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## 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

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### Background Papers:-

None

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