

Edenmore Park and Pitch and Putt Course

Due to the CoViD 19 pandemic the Parks Service were required to prioritise operations given the reduced hours of working imposed by social distancing, pod working, staggered rosters and other restrictions. The pitch and putt course in Edenmore Park was a casualty of this prioritisation as it was not open to the public and was used by a relatively small number of people. Public parks have been prioritised as they have been intensively used by the public and local communities throughout the CoViD event.

At the June North Central Area Committee meeting the Councillors made it clear that they wanted the course to be re-opened to facilitate Grange Woodbine Pitch and Putt group and that a community consultation should be carried out to engage the thoughts of the wider community.

The Parks Service engaged with the community in recent months including the Pitch and Putt Club, the wider community, nearby business community and the local community Gardaí with regard to the options available and the relative benefits of the pitch and putt course and returning the land to public parkland.

Options and Alternatives:

One option considered and discussed included reducing the facility to a 9-hole course which in theory would free up half the lands for other uses. However when this was explored it was discovered that this is not a realistic option. Walkers and park visitors have to be protected from errant golf balls, so if the course was to be split and 9 holes re-constructed, approximately 300m of ball stop fencing would be required across the park to allow the other half to be opened up to the public. The course would also have to be re-configured to facilitate tees and greens.

An alternative of making provision for the Pitch and Putt Club in the St. Anne's Park Par 3 course was discussed with the club on site. St. Anne's is a very good quality and well maintained course only 1km from Edenmore Park. It has ample parking and there is a bus route from door to door. However this option was not favoured by the club as they considered a Par 3 course to be unsuited to pitch and putt requirements.

This matter has been discussed with our golf management company who manage the par 3 at St. Anne's Park. They have advised that the main difference between par 3 and pitch and putt in terms of the course is that in pitch and putt no green can be further than 70m from the tee. The vast majority of the 18 holes in St. Anne's meet this 70m requirement and the other holes can be appropriately shortened by providing additional tees further up the fairway. These can be provided in the way of mats very quickly with full tee boxes constructed in due course.

We have also liaised with the Pitch and Putt Union of Ireland and will ensure the proposed changes to the course meet with all requirements of the Union. The course in Edenmore did not meet requirements in this regard and the groups using the Edenmore Course are not affiliated with the Pitch and Putt Union of Ireland. The move to St. Anne's however, would allow these groups to become affiliated if they so desired. The St Anne's course and affiliation with the Pitch and Putt Union of Ireland would allow the game of pitch and putt to be promoted and developed in the area and allow regional and perhaps eventually even national competitions to be held in St. Anne's. The promotion of pitch and putt in the locality to attract younger members to take up the sport was one of the requests from the local councillors in the consultation.

Having carried out a consultation and considered the options it is proposed that the most appropriate course of action is to provide the Grange Woodbine Pitch and Putt Club with preferential access at a similar pricing structure to the Pitch and Putt/Par3 course in St Anne's Park which will be accredited with the Pitch and Putt Union of Ireland.

The pitch and putt club has been invited to come and trial the facilities at St. Anne's and they will be accommodated as soon as a date that suits them for their visit can be identified. The new booking system will allow for slots to be booked for play and competitions as is required going forward.

Unsustainability of Edenmore Pitch and Putt Course:

This was the last sports facility in a public park where DCC staff still collected cash. This placed them in a vulnerable position and indeed staff have been attacked here in the past. It is not proposed to put staff into this situation again and staff are required otherwise to carry out much needed maintenance duties in this and other parks in the area.

The pitch and putt course costs more than €60k per annum to maintain and operate. While the income generated by the course fluctuated from year to year it has fallen considerably in recent years from €14k in 2010 to €3k in 2018 and €4k in 2019. This represents only a small number of rounds played each week. The costs to maintain and operated the facility is composed mainly of staff wages including after hours and weekends, day to day maintenance and ongoing repairs due to vandalism. Watering of the course is also an expense as there is no well or borehole on site and all irrigation is carried out with metered potable water.

However, the location and enclosure of the pitch and putt course is a major contributor to facilitating serious and criminal anti-social behaviour in the afternoons and evenings. The perimeter planting which forms the boundary to the course prevents views into the 4 hectares and the fencing does not allow the Gardaí to effectively patrol the area. The dense perimeter tree planting at the rear of houses on Woodbine Park which is in place to prevent golf balls going into those properties provides cover for ongoing anti-social behaviour and are a cause of on-going complaint by the residents of Woodbine Park due to shading. All of this planting could be significantly reduced and removed if the land were no longer used for pitch and putt golf.

As the course has not been maintained as a golf facility for a number of months it would take some considerable investment of time and resources to bring the greens into commission and it would not be playable until mid to late 2021.

Potential Community Gain:

One of the key issues gleaned from the consultation was the level of serious anti-social activity which emanates primarily from the enclosed space occupied by the pitch and putt course because of its seclusion, lack of natural supervision by park users and difficulty of access to the Gardaí. This impacts on both communities in Edenmore and Grange Woodbine and undoubtedly deters some vulnerable local people from using the park. The Gardaí confirmed the serious nature of the activities in the park and would support opening up the entirety of the park to views and access. The greatest deterrent for congregation is of course footfall; increasing the

number of visitors to the park by allowing them to feel safer through opening up views and removing cover will have the greatest impact on the how the park is perceived in the community.



Map 1 : Integrating the pitch and putt course into the park would deliver a better proportioned park

A second takeaway from the community consultation is that while Edenmore Park is used by the communities of Grange Woodbine and Edenmore it is clear that there is little evidence of sharing or communication between both which is a challenge to DCC.

Parks throughout the City are spaces which unify communities and it is our strong contention when the 4 hectares from the pitch and putt course (Grange Woodbine side) are added to the 4 hectares from the Edenmore side, this part of the city will have a neighbourhood park comparable to any other in the city.

By removing the pitch and putt course fencing the effective area of the park could be doubled and deliver a better proportioned park. At present Edenmore park is linear and wrapped around the pitch and putt course. The heavily vegetated boundary between the park and the course could be opened up, crown lifting the trees to allow for clear views beneath and reducing cover for congregation after dark and anti-social behaviour as has been achieved in Stardust Park over the last 2 years.

A new perimeter path of 1.25km which would attract a lot more walkers into the park and could form the basis of a new local junior park run.

The pitch and putt area has huge biodiversity and wildlife potential. An environmental survey carried out during the summer revealed a very interesting floral community in the park including orchids and cowslips and that the site is being used by a range of animals including at least 3 species of bat as well as foxes, squirrels and rare birds including a raven and buzzards. The elimination of the use of herbicides used heretofore on the pitch and putt course will further enhance the biodiversity and environmental quality of the park to become one of Dublin City's Green Flag Parks.



Map 2 : Potential path network

It is proposed therefore that the Parks Service will begin the work of opening up the boundaries as soon as is practicable to remove cover for congregation and allow for effective patrolling of the area before Halloween. It is not proposed to remove any trees other than the leylandii on the northern boundary but the understorey shrubs will be cut back and the crowns raised to provide clear sightlines beneath.

Railings have been ordered and are on course to be installed before the end of 2020 on the southern boundary of the park to prevent any further joyriding in the park. Other improvements can be considered in the context of a new plan for the park to include additional playground equipment and boules for senior citizens. New footpaths and park benches are also an essential part of any new plan

The plan therefore is to accommodate the desire of the Grange Woodbine Pitch and Putt group to continue participation in their sport in the nearby St Anne's Park and to develop the full extent of Edenmore park for the benefit of the wider community with the specific objective of dealing with the anti-social activities and catering for the needs of all age groups.

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