
Minutes of the meeting of the **Playspace Sub-Committee** held on **31 March 2005** when there were present:-

D G Stansby (Chairman)

Cllr R A Amner
Cllr T Livings

Cllr P F A Webster

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr Mrs M S Vince

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs J R Lumley.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr C J Lumley

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts	- Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
D Timson	- Property Maintenance & Highways Manager
C Milton-White	- Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator
M Martin	- Committee Administrator

ALSO ATTENDING

Cllr Mrs M A Weir	- Rochford Parish Council
M Hughes	- Essex County Youth Service
L Gay	- Young Essex Assembly
J Vickers	- Detached Work Co-ordinator, Essex County Youth Service
P C Routh	- Essex Police
T Eastabrook	- Local resident
S Hennessy	- Local resident
N Nichol	- Local resident
J Patch	- Local resident
M Patch	- Local resident
S Webb	- Local resident
N Winfield	- Local resident

14 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to it being noted that

Cllr D G Stansby had not declared a personal interest, due to the fact that he is not a Member of a Parish/Town Council.

15 SUTTON COURT PLAYSPACE, ROCHFORD

During discussions with local residents in attendance at the meeting, a number of suggestions for alterations to the playspace were put forward, as follows:-

- The provision of netting across the top of the ball playing area, in order to prevent nuisance when balls are accidentally thrown/kicked into neighbouring gardens.
- Provision of a single goal at one end of the playspace.
- The basketball net could be moved.
- The bench seat could be moved.
- The division of the playspace into two distinct areas serving different age ranges.
- Consideration as to whether the teen shelter continues to meet the needs of the current generation of young people.

Residents advised Members that the playspace provides a well-used local amenity for young people, but expressed concern over the irregularity of the opening and closing times since the playspace had been kept locked overnight.

It was noted that:-

- at present the playspace was being unlocked and locked by District Councillors, but that this could only be seen as a short-term measure.
- in the interests of the children's safety, it was very important to ensure that regular opening and shutting times were maintained.
- a volunteer, who had previously written to the Chairman, reiterated that she would be happy to undertake to organise a rota of people to ensure that this was regularised.
- Members were concerned to ensure that such a measure would not put local residents at any risk.
- locking/unlocking of playspaces in other Parishes within the District had proved successful.
- This provided an excellent opportunity for local people to take responsibility for a facility serving the local community.

The views of the Parish Council were such that every effort should be made to maintain the provision of this particular playspace, whilst listening to the views of all concerned. The Parish had contributed financially to the facilities, such as, for example, the teen shelter.

Representatives from the Youth Service indicated that they would be happy to work with users of the playspace to draw up plans/drawings for a more practical layout.

In response to Member questions, the representative from Essex Police advised:-

- that no evidence of any form of drug abuse had ever been found at this particular site.
- since Christmas 2004, there had been only 2 calls specifically to the playspace; one had been due to a youth climbing into the prematurely locked playspace and the other had been when the lock had been broken.
- since January 2004 there had been 5 calls specifically to the playspace; two of which had resulted in the recording of minor offences.
- that this playspace was not considered by Essex Police to be a problem area.

Officers from the District Council also confirmed that they had not received any complaints about this playspace or discovered any evidence of drug abuse in the course of maintaining the site.

Members of the Sub-Committee indicated that they would require an assurance from the youth of the area that they would continue to be mindful of those living around the playspace, in order to prevent any instances of nuisance being reported to the Police or the local authority. This should involve, for example, ceasing to play ball games by a reasonable hour of the evening.

Local residents who had lived in the area for a number of years, confirmed a lack of awareness that the use of the playspace caused any problem, despite what had been indicated in the local press.

The Sub-Committee indicated that it would expect the Parish Council to contribute 50% towards the cost of any improvements considered necessary and the Parish Council indicated that, whilst it operated a very tight budget, careful consideration would be given to what other funding could be attracted for this worthwhile community project.

The young residents present at the meeting also indicated that they would be happy to be involved in small-scale fund raising initiatives to aid the financing of the project.

The Police officer reiterated that local residents should contact him should they become aware of any incidents of nuisance occurring.

Officers advised that whilst the locking/unlocking of the playspace had been in response to a particular issue, consideration could be given to leaving the playspace unlocked again as an experiment and on a Motion moved by Cllr R A Amner and seconded by Cllr C J Lumley it was:-

Resolved

- (1) That the Sutton Court Playspace, Rochford, remain unlocked for a trial period of two months, provided that ball games continue to cease at a reasonable time each evening.
- (2) That any further complaints from local residents received by the Police/District Council/Parish Council would be monitored, together with any evidence relating to their validity.
- (3) That the Youth Service work in conjunction with local users of the Sutton Court Playspace, Rochford, to provide some design work for the District Council to cost out in consultation with the Parish Council.
- (4) That the work on the design/costing be completed within two months, following which a further meeting of the Sub-Committee be arranged to agree some recommendations.
- (5) That a copy of the Minutes of this meeting, together with a covering letter from an officer, be sent to the complainant.
- (6) That a press release would be issued once a design had been agreed upon. (CD(F&ES))

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm.

Chairman

Date