

To Oxford City Council  
Council meeting, Monday 10 October 2011

## **FIVE MILE DRIVE RECREATION GROUND**

I am speaking for 500 families who live hemmed in by the A40, Banbury and Woodstock Roads, from Sunderland Avenue northwards to Jordan Hill on the edge of the City. Over 2,000 people, including many children, live in this triangle and the only public amenity we have is Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground, just 2.3 hectares of plain, open space, compared with the City's target of 7.5 hectares per 1000 population. The recreation ground consists of 2 football pitches, a small children's playground, a hard court, a wooden pavilion (currently derelict) and some green space. We have no community hall, no church, no pub, no shop – everything except the recreation ground is on the other side of busy trunk roads beyond the safe reach of our children. To get to most facilities we have to go by bus or car.

We were extremely concerned to learn from a press report in July that Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground had been shortlisted for new cemetery space in a City Council study. In just a few days over 500 people signed a petition against this proposal, which was delivered to the Town Hall on 21 July.

Everyone needs open space for health and happiness. We have used and enjoyed Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground for over 60 years. Dog walkers are there from early morning to dusk. Summertown Stars football club bases four teams of under-16 girls and boys there, using both pitches every Saturday and Sunday. Children and teenagers play informally and families use the playground throughout the week. This small green space is vitally important to our community.

Children these days have less and less freedom to roam, and teenagers have less and less to do. We face a national obesity epidemic. The youth service is being cut to shreds. Research shows that lack of exercise and green space increases the likelihood of mental health problems at any age, as well as obesity. And 2012 is the year of the UK Olympics. We must not destroy forever our accessible local sports fields and playgrounds, which are so well used and highly valued.

The planning report says that Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground "will not meet entire cemetery need identified". So within a short time the City would be looking for more burial space - but our children and grandchildren would never get their playing fields back. The City's Victorian cemeteries, that are today almost full, were established in open countryside beyond the urban limit. We now need new cemetery space beyond the current edge of the City. We urge the City Council to give priority to the living, not the dead, and to preserve and enhance Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground as a sports facility and public open space.

Richard Lawrence-Wilson  
65 Five Mile Drive  
OX2 8HW

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