west side of the Somer and linking through to Cautletts Close.

The footbridge itself provides a positive sense of entrance, so little more is suggested here than a possible entrance sign or interpretation board. See 3.10 below regarding signage and interpretation.

3.2 Paths & Access

3.2.1 Existing north – South Path

Path width: This is currently the only hard surfaced path, providing a very utilitarian straight route through the park. The path is currently only around 600mm wide, which is rather meanly narrow and insufficient width for two people to pass or walk side by side.

Recent investigation by B&NES Parks team has revealed that the macadam extends to around 1m wide under the grass either side. As a minimum measure, the grass either side should be cut back / removed to restore the 1m width. This may then require some making good of macadam if the invading grass has rooted through the macadam and damaged its integrity.

Potential improvements: If making good is required, it would be relevant to consider widening the path at the same time to 1.2 or 1.5m, a better width for two users to pass.

The option of making this path suitable for shared pedestrian and cycle use was discussed during the consultation. This shared use would ideally need a 3m wide path. While not excluded as a possible future aspiration, this does not form part of the current masterplan. It is suggested that to justify the cost of making it suitable for cycle use, the relative merits and need for it to be a cycle route should be properly considered, which is beyond the scope of the current masterplan.

3.2.2 Pedestrian circulation and through routes

Lack of circulation and connectivity: There are currently no other surfaced paths within the park. As a result a large number of users, simply use the existing path as a through route, especially in wetter months of the year when the grass and unsurfaced desire line routes become quite muddy. There is no dry ground connection to the footbridge and entrance from Riverside Walk.

New paths: The masterplan suggests creation of a new path linking from the existing path near its north and south ends. This new path will then broadly run along the western edge of the grassland areas, connecting to the footbridge and providing potential of a dry circuit route round the park.

This path is shown at 1.5m wide which is the ideal width to allow two pedestrians or a pedestrian and a wheelchair to pass. However, if budgetary constraints do not allow this, a width of 1.2m could be acceptable.

Path Surface: The path would ideally be surfaced with macadam, being a cost effective, durable and relatively maintenance free option. A self-binding gravel or hoggin surface would provide a cheaper alternative. However, it should be noted that self-binding gravel will require a higher degree of maintenance and re-dressing of the surface.

Creating the new paths will require excavation of existing soil so that the path surface finishes roughly flush with existing levels. It is suggested that this excavated soil could then be used to form some very gentle, low soil mounds (maybe approx. 300mm high with gently contoured sides) within the northern grass area. This will save on costs of removal, retain the soil resource on site as well as providing variety to the topography and potential to use lower fertility soil on the surface that will better favour species rich grassland.

Protection of Tree Roots: Where the new path comes within the potential root zone (root protection area) of retained trees, it is likely to be necessary to employ no-dig construction methods; whereby the path is built on top of existing undisturbed ground. In these areas additional soil will be required either side of the path to marry in levels.

Secondary grass paths: In addition to the surfaced paths a further network of mown grass paths is proposed, linking larger close mown grass areas, with longer species rich meadow to either side (See section 3.8.3 below)

3.2.3 Maintenance Access

South Entrance: The principal point of access for maintenance vehicles will be via the southern entrance from Staddlestones / Riverside Gardens. The arrangement at the entrance is discussed under 3.3.1 above.

Reinforced Grass Area: From the end of the widened macadam path a further area is to be formed as reinforced grass. This will provide access to the middle field, space for a vehicle to park off the path as well as space for turning. A proprietary 3-dimensional cellular grid made from black recycled plastic is suggested as the most effective and least visually obtrusive means of reinforcement.

3.3 Seating

It is always difficult to estimate the number of seats that might be appropriate to provide. A potentially generous number of suitable locations for seats are identified on the masterplan, in anticipation of increased use of the park following improvements. The final number could be more or less depending on perceived demand.

Exact locations could also be considered further in-situ to make best use of views.

A “house style” should be chosen for all the manufactured seats to give a sense of visual cohesion. They should be sufficiently robust and durable for public open space use. If timber seats are chosen care should be taken to ensure the timber is from a sustainable source. There are also options available made from recycled plastic that provide a long lived, relatively maintenance free and sustainable option. If the latter is chosen a design that is not mimicking traditional timber seats would be a more honest choice.

3.3.1 Bench Sets

The majority of the seats should be a fairly standard “park bench” type seat with a back and ideally with arms also. The arms are valuable to less able users who need assistance sitting down or getting out of a chair, as well as reducing risk of use for “grinding” by skateboarders.

3.3.2 Picnic Benches

Four potential locations for picnic benches have been identified. Some models are available with an extended overhang at one end of the table element, that allows a wheelchair user to sit properly at the bench.

3.3.3 Informal Seating – Logs / Boulders /Reproduction Staddle Stones

Existing Log: There is an existing fallen log overlooking the river, which has previously been a popular informal seat and feature for children to climb on. More recently this has become overgrown and inaccessible. Vegetation should be cleared from around it and kept clear to maintain access.

Further similar log seats could be provided (locations yet to be identified), especially if any necessary tree works on or near the site result in suitable logs.

Staddle stone or boulder circles / hang out circles: In two locations, one in the northern field and one close to the south entrance a circle of staddle stones or boulders is suggested to provide a space for small informal groups to sit and chat.

Real staddle stones would be likely to be unsuitable as they are increasingly hard to come by and the tops are usually a separate piece which could easily be vandalised. However, replica staddle stones could be custom made from cast (artificial) stone, with a smaller top that is integral to the base and with a lengthened base to allow them to be firmly set into the ground.

Alternatively, a ring of suitably sized natural boulders could be used instead.

3.3.4 Practical considerations

Fixing: Seats should be securely fixed in place to reduce risk of theft or vandalism.

Base: Consideration should be given to whether seats have a hard surfaced base to sit on. This will ensure a mud free area around the seat and reduce the need for awkward grass cutting or strimming below the seat.

Disability access: As far as possible seats and any bases provided should allow for a wheelchair user to sit along side and in line with able bodied users on the seats. Provision of a space 1mx1m to one end of a bench will allow this.

3.4 Play Area

The play area and its equipment has not been an area of focus for this masterplan due to the scope of the funding, and that B&NES Parks team have their own policies and renewal programmes for play equipment.

However, it has been suggested that as a minimum the existing swings are replaced or supplemented with an accessible swing.

The masterplan has considered the perimeter fencing of the play area. Currently this extends tight to the side of the main north-south path and to the dense vegetation along the river bank to the west. This has the effect of cutting the park in two, forming a bottleneck on the path and reducing connectivity. It is proposed to realign the fencing to provide a more generous route to either end of the play area as well as better visual connectivity on the main route from the south entrance.

A seat and picnic bench are also included in the play area (see section 3.3 above)

3.5 Community Orchard

A community orchard has been suggested as a potential feature for the park. The small area to the south of the play area (which separates it from the rest of the park) is in many ways the most logical location. However, the ground here is known to get very wet and muddy during the winter. In consideration of the potential unsuitability of ground conditions here, it is proposed to plant fruit trees dispersed around the site rather than in a single specific location. Detail of numbers of trees and location to be determined as part of developing detailed proposals for tree planting overall.

Proceeding with planting orchard trees may be dependent upon there being a group of local volunteers willing to maintain the trees, as pruning, and looking after them is likely to be beyond the scope of the parks team's maintenance resources.

In choosing fruit trees, selection of historic local varieties would be a desirable option, however this should be balanced with consideration of disease resistance, ease of cultivation and fruitfulness (if provision of free food is part of the objective). Some of the old varieties are less disease resistant and can be tricky to grow.

3.6 Football / sports pitch

The existing space in the northern field, provided with football goals is not known to ever be used on a formal team basis. Its use is mainly limited to casual "kick-about" football. Of the northern and central fields, the northern one shows evidence of a greater floral diversity and so greater potential to support species rich meadow grassland.

It is thus intended that the kick-about football facility will be moved to the central field which has much less diversity within its sward and so is more appropriate to be maintained as regularly close mown grass.

A simple pair of goals will be provided. It is not currently proposed to provide line marking. Some levelling of the space may be required as levels drop off towards the river to the west.

3.7 Boules Court

A boules (or pétanque) court was not part of the original brief or thinking for the site. Instead, the idea came up as part of the consultation process. Its inclusion is considered an ideal means of providing for active use by a wider age profile of visitors as well as potentially encouraging inter-generational play.

A standard court (as shown on the masterplan) is 12m x 3m. This will require simple timber edging and a surface of suitable self-binding gravel laid over a type 1 aggregate base.

3.8 Existing Vegetation

3.8.1 Trees

Responsibility: The existing trees are under the care of the B&NES tree team, so their ongoing routine maintenance and safety checks have not been considered here.

Line of young trees: the relatively young but maturing trees to the immediate west of the main north-south path are currently less than half their likely mature size. As they mature, they are likely to form a continuous conjoined canopy which will close off views to the tree'd ridge line above the old railway line to the east. Consideration was given to removal of alternate trees to maintain a sense of openness. However, following consultation with B&NES tree officer it was decided to keep all these trees.

Crown lifting: Gradual crown lifting of these trees will be desirable to maintain clear visibility and head room between these trees, in time providing a clear head height of around 4m. The trees will need to grow more before this height is appropriate, but an initial phase of crown lifting would be advantageous in the next few years.

Veteran Oak: The veteran oak tree within the hedgerow that separates the play area from the middle field, is arguably the most significant and historic natural feature on the site. This tree could form the focus for a variety of community engagement activities, possibly including the natural history of an oak tree (which can play host to a potential 2,300 species of animal and plant), seed collection and growing, or history focussed activities; things that have happened within the life of the tree. Its age can potentially be estimated based on its girth.

Particular care will be needed to ensure that its root zone is not damaged as older trees like this are generally less able to recover from damage or root loss.

Protection of trees during works: In accord with BS 5837 2021, a root protection area equating to a circle with a radius 12 x the stem diameter of any tree (measured at 1.5m above ground) should be defined and protected from any ground disturbance, compaction or change in level.

Trees and other woody vegetation along riverbank: With the land the other side of the river being within highway department ownership, trees both sides of the Somer are presumably under the care of B&NES tree team.

To maintain and enhance casual surveillance of the park (see 3.11 below) from Riverside Gardens it is desirable to manage these trees and understory vegetation to maintain views through to the park. This will entail selective crown lifting of the trees and coppicing of other woody vegetation. (see also 3.8.2 and 3.11 below)

3.8.2 Hedgerows

The hedgerows would benefit from hedge laying which could be undertaken as a community activity with appropriate supervision. Laying hedges helps to maintain their vitality, species diversity and ensure optimum value to wildlife.

3.8.3 Grassland

The grassland areas are currently regularly mown. While this provides a sward suitable for recreational purposes, it does not favour species diversity and can be argued to provide a rather bland “green desert” or wall to wall carpet effect.

Changes in management of grassland can have a dramatic impact on biodiversity. Whilst soils on site are almost certainly relatively fertile, which is not ideal for maximum grassland biodiversity, the existing sward, especially in the northern field shows presence of a number of wildflower species. A quick count during the walkover survey in May 2023 revealed at least 14 species of grass and wildflower.

To encourage biodiversity and provide visual and textural interest and define spaces, three grass management regimes are proposed:

Close Mown Grass: Regularly mown areas to provide amenity space and access.

Meadow Areas: Grass cut 1x or 2x per year in mid to late summer and autumn, with all arisings removed to gradually reduce fertility over time and encourage increased floral diversity. Harrowing and overseeding of these areas with a seed mix including yellow rattle (a wildflower that parasitises competing coarse grasses and reduces their vigour) could be considered subject to specialist advice.

Un-mown hedgerow margins: Areas that are left to grow naturally and only cut perhaps every four years (cutting ¼ of such areas each year). These areas will develop coarser vegetation providing a beneficial transition from hedge to meadow grass to mown grass. Nettles, bramble and various umbelliferous plants (e.g. cow parsley) are likely to develop in these areas. The routine 4-yearly cutting will prevent them turning into less beneficial dense scrub.

3.9 Proposed planting

New Trees: Suggested locations for new trees are indicated on the masterplan. As the site is already well provided with trees, planting new ones is not a high priority, but is seen as beneficial, particularly if careful attention is paid to the choice of species suitable to the ground conditions and which will add to biodiversity and be resilient to climate change. While native species or cultivars derived from native species would be an obvious choice, anticipation of climate change and providing variety and interest for human visitors, could suggest inclusion of some non-native species.

3.10 Signage and Interpretation

Name of the Park: While within the council, the park is generally known as Staddlestones Park, during the consultation event it became evident that some residents know it as Riverside Park. The general neighbourhood is identified on Ordnance Survey mapping as Riverside. This divide probably depends in large part upon which side of the park users live – the (more recent?) Staddlestones estate to the east of the (older?) Riverside estate to the west. To resolve this disparity the name “Staddlestones Riverside Park” has been agreed.

Interpretation signage is proposed at each of the three entrances to the site. This should be kept fairly simple, potentially with links to more detailed online information (although such links can rapidly become out of date). Signs should be professionally produced to a high standard of content and made from durable, weather and fade resistant materials.

Information could include a map of the park; details of relevant local history; information about the river Somer; plants and wildlife to spot; the veteran oak.

All such signage has a lifespan and replacement should be planned for.

Directional signage: Apart from at the Cautletts Close entrance (see 3.1.2 above) there does not seem to be a need for directional signage within the park. However, should any interpretive walking trails be developed, these may require some route marker signs.

Boules court: A simple sign setting out the rules of the game would be a positive addition, encouraging use of the facility.

Prohibitions: Consideration needs to be given to prohibitions and signs to encourage positive behaviours (see also section 3.11 below). A balance needs to be found to avoid such signage becoming over dominant. Prohibition symbols could be included at the bottom of the main interpretative signs (e.g. no fires; no motorcycles; no littering / pick up litter / dog mess).

3.11 Antisocial Behaviours

At the consultation event, a few people expressed concern about increasing antisocial behaviour. What constitutes antisocial behaviour is of course subjective.

The general perception is that such behaviour is not currently a significant issue. There are anecdotal reports of occasional noisy gatherings of teenagers, but that these tend to be only occasional and then are and short lived.

There is repeated strong evidence that the more well used a public open space is, the less antisocial behaviour is likely to occur. The casual surveillance of responsible and considerate users tending to modify the behaviour of others. E.g. a dog owner is more likely to pick up dog waste if someone else sees them and youths are less likely to vandalise with someone else watching.

Through the various improvements planned for the park, it is expected that more people from a wider range of backgrounds will be encouraged to use the space, enlivening it and as a consequence providing increased casual surveillance.

3.11.1 Rowdy / Noisy Behaviour and Vandalism

Apart from occasional vandalism (most recently to the parapet of the footbridge) as explained above this is not currently thought to be a significant problem and the proposed improvements are likely to reduce rather than increase such behaviours.

3.11.2 Motorcycles

A number of people attending the consultation event expressed concern about motorcycles accessing the park. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this is currently a significant issue. While the current kissing gates may be a factor in making the site less attractive for errant motorcyclists, the site could currently be accessed via the footbridge.

Overall through discussion with the project team it was felt that removing the kissing gates to make the site more welcoming and accessible to all, outweighs the concern about this possibly making the site more attractive to errant motorcyclists.

However, specific signage at the entrances prohibiting motorbikes should be considered and regular reporting of any non-compliance to the police should prove effective in preventing this becoming a regular problem.

3.11.3 Dog Fouling & Litter

This is a perennial and recurring issue on many public open spaces. Again, increased use of the park is likely to encourage picking up. Signage and education through community engagement events are also useful tools.

As part of the proposals it is intended to provide a new combined dog waste and litter bin near the south entrance, employing a bin with a lid to help control smells.

There is then a bin to the North on Cautletts Close near to where the Riverside Walk path joins this road. If dog fouling continued to be a problem, consideration could be given to providing a further 1 or 2 dog waste bins within the park, but of course any further bins will need sufficient resources to ensure regular emptying.

3.12 Boundaries

No specific works are proposed to the boundary features of the site. All are fairly well defined by appropriate fences and / or hedgerows.

It is noted that some residents of the houses along Staddlestones with gardens bounding the park have introduced gates giving them direct access to the park. These have presumably been installed unofficially. It may be appropriate to consider whether such access points are

acceptable. If felt to be undesirable, one option would be to write to residents, using suitable wording to state that no right of way is to be formed, that the current residents may continue to use existing gates for the duration of their occupation, but that when houses are sold any such gates should be removed and closed up with fencing.

3.13 River Somer

The river Somer is a highly significant and valued feature of the site, providing wildlife value, visual and audible interest as well as being of significant recreational value.

The river channel has been subject to a separate study by the Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (BART). See their document "Somer Valley Rediscovered, Watercourse Opportunities Report" dated January 2024, for further details.

Key elements of their recommendations have been incorporated into the final masterplan drawing.

3.14 Lighting

The subject of lighting was raised during consultation, particularly along the main north-south path. In general B&NES do not provide lighting within parks. It being costly to maintain and potentially in conflict with wildlife, in particular bats.

In discussion among the project team, it was decided not to pursue installation of lighting. However, this does not mean it could not be considered in the future, particularly if self-contained solar powered lighting options improve and become a viable option in the public domain.

3.15 Health & Safety

In accord with good design practice, health and safety considerations have run through the survey and design process. A high-level review of the masterplan reveals that other than items highlighted below, there are no risks that are severe or unusual. Any risks in relation to implementing the masterplan, are within the scope of those normally found on a works site and should be managed by normal good construction practice. Ongoing health and safety conditions in operation and the management of park are all within the scope of normal good management practice for public open spaces.

The main factors particular to this site are as follows:

River safety – risk of drowning: As a natural feature the potential risks presented by the river are considered within the realms of acceptable risks, as risk taking play helps children test their limits and develop skills including learning how to avoid and adjust to dangerous situations. The key things to ensure are that:

- If someone should fall into the river, have they got a sufficiently easy means of escape.
- If features are added that actively encourage engagement and interaction with the river, have these features adequately considered health and safety.

It is expected that the BART report (see 3.13 above) will cover this area in more detail.

River safety – Water quality, risk of infection: There have been concerns about water quality and possible risks to public health from direct contact with the water. It is understood that water quality on this stretch of the Somer is better than some other stretches on other sites within the Somer Valley Rediscovered project.

However, there is grazing land and a sewerage works up-stream from the site, potential risks should be considered further as part of any decision making over possibly encouraging human interaction with the water. Again, the BART report is expected to take this into account.

Play Area safety: with the play area being generally outside the scope of this project and covered by B&NES routine safety inspections, safety of the play equipment has not been considered.

Trees: Mature trees can present a health and safety risk from falling branches if not routinely inspected and managed. As all the trees of significant size are already managed by B&NES, safety considerations should fall under existing management regimes. It would however be worth discussing any changes to the site that may change the level of exposure to risks from trees, which may in turn impact on how these risks are assessed and managed.

Ground contamination: Although during the consultation event one attendee gave an anecdotal account of there being a buried vehicle under the park, and in the absence of a full search, there is no evidence of past uses that gives rise to concerns about potential ground contaminants. None of the proposed works are likely to be sufficiently disturbing of existing ground to significantly change the current situation.

4. PROGRESSING THE PROPOSALS

4.1 Further investigations

4.1.1 Ground conditions – orchard

Some simple shallow trial holes should be dug in the proposed orchard area to determine if the wet ground here is the result of high water table or just water retention in the probably clay, soil. Soil texture should also be assessed in order to measure against conditions required for growing fruit trees.

4.1.2 Services search

There is evidence of a sewer crossing the site (line of inspection covers just to the west of the main north south path). No detail of this is known and nothing is known about other services crossing the site.

A full services search should be undertaken, to determine what service are recorded as crossing the site, so that these can be adequately taken account of in any proposed works or work methods. It is likely that B&NES Council can undertake this search in-house.

4.1.3 Land ownership – south and north entrances

At both the north (Cautletts Close) and South (Staddlestones / Riverside Gardens) entrances, land that is outside the actual park boundary is involved. Certainty over ownership and access rights should ideally be achieved. However, if owners cannot be traced then risk could be assessed and works progressed accordingly.

4.1.4 Tree survey

Some works, particularly installing new paths, may impact on tree root protection zones. A full BS5837 compliant tree survey is probably un-necessary. However, the location and girth of any trees likely to be affected should be surveyed and recorded. This will enable appropriate root protection zones to be defined, to then inform decisions over appropriate construction methods to minimise potential root damage.

4.1.5 Measured Survey

The current masterplan is based on Ordnance Survey data which is not necessarily sufficiently detailed or accurate to fully base technical design proposals on. A full topographic survey is probably not necessary, but detailed dimensional checks of some areas may be appropriate to inform detailed and technical design.

4.2 Permissions

4.2.1 Planning Permission

Determining what works to a public open space, that fall within its existing use category, can be a grey area. As a local authority B&NES have fairly extensive permitted development rights, meaning that much if not all the proposed works may constitute permitted development not requiring a planning application.

For the avoidance of doubt, it is suggested that the masterplan be submitted to the planning department under one of the following routes:

- **Application for a Certificate of Lawful Use - Proposed**, which would make it clear that works do not require formal consent. This is the cheaper and more straightforward process, however with lack of clarity at this stage, over the precise nature of certain features (e.g. entrance features), the planning department may find that they cannot determine the application.
- **Seek Pre-Application Advice**: This is a paid for service with fees likely to be higher than the above process. The planning department will review the proposals in detail and advise what if any aspects of proposed works require planning consent, on the best approach to submitting an application and what details would need to be provided.

4.2.2 Environment Agency

It is not thought that any of the works currently proposed are likely to be of concern to the Environment Agency in relation to flood protection and the water course. However, some works within the expected BART report may have a more direct impact on the watercourse.

The EA's guidelines can be quite hard to navigate especially in relation to the type of work proposed, which it is often unclear whether it falls within the works described by the EA.

Once the scope of work proposed by the BART report is known, an approach should be made to the EA for pre-application advice.

Some of the proposed works may require an Environmental Permit or to be registered with the EA as proposed exempt activities.

4.3 Costs & Phasing

It is understood that currently available budgets are unlikely to cover all the works proposed on the masterplan.

To inform decisions over phasing of the works it is recommended that an outline schedule of works and rough cost plan is developed.

This exercise should include consideration of whether some works may be logistically interdependent upon others in terms of sequencing.

4.4 Technical design and procurement

The Masterplan is not intended to provide sufficient detail to procure the proposed works. Some of the more management-based works will need schedules, specifications and location plans to be prepared. Construction related works will require detailed designs, technical design and specifications.

Once it has been determined which works are to proceed under currently available funding, a procurement plan can be prepared. This will determine how works will be packaged into different elements and undertaken by different types of contractor or organizations. Alternatively, it may identify that it is more appropriate for the work will be let as one large package with a main contractor then employing specialist subcontractors under their overall control. The plan will also consider any regulations or particular requirements about means of procurement that may be set out within the funding agreement(s) or B&NES own procurement rules.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Drawing BNES762/Drg01 P2 - Site Survey & Analysis

Appendix B - Drawing BNES762/Drg02 P4 - Masterplan

Staddlestones Riverside Park, Midsomer Norton - Masterplan



Staddlestone Circle



Accessible seats & benches



Ideas for features at entrances



5-A-Side football & river dipping



Differential mowing and grassland management to increase range of wild flowers for human enjoyment and to benefit pollinators

