

## Appendix 7 – Local Green Spaces – Detailed Evidence

### Neigh Bridge Country Park, Somerford Keynes

#### General information

Neigh Bridge Country Park is situated at the southern entrance to Somerford Keynes village. It is a site of former gravel extraction, approximately 21 acres in size, of which the main feature is a lake occupying perhaps 85% of the total. A grassed area and a car park stand to the east of the lake, closest to the road leading into the village. The Thames Path National Trail runs along the northern boundary of the site, following the course of the River Thames; there are further footpaths around the remainder of the lake which, although not marked on the Definitive Map, have been used by both local people and visitors for decades. Close to the car park there is a small children's play area.

The site is readily accessible by local people and Thames Path walkers on foot; by cyclists along the Spine Road cycle path or the quiet lane from Kemble Station; and by motorists. There is access to most of the site for people in wheelchairs, including a wheelchair-accessible angling station.

The Country Park is used by residents of Somerford Keynes village, for whom it is the only readily accessible public grassed area and children's play area; by walkers and cyclists, some of whom are taking advantage of the car park to make Neigh Bridge the start and end point of a circular route; by Gloucestershire and Wiltshire residents who drive in to walk their dogs in a tranquil atmosphere; and by people from much further afield who arrive by car and spend the day there, picnicking on the grassed area. The lake is used by anglers from Ashton Keynes Angling Club.

It is the purpose of this application to ensure that the recreational facilities afforded to local people by the Neigh Bridge site are continued, and that the tranquil vistas from the site boundaries across the lake are preserved.

#### Ownership and planning history

The site is owned by Gloucestershire County Council and occupied under a long lease by the Cotswold Water Park Trust. The Trust is aware of this application to designate it as a Local Green Space. There are no known planning applications affecting the site.

Neigh Bridge Country Park was formerly in Poole Keynes Parish but the parish boundaries were amended slightly in 2015 to transfer it to the Parish of Somerford Keynes.

### Size, scale and local nature

The Neigh Bridge site is compact, its lake one of the smallest in the Water Park. Prior to gravel extraction it was a single field comparable in size to other fields in the area, and its borders are still outlined by hedges and mature trees. Although there are open views across the lake from most positions on its perimeter, these boundaries give the Country Park an impression of enclosure and intimacy, making it feel local in scale and character. It is only a hundred metres from the most southerly dwellings in Somerford Keynes village and a short walk from the centre of the village.

As important as geography is the feeling of connection which Somerford Keynes residents have for Neigh Bridge Country Park. The village has been within an area of gravel extraction for over 50 years. Its residents have been subjected variously to the noise, dust, mud on roads and traffic which such extractions bring. Many of the gravel workings, once completed, have been sold on for use as holiday villages, watersports facilities or angling lakes. Few have benefited local people. The acquisition of Neigh Bridge and Keynes Country Parks by Gloucestershire County Council, and their return to the community via the predecessors of the Cotswold Water Park Trust, served in some measure to recompense local people for the inconvenience they had suffered. In return, residents of the Water Park villages helped in the management of these public amenities and felt that they were truly 'theirs'.

For various reasons Keynes Country Park no longer has this feeling of belonging to its community, but Neigh Bridge Country Park does. It was for this reason that Somerford Keynes Parish Council successfully applied in 2015, with the consent of Poole Keynes Parish Meeting, for Neigh Bridge to be included within its parish boundary.

### Need for a local green space

The Somerford Keynes and Shorncote Parish Plan, adopted in July 2013, identified the need for a recreation area for young people within the Parish.

Despite being in a rural area, Somerford Keynes has little by way of public green spaces, especially places where children can play. The Neigh Bridge site contains the only sizeable public grassed area close to Somerford Keynes village, and the only children's play area, and although it is not central within the village it is still readily accessible to most residents.

Village residents are able to visit Keynes Country Park, which partly lies within the Parish, but in order to do this they must cross a road which can be quite busy, especially during the summer months. In addition Keynes Country Park is run as a commercial enterprise attracting many visitors from further afield; whilst it provides amenities to local people it cannot be considered to have a 'local nature'.

## Criteria for local significance

### 1. Recreational value

Neigh Bridge Country Park is used a great deal by local people for walking, exercising dogs and taking small children to play. This usage was reflected in the Parish Plan, where 81% of respondents to the Plan questionnaire stated that they valued the walks and footpaths in the area, and 67% stated that they valued the Country Parks.

The grassed area at Neigh Bridge Country Park is the only accessible suitably-sized place near Somerford Keynes village where young people can play ball games. The small play area is the only one easily accessible to parents walking with small children. There are better playground facilities at Keynes Country Park but they are further away, require the crossing of a main road and are less easy for small feet to walk to.



**Figure 1: The Thames path and playground at Neigh Bridge Country Park**

The Country Park is especially used by dog walkers since their dogs are allowed to swim in the Thames here. A platform has recently been constructed to improve access in and out of the water.

For visitors arriving by car there is a public car park at the south eastern corner of the site, next to the grassed area and children's play area. From here it is possible

to walk all round the lake on footpaths which are accessible to pushchairs, and for most parts wheelchairs. Part of this circular walk is on a Public Right of Way, the Thames Path National Trail, which enters the site at its most northern point and follows the River Thames in a south-easterly direction, leaving the site at the car park. The remaining footpaths are not marked as Public Rights of Way on the Definitive Map, but neither are they restricted in any way.

In addition Neigh Bridge Country Park is a convenient start and end point for a large number of cycle rides and circular walks. From here it is possible to cycle, almost entirely off-road, to Cricklade, returning by way of quiet country roads. There are walking routes, mostly following public rights of way, to Ewen, Kemble, Oaksey, Ashton Keynes and South Cerney.

The lake is used by anglers from Ashton Keynes Angling Club, under a lease agreement with the Cotswold Water Park Trust.

### 2. Beauty and Tranquility

Gravel extraction at Neigh Bridge Country Park was completed in the 1960s and since then it has been managed as a country park by the Cotswold Water Park Trust and its predecessors. Unlike many of the lakes in the Water Park it has a mature look, having long lost the rawness which characterises recently excavated areas. The lake banks have been sensitively managed

for angling; there is no extensive perimeter vegetation and although it is not a large lake the views across it are open and clear from most points around its edge.

It is these vistas which characterise Neigh Bridge Country Park. The sight of this body of still water, reflecting the surrounding trees, comes as a particularly pleasant surprise to walkers arriving from the north along the Thames Path; if they started their journey at Thameshead, four miles away, Neigh Bridge lake will be the first substantial stretch of water they encounter.



Figure 2: The view of Neigh Bridge lake from the Thames Path

The impression of the lake is entirely rural. There is nothing here to jar the senses. Where many of the lakes in the Water Park have been given over to various recreational uses, some of them quite noisy and visually intrusive, Neigh Bridge Country Park is a peaceful and beautiful place with nothing more intrusive than walkers, anglers, birdsong and the occasional boisterous summer picnicker.

### Conclusion

Residents of Somerford Keynes village have been using Neigh Bridge Country Park informally as their local green space for more than 40 years, and have sentimental as well as geographic links to the site.

Neigh Bridge Country Park is the only area within easy walking distance of the village which contains both a grassed area suitable for kicking a ball around, and a play area for small children. It is used by many groups of people, both coming on foot and arriving by car. Many of its users are recreational walkers, including dog walkers.

In contrast to the majority of worked-out gravel lakes, Neigh Bridge Country Park is both publicly accessible and tranquil. There are no intrusive activities aimed more at tourists than local people, but instead unspoilt and relaxing vistas of water and mature vegetation.

This application is being made so that these qualities, which make Neigh Bridge Country Park so attractive, may be preserved for both local people and visitors alike.

## **Village Lake (Lake 99), Somerford Keynes**

### General information

Village Lake is situated on the Spine Road, at the end of Mill Lane, at the southern edge of Somerford Keynes village. The site was extracted for gravel during 2003 and later donated to the Parish Council, for the use of Parish residents, by Hanson plc. It comprises two small lakes, separated by a narrow causeway, together with a narrow strip of land surrounding the entire site. The total area is approximately 4.5 acres.

Following its acquisition the Parish Council carried out works to make the site secure and readily accessible by local people, walkers and cyclists from the Spine Road cycle path; there is no provision for car parking. There is access to most of the site for people in wheelchairs.

Village Lake is used by local people, walkers and cyclists as a tranquil area in which to meet and to enjoy wildlife.

It is the purpose of this application to ensure that the peace and tranquillity afforded to local people by the Village Lake site are continued, and that its lakes continue to provide visitors with an appreciation of the wildlife of the Water Park.

### Ownership and planning history

The site is owned by Somerford Keynes Parish Council on behalf of Parish residents. There are no planning applications affecting the site.

### Size, scale and local nature

Village Lake is a very small site, of approximately 4.5 acres. Its borders are surrounded by hedges and mature trees, giving it an intimate feel. Its entrance is only a few metres from the end of Mill Lane, a residential road, and a short, safe walk from the centre of Somerford Keynes village. Except for the churchyard, it is the only public green space within the village envelope.

The acquisition of the site by Somerford Keynes Parish Council in 2012, following gravel extraction there, was the result of prolonged negotiations between the Parish Council and other parties. Following this the Parish Council successfully applied for grants to install fencing, safety equipment, a boardwalk, an interpretation board and seating, and the site was formally opened to the public in May 2016. It is the Parish Council's intention that Village Lake shall be maintained for the encouragement of wildlife, and for the benefit of visitors who wish to view wildlife in a tranquil setting; as a meeting place for local people; and occasionally as a venue for small, low-key village events such as picnics.

The footpath around the larger lake was designated a Public Right of Way in June 2016.

Day to day management of the site has now been delegated to a Management Committee. This is the only outdoor site within the settlement boundary of Somerford Keynes village which is under the direct control of local residents, on behalf of local residents.

### Need for a local green space

The Somerford Keynes and Shorncote Parish Plan, adopted in July 2013, identified the need for a communal outside area within the Parish. There is no village green, public park or other such area. Whilst not extensive, the land around Village Lake provides a suitable location for local people to sit and meet, or for parents to bring younger children for gentle play and 'pond dipping'. It also provides room for community events such as picnics.

The site is within the Somerford Keynes village footprint and is easily and safely accessible on foot, being within a few minutes' walk of the village centre. Its entrance is on the Spine Road cycle path, and a cycle rack has been installed for visitors arriving on two wheels.

### Criteria for local significance

#### 1. Recreational value

Although Somerford Keynes is in a rural area, there are limited opportunities, within a short walk of the village centre, for sitting and meeting people in a tranquil outdoor setting. Village Lake meets this need. The Parish Council has provided a small number of benches and picnic tables for the benefit of visitors wishing to picnic, or simply sit and enjoy the water and the wildlife. An interpretation board gives information on the sort of wildlife which they might expect to see.

The footpath around the larger lake allows for a short walk suitable for parents with younger children, and also affords opportunities for pond-dipping and other low-key activities.

#### 2. Tranquillity

Gravel extraction was completed at Village Lake in 2003 and since then the site has been left in relative peace. The absence of a car park means that visitors to the site have to get there by foot or cycle, and its small size makes it less inviting to day trippers than nearby Neigh Bridge Country Park. It will be managed to maintain this feeling of tranquillity and intimacy so that it remains an attractive place for local people to visit.



Figure 3: Village Lake

### Conclusion

The residents of Somerford Keynes are fortunate in having acquired, after a period of negotiations, a site which will serve them in the same way that a small public park or village green serves other villages. Village Lake is a secluded and quiet area which local residents and visitors arriving by foot or cycle may enjoy in peace.

This application is being made so that these qualities may be preserved in perpetuity for local people.