

The Meadows

CONSULTATION STAGE 1: SUMMARY, RESULTS, ANALYSIS
WIRKSWORTH TOWN COUNCIL

The Meadows

Executive summary

Wirksworth Town Council received a very positive response to the primary consultation regarding the future usage of The Meadows. This is a historic area at centre of the town and the community are interested in its development. This phase resulted in a large number of suggestions from residents and many responses included three-four ideas for the space. The council hope to progress the project in 2021; defining, from initial results, a more focussed selection of options to take into a second phase consultation in the autumn.

Historic Context

There is not a lot of primary information available about the history of The Meadows specifically, but it has been an open space for centuries, perhaps never built upon. It first appears in documents in 1420, possibly as 'Meadow Wall,' but there were several meadows in different locations around the town. In medieval times meadows were fields shut up for

hay making, probably from early spring until well into August. After the hay had been cut, the field would have been opened for the manorial tenants to put their stock on, for a period in the autumn.



By the 1840s 'The Meadows' as we know them now were composed of Great Meadow, Little Meadow and Meadow Croft. From 1971 the Yokecliffe estate was built upon Great and Little Meadow, so the field that now survives is actually 'Meadow Croft'. As far as we know, hay continued to be cut, that is to say Meadow Croft was mown, until the 1990s¹.

The conservation area appraisal of 2001 referred to The Meadows as "extremely important as an historic public open area for recreation, views of the town, footpaths across and breathing space."²

¹ Source: Anton Stone, 2021.

² Wirksworth Conservation Area Appraisal, April 2001, DDDC, Wirksworth Town Council, Wirksworth Civic Soc.

Background

1. Purchase

The Meadows was put up for sale by the previous owners in July 2019. At the Town Council meeting of August 5th, 2019, it was resolved that:

1. the Town Council should make a bid for the land in order to bring the land into community ownership.
2. to proceed with the attempt to purchase the land irrespective of its status as an Asset of Community Value ('ACV').
3. to seek pledges/ financial support from the community to raise the funds available to make the bid.
4. that the Town Council approach DDDC to request the preparation of a detailed planning brief for the land, in the event that the Town Council's bid is unsuccessful.
5. under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings Act 1960 s1) to exclude members of the press and public in order to continue discussing the financial elements of the bid.³

It was felt the future of such a central green space should be bought within the protection of the town council, rather than sold to an external developer. The importance of this action was reinforced when the bid to have the area registered as an ACV was rejected by the District Council. A sealed bidding process for the purchase of the land concluded in September 2019. The council put forward some of its own funds and asked for contributions from residents- those who were interested and in a position to assist⁴. Following a successful appeal, the combined funds were put forward and the Town Council were ultimately successful in their bid to purchase in December.

Following the planning of a staged consultation, the first phase was launched at the beginning of February 2020. Leaflets⁵ were distributed via the library, the town hall, the doctors, the pharmacy and key shops within Wirksworth. Posters were put up on noticeboards throughout the town and shared onto social media- the town and council Facebook pages and the Town Council's website⁶. There was also editorial in the local publication (*Community Fayre*) encouraging residents to contribute. Finally, there was a leaflet drop of consultation leaflets, carried out by councillors and volunteers, which covered the Yokecliffe and Summer Lane estates and surrounding areas.

The first consultation ended as the first lockdown began -and with that the project was paused.

2. Note regarding the Covid-19 pandemic

The first national lockdown in response to the Covid-19 epidemic began on 19 March 2020, with just over a week of The Meadows consultation left to run. Despite the unprecedented situation nationally, we continued to receive responses to the consultation and took into

³ Minutes of the Wirksworth Town Council meeting, 5 August 2019. Minute no. C056/19.

⁴ See Appendix 1.

⁵ See Appendix 2.

⁶ See Appendix 3.

account any late submissions, well into April. Ultimately 48 responses (27%) were received after the lockdown commenced. It was planned for the local schools to be involved in contributing ideas but this was halted following the closure of all educational establishments. Some submissions were received from the Infants School however and subsequently it was decided to run a small campaign aimed at local children who may wish to contribute ideas during lockdown, 'Picture the Meadows'⁷.

Despite the pandemic restrictions - and though seriously hindered by the situation - the Wirksworth Archaeological Society were able to access the site for limited assessment. One area, 'The Tump' was assessed Summer/Autumn 2020 and following on from this they moved their focus to the eastern boundary in the winter of that year. Their work is ongoing⁸.

Other works necessitated to continue throughout this time of national lockdown were to the trees. Immediately after acquisition an arboriculturist was engaged to carry out a tree survey. As a result of this survey two trees were identified as requiring removal and this task was undertaken during lockdown. The tall stump of one of these trees was left as a wildlife habitat. Paths were kindly mown and widened - by mowing either side of the path to allow for social distancing- in summer 2020, by our usual contractor.

3. Recommencement

At the Wirksworth Town Council meeting of 15 March it was resolved "that Stage 1 of the consultation be 'unpaused' and that the council publicise that it is seeking further contributions from residents with a closing date of 30th April." The consultation was then reopened with immediate effect and advertised on social media and in print⁹, including on the new Meadows noticeboard (leaflets could not be produced this time, as physical distribution and handling was discouraged during the pandemic). This six-week period gave any residents, who had missed the first window, a second opportunity to submit their ideas. A further 21 submissions were received during this period.



Example submission from a Junior School child. April 2020

⁷ See Appendix 4.

⁸ See <http://www.wirksworthtowncouncil.gov.uk/meadowsnews.html> for further information.

⁹ See Appendix 5

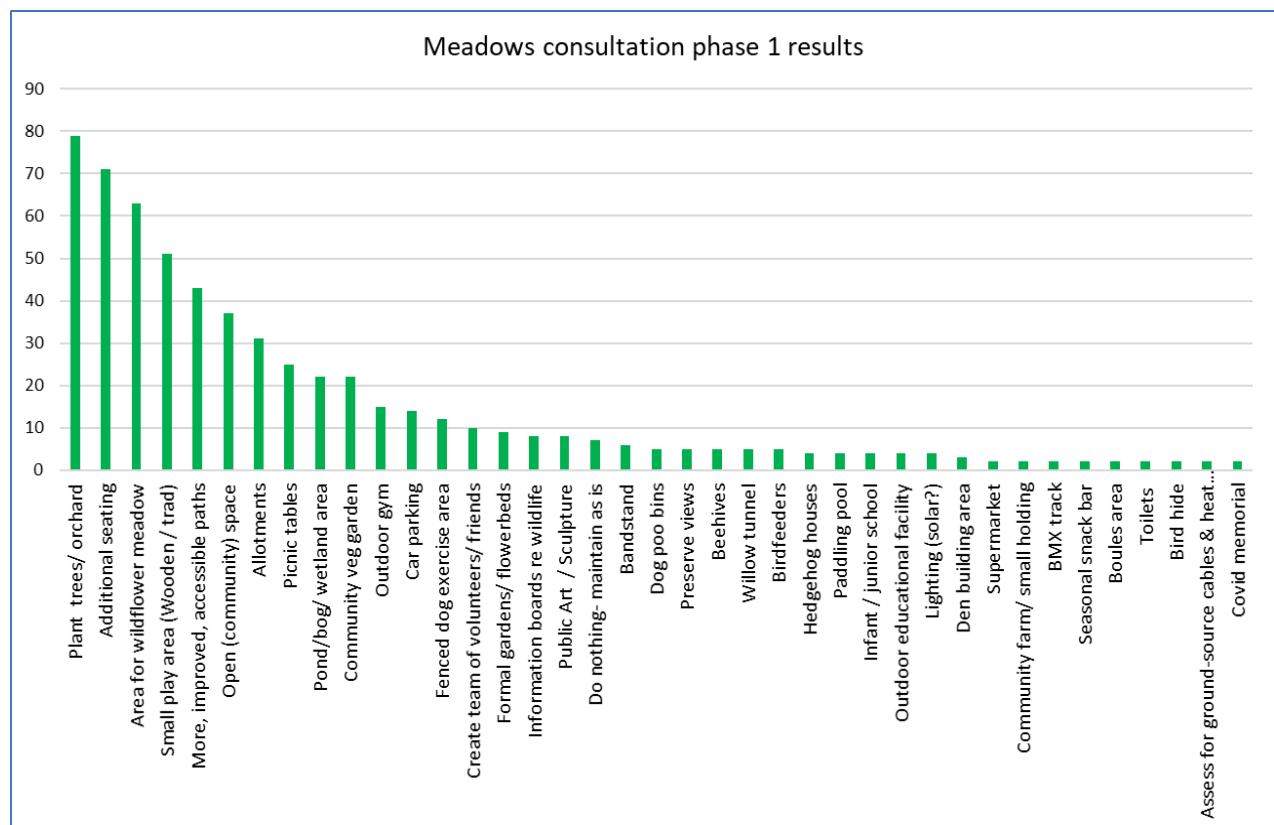
Consultation

4. Overview

It was decided to begin the primary stage of public consultation looking at the ‘big picture’ of what should be done with The Meadows, which would then be defined -and designed- in later consultations. Leaflets and social media posed the question to residents, ‘Please tell us in 100 words or less, what would you like to see on The Meadows?’ We received 176 replies during the first window of consultation and 21 in the second, totalling 197 responses. This means that just over 4% of the town’s adult population¹⁰ submitted comment. A further 25 design ideas were received from the local infant school.

5. Results

The following chart shows all suggestions which had two or more supporters. Only 7 residents felt the Meadows should be left exactly as it is, showing an overarching preference for there to be improvements of some kind.



Comments from local groups:

The Civic Society:

- The Meadows is valued as an open space. It should remain an open space.
- It’s openness enables great views to be had of the town centre: especially from the south west corner. Features seen are; the church tower, roofs of historic buildings and fine specimen trees within the garden of The Gatehouse. These views should be protected.

¹⁰ Adult population of Wirksworth 2011 census: 4,670. See Office of National Statistics:
http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E05003366#section_6_1

- Tree planting has been carried out along the eastern boundary. Any further tree planting should be limited to the western boundary, therefore leaving the main space uninterrupted.
- The biodiversity of The Meadows should be enhanced, primarily encouraging wildflowers and other low-lying vegetation.



Wilder Wirksworth:

- Leave existing habitats- the ivy on the walls, the mature trees.
- Mow / strim paths and add picnic benches.
- Encourage children to explore the space: include a willow tunnel, den building area, tree stump stepping-stones, logs for mini beasts.
- Plant native hedgerows to break up the area and create habitats.
- Plant small native trees.
- Create a wetland -fenced pond or boggy area.
- Happy to be involved in a 'Friends of' group.

A selection of quotes from residents, representative of common themes:

"A managed wildflower/wildlife meadow with pond and appropriate trees... more benches and pathways; possibly bandstand/shelter; small outdoor gym; small play area..."

"We think the Meadows is large enough for some of it to be developed as a community space. We'd love to see a parkland area for family picnics, games... We think there is a brook flowing under the Meadows and it would be fantastic to see this opened up as a stream and maybe pond area."

"Limited section of allotments with option for half size plots... picnic tables and an area with casual seating and shapes for toddlers to explore... more native trees and winding paths."

"I would like the meadows to remain a wild area with wildflowers, trees, pond. Areas for seating, picnics. Tree trunks for children to climb on and explore."

"A proper path near Fogg's entry, along the line of the trees; people walk there now, but it's mostly boggy."

“An orchard, an area for allotments, seating, garden area. I think it is very important that whatever the meadows is used for that it still allows for dogs to be walked...this area has always been used for this...”

“Part of The Meadows should be returned to a wildflower meadow with adjacent benches or seats, public art works and a children’s play area. Interesting and attractive as the town centre is, it lacks quiet places to sit...”

“Wildflower meadow area... Plenty of space -interesting paths. Dogs in one area only – not everyone loves dogs but they need space to run around!”

“I would strongly like it to remain essentially a natural area but with more management of the grass so that visitors can sit and enjoy the views and the atmosphere.”

“Better pathways for pedestrians and users of pushchairs, shopping trolleys and mobility scooters... some open grassland, various small trees... spring bulbs”

“I would like to see a full ecology survey done on the meadows and plans to ensure some of the very natural and wild elements of the space are kept... There is potential for a community growing/orchard project...”

“The area should be kept as a green space but enhanced with a picnic area, playground and performance area...”

“Zoned habitats: meadow (70%), woodland (25%), wetland (5%)”

6. Analysis

The results bar chart (previous page) shows there were on average three suggestions per response received and the majority of respondents favoured a selection of sympathetic uses for the space (e.g.: 'a wildflower meadow, with new pathways, seating and some beehives.')

The predominant theme which emerged was to encourage wildlife and birds, while making the space slightly more accessible to residents.

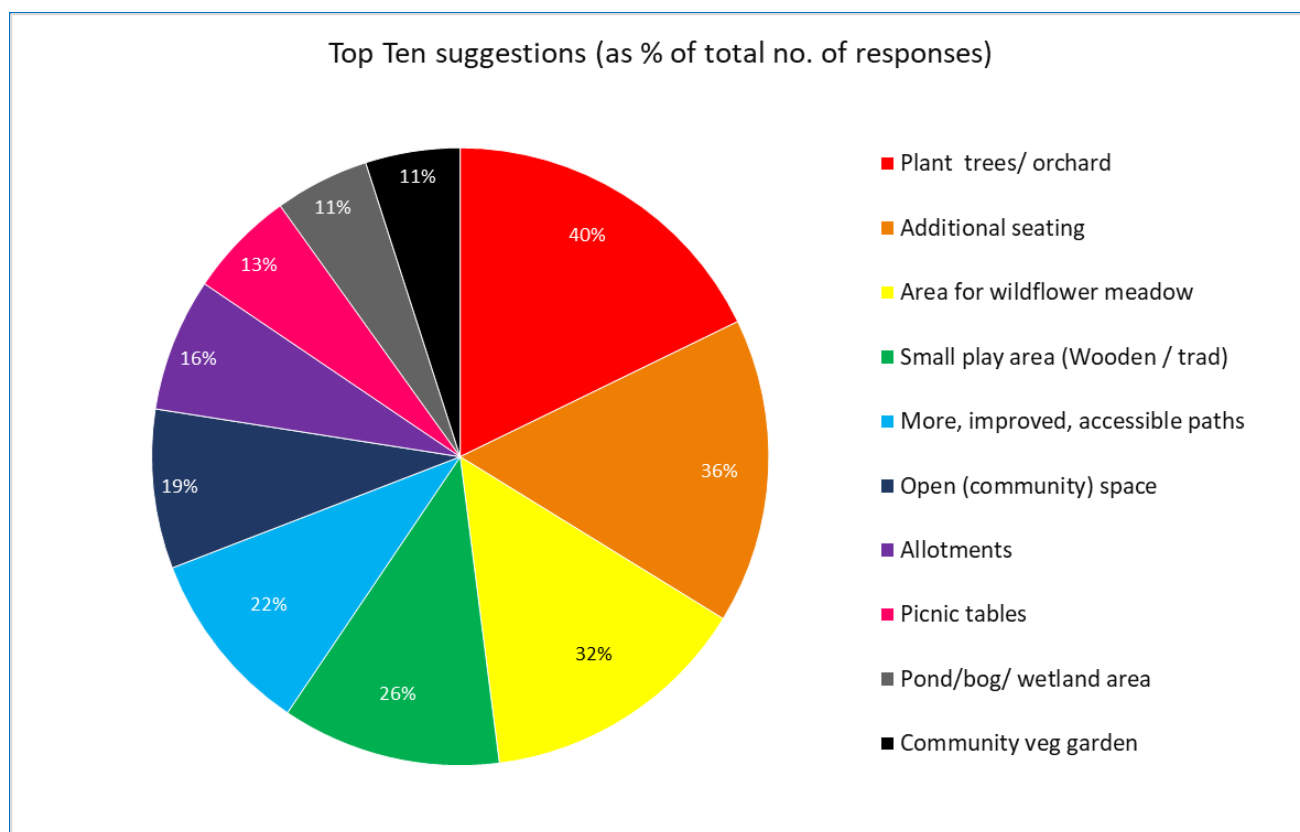
The 10 most popular suggestions for the space were as follows:

1. Plant trees
2. Additional seating
3. Area for wildflower meadow.
4. Small play area (wooden or traditional)
5. More, accessible paths
6. Open Community Space
7. Allotments
8. Picnic tables
9. Pond
10. Community vegetable/ growing garden

Of this top ten, the first six were the forerunners overall. Of the 197 submissions 16% suggested allotments (though most saw this as a use for just part of the area). Just outside of the top 10 were car parking, outdoor gym equipment and fenced dog exercise area. Dog

waste was repeatedly highlighted as an issue and additional dog waste bins were suggested by 5 respondents in addition to the fenced dog exercise area by others.

The following chart extrapolates the ten most popular suggestions as a percentage of the total responses received:



As respondents made more than one suggestion in the large majority of cases, the data does not total 100% (e.g., 50% suggest car park, 30% a wildflower meadow and 20% a play area) therefore each suggestion has been calculated as a percentage of the total responses received.

The most popular idea, suggested by 40% of respondents, was tree planting. Common descriptions were 'native' and 'small', and many thought such planting should be along a border or dispersed to preserve the open space and views. This 40 % also includes a large number who suggested planting an orchard or native fruit and nut trees. Seating had the second largest number of advocates. Many residents would like to see seating within the space as well as around the perimeter and wooden or natural materials were commonly mentioned. Taking into account that an additional 13% of responses mentioned picnic tables, seating is clearly an issue in order for people to feel able to enjoy the space rather than just pass through it.

Nearly a third would like to see some form of wildflower meadow area created to encourage wildlife and over a quarter proposed a play area, the majority suggesting 'for small children' and other recurring words include 'wooden' and 'traditional'. Over a fifth of respondents would like more, improved pathways. Opinions seem somewhat divided on this matter however, with some suggesting fully accessible pathways to allow wheelchair and mobility scooter users access whilst others thought paths should just be mown and not lain. Other similar recurring themes were perimeter paths, trim trails and the possibility of cutting out

the narrow pavement on Warmbrook by crossing the Meadows along the eastern edge between Foggs Entry and Summer Lane (by the substation).

The last dominant idea was to maintain some open space, be this a lawned area or a regularly mown, maintained space of some other form. It was highlighted by some that there is no clear green space in the centre of the town. The idea of open space was also linked to picnic benches, sculpture, outdoor performance and community events. No respondent mentioned Stoney Wood in this context, possibly due to its location just north of the town and the very different topography. One additional, recurrent idea (put forward by 9% of people) was to approach the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust for advice regarding the management of the space ecologically.

Conclusion

Overall, this initial set of results suggests that a sympathetic scheme can be found for The Meadows. Predominant themes relating to an ecologically friendly space and one which is pleasant to sit in, child-friendly and easy to walk through, were central to a large proportion of responses.

By taking forward the most popular suggestions from this sounding to the next phase of consultation, we plan to determine the definitive elements to be included within the scheme. It should be possible, by incorporating several compatible elements, to create a design which will prove agreeable and beneficial to the majority of respondents, and indeed the wider Wirksworth community.



Do you want to contribute to the purchase of the Meadows?

The Meadows is the area of land behind houses on St John Street, Summer Lane and Yokecliffe Crescent. It is in private ownership. The Town Council has resolved to try to buy the land to ensure it is kept for the people of Wirksworth. The Council supported the application for the area to become an asset of community value, unfortunately this failed.

We continue to pursue acquiring the land. If successful we will consult the Town on the detail of how it is to be used.

The planning status of the area is currently a green space and we have confidence that, at present, the planners would resist any housing development on the area.

The Town Council has set aside (from operational reserves) an amount of money we believe would make a good offer for the land. As the purchase is by sealed bid, we have no idea if we are to be successful.

We're aware that there are people who would be willing to contribute to the purchase. The higher our offer then the more likely it is to succeed. We are therefore inviting donations towards buying this asset for the town. Any donation however small, is welcome, but we believe that significant contributions will be needed to counter a bid from a developer. For example, if each household in Wirksworth's parish gave an average of £50 this would raise an additional £100,000.

If you would like to contribute to the purchase, then the Council is willing to take contributions which will be held until the owners decide who they will sell to. These will be added to our offer. If we are successful, the payments will be used. If not, the payments will be returned.

The simplest way to give a contribution is by cheque.

The cheque should be made out to '**Wirksworth Town Council**'. We will not bank cheques until we know we are purchasing the land. If we are not successful, we will return the cheques.

If you are not able to give a cheque, then you can write to the Town Council telling us how much you are willing to pledge for the purchase. As we would be less certain about these pledges being paid, we will have to take a view on whether we include the full amount pledged in our offer.

Donors offering over £500 may be contacted to check the surety of their offer.

Whichever way you choose to contribute please include a self-addressed envelope with your cheque so that we can write to you or return the cheque.

Please complete details on reverse and enclose in your envelope.

We need to receive cheques and pledges by 9am on Monday 4th November. We can then finalise our offer at a special Town Council meeting that evening.

Please send or drop in your contribution to Paul Jennings, The Town Clerk, Town Hall, Coldwell Street, Wirksworth, DE4 4EU



Name:

Address:

Contact number:

Contribution
amount:

Signature:

☐

I understand this donation will be accepted without obligation or condition, although if successful the Town Council will consult on the detail of how the space is to be used (✓)

Your personal information: By completing this form you agree to our retention of your details for the duration of this project. Wirksworth Town Council only collect information about you that is needed. We will keep your information safe. Your personal information is only seen by people who need it to do their jobs. You can ask for a copy of the information we keep about you and we will delete your personal information if you ask us to. We only keep your information for as long as we need to. This is normally 12 months after the completion of a project. Further information about the Council's Privacy policy can be found at <http://www.wirksworthtowncouncil.gov.uk/gdpr.html>. If you have a question, you can get in touch: enquiries@wirksworth.gov.uk | 01629 823406

The Meadows Public Consultation



On 4th January Wirksworth Town Council finalised the purchase of the Meadows. The successful campaign to buy the land was made possible by the generous contributions of the residents of the Town. The council is now looking ahead to what improvements could be made to the Meadows and what use, if any, could be made of the area.

Background

The Meadows is a 4.8-acre piece of land. For almost 60 years, it has not been used or maintained except for two public footpaths that cross the space. It sits behind Warmbrook and can be accessed on foot from Hammonds Court, Fogg's Entry, Yokedcliffe Drive, Yokedcliffe Crescent and Summer Lane. There is currently no vehicular access.




What will the process be?

The Meadows has been unused for many years and we will now take time to ascertain the most suitable usage for the land. As the first step in the process we are gathering people's ideas on how the space might be used. All residents are welcome to submit suggestions, the Town Council will also consult the schools and community groups directly. Ideas will then be collated and summarised to form the next stage of consultation.

What are the options?

At this stage of the process we welcome all ideas, big or small!

How to submit your ideas:

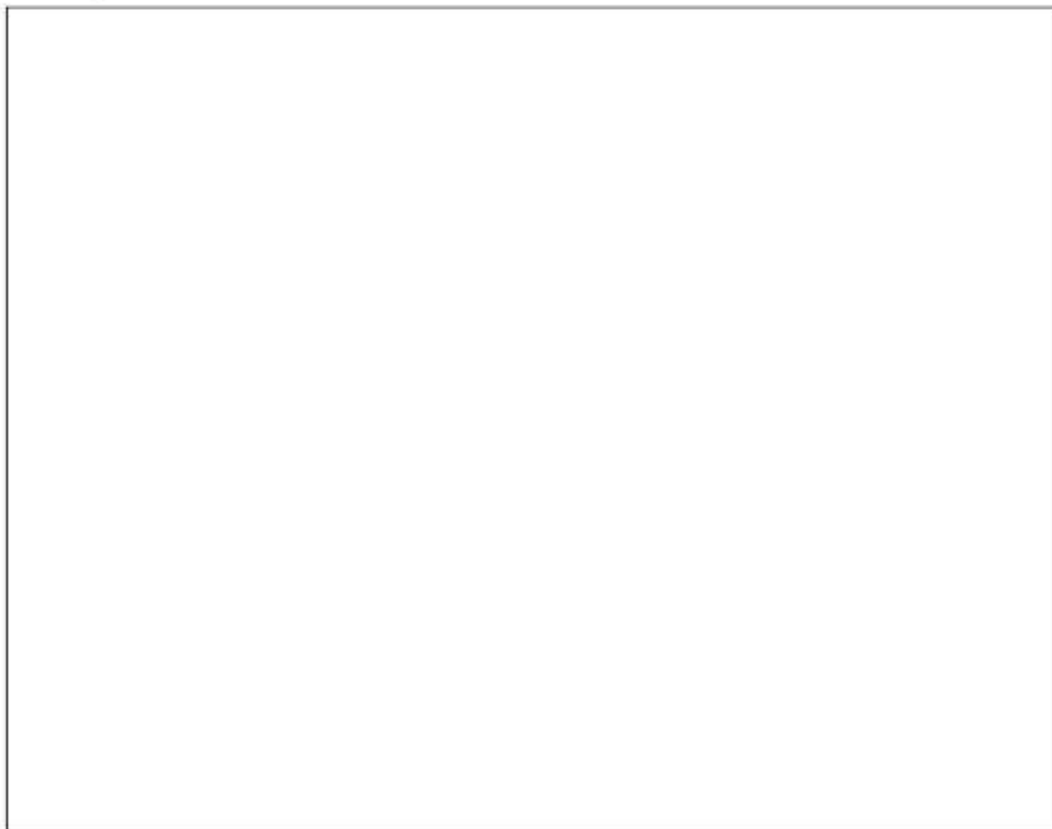
-  Email us your idea (in 100 words or less) to:
enquiries@wirksworth.gov.uk
-  Complete the form over leaf and post/drop into Wirksworth Town Hall, Coldwell Street, Wirksworth DE4 4EU.
-  Any queries? Call the Town Council on 01629 823408

See overleaf

Your ideas

Please tell us in 100 words (or less)

What you would like to see on the Meadows?



Why not just leave the space as it is?

In 2019, an application to register the land as an 'asset of Community Value' was rejected by Derbyshire Dales District Council with the reason given that there was insufficient evidence that the space is used by the community (other than the Rights of Way). Therefore, the best way to protect the space may be to provide it with some kind of regular usage, other than a footpath.

Submit your ideas in one of the following ways:

✉ **Post**/drop this form into Wirksworth Town Hall, Coldwell Street DE4 4EU

📧 **Email** us your idea to: enquiries@wirksworth.gov.uk

Deadline for suggestions: 29 March 2020

What should we do with the Meadows?

Have
your say

Submit your ideas at:

enquiries@wirksworth.gov.uk

Or fill in the form, available from the Library, Ken's & shops around the town.

Deadline: Sunday 29 March



Wirksworth Town Council, Coldwell Street, DE4 4EU
01629 823408 | www.wirksworth.gov.uk

Picture The Meadows

The first stage of consultation about the Meadows has now paused.

Sadly following school closures, planned projects could not take place to gather ideas from local children.

So, if your child would like to draw a picture illustrating their ideas for the area, we would like to receive them! These will be displayed at future consultation events.



Submit your ideas at:
enquiries@wirksworth.gov.uk or
post to the address below



Town Council , Town Hall , Coldwell Street, DE4 4EU

01629 823408 | www.wirksworth.gov.uk

Last Orders: What should we do with The Meadows?

Have
your say

The first consultation is re-opening, having been interrupted by the pandemic. There's no need to re-submit if you have already contributed.

Please submit ideas by 30 April 2021,
in no more than 100 words, to:

enquiries@wirksworth.gov.uk



Wirksworth Town Council, Coldwell Street, DE4 4EU
01629 823408 | www.wirksworth.gov.uk