



1. What is the future for Evergreen field?

When development proposals were rejected in 1997, the Wanstead Society was formed to safeguard this land for Wanstead. It has succeeded in keeping it open, but it remains unused. We have become familiar with the open field, but the land is in limbo: unused, no public access, privately-owned but with planning policy against building, other than where it supports or is ancillary to the purpose of that open space.

What practical use could be made of Evergreen Field, for the benefit of Wanstead? What do we want to see there?

These pages consider a future for Evergreen Field – where research, design, purpose and management could lead to a feasible proposal. You are invited to contribute to this.

Is there a solution that can be achieved by owner and community working together? Our starting point is to maintain the open character and a beneficial use, based on the current planning permission obtained by the Wanstead Society in 2013.

This report was first published on Wansteadium in December 2014. Thank you to all everyone who responded. Comments received have been included. In addition, the report now considers the practicality of achieving different uses. First some background...

2. Facts about the field

Why it is special

It is part of the distinctive green side to the High Street, giving a significant sense of openness. It provides a setting to the listed Christchurch, Wanstead's main landmark. It provides a green link between Christchurch Green and Church Path. It makes a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.

A brief history

Originally, the site was home to two houses, one called Framlingham, the other occupied by Dr Boney, damaged during the war and demolished in the 1960s. The site was then acquired by the Metropolitan Police for a police station but never brought proposals forward. Furlong Homes owned it for many years and failed to get permission for a dreadful development scheme. The Evergreen Trust made a valiant effort to buy the land in the late 1990s, but it was sold on to Gladedale Homes, who sat on it and did nothing. When Dalco Developments bought the land in 2012, there was concern about their development hopes. The Wanstead Society obtained planning permission for multi-use open space in April 2013 – but that needs to be translated into practical steps to bring the land into use and to manage it in the future.

Where we are now

As the land is privately-owned, it makes sense to develop a dialogue with the owner to explore mutually supported options for future use and management of the land. This will not be simple, but an adversarial approach will be less likely to result in the best solution.

Why doesn't Redbridge Council buy the land?

Redbridge Council could not buy the land without a defined need and sound financial and political case. It would be costly and risky for the Council to compulsorily purchase (CPO) and it is not a borough priority for spending limited financial resources. It does not make sense for the Council to buy open space in an area already well-endowed with open space, when other parts of the borough have more pressing community needs.

Is there another site that could be swapped with Dalco for the Evergreen Field?

If there was an existing community use in the Wanstead area that would suit Evergreen Field, it could swap places. The existing community site would be developed to cover all the costs. The only possible swap was with the Scout Hut near the Eagle at Snaresbrook, but that has just been rebuilt.

What is the owner's position?

The owner wants development but understands the public interest and is prepared to allow a reasonable amount of time to work with the community. To demonstrate this, he has withdrawn an unpopular planning application for fences, removed polythene sheets, consulted public health officials about rat problems and cut the grass.

How realistic is leaving things as they are – to do nothing?

After the 1998 planning refusal and Redbridge policy, the past development company landowners (Furlong and Gladedale) seemed content to leave this land in their land bank. The land was sold in 2012. We can continue to ask the owner to cut the grass and keep it unused, and the current owner has done this, but this makes no business sense for the owner and is not a secure position for the community. Is an empty unused site the best solution to this dilemma?

A plan of the field

This diagram is a plan of the field. It is one acre in size, located on the west side of High Street, adjoining Christchurch Green and Christchurch. It has a rich variety of trees.



Town planning information

- The land has no use in official planning terms. Planning permission is required for any use or development of the land, whether this is related to a recreational use of the land, commercial use or residential use.
- There is an Article 4 Direction on the land which was made in February 2002 and removes the permitted development right for the "erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure" meaning that these works require planning permission.
- Redbridge Council, the local planning authority, have a policy (reference CR1) in the Borough Wide Primary Policies DPD (2008) that says the dominant character of the land should be as Open Space and that development proposals for the land should be refused unless they are supportive of or ancillary to the purpose of that Open Space. Ancillary uses are subservient to the main uses of the site as open space and might include changing rooms.
- Emerging policy within the draft Redbridge Local Plan 2015- 2030 proposes to continue this strong level of planning policy protection.
- It is in Wanstead Village conservation area, reflecting the special character of the High Street based on its buildings, townscape and green spaces.
- The adjacent Christchurch is a grade II* listed building.

The condition of the land

It has a very uneven surface, probably containing buried foundations and filled-in cellars. There is an overgrown air raid shelter near the Christchurch path. The current owners, Dalco Developments, have cooperated with the Wanstead Society by keeping the field tidy.

Ownership information

The land is owned by Dalco Developments, who bought the land in 2012 from Gladedale Ltd – a housebuilder who had owned the land for several years.

Transferring ownership

Enquiries have been made informally with the owner to acquire the land. However, the owner is unwilling to sell the land at this time. Compulsory purchase by the Council would be hard to justify and the Council would be unwilling to exercise its powers in this respect. A tentative value of the land in its current condition has been put at about £60,000, albeit the basis of this valuation is unclear. In any event, any buyer would have to agree a price with the owner and of course meet fees for legal services. The buyer would also need to have the proper standing to hold a legal interest in the land (e.g. freehold); this could be an individual or properly incorporated company or trust, or perhaps the Council.

A community trust

If ownership of any land is transferred for public use, and the Council does not wish to acquire the freehold of the land or any part of it, then it could be held in trust for the benefit of the community by a charitable organization. A trust would plan the future management of the community land and raise funds for all the work needed to bring it into use.

Local opinion

The Furlong Homes proposal for a building facing the High Street with parking behind and a blank end wall facing the Green stimulated the setting up of the Wanstead Society. There has been resistance to similar development since, reflected in the Council's policy protecting the open land.

Planning permission

The Wanstead Society made a planning application for multi-use, community open space, with new fencing, planting and access (reference 2254/12). No planning permission was granted for permanent fixed structures. This was granted in March 2013 and is the only formal status the site has; it will expire in March 2016 if it is not implemented in that time. The permission however requires tree surveys, walls and fences and hard surfacing/ soft landscaping design which are conditions of the approval of the planning permission and must be discharged by Redbridge Council before the use can commence. All of these works will have financial implications for the community that will affect the practicality of implementing this permission. These costs would run into tens of thousands of pounds.

Temporary uses

Any moveable structure within the site is only allowed up to 28 days in total in any calendar year. In addition any holding of a market is limited up to a maximum of 14 days in total in any calendar year.

3. Considering viable options for the land

This report is not merely a list of ideas. It starts to investigate how achievable each idea is in terms of the immediate cost of providing the proposal and the ongoing cost of maintenance. We have to understand how feasible each option would be - to get planning permission, to carry out the works, and to manage in the long term. We have to consider where the funding comes from – crowd-funding, grants or ‘enabling development’.

Bringing the land into use – the basic steps

These are basic tasks that will need to be undertaken whatever the final use might be, whoever owns the land, all of which have potential cost implications:

Designing and approving a new use

- A professional tree survey is needed
- Planning permission is needed, whatever the proposal
- Landscape design for public open land and an architect for any building.
- A Quantity Surveyor to work out precise costs alternatives

Ground works and Landscaping for public open space

- Removal / infilling of the air raid shelter, eliminating rats, removal of scattered masonry and re-grading the uneven surface
- Removal of saplings and invasive undergrowth
- Ensuring the existing trees are healthy
- Construction of path access, drainage, fencing, etc
- New planting
- installation of play / sport / fitness equipment
- Construction of ancilliary structures

Management plan

Drafting a management regime and costing the annual maintenance.

Viability

For each option, we can assess the physical practicality of the use, the cost, the source of capital funding, and the income from rents or sales.

For the landowner to carry out a project to bring the land back into use, there has to be enough financial incentive to cover the original price of the land and the time and effort required for the project.

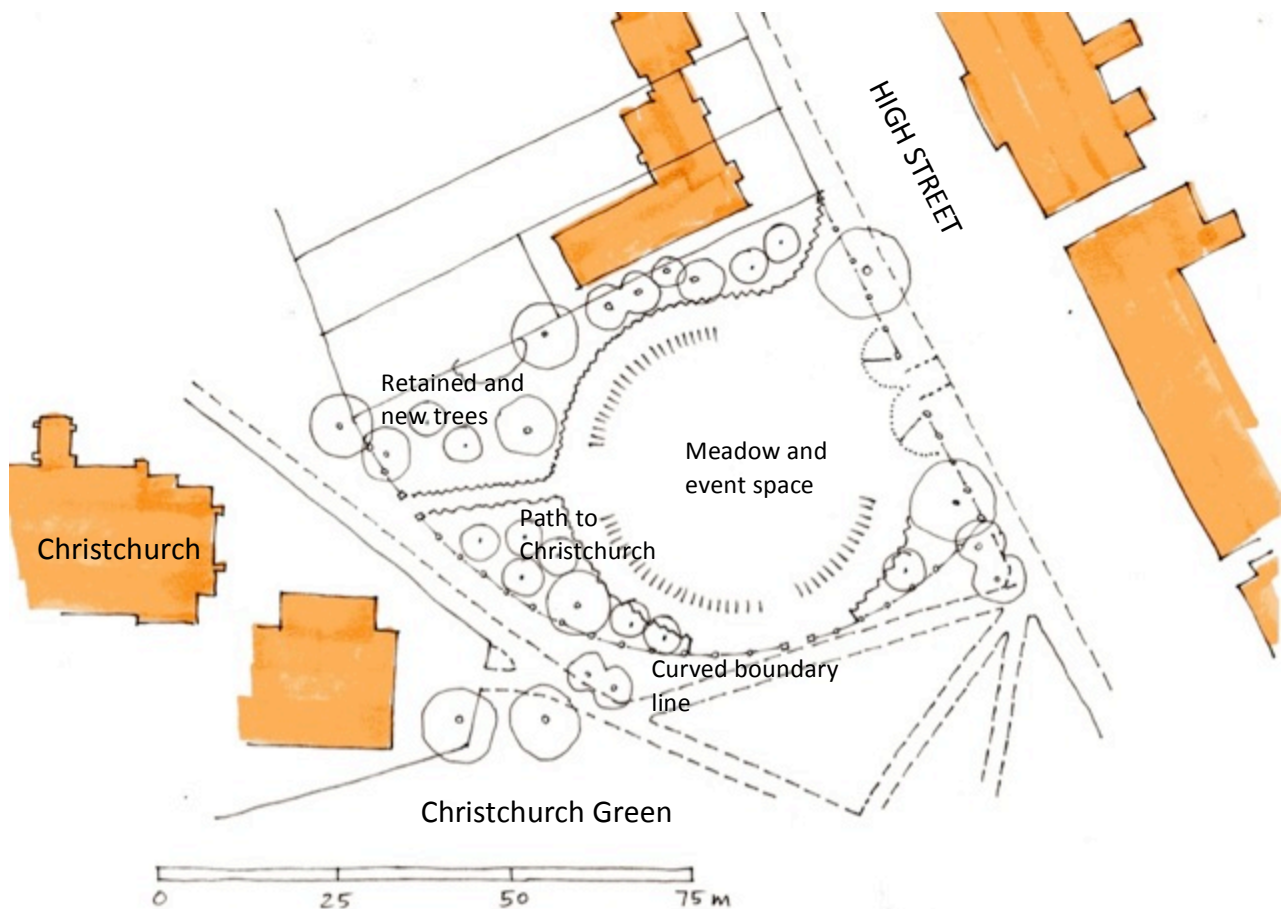
For a community-led project, there has to be a community land trust established, sufficient funding to negotiate acquisition of the land and the cost of professional fees, construction and maintenance. The community value of the proposed use will be the key factor in determining whether sufficient money can be raised by grants and crowd-funding.

4. Ideas for the land

The following pages outline five broad ideas for the future use of Evergreen field, with a short assessment of how achievable each one is.

Idea 1. Entirely open space for informal recreation and community activity

A multi-use community open space, for a wide range of formal and informal activities. The central meadow would be available to rent for some temporary events.



This approach is based on a free space for a variety of activities and new kinds of recreation, different from what we have in Wanstead already, and intended to appeal to the whole community. This could be a managed space for a calendar of organized activities. With support from community groups, nearby places of worship, local schools, Scouts and Guides who meet close by and local businesses. Here are some ideas about how the space would be used:

'I think that making it into an outdoor venue for plays, concerts, music, comedy festivals would be a great use of the space. It could be kept very natural – grass and maybe either a picnic area and benches arranged in a graceful semi-circle. Performances could be mounted during festivals such as the Wanstead Festival, the Art Trail. In between times, it would be just a natural outdoor venue that invites casual public use.'
Ginnette Benedict Carty

'Perhaps some provision could be made for a small performance space/projection wall on the side of the land which abuts the doctors surgery? Public events could be screened there using temporary projection kit.'
Nick / Wansteadium

'A small amphitheatre sculpted out of the landform would turn the area into a performance space and a meeting place. It would also contribute to a bustling High Street.'

'My personal opinion is that the best thing for the residents of Wanstead would be for the Evergreen Field to be decontaminated, trees felled and planted as required, paths laid and the perimeter fenced, and the land to be joined to extend the existing Christchurch Green. I believe the Christchurch Green park is well used and especially busy in the summer months and making it bigger would be great. **Mark Ling**

Integrate it into Christchurch Green...

'I'd like to see the space simply integrated into Christchurch Green. It would be the most straightforward and cheapest option, with fewest ongoing management issues. Buildings cost money to erect, maintain and secure. A bowling green would be very difficult given the gradient and, like a vegetable plot, would sadly be susceptible to vandalism.' **Andrew Shields**

How achievable is Idea 1?

Converting the field to public open space is the simplest and on the face of it, most achievable. However it still involves costs, without clear-cut sources of finance.

The current owner is unlikely to spend money on making it an open space, on top of the cost of buying the land. There would be ongoing maintenance responsibility and the Council cannot be expected to do this.

Idea 2. Open space for specific purposes: natural play, food growing, active all-age recreation

This approach seeks to keep the land open but extract a specific benefit from the land, either as a natural resource or a structured recreational activity.

Natural play.....

Natural play sites' consist of natural and manufactured structures to stimulate creative and imaginative play.

'This is seen to be the way forward in terms of play in urban areas. Most natural play features are mounds, tree trunks, boulders. The formal equipment associated with this type of play, such as nest swings and climbing frames, are not restricted in terms of age, we would welcome anyone to use them - age restrictions are avoided these days in terms of play. In South Park we have a very inclusive playground in the north end of the park and also in Seven Kings park (Aldborough Road South) a playscape which is a landscape based playground.'

Ian Shepherd

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/>



Nature play activity recipes are tried and tested activities with children on three adventure playgrounds the team has worked with in North Tyneside, Haringey and Torbay.

Natural England's Access to Nature programme, provides funding

In Ray Park South Woodford, a woodland was planted and includes a natural play zone. This was undertaken with Trees for Cities



Adventure playground...

'I agree with the proposals to turn it into an adventure playground of some sort – perhaps with a natural theme (see also play area near velodrome at QEOP). Because there are so many schools within striking distance of Wanstead, there are a lot of families in the area with older children who do not get anything out of the existing playground (which itself could do with improving) who would benefit from this. It would be a more constructive place for older children to go rather than hang out outside the chip shop, and it would retain the land as mostly open space for use by the community. There is nothing like this nearby so would be a real asset to the area.' **Jane O'Keeffe**

I'm not against the idea of a natural/adventure playground or skate park for older kids but this would also need maintenance and management, which is a cost that needs to be met somewhere.'

Andrew Shields

Food growing.... Much of the land could be devoted to raised beds for cultivating food, or an orchard. There is a history of nurseries in Wanstead.

Growing food...

'This could be a great place for people to plant herbs, fruits and veg? People could buy small plots, or it could be started up by the people who own the land and then there for people to buy from, acting like a natural fruit and veg stall! I definitely think it would attract lots of attention. Something a bit different too! #buylocal' **Robyn Allan**

Growing vegetables close to a road? Allotments can sometimes look unsightly and ramshackle; inappropriate for such a visible site in a Conservation Area?



The London Orchard Project is a fresh initiative promoting orchards and fruit trees in London. We are working with Londoners to plant and harvest apple, pear and plum trees all over the city, and help us all to rediscover the pleasure of eating home-grown fruit. Join us and take part in the fruit tree revolution.

Active recreation... On the other hand, a more structured approach could provide equipment and surfaces for intensive active recreation and alternative sports to optimize recreational value.

The Adizone at Ray Park has fitness equipment, a climbing wall, and basketball hoop. The gym is free to use during park opening hours and aims to give young people an opportunity to meet socially while being encouraged to play sports.



Adizones are permanent installations measuring 625sq metres, with sporting facilities inspired by Olympic and Paralympic sports. They are devised by Adidas. They feature a number of activities including a climbing wall, basketball ring, outdoor gym and amphitheatre for dance, aerobics and gymnastics. Each activity has instructions on how the equipment is to be used properly and safely plus details on local clubs and how to get involved.



'A smart bowling green would be a welcome addition to the village high street. A club house with facilities to hold functions could form part of this set up. Perhaps a place that can be booked for barbecues in the summer months.' **Amar Singh/ W+W Guardian comments**

Skate park...

'There is nothing in Wanstead for older children and teenagers. They need something. I'm for a 'wooden waves' skate park – it could be sponsored – which could be landscaped.' **Denise Webb**

Adult recreation...

Please let's do something for adults for a change. An outdoor gym would be fantastic, but even just opening this up as more space would be preferable to another playground.' **Bob**

'Bob has a point. We need to refurbish what we have for the kids and need something fresh and new on the green. Just take the fences down and cut the grass is what I would like to see first! **Martin**

Play for 8-16s...

'The playground looks like a really good idea for all ages, maybe something that also includes a small cafe and skate park too. We have very little to offer children between 8-16, a dedicated space would be a good way to show that they are valued. Outdoor gyms could also benefit everybody's health so is an overall winner. Perhaps the GP surgeries could get together to help fund it?' **Heather**

Outside gym...

'An outside gym on the green is a good idea, but not so close to the road.' **Carin**

Open air swimming

'My suggestion would be for a public lido or swimming pool. It would provide something for people of all ages in the community. In addition it would attract people and their wallets to Wanstead with its shops and cafes. An idea.' **Sue Carter**

'If not a skate-park, how about an open swimming pool?' **Denise Webb**

'Wanstead is a lovely place to live but what it lacks is a swimming pool. Why not use the land for a heated lido that can be used all year round like the one in London Fields. Great use of green space for everyone. Great for the community, provides jobs and helps get people healthier. Redbridge has been promising a swimming pool in Wanstead for years. This seems like a good opportunity to make Wanstead even better and more attractive. Will also drive more footfall to the high street.' **Laura Brodie**

How achievable is Idea 2?

No problem at all with any of these attractive ideas, but as with Idea 1 the question is who would invest in this and then manage the site and facilities. It is all weighted towards cost and liability without any income. Food growing and natural play may attract some support and project funding from other organisations. Active sport and fitness would address a specific recreation need not currently available, but would entail costly equipment and still need a management arrangement. Some comments expressed concern amongst about anti-social behavior but this is no more likely than Christchurch Green. Another query was 'Would it be used?' Lack of privacy on the High Street might put off potential users. Even an open air swimming pool or lido would be very costly, require specialist maintenance and safety measures.

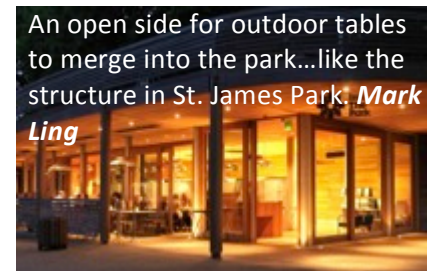
Idea 3 Entirely open space for community activity, but with an all-weather event room

Types of open space as described in ideas 1 and 2 could be accompanied by a building. A simple building for shade and shelter would enable a wider range of all-weather activities including meetings, exhibitions, arts and crafts. A covered space over part of the site could be used as part of a multi-function use of the whole site, perhaps jointly with an outdoor gym. Stalls for arts and crafts could run parallel to the pavement so as to screen activities behind and provide an element of privacy for other recreational users.

'A splendid pavilion once stood in Wanstead Park close to the Temple – the ground floor had a generous overhang to the roof for seating and protection from the weather. It had tea rooms, kitchen etc on ground floor, fully glazed upper level topped by a belvedere.' **Rob Maitland**

Arts and crafts market...

'What about using the space for an outdoor arts and crafts market that encourages local folk to display their goods? The landowner would get rent off the stalls (assuming rent was reasonable), local people would be able to display their talents as they do during the art trail and other events and it would bring money and visitors to the area. A much smaller scale Camden/ flower/ Portobello road type market perhaps?' **Sue**



An open side for outdoor tables to merge into the park...like the structure in St. James Park. **Mark Ling**



A smart bowling green would be a welcome addition to the village High Street. A club house with facilities to hold functions could form part of this set up. Perhaps a place that can be booked for barbecues in the summer months. **Amar Singh, Wanstead and woodford Guardian comments**



How achievable is Idea 3?

Although the current Local Plan designation of this land seeks to safeguard the land as Open Space (Policy CR1), as is clear in the Local Plan, built development on the land may be acceptable in principle where it is *'supportive of and ancillary to the purpose of that open space'*. Ancillary uses are subservient to the main uses of the site as open space; for example changing rooms. If associated with recreation, it is hard to see this kind of structure conflicting with the current policy. It would certainly open up a wide range of possible activities and a small building would earn rental income, though it would require an administrator. It would have to be owned and maintained by a body other than the Council, such as a community trust, who would have to raise substantial sums.

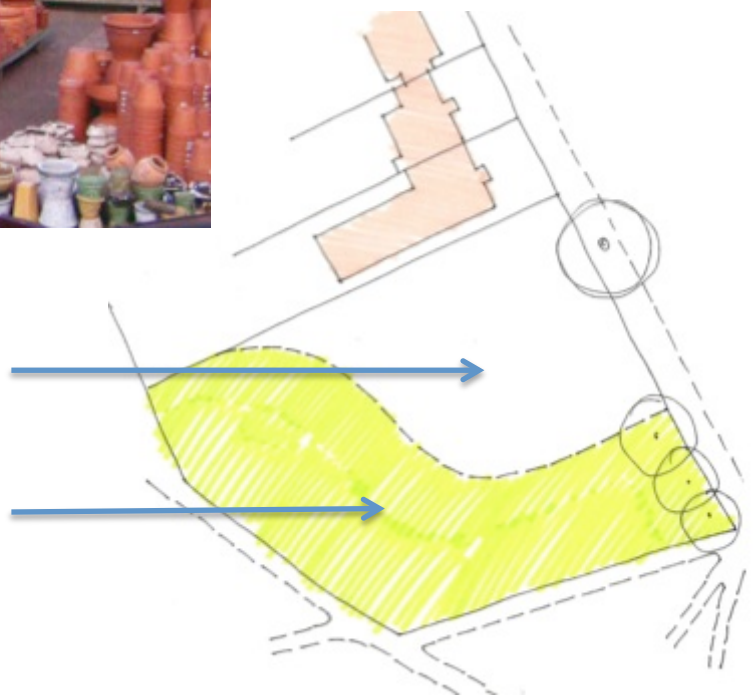
Idea 4 – mainly open, but a commercial garden centre

The land could be kept open and used as a garden centre, selling trees, shrubs and garden items, where the number of structures is minimized and the open green character maintained. It would need space for delivery vehicles and customer parking. It would have at least one small building, but the amount of building could be limited by planning condition.



Approximate area needed for a workable garden centre

Area of open space retained and restored for public recreation.



How achievable is Idea 4?

A garden centre is one of very few commercial options that would meet the open objectives of the planning policy, if structures and parking were reasonably restricted by condition on the planning permission. A garden business would buy or lease part of the land, and this would help pay for restoration and conservation of the remaining natural space.

Idea 5. A reduced open area used for one of ideas 1-4, but with part of the land developed with buildings

Since they acquired the land in 2102, Dalco Developments have been open about their hope to develop the land, and they have been prepared to reduce the area and to consider viable alternatives. The owner naturally wants to achieve some return for their investment. Dalco are the first owner that has sought to engage with the community, to find a workable approach.

The current Local Plan site policy safeguards the land as Open Space (Policy CR1). In any application for built development, the Council would have to consider the proposal against the policy to protect the open space. The Local Plan says built development on the land may be acceptable, in principle, where it is *'supportive of and ancillary to the purpose of that open space'*. Ancillary uses are subservient to the main uses of the site as open space; for example changing rooms. So development for homes and shops would clearly conflict.

The Council would have to consider what purpose this open space meets in its current state as private land with no rights of public access. It would then have to consider how a built development proposal would contribute to achieving a useful purpose for the open space. This would be especially significant if the proposal guaranteed future rights of access and use for the public.

Accordingly, a small amount of development next to the existing buildings on the High Street, with the majority of the land kept open and used for community purposes, may be an option. Whilst it is acknowledged that many residents may have strong opinions regarding such an option, it is helpful to illustrate what might, or might not, work at Evergreen Field.

The key principle is:

- Most of the land should remain open and the landscape design of the open space should come first.

Secondly, it would be necessary to show that any other development would:

- help to facilitate public access to the site,
- complement its appearance as open land through a high quality design,
- be environmentally sustainable.

And crucially:

- the proposal would have to help fund the long term care and use of the remainder of the site as public open space.
- And the publicly accessible open space Land retained in perpetuity by transferring it to a trust, or to the Council, or other body to own in the public interest.

How achievable is Idea 5?

Building on part of the land would conflict with planning policy, but is the only clear-cut way to generate capital funds to enable creation of a genuinely useful open space. A carefully placed development, carefully designed and costed is worth exploring, despite the policy position. Diagrams, plans and images are shown below, providing examples of what may be possible.

What size of building?

The aerial photos below experiment with placing well-known Wanstead buildings on the Evergreen Field. This gives a sense of scale, showing how much of the field would be left.



1. The Cornerhouse

An individual landmark building facing High Street and Grove Road. It is coloured orange in the bottom right hand corner of the aerial photo below. This has been copied and placed in the Evergreen Field at the same scale.

Allowing for access, parking and a small amount of private space, it would take about 40% of Evergreen Field.





2. The Cuckfield

A three storey, oblique-angled building, turning the corner into Wellington Road. It has substantial ground level floorspace.

It is seen at the top of this aerial photo. Again it is copied and placed on Evergreen Field below, but turned to face High Street and the open green space. The land required for the building, access, parking etc would take about 25% of Evergreen Field.





3. Former Barclays Bank

A landmark three storey building with turret. It is copied below, turned round and placed on the field.

A site for this would occupy about 30% of the field area.





4. No. 27 High Street

This is the house that directly adjoins the field.
This is shown replicated on the Evergreen Field below.

A building with the same 'footprint' as this would require about 25% of the field.



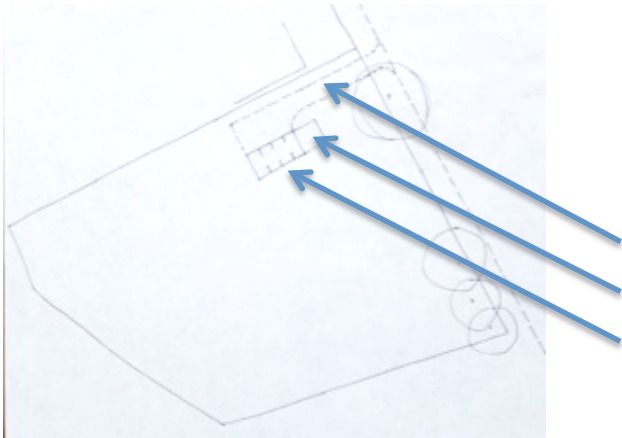
What this shows

Superimposing buildings we know gives a good idea of the scale of building that could be built on Evergreen Field. It demonstrates the visual impact it would have, while leaving the majority of the field open. These exercises also show the importance of a building that faces both the High Street and Christchurch Green.

A building of the scale of one of the buildings above could have a ground floor shop and two or three flats above. Construction of a three storey building would cost roughly £400,000. The sale of one, 1 bed flat at £300,000 and two 2 bed flats at £450,000 would generate £1,200,000, covering the cost of the build, the price paid for the land, the surveys and architects fees, the cost of converting the rest of the land to open space and paying the Council to maintain it.

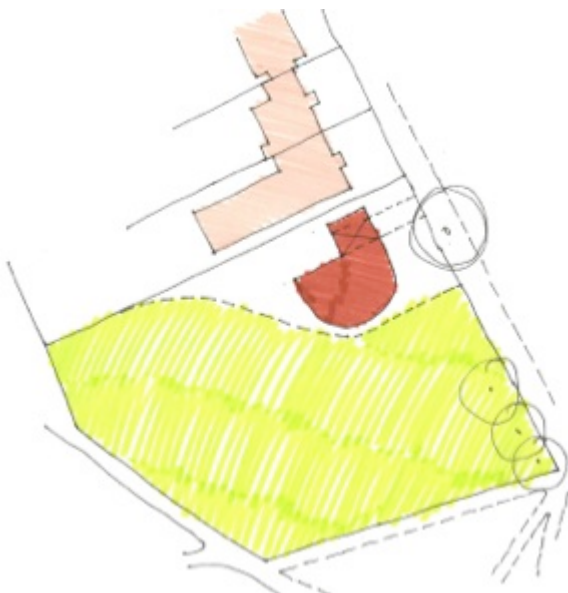
Obviously a proper cost analysis would be needed, but this is the scale of development that might enable the site to be unlocked.

The sketch plans below show firstly how parking could be accommodated with vehicle access out of sight from the park, and how small buildings could be placed adjacent to and in line with 27 High Street, facing out over the green space.



This shows the minimum land needed to create a vehicle access, four parking spaces and a storage area for refuse and recycling bins, bikes and buggies. Much of this could be underneath and hidden at the back of a building.

Vehicle drive
Area for bins etc
Four parking spaces

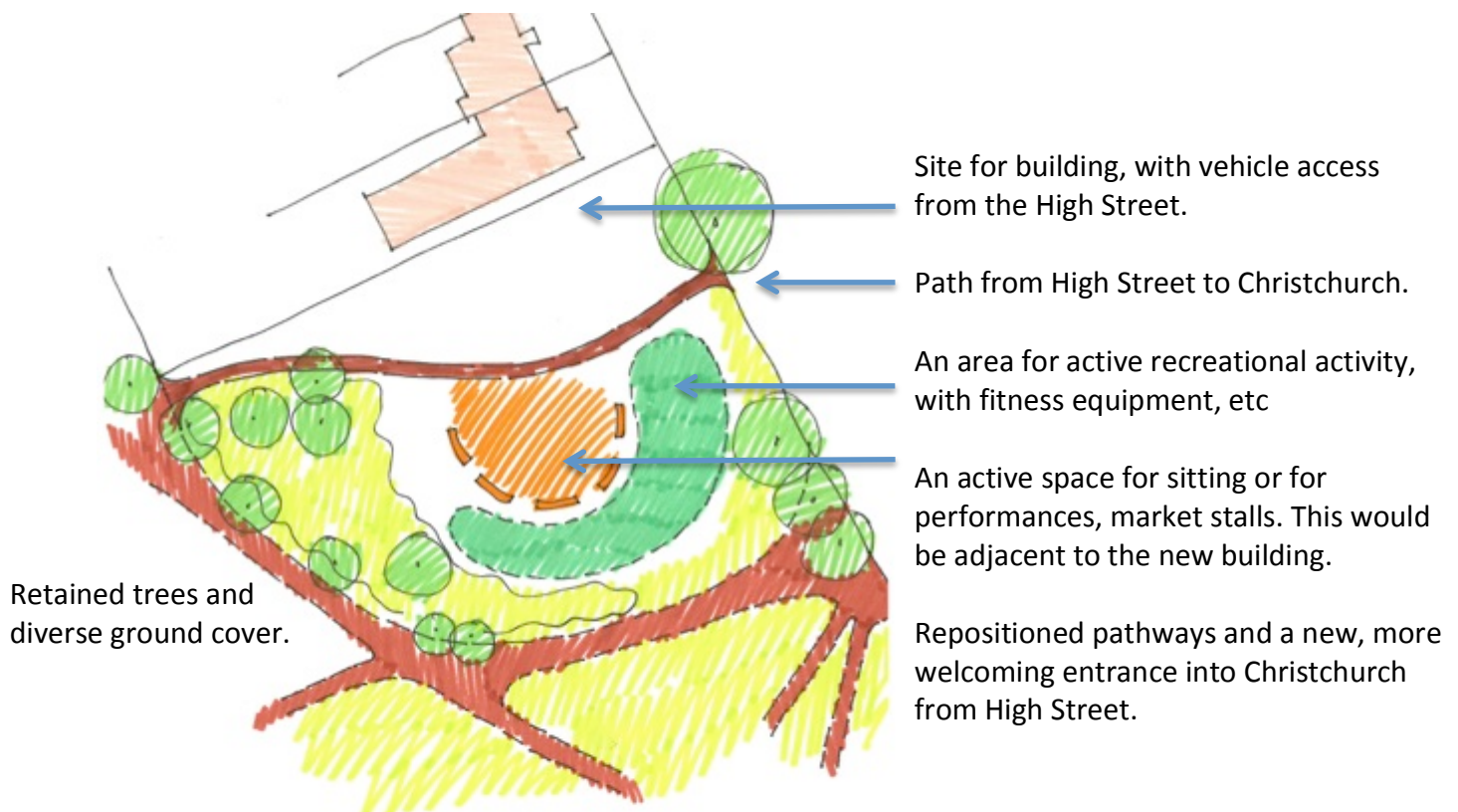


This building footprint is roughly the same as Barclays Bank. It shows a rounded shape to face out across the park as an attractive building. It is the smallest scale of building that could be built economically, with a vehicle entry going through an arch under the upper storeys. The site boundary is curved to provide a pleasant, natural edge to the park space. The majority of the field is left open, and re-landscaped for public use.

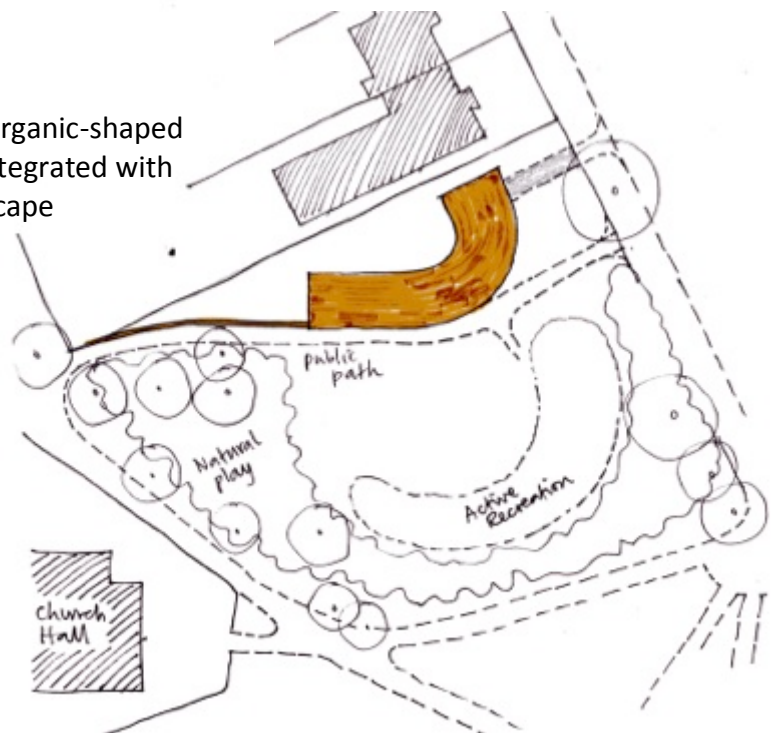


This shows a squarer building, also small scale, but closer in size to the Corner House and like the corner House with two fronts, facing Christchurch Green and High Street.

This shows how the landscape could be designed to create a usable public space, while accommodating built development:



Right: an organic-shaped building integrated with new landscape



I suppose one way might be to divide the land, allowing them to build on approximately one-third of the land adjacent to the Doctors Surgery and the remainder as an extension to Christchurch Green. **Mark Ling**

Conclusions

We are all used to the green area on the High Street, with a view of the church spire over the tree tops. It has planning protection, yet has no public access and is private owned.

Although there has been a lot of discussion, there is no community initiative yet to fundraise to acquire the land and form a community land trust. One of the open space options about could form the basis of such a campaign.

There is no prospect whatsoever of Redbridge Council acquiring the land and investing in the works needed to make it suitable for public use. There is no prospect at all that they would approve compulsory purchase. But if there was an initiative by the current owner or community partnership, the Council might accept land at no cost, along with funds for future maintenance, to be integrated with Christchurch Green and maintained by them.

A portion of the land – about a quarter or a third of the area, could be developed for flats and retail by the owner. A building similar in scale to existing High Street buildings, could be designed in sympathy with Christchurch, the Green and High Street. Sales would generate sufficient capital to cover the owner's original land outlay, and the cost of restoring the rest of the land for public use and a sum to give to the Council for future maintenance. It would be achievable and enhancing; it would provide public use of land that has been out of bounds and derelict for 60 years.