TENTERDEN RECREATION GROUNDS REDEVELOPMENT

Alternatives for Consideration

Dear Tenterden Town Councillors and Recreation Ground Focus Group

As a resident of Tenterden for the last 10 years, I have taken an interest in the town’s development and success, albeit, with limited direct participation due to London-based work demands. Watching the various projects being considered from the Section 106 allocations from the Tent 1A development, I have been interested in how the redevelopment of the Recreation Grounds (RG) unfolds.

Recently in the community and press, there have been various viewpoints about designs for the RG (developed by Ground Control), its affordability (sharing with other community projects) and collaborative engagement with the Focus Group (that I have not been party to).

With my experience in building projects, including masterplanning and landscaped spaces, there appear to be options and ‘tweaks’ that should be discussed with the Focus Group to optimise the proposed design to meet the aspirations of the town and enhance the services offered all within reasonable financial parameters.

So, unsolicited, I offer two variations to GC’s proposal that could be useful in the considerations for the Recreation Grounds Focus Group. I would be happy to discuss these ideas further with the Focus Group and the Council.

GC’s site plans* presented earlier this year were reasonable diagrams, but it is not clear in the Focus Group meeting minutes and presentations, if they discussed exemplar projects, current thinking around successful, active ‘Play’ environments, how to ‘right-size’ the skateboard parks and developing implementation strategies for an uncertain budget.

The proposed GC design offers the ‘wish list’ but appear not to have tested or offered ‘value engineering’ alternatives to enable TCC to make informed cost decisions. As well, it proposes facilities that might not be operationally affordable and removes but does not replace the public WCs and support facilities to maintain the grounds. It does not study options to reuse existing facilities and services (except for the recent proposal to retain the Pavilion) which could reduce the overall costs.

For these reasons, I have developed two scenarios that can be used to facilitate further discussions with the Focus Group, TCC and Ground Control. To make it convenient to consider the changes, I have ‘cut and pasted’ GC’s plan. They have been made aware of these alternatives. It is my hope that these suggestions will be received as constructive.

*Note: GC submitted a subsequent option showing the reuse of the Pavilion that included a significantly smaller MUGA.
GROUND CONTROL’S PROPOSAL

Tenterden Recreation Ground
Landscape Masterplan - Alternative Sports Arrangement
ALTERNATIVE 1

This option looks at reducing costs by avoiding the full relocation of the Bowls Club, to repurpose the Pavilion and reuse the existing WC and maintenance building. It encourages more extensive use of ‘natural play’ areas over formal play areas to enhance the developmental benefits of active, imaginative, and risk-taking play, whilst reducing costs (using locally-sourced natural materials).

I am in support of the Skateboard Park; however, they are usually backed up with a well-researched demographic/business case; I am not aware that one has been prepared. It would be prudent to consider building the park in phases and how it might be used for other purposes if its popularity does not materialise or declines over time.

The ‘gardenesque’ seating area, aside from initial costs, is likely a high maintenance area; is this reliant on volunteers to maintain? I have suggested a lower maintenance option by creating a copse that ties in with increasing paths (permeable and paved) that accommodate all-weather use. The additional trees increase the buffer to the adjacent residences.

The primary moves for Alternative 1 include flipping the Bowling Green to the opposite side, enabling the reuse of the clubhouse (with some conversion to re-orientate access). Although the lawn is costly, it reduces the cost to replace the clubhouse and provide a dedicated drive and car park. With this move, the Grounds are opened to connect the two halves of the TRG. The play areas can move to the Recreation Ground Road providing better access and supervision.

The tennis courts are moved to the rear of the site allowing the skateboard park to be adjacent to the re-purposed Pavilion as the Youth Centre. The skateboard park is nestled between the Youth Centre, tennis courts, MUGA court and car park providing a space that affords a little more privacy to the users, but with good observation around it for the security of the users. Locating the tennis courts at the rear open views to the Leisure Centre as well.

The car park has been reduced to its current size.
ALTERNATIVE 1 – Bowls Club’s Green flipped 180°
ALTERNATIVE 2

This scheme is potentially more controversial and requires reconsidering the concept of ‘unifying the Recreation Grounds’. If the GC proposal and Alternative 1 are considered unaffordable, this option may be the next best. Taken further, if one considers the Leisure Centre as an integral part of the Recreation Ground there are some potentially significant opportunities.

Alternative 2 starts from the premise to spend no money on the Bowling Club and car park and only ‘modernisation makeovers’ on the Pavilion and WC / Maintenance Store reserving essential funds for new works. The conceptual change acknowledges the separation but organises the site into the Town Green and the Activity Centre. The southeast half becomes the Activity Centre. Linking the new activity areas (tennis courts, MUGA, skateboard park and play areas) closely with the Leisure Centre. As such, the Leisure Centre would be the ‘heart’ of both indoor and outdoor activities for Recreation Grounds.

The TLC could provide support facilities including managing the booking of the courts, access to changing rooms, WCs and car park, as well as linking to the pool, gym and indoor courts. The TLC’s café could connect out onto the play area a more viable catering provision.

The northwest half to the TRG would continue to face the High Street. Providing the same as area as currently available, the Green could be developed to provide better all-weather access. The design suggests a more formal organisation of the green with an all-weather path around it. The popular raised mound is reshaped to provide a truncated cone that becomes a focal point for the Green and can be used for play as a vista to the High Street. The circular path carves into the cone creating a sculpted backwall denoting the location of the stage for performances.

In front of the WC, a paved space is created for vendors and marquis including mobile pop-up coffee and ice cream vendors. Covered seating areas can be provided if desired.
ALTERNATIVE 2 – Retain Existing Facilities
**ZONING DIAGRAM**

The adjacent diagrams illustrate the organisation of the major zones: Town Green, Formal Activity and Play Areas zones.

Alternative 1 offers the best arrangement for siting the Play areas with regards to access, convenience and security.

GC’s Proposal and Alternative 2 are similar but with the Play Areas relating to Town Green or the Leisure Centre.
ORIENTATION AND CONNECTIVITY DIAGRAM

These diagrams illustrate the relative differences between the schemes in their visual orientation with regards to the High Street and the Leisure Centre and the connections between them.

The Ground Control proposal has the longest view across the Recreation Grounds, whilst the connection to the Leisure Centre is restricted with the fenced and hedge courts in front of it.

Alternative 1 had moderate views, but is partially blocked by the Relocated Bowls Green. The Leisure Centre is relatively visible from the other end of the TRG.

Alternative 2 clearly subdivides the TRG, but emphasis creates two distinct destinations: the Town Green related to the High Street and the outdoor activities and play areas as being part of the Leisure Centre activity hub.
SUMMARY
The Ground Control design is viable but may not be fully affordable and, as in any early scheme, has room for further improvements.

Alternative 1 achieves the unification of the Recreation Grounds as desired by the Focus Group, improves connections to the Leisure Centre over the GC proposal and should be less expensive.

However, Alternative 2 is appealing in an unforeseen way. Although keeping the Bowls Club in place does not improve the unification of the Grounds, it could save a significant amount of money and avoid having to negotiate a new lease. Although not aesthetically attractive, keeping the existing car park also saves money and remains very convenient for the Ivy Court and East Clinic patients.

As important may be the unexpected gains realised by consolidating all indoor and outdoor activities through the Leisure Centre. It can provide management support as well as facilities and parking at little, if any, additional cost and may be a boost to its membership and viability.

In Alternative 2, the Town Green remains an important feature and use for Tenterden. If as the design proposes, the space would be more structured and support improved access and use during inclement weather (this feature option could be applied to all options).

I hope these thoughts are useful to expand the discussion and alternatives being considered. As mentioned, I would be happy to discuss them with the Council and Focus Group.

Kind Regards

Bruce Nepp
2 Eastgate Road
Tenterden TN30 7AH
bruce@nepp.net
O7798 625 332

Note:
These proposals were developed on my own initiative. Although a Director of an architectural practice, my ideas and opinions are provided on an informal personal basis to assist the community in a strictly non-commercial / non-professional context.