



To:

Cllr Leah Coles, Cllr Angelique Foster, Cllr Marie Ireland, Cllr Caroline Smith, Cllr John Yates, Cllr Graham Baxter, Cllr David Cheetham, Cllr Christine Smith, Cllr Lilian Deighton, Cllr Michelle Emmens, Cllr Pam Jones, Cllr Richard Welton, Cllr Susan Burkitt, Cllr Mark Foster, Cllr Anthony Hutchinson, Cllr Alex Dale, Cllr Philip Wright, Cllr Gareth Hopkinson, Cllr Kevin Tait

cc: The Rt Hon Lee Rowley MP, The Members of Dronfield RC, The Public (by way of publication at [www.dronfieldrc.co.uk](http://www.dronfieldrc.co.uk))

Date: Tuesday 28th March 2024

Dear Councillors,

As you are no doubt aware, Dronfield Running Club has been in dialogue with Dronfield Town Council for some time regarding a request to utilise Sindelfingen Park to host a junior parkrun.

Unfortunately, this request was rejected at a full council meeting on 4th December 2023. At a meeting of the parks and recreation committee on 26th February 2024, it was explained to us that the reasons for this were centred around noise, parking, drainage and narrow paths.

This was obviously a disappointment to us but we maintained the stance that we wished to continue dialogue with the council to discuss its concerns, with the ultimate aim of understanding, removing and reducing the highlighted problems as far as possible and ultimately satisfy the council that a parkrun could be successfully hosted at Sindelfingen Park.

To this effect, on 27th February we set out 'the case for...' on our website and invited local residents to consult on the matter which we intended to present to the council so it (and we) were fully informed of the thoughts and feelings of local people. This was to provide a stimulus for reopening dialogue. We deliberately stressed our consultation was not a petition or a protest, for balance we sought objections and support in equal measure. The results of that consultation are summarised later in this correspondence and enclosed in full.

While our consultation was ongoing, we were surprised to read on the council's bulletin page of the Dronfield Eye that it had unanimously voted in favour of hosting a parkrun and that Dronfield Woodhouse Sports & Social Club be risk assessed as a venue.

Whilst it's disappointing that, as the primary (only) stakeholders in this matter, we had to learn of this via local print media, it was great to read that the council now supported our proposals, at least in principle.

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We then requested an update from the Town Clerk such that dialogue could be reopened and on 26th March were further surprised to be advised that:

*"the impact assessment [for Dronfield Woodhouse Sports & Social] was presented to members of the Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee at their latest meeting, held yesterday and a recommendation will be made to full council at the April Council Meeting"*

As nobody at the council had sought to consult with us on this change of stance and venue prior to it being debated and decided upon (at meetings which we were not invited too), we felt it prudent to write to declare our position.

To be unequivocally clear, Dronfield Running Club does not support a parkrun at Dronfield Woodhouse Sports & Social Club and would not be seeking to fund its set up or manage it on a weekly basis. We are of the view that Dronfield Woodhouse Sports & Social Club is a substandard venue for a multitude of reasons and a junior parkrun at this venue would not be successful.

Our primary concern is that running four laps of a grass field, particularly in winter, is tough, uninspiring and frankly, a boring pursuit for young children. In all but a few summer months the junior parkrun would be at risk of cancellation on a weekly basis for issues of runner safety and ground maintenance. Furthermore, the course being entirely on grass creates unnecessary barriers to participation for the disabled, the partially abled and partially sighted.

In 2023, Dronfield RC worked with the council and funded the demarcation of a track on this field as a trial for its viability as a venue for running. We did this with honest intentions but even as seasoned and hardened runners, concluded that this was not a suitable or enjoyable place to host running events and training for adults, let alone children. We decided we would not be funding the track going into 2024.

We had, before submitting our proposals for Sindelfingen Park, carefully considered Dronfield Woodhouse Sports & Social Club as well as Coal Aston Community Centre and Cliffe Park and dismissed all three alternative venues as unsuitable for similar reasons.

To expect children to run on cambered fields with long grass, divots, mud and no surrounding tree cover, leaving them open to all the elements is taking the sport of running back to the dark days of poorly delivered school cross-country lessons that pushed entire generations away from distance running for decades. A trend that running clubs across the country, and parkrun themselves, have worked hard to reverse over a number of years.

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In stark contrast, none of these enjoyment-sapping issues are present at Sindelfingen Park which is a lovely venue to visit, run, exercise, play and enjoy being outdoors. It has tarmac paths, tree cover, playgrounds, basketball nets and is adjacent to cafes and shops, all of which adds a sense of purpose and magnetism to a parkrun. The correct venue for a junior parkrun is not simply the most conveniently available field but one that children actively want to visit. It is one that is inviting and offers more than just running around a patch of grass. The correct venue is absolutely essential to getting kids and their parents/carers to attend at all.

Getting out of bed purely to run around a muddy field is not an attractive proposition. Visiting a nice park, its present and surrounding amenities and participating in the parkrun is a strong draw for children and, equally importantly, their parents/carers. The purpose of a junior parkrun is to embed into children that exercise can be fun and a part of everyday life and play, not something to be endured. That is our aim and why we stand firmly behind our stance that Sindelfingen Park is the only viable venue in Dronfield.

When we first presented our proposals for Sindelfingen Park, the council's reasons for rejection were centred around noise, parking, drainage and the width of the paths. These concerns are not without merit and it is incumbent upon the council to raise them with us but we (and our consultees) don't believe they are of sufficient detriment and/or insurmountable as to outweigh the vast and varied benefits that a parkrun would bring. Furthermore, the council's reasons for objection at Sindelfingen are exacerbated at Dronfield Woodhouse Sports & Social.

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A site by site comparison of both sites, focusing on the concerns raised by the council regarding Sindelfingen Park is detailed below:

Concern	Sindelfingen Park	Dronfield Woodhouse S&S	Demonstrably preferable venue
Parking provision	89 off road public parking spaces (when we measured on a Sunday morning at 0900, there were 70 available)	20 marked off road parking spaces	<b>Sindelfingen Park</b>
Drainage	Run on tarmac except for 140 meter grass section which could be varied during winter so as to maintain the ground.	Run entirely on grass and fully exposed to surface damage and cancellation due to wet ground.	<b>Sindelfingen Park</b>
Footpath width	2m wide footpaths, enough for people to pass each other safely. Runners briefed to give way to other park users before every event.	N/A as there are no footpaths	Not comparable as there are no footpaths at DWS&S
Accessibility	7,128 people live within a 1km (walkable distance) of the venue. *2020 census data	1,528 people live within a 1km (walkable distance) of the venue. *2020 census data	<b>Sindelfingen Park</b> More people are likely to walk to the venue, reducing traffic and parking concerns.
Noise	41 properties share a boundary with the park or are within a sight line of users	64 properties share a boundary with the field or are within a sight line of users	<b>Sindelfingen Park</b>

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As briefly noted above, we enclose with this letter the results of our consultation on the matter of a junior parkrun at Sindelfingen Park.

In total, 607 people submitted their thoughts.

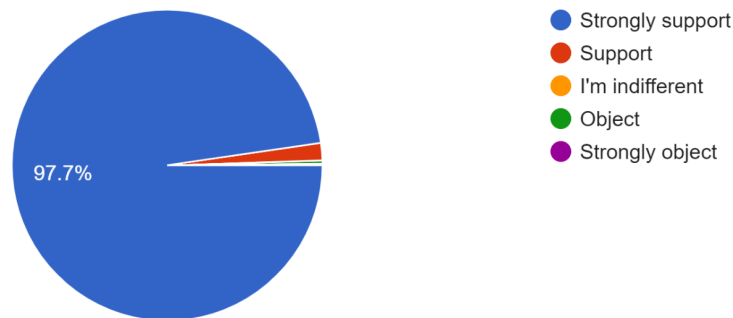
521 of those 607 live in Dronfield and 65 in surrounding parishes. Just 21 live further afield.

The number of responses indicating their households has children within the age criteria of junior parkrun is 404

Only 1 'strongly object' was received, 2 respondents 'object', 11 'support' and 593 'strongly support' (see chart below)

Do you support Dronfield RC's proposals for a junior parkrun in Sindelfingen Park, Dronfield?

607 responses



Behind all the statistics is the qualitative feedback we received, all of which is enclosed with this letter. There are strong arguments made by many people, including local healthcare practitioners and teachers of Dronfield Henry Fanshawe School. Of particular interest is that the overwhelming majority of respondents who noted that they live in the immediate vicinity of Sindelfingen Park highlighted their support. Examples below, with further reading within the enclosed document.

*We live in close proximity to Sindelfingen Park and are in the older age bracket. We are more than happy to support a weekly junior park run with all the health and social benefits that it would provide for our local youngsters.*

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*We live very close to the park and we have not received any consultations about this. We would strongly support this and have no objections.*

*As a resident living very close to the park none of the issues raised by the council concern me and I do not feel they should prevent a positive healthy activity for the youth.*

We ask that the council considers all the above carefully. Including the issues we highlighted with Dronfield Woodhouse Sports & Social Club, the side-by-side comparisons with Sindelfingen Park and our consultation feedback and work with us to properly and thoroughly evaluate Sindelfingen Park and what can be done to remove or reduce any barriers for it being the chosen venue for a junior parkrun.

The Council has unanimously voted to support the principle of a junior parkrun in Dronfield. In doing so it presumably agrees that it is of benefit and merit to the community which it serves. It is something that the council can point to, that it has helped to provide, at a time it is so often accused of not providing provision and opportunity for children and young people.

Dronfield RC are not a protest group or fly by night 'pop up' venture asking for any council support or funding. We are a professionally-managed charity run by democratically elected and legally scrutinised trustees that oversee a committee of 12 volunteers who manage a club with a diverse membership of over 200 local people. We are affiliated to England Athletics, the national governing body for running and athletics who hold us to the highest standards of quality assurance, welfare and governance. We are proud to represent Dronfield and Dronfield Town Council should consider us their allies. At a time where budgets are being cut and councils face tough decisions it can turn to organisation like us to fill gaps in community provision that it cannot. That kind of collaboration is what makes a collection of people a community.

Our part in this is to assist, advise, fund, host and manage the junior parkrun. Between our 200+ membership we have decades of experience of hosting, managing and participating in such events across the length and breadth of the country and across the globe. We know what works and we know what doesn't. We urge you not to ignore our voice in this matter.

We close with the words of Mayor Burkitt. (March edition of The Dronfield Eye)

*"This is a great opportunity for children between 4 and 14 to get out in the fresh air and take part in a local parkrun"*

We fully agree. So let us work together to make it happen. At a venue where it can be a success. Not on a field on the outskirts of the town but in the heart of the community for whom it exists. At Sindelfingen Park.

The Trustees and Committee of Dronfield Running Club.

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