

APPENDIX A

SUTTON COURT DRIVE PLAYSPACE**1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a progress update, provide information from residents suffering from nuisance and suggest possible ways forward.

2 PROGRESS

- 2.1 At the meeting held on 31 March, the following actions were agreed:
- The playspace to remain unlocked for a trial period of two months, provided that ball games continue to cease at a reasonable time each evening.
 - Further complaints from local residents received by the public/District Council/Parish Council would be monitored, together with any evidence relating to their validity.
 - The Youth Service work in conjunction with local users of the playspace to provide some design work for the District Council to cost out in consultation with the Parish Council.
 - Work on the design/costings to be completed within two months, following which a further meeting of the Sub Committee be arranged to agree some recommendations.
 - A copy of the minutes of the meeting, together with a covering letter from an officer, be sent to the complainant.
 - A press release be issued once a design had been agreed upon.
- 2.2 The playspace has remained unlocked since the decision was taken by the Sub Committee on 31 March. For a two-week period Police patrols visited the site between 9.30p.m. and 10.30p.m. No problems were encountered on any of the visits, although on one occasion there was evidence of alcohol abuse.
- 2.3 During the period, four complaints have been received in the office. These were essentially regarding the fact that residents opposed to the playspace were not aware of the March meeting and consequently were not able to put forward countervailing arguments. As a result of this, a copy of the agenda and report for this meeting has been sent to all residents who have put their name to a recent petition. The complainants did refer to problems at the playspace, but these preceded the March meeting.

- 2.4 Councillor Gordon, who has been liaising with residents over this issue has a file of correspondence which he has asked for all Members to receive. These have been copied under separate cover to the Members of the Sub committee. Councillor Gordon has also put forward options of his own and these are attached as Appendix 1 to this report. From the above mentioned correspondence, it appears two complaints regarding ball games have been reported to the Police since 31 March.
- 2.5 The Youth Service has been active in trying to distribute questionnaires to the users of the playspace in respect of possible designs. Unfortunately, no suggestions in respect of design have come forward. Suggestions have, however, come forward in respect of holding a fundraising event in the playspace.
- 2.6 As no designs have come forward, officers have suggested a possible solution. Phase 1 would require a modest outlay of around £3,500. This separates the younger children's area from the older users. This could be implemented very quickly. Phase 2 envisages a full refurbishment of the older children's playspace at a cost of around £35,000. It is acknowledged that, if the Parish Council seeks external funding, there would be a delay of some months before work could take place. For this reason, a two-phase scheme is suggested. At a future time the younger children's playspace will require refurbishment which would need to be prioritised within the Council's rolling capital programme. Copies of the proposed changes are attached as Appendix 2 of this report. A layout of the ball court area will be available for viewing at Freight House prior to the meeting.
- 2.7 A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 31 March were sent under separate cover to the main complainant.

3 OPTIONS

- 3.1 This section of the report considers the options put forward by Councillor Gordon at Appendix 1 of this report. Set out below are additional officer comments.

Do Nothing

- 3.2 There are very real and conflicting issues and officers are of the view that this option should be disregarded.

Change Layout

- 3.3 This is similar to the proposals put forward by officers. The officer proposal does allow for some immediate work, as it is acknowledged that funding may take some time to acquire.

Locking

- 3.4 This option could be introduced immediately as a local resident has already volunteered to carry out this task. The most appropriate times for locking and unlocking would need to be agreed, preferably taking into account the views of both users and residents.
- 3.5 Notwithstanding the issue of locking and unlocking, officers believe that the works suggested in 3.3. above would still be required. This would also allow for the possibility of locking individual areas at different times, subject to stakeholders' views and willingness of volunteers.

Partial Sale

- 3.6 This is obviously dependent upon finding a potential buyer and seller. To access land at the rear of Warwick Road would require bridging a stream. This would need careful consideration from a health and safety perspective for the bridge, approaches and field usage.
- 3.7 As timing of receiving funds and incurring expenditure could be an issue, there is a risk of having no ball playing area for a period of time.

Full Sale

- 3.8 All of the views set out in 3.6 above apply here. As there would also need to be extensive partnership working this would increase the risk of there being no play facility in the area for a period of time.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS**Operational Risk**

- 4.1 The operational responsibilities rest with the District Council. Any solution, therefore, must be capable of being managed within existing resources.

Reputation

- 4.2 As the authority is responsible for the playspace, it is expected to be able to produce solutions that, as far as possible, meet the expectations of differing stakeholders.

Third Party

- 4.3 The playspace must be maintained in a safe condition in order to prevent harm to users.

5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There is at present a nuisance problem. Any action taken should have a positive impact on this.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 If the officer proposals are accepted, there will be an immediate requirement for expenditure of £3,500. There is no provision for this in the current budget. This figure is within the delegated virements limits for the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services). The work could, therefore, be carried out on the basis he would identify a virements during the course of the financial year.
- 6.2 The second phase could not be undertaken immediately, as it was agreed at the meeting of this Sub Committee on 31 March that the Rochford Parish Council should try to source 50% of the required funding. This will take some months to secure. In the event of the Parish being successful, the District Council would need to determine a way of funding 50% of the cost.
- 6.3 Provided local residents are prepared to volunteer to lock and unlock the playspace, there is no resource implication on the Council for this activity.
- 6.4 If any of the proposals regarding land sale are supported, detailed investigations and approaches to land owners will need to be carried out. Officer time will be required to carry out these tasks and to formulate a full costed proposal for Members to consider.

7 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The playspace is located in the area of Rochford Parish Council.

8 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS** further courses of action.

Roger Crofts

Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)

Background Papers:-

None

For further information please contact Roger Crofts on:-

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Playspace Sub-Committee** held on **6 July 2005** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr D G Stansby

Cllr R A Amner
Cllr T Livings

Cllr P F A Webster

VISITING MEMBERS

Cllr Mrs S A Harper and Mrs M S Vince.

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts	-	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
D Timson	-	Property Maintenance & Highways Manager
R Tatton-Bennett	-	Principal Engineer
S Garland	-	Community Safety Officer
C Milton-White	-	Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

ALSO PRESENT

Cllr Mrs M A Weir	-	Rochford Parish Council
M Hughes	-	Essex County Youth Service
J Vickers	-	Detached Work Co-ordinator, Essex County Youth Service
PC Routh	-	Essex Police

16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 March 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17 SUTTON COURT DRIVE PLAYSPLACE

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on progress, information from residents and suggested ways forward for the Sutton Court Drive Playspace.

Prior to detailed discussion, the Chairman confirmed that the Sub-Committee had always intended to ensure all interested parties were consulted and kept informed of the process.

PC Routh reported on the number of incidents in the vicinity of the playspace requiring Police attendance since 1 April. The Sub-Committee accepted that quality of life issues could be associated with the congregation of youths at playspaces and that damage could be caused by ball games.

In considering this matter, Members noted that:-

- Subject to appropriate indemnity, a local resident remained willing to lock/unlock the playspace facility.
- To minimise financial impact on the Parish Council, an arrangement could be introduced whereby works commence subject to the Parish agreeing to source any immediate shortfall in their own financial contribution via next year's precept.
- Over time, the Parish Council had investigated the feasibility for play-space provision in a number of areas in the Sutton Court Drive area of Rochford.
- Notwithstanding that it would need to give detailed consideration to overall funding, the Parish Council was likely to support the Phase 1 proposal as identified in the report. It should be possible for the Parish Council to consider the matter in detail and report back to the District before the end of the month.
- Of the Youth Service questionnaires that had been returned there was an indication that young people would appreciate the playspace being opened as frequently as possible and that there was respect for the concerns of the community. There was also an indication that it would be appreciated if the teen shelter was either improved to give greater protection from the weather or replaced with one offering such protection.
- Separate open/closing times for the two parts of the playspace may be worth consideration.
- Teen shelter replacement would cost approximately £12,000. There were differing opinions about the merits of a shelter.
- Phase 1 proposals did not include the introduction of netting to catch high balls. Whilst risk/safety issues could be associated with the introduction of such netting, possibilities could be investigated by District Officers.
- The Authority's Byelaws did not prohibit ball games.
- The organisers of any site fund-raising activities, such as a fete, would need to ensure appropriate insurance cover was in place.
- As long as activities could be directly related to youth work, the County Youth Service would be happy to work with the young people of the area in exploring funding possibilities. 57 South Street would be available.

- There would need to be specific costing of any alternative design proposals around Phase 2.

During debate it was recognised that, whilst the community had many desires on aspects such as the ideal location for a playspace, it is important for the District and Parish Council to work together in bringing appropriate realistic solutions at the current location.

It was observed that the interest being shown by the youngsters of the area was commendable and there would be clear merit in involving them as much as possible.

A Member confirmed that an Essex Police leaflet setting out the parameters associated with obtaining funding of up to £750 for projects run by 18 to 25 year-olds would be passed to the Essex Youth Service representatives.

The Sub-Committee concurred with the view of the Chairman that the Parish Council should now be asked to develop final recommendations based on a contribution from the Parish of 50% of costs and it was:-

Resolved that Rochford Parish Council be asked to consider the options and develop final recommendations for the Sutton Court Playspace (including arrangements for locking/unlocking) on the basis that it will contribute 50% towards the cost of any improvements considered necessary. (CD(F&ES))

The meeting commenced at 4.00pm and closed at 4.55pm.

Chairman

Date