

## Response to the document produced by Friends of Gledhow Field (15<sup>th</sup> July version), available on their website (<http://friendsofgledhowfield.org/>)

The preamble to the report link says *The Friends of Gledhow Field have compiled a report which gives the results of our survey, petition, research and community engagement campaign. We believe this report is a fair, honest and accurate statement of the facts.*

We regret to say that the School does not share the view of the last sentence, as outlined below. Quotes from the report are indicated in italics. The response broadly follows the order of the report, but one of the closing statements is dealt with first for clarification:

***This report was prepared by the Friends of Gledhow Field for presentation at a meeting on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2015 to the school, Local Councillors and LCC staff.***

This is not the case. While some parts of it were read out by the FGF representative, it was not presented at the meeting, so there was no opportunity for scrutiny and comment until now. It was emailed to us on the 15<sup>th</sup> July, and some of our concerns are noted below.

### **Background**

- *The field behind Gledhow Primary School, (known locally as the 'Postage Stamp' or 'Gledhow Field'), will be fenced off this summer, (August 2015).*

There continues to be reference to 'the field' in this report and the website as though it were separate from the school. As has been pointed out repeatedly by the School and Council, the land is legally the school playing field. This kind of language throughout serves to reinforce the false impression that the school is grabbing public land.

- *The reason given is that there are plans for the school to grow from 2 to 3 Form Entry, (they will have an extra 7 classes, 1 per school year, which amounts to an additional 210 children), and, if that happens, the school would like more land for their expansion. This is subject to planning permission being granted.*

The school would not like more land for its expansion. It wants to securely fence its existing land for the safety of the children, to meet minimum planning guidelines for sports field areas, and to ensure continuing outstanding curriculum provision.

- *There are no legally binding restrictions on how much land a school must have therefore the school's expansion programme could go ahead without the additional land.*

No it could not. The Governing Body, informed by planning guidance, is clear that expansion requires the full use of its land. It is not the place of FGF to dictate how the school operates.

### **The Friends of Gledhow Field (FoGF)**

- *As a result of the planned closure of the field ...*

Or alternatively, "As a result of the school needing to re-fence its land"...

### **Statistical Results**

#### **Petition**

- *More than 450 people have signed the 'Save Our Field' petition to date.*

We think that respondents were misled throughout, and more responsible and accurate information may have produced somewhat different results. This is the text above the petition:

*The field behind Gledhow Primary School in North Leeds is the last open space accessible by the public in the locality. It has been freely used by the local community for over 20 years. Now the school is planning to build a fence to enclose most of the field and has expressed an interest in forming a partnership with a private company to build changing rooms and all weather playing surfaces on the field. These surfaces would also be used in the evenings. If we lose this field there is nowhere left for local children to play or anyone else to enjoy the peace and quiet. The park is too far away and the woods are not safe for young children. Please help us to preserve this hidden gem for public enjoyment for present and future generations to come.*

This has remained even though the inaccuracies were pointed out to FGF at a meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> June. On 14<sup>th</sup> July (26 days later), a supplementary 'update' was added below which could only be fully read by clicking on a link. This said:

*14 Jul 2015 — But please don't stop sharing - let's get it over the 500 mark.*

*Update - We are pleased to report that the organisation with whom Gledhow Primary School entered into a dialogue with regarding all weather pitches has withdrawn its interest and we are advised that the school/council now has no current plans under consideration to pursue this option. Phew!!!! However, this does not affect the plans to close the field to public access so we still need your signatures to keep the land open and free for the community.*

*Please note that we have a paper petition running alongside the online one so have a bigger total than shown here. Make sure you don't sign both!*

*Thank you for your support.*

This belated change still implies there was ever a plan to have all weather pitches. There was not.

#### **Appendix 1 Summary Of Comments From Petition**

This is not a summary of comments, it is a selection of those which support the view of FGF. It is equally possible to select those comments which show respondents have completely misunderstood the ownership and plans for the school playing field. Of the 125 comments visible on 14<sup>th</sup> July, the following 30 (just under 25%) illustrate this:

Gledhow already have a HUGE playing field they could build on, with plenty of space left over! Excess traffic in the area (due to children not from the local area) will be horrendous as it is shocking enough now!
Don't go fencing it off and sticking artificial surfaces on it!
An all weather sports pitch would prevent rainwater being able to soak into the ground efficiently and would be damaging to wildlife such as bees
We need to keep as many of our green fields as possible, and it would appear that Gledhow PS is probably looking at financial gain. I agree with all that is said in the statement to Leeds CC and Gledhow PS
It constitutes a public right of way, and is also the last green space in the whole area. It must not be built on.
We don't need more houses built by greedy developers. We need a better system for maintaining and filling the houses that are standing empty and neglected.
There appears to be a greedy business plan to exploit this space and a disregard for the local environment.
The school can still use it for Sports Day enclosing it with a fence restricts who can use it and when.
There are many empty houses use these to house people not precious green space
I'm signing because - as an ex-pupil of Gledhow CP School I recognise that the open space is a community asset, and should not be lost as a private/income generating one.
I do not feel schools should be focusing on this sort of enterprise. Their role is to manage their school. The government should provide enough funding to enable the school to be run effectively without having to resort to using common land to raise money. This land was provided for all the community - there is a major risk that this will no longer be the case. The school currently has adequate outside space for its primary pupils.
On balance of potential usages, while there would be some community gain from the proposed all-weather pitches, keeping the field open for the widest possible access by the community seems preferable,
This doesn't belong to the school, it is for the people who live in Gledhow/Brackenwood, they've got enough space as it is, have you seen the size of the playing fields they have!
Stop the degradation and sell-offs!
the school are wrongly claiming this land
I think the school has a adequate size playing fields.

I think this would also take away natural habitats and destroy the environment. It would also create noise pollution and the increase of people around this area would make the environment suffer as there wouldn't be enough room for parking and it would increase the amount of litter.
A company now wants to change this field allegedly into a paying football field which will stop a lot of these children being able to use it as many will not be able to afford to pay. I fear down the line houses will then be built on this space.
Green space is so important in a city, more important than making a sale for a quick buck. Also, it belongs to the public, it's not the councils to sell.
We are losing green fields by the day and before many years have passed the entire country will be one mass of concrete. It must stop!
The school do not need what they are saying
There's way too much been built on our precious land due migrant over flow.
There are many green spaces in North Leeds under threat of disappearing under bricks and concrete!
I do not agree with building on school playing fields
There is absolutely no need for this
Our birds, hedgehogs etc are already in decline because of loss of habitat. Green space also needed for rainwater to be absorbed.
would be a huge shame to see it gone to another 'goals' football pitch. There are plenty of other locations to develop in roundhay and throughout leeds, places that need it more than we do.
To lose it to what on the surface appears to be a commercial enterprise would be totally wrong & would not serve the interests of the local population.
Stop privatizing our common land!
It's bad enough that the government in the past have sold off school fields, lets not now reverse that by permitting the acquisition of public land for private school use.

13 of the 125 respondents who left comments (just over 10%) are not from Leeds – some as far as London and Edinburgh, so it is not an entirely local survey. The rest say Leeds, although it is not clear if they are actually from the local community.

### **Survey**

*(Please note: Respondents were also asked about their views on all-weather pitches as, at the time, it had not been made known that the private organisation had withdrawn their interest. For future reference, should all-weather pitches be something that is explored at a later date, the results relating to this were as follows:*

- *When asked whether they would like to see all weather pitches on Gledhow Field, 91% of people said 'No'*
- *When asked whether they would be prepared to pay to use sports facilities on Gledhow Field, 93% of people said 'No'*

As with the petition, the nature of the background information presented to people meant they had an entirely false view of the plans for the land. At no point did FGF contact the school to ask if there were any plans. Instead of a simple letter or phone call, or request for a meeting for clarification or to voice any concerns, FGF set up a formal Group, developed a website populated with inaccuracies and conjecture, and designed what we believe was a misleading petition and survey. Despite repeated attempts to convince FGF that there are no such plans and never have been, they persist in maintaining this impression.

### **What's the Answer?**

#### **Short Term – A Temporary Stop on Erecting the Fence for Twelve Months**

*The school will only have one extra class next year and, even though it has lost some of its land to the 'Reception Village', it will still have more than adequate space to fulfil the requirements of the school's Physical Education curriculum. (See appendix 2 which details the space within the school timetable for additional PE lessons).*

No it will not. It is losing sports field and playground space while accommodating more children and staff. Again, it is not for FGF to decide what is 'adequate' space.

## **Appendix 2 School Timetable**

We find it entirely inappropriate that FGF have taken this from the school website and see fit to dictate how and when the school should deliver its curriculum and design the timetable.

*... there has been a previous request that the 'surplus land' be sold due to lack of school use*

There has been no such request.

### **Long Term – Agree To The Community's Wish To Maintain Open Use Of The Land Or Find A Compromise**

- **Split The Land** *It is considered, by the community, that the school does not need the land.*

Whether the 'community' considers this is not the point – it is a matter for planning guidelines and the schools' needs to deliver the curriculum and educational experience safely. Had they not been so widely misinformed, they may have reached different conclusions.

#### **Conclusion**

*There is deemed to be no morally justifiable reason why the school should take all of this land as they already have significantly more soft play area than most schools and, leaving the land open to public access, will not affect the ability to expand.*

Again, use of the word 'take' in a statement about moral justification neglects the legal status of the land as school playing field, and implies the school is acting immorally.

The school may have more soft play areas than others (which may have sold it for development, or never had it in the first place), but that does not mean it should engage in a race to the bottom. The school currently has less hard play area than is recommended in guidelines for its size, and it will lose much of this to the new extensions to existing buildings. So appropriate size hard play areas will be made on current soft play areas, requiring the full extent of the school's fields to be used when there are 50% more pupils. This is explicit in the Chair's letters to parents, and was communicated to FGF by the Council at the meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> June, so to persist with this point is to wilfully ignore evidence and arguments which do not fit with the FGF narrative.

*That a temporary hold is put on the installation of the fence, for a period of 12 months*

This is possible, but would mean a halt to building 3FE expansion, which would impact the Council's ability to provide school places and local parents and children.

#### **Final notes from the School**

While we regret that an area of green space is being lost to the public, the School has always felt it was doing the right thing for local parents and on balance expansion is the correct decision. We do not share the view that, for example "*The park is too far away and the woods are not safe for young children*" (FGF website), and there are relatively recent 'new' green spaces on Allerton Grange Field, and we understand Gledhow Sports and Social Club allows access to its land. We have not engaged in an opposing media or public campaign, but staff and students of the school in the 1970s and 80s have confirmed all the school field was fenced (albeit with holes cut to gain access!) and we have had messages of support typified below:

Hi Mr Archer,

I've just seen the very well argued letter from the Chair of the Board of Governors. I just wanted to say that as a parent who reluctantly accepts the need for Gledhow to become a 3 form entry school I absolutely back you in the need to bring that part of the school's land back within school boundaries and keep it green.

If there is anything else we as parents can do, please let us know.

Dr John Willott  
Chair of Governors, Gledhow School