



# The importance of Greenland space within St Helens

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## MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF GREEN SPACES

Woodlands and open-air space have a remarkable value on everyone's mental health and physical health. Getting out into natural surroundings helps us get out of our everyday routines, it gives us a break away from the relentless noise of society and allows us to take time out. It permits us to be present and mindful without thousands of unwelcome distractions from predictable life. Considering that the suicide rates are exceptionally high in St. Helens, we certainly need to stop lessening these natural spaces. Office of National Statistics (ONS) showed that between 2015-2017, St Helens had a suicide rate of 17.9 per 100,000 population – more than 80 per cent higher than the 9.6 national average. The fewer woodland spaces we have, the fewer options we will have to naturally increase our moods, in turn accumulating pressure to the already stretched mental health services, the outdoors is a boundless alternate to medication and consistent stays in psychiatric units, while medical help should constantly be sought in more life-threatening cases. The minimal increase in oxygen from being in these natural spaces, enhances the natural serotonin in our bodies, behaving as an antidepressant without having to take medications. It also eases cortisol which causes our stress to lessen. It has been demonstrated that walking among trees can help with mental health recuperation and can increase our immune systems too. By eradicating the nature surrounding the town we will continue to fail in our mental health of the people as a way of escaping the intricacies of life. This will put more burden on mental health services, NHS and addiction services already struggling in the borough. Studies have taken place and it has been proven that spending more time around trees reduces anxiety, decreases blood tension, and raises mood. Walking in these spaces gives people a mood boost and time away from their hectic lives. It also gives families to

spend infinite time discovering, learning and being together as we now live in an astoundingly fast paced environment with unswerving and fast access to data, which can have serious detrimental effects on children, as well as being addicted to gaming and technology, the outdoor spaces neighbouring and within the town give those families, that may not have access to transport to live and bond as a family through the countryside. The urban areas of the town have no big greenspace spaces spaced out across the town from the three large parks, and there currently seem to be no strategies in place to turn any of the brownfield land into commercial grounds, nor environmental places for those living in the area that are heavily built up. Small community gardens, which has been suggested, will not help in the exercise of families as much larger spaces are needed for those children that need extra stimulation, from both physical, educational, and to help the parents to give the rest they need whilst allowing their children to roam and learn safely about the importance of nature, littering, drug use, and looking after and respecting their environment as they grow into young adult, as we currently inundated with fly tipping and litter. Community gardens would not be suitable for those wanting to take long walks, bike rides or to gather with family, unless they are purposely built with these things in mind.

Ideally, we would like to use this space at Positive Life Workshops to start up new pursuits to help lessen the suicide rates in St. Helens. These would extend from beginner walking for wellbeing groups, various levels of nature walks, foraging, walking groups with meditation and relaxation, various well-being retreats, natural art sessions, picnics, trails, school holiday activities. All these activities would need substantial spaces to be able to fulfil a large number of adults and children to be able to forage freely, whilst learning new skills. As the more greenbelt land is gaining permission to be built on, a smaller amount of land we have to be able to help the deteriorating mental health of the town, for the most part the very vulnerable who have been shielding since March 2020. The outside space is crucial, as those vulnerable people feel safer outside to be able to socialise with friends and family as lockdown eases. As we do not know when the outcome will be with the coronavirus, or if any other pandemics that may come in the coming years due to soaring population growth across the world.

## HERITAGE IN BOLD AND WITHIN PROXIMITY OF THE PLANNING APPLICATION

Whilst we visited the site assigned for demolition with the building of warehousing spaces on Greenland in Bold, we noticed a significant amount of trees that we over 100 years old, We did an very small sample of oak trees, 3 in total, that were all running along the side of the area that is due for works.

TREE 1 – 170 Years old

TREE 2 – 138 years old

TREE 3 – 113 years old

Removing just one of a tree's major roots during haphazard excavation for construction or services can trigger the loss of up to 20 per cent of the root system; this destabilises the tree's capability to absorb water and leaves it unsteady in high winds. It is always advocated that construction takes place as far away from trees and instituted vegetation as feasible. Damage directly affected by neighboring tree roots, such as roots applying tension on underground services and cracking drains, is quite a rare event. The most vital factor for designers should be the secondary effects caused by shifting ground conditions near a tree, caused by fluctuating degrees of moisture ejection. It is important to remember, though, that removing trees will also affect ground environments. Having recently removed a tree means that the moisture that would otherwise have been absorbed diurnally from the ground will persist, allowing the soil to swell and heave - the condition whereby water that would otherwise have been removed swells clay soil, causing pressure on trenches and slab foundations, which is in remarkably proximity to at least 5 Grade II listed buildings. As we traveled through the privately owned farm that had numerous ponds onsite to help with vegetation and wildlife preservation will be vastly affected by the harm caused by the bordering trees. Over on the land that will be converted into warehousing there are several larger trees which will be detrimental to the natural water flow to the farm and the flood plain areas

surrounding this site, which has been earmarked for housing development. Building on flood land, particularly with the destruction of the local trees that will exasperate the living conditions of those living on these new builds.

What we also must contemplate is the damaging affects this will have on the wildlife existing in the area, whilst on our tour of the farm we found innumerable nesting areas underground that could have come from many natural animal habitats – from hedgehogs that are endangered, to brown hares recently spotted, and other burrowing animals. With the obliteration of their living areas this will cause further injury to the environment as these animals will be forced to move into urban areas, putting them at acute risk of car accidents, being killed as a threat, or making a nuisance. The upkeep of chickens in homes is becoming more and more popular as people are moving towards a more sustainable living due to climate change, the foxes and rats will become a daily irritation to those trying to live a more eco friendly life.

According to Friends of the Earth It is easy to suppose nature will always be with us. But even in my generation, birds like starlings and house sparrows have deteriorated so much they are now listed as endangered. In fact, nature is performing worse in the UK than in most other countries. The latest State of Nature report shows that over half our wild species – plants, insects, birds, mammals – are in decline. Seven out of 10 people admit they are losing touch with nature. And more than a third of parents acknowledge they could not educate their personal children about British wildlife.

Demands of daily life mean we are progressively disengaged from nature even though nature in many forms is there for us. Yes, like love, nature is all around – and it is free. As we live in a comparatively poor town, many of our residents do not have the resources of affording, cars, transport, costly trips, and holidays and rely on the greenspace surrounding their town to access the outdoors. According to the official council statistics of the town in December 2019 we drop behind on level of education across the board and are doing worse than any other area of the country, including the North West, the only thing we scored higher on was the lack of qualifications in total, which we are higher in than the local and national average. In St Helens, the typical person with a degree is 23.8%, yet the national average 33.1%. This shows that

we need a greater boost on education of all categories, not just academic and mainstream schools, but also those children that need an alternative education and a lot of outside stimulation. We need to be exploring higher education for the residents of the future and not factory jobs reimbursing minimum wage, or zero hour contracts, as this will put additional weight on benefit services, both from National Government and Local Authority to top up wages. Aspiration of our younger generation should be what we should be looking for and generating higher incomes and higher standard of living and education, as the housing presently being built on our Greenbelt is far out of the reach for the typical town resident income. This could be considered as gentrification of certain areas with higher house prices. In 2011 Local Authority noted that 28% of residents living in the borough were living in poverty, this will have been exasperated with the redundancies and devastation of Coronavirus throughout 2020, and now the beginning of 2021. It is important that these families can gain access to free outdoor space to be able learn, explore, make mistakes, learn, and understand the countryside. Due to the inevitability of Climate Change, we will soon see a change in weather in the UK with possible more flooding and harsher winters, meaning the poorer children of the borough will have their life chances reduced. Especially if the trees have been removed that have protected many areas from flooding in winter.

We also have a higher-than-average Long-Term Sickness and looking after family at home. As we have declared in the paragraph about the mental health impacts of those that do not have the mobility freedom of those not earning and having no employment. The outdoors is a great way for those people who are vulnerable to be able to get out and about and confidently enhance their physical and mental health wellbeing.

## HERITAGE IN BOLD

Bold has an extremely interesting history with six Listed Buildings and five of them within a very close proximity to the land proposed for development of warehouses. This will bring more traffic to the area in the way of large vehicles and commuters. As the council have announced a huge economic plan on preserving heritage this is contradictory to the plan. At Momo's we have been working throughout the lockdowns to be able to provide heritage trails around the town to tell the story of how the town developed from the beginning. We have received funding to build a local history library and heritage center in which we hope to work with



community groups, schools and young persons centers to be able to use storytelling as a way to promote positive attitudes with nature, history and well-being combined. We hope to build a heritage trail throughout Bold to tell the famous story of John Houghton the Blacksmith and the dragon. The story has been researched for a year and we have managed to break down the components of the story to The Vikings and The Norman Conquer of 1066, an especially important moment on the curriculum that all children learn about. As some children cannot access mainstream education for a various number of reasons, plus do learn from pen and paper exercise this can be incorporated into schools for children to take day trips and also combine the history and physical education curriculum. We hope that this will encourage tourists and visitors to the town and help to boost the economy for the town by focusing on its history and making the town and interactive and fun learning environment that involves the families maintaining physical health, economic benefits by new independent businesses in the area.

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## Gallery of Bold Area

