

CHORLEYWOOD PARISH COUNCIL

**Notes of the Play Space for Chorleywood Open Meeting held at the War Memorial Hall,
Common Road, Chorleywood, on Tuesday 23rd February 2016**

Chairman of the Open Meeting - Mr David Moore.

ATTENDANCE

Parish Councillors:

Jo Clarke
*John Copley
Harry Davies
*Tony Edwards
*Barbara Dickens
*Barbara Green
Raj Khiroya
*Rodney Kipps
*Jill Leeming
*Ken Morris
*Alison Preedy
*David Raw
Martin Trevett
*Steve Watkins
*Jane White
*Jenny Wood
*Jackie Worrall

*Denotes Member present

Play Area Advisory Group Members present:

Cllr Barbara Green
Cllr Alison Preedy
Cllr Steve Watkins
David Hiddleston - Friends of Grovewood
Michael Hyde - Friends of the Common
Doug King - Friends of the Chorleywood House Estate
Maria Larkin - Chorleywood Residents Association
Simone Tyson Chorleywood Mums

Expert Report Authors present:

Paul Evans - Countryside Management Services (CMS)
Michael Clare - Hertfordshire Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor

Parish Officers Present: Yvonne Merritt - Clerk
Claire James - Deputy Clerk
Michelle Putman - Admin Officer
Laura Hamilton - Admin Assistant

There were 62 Members of the Public present.

1. OPENING ADDRESS BY CHORLEYWOOD PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

Cllr Tony Edwards opened the meeting explaining the background and reasons for the meeting and introducing Mr David Moore who would be chairing the meeting as an independent person, not connected with the Parish or District Council or living within either the Parish or District. Mr Moore was Chief Inspector of the Rickmansworth Police force before retiring from the Police and is now with Dacorum Borough Council as part of the Dacorum Community Safety Partnership.

The purpose of the meeting was explained as an opportunity for Members of the Public to hear a presentation from Cllr Barbara Green, Chairman of the Play Spaces Advisory Committee which had been charged with the investigation of all matters pertaining to all possible sites in Chorleywood for both formal and informal play equipment. The meeting would then be opened up for Members of the Public to make representations or ask questions of the author of the Countryside Management Service report, the author of the Police Report and members of the Advisory Group. Cllr Tony Edwards explained that Parish Councillors were in attendance in the audience to listen to the debate but were not there to take part in the debate.

2. POWERPOINT PRESENTATION FROM CLLR BARBARA GREEN – CHAIRMAN OF THE PLAY AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Cllr Barbara Green gave a presentation on the background to the Play Area Advisory Group, the methods that had been used by the group to evaluate the information collected and the conclusions and recommendations reached by the group.

3. OPEN FORUM

The meeting was then opened up for members of the public to make representations or ask questions.

NOTE: Whilst every effort has been made to record the main points of the statements made and questions asked by each person, it was not possible to capture everything verbatim.

At **Appendix 1** is a list of all the people who spoke.

Abbreviations used: Site 13 and 15 are the two sites on the Common, CWHE is the Chorleywood House Estate, TRDC is Three Rivers District Council, PAAC is the Play Area Advisory Committee

OF 1 Resident:

“We already have a playground in Chorleywood – it’s at the Swillett. We all know that the majority of parents don’t have the time to walk there with their children, so they drive. Having a new play area sited on the Common won’t make things any different, they will still drive.

What **is** different this time, is that selfish parents - along with their allies in influential positions - have waged a political campaign to lobby for another play area which is more convenient for them to drive to, and park at, whatever the cost. That cost is unacceptable in more ways than one. Site 15 involves destroying nationally-rare grassland, Site 13 involves cutting down woodland.

In 1970, Canadian songwriter, Joni Mitchell summed up the madness of the destruction of our natural environment when she released Big Yellow Taxi. Her lyrics have become an environmental anthem and are just as pertinent today to the situation in Chorleywood.

“They took all the trees and put them in a tree museum”
“Then they charged people a dollar and a half just to see them.”
“They paved paradise and put up a parking lot”.

I’ve got a statement here from the concerned residents in the woodland at Site 13 about the destruction of their habitat, so I’m going to play that for you on the loudspeaker.

Dawn Chorus (*recording of Bird Song*)

If the play area goes ahead on the Common, there will indeed be pressure for a larger parking lot and then toilets and then a café. Once the precedent of development, however limited, has been set, a Pandora’s Box will have been opened and more threats will surely follow. The first step in this encroachment is already on the table. There has been talk by some in the Play Area Committee of “mitigation” that is, trying to make bad things not quite so bad - and “translocating habitat”. That is literally digging up habitat and moving it somewhere else. It is utter nonsense. And expensive nonsense at that. It is pushed by developers to carry on with business as usual and, not surprisingly, it fails more often than it works.

And besides, move it to where? And who is going to pay those additional translocation costs? And then who is going to shoulder the legal costs of going to court to fight the objections?

Who is going to pay for a public inquiry to overturn the Commons Act?

Is the Parish Council really prepared to see their coffers drained of cash to pay for legal expenses? In a sinister move, Three Rivers District Council have apparently indicated they will take on part of that additional financial burden, so you have to ask why are they being so insistent on opening up development on our Common? Then there’s the issue of whether those legal costs will be shared with Maple Cross? And what will their residents think about paying for a playground in affluent Chorleywood?

All of us are extremely lucky to have grown up with an area of natural beauty on our doorstep, as a result our children have gained an appreciation of the natural world. Paving over our precious natural Common for a play area that we don’t need, or want, is not the way to go.

I urge the Parish Council to vote decisively against it - for a second time”.

OF 2 Resident

“I did walk here tonight. The distance estimated for the 1st choice site is 25 mins, with a two year old this would be more like 45 minutes so would have to drive. This wouldn’t help the obesity issue and it wouldn’t help pollution issues”.

OF 3: Resident, Dr and Mother

“I Support the comments made by the previous speaker. It is all about our children, they don’t have a voice. Previous gentleman speaker was trying to argue that parents are selfish. Children today have a different upbringing, they don’t have the freedom. I’m not happy to let my children walk alone therefore they get a fraction of the exercise needed. They need the opportunity to walk and play. There is an obesity crisis and it is really crucial for the health of the children. Children don’t

have a voice, parents are representing them. Need a play area near to the centre, do their shopping and walk onto the play area. They need challenge and risk. The Swillett (play area) is OK but it is for younger children and is tatty. The Common is a big wide open space for all users, not just a small section. The golf club is a very large area with grass cut short, how is this in keeping with grassland”.

Cllr Barbara Green thanked the speaker saying that ties in with comments made. She further explained that TRDC had put money aside because they see we have a need in Chorleywood, as the worst provision of play facilities stating that it was crazy that we don't provide more facilities.

OF 4: Resident

“I am not for or against a play area but am concerned about the problems of access to the site of area 13 on the Common. If I was to walk the prospect is quite alarming. If you drive across Shepherds Bridge you have to wait for traffic coming in the opposite direction, if walking – it would be terrifying if you have a small child and or a buggy, there are no pavements – how is this to be addressed?”.

This question was then addressed to Simone Tyson who firstly explained that she had not prepared for being on the stage that evening and then went on to give her answer to the question raised. She felt that there would be additional signage and safe walking routes. The resident questioned where the safe walking route was. Simone Tyson responded that they had looked at this, there were a lot of pathways in the Village, not using Shepherds Bridge, coming in from different routes. The resident challenged that this would be an even longer route, Simone Tyson responded that it was still more walkable than the Chorleywood House Estate site.

OF 5: “Chairman of the Friends of Chorleywood Common, speaking on behalf of the Committee (other than Jackie Worrall, who has excused herself) and a majority of the members of the Friends. I should like to explain what we think about the recommendations of Chorleywood House Estate as a site for a play area, the significance of surveys and petitions and the reasons why the Common should be kept as it is. There is a great deal that could be said about each of those topics, I will try to make the main points as briefly as I can.

Chorleywood already has a very good play area called the Common. It is an important conservation site. The public have rights of access for air and exercise over all of it and it is well used for kick about, kite flying, dog walking and all sorts of informal recreation. Keeping it as an entirely open space for informal activities sends the right message: use, enjoy and appreciate the whole of the Common. It is the nearest thing we have to unspoiled open Countryside, which makes it a valuable resource and one of the things which make Chorleywood such a congenial place to live. Any change which alters the character of the Common, part of it, and in particular anything which might lead to pressure for further changes, should be resisted. The Common is good as it is.

We welcome the Advisory committee's recommendation that CWHE is the most suitable site. The estate is parkland and already has the public tennis courts, so formal play equipment would not be out of place. There would be no need for an application under the Commons Act, or for the public enquiry and delay, which would be likely to follow, that gives time and cost savings (additional benefits which are not in the Advisory Committee's calculations) and the equipment would not be subject to the restrictions in design and colour which would be likely to apply to a site on the Common. Access by car is straightforward and parking space is available. Access by foot is by made up and level pavements and the distance from the residential parts of West Chorleywood is not significantly greater than that of the site near Christ Church which was among the sites on the Common recommended in 2012, before Natural England said it was too close to the pond. To cross the A404, there is already a pedestrian phase on the traffic lights at Dog Kennel Lane, and there will also shortly be a pedestrian crossing at the junction with Common Road.

The Parish Councillors may find it useful to bear in mind that the Community Plan questionnaire was probably the most comprehensive survey and over 90% of respondents said it is important to protect the Common, opinion on the adequacy of children's play facilities was fairly evenly divided, and a very low percentage actually asked for new play facilities.

OF 6 Resident: Question to Cllr Barbara Green – What is the age range for the play area? Cllr Barbara Green answered 2 – 14yrs. A further question was put: What has changed on the Common when the Common has been used for years. What has created an urgent need for a play area on the Common? Cllr Barbara Green responded that there was a clear need for a play area. Children needed to undertake activity with a manageable risk. They won't or can't do this if just walking with parents on the Common. The resident asked again for the age range that the play equipment was targeting at and asked what form of exercise will be provided that isn't provided on the Common. Cllr Barbara Green gave a description of the possible equipment that could be provided, further stating that people are not allowed to climb trees on the Common .

OF 7 Concern was expressed that it would not be possible to fence on the Common and the member of the public asked what pressure would be put to bear on this aspect. She asked the Chairman of the committee whether she could assert that this would not happen. The Chairman of the meeting passed this to the Clerk of the Parish Council Mrs Yvonne Merritt. She advised that this very issue had been tested by the Council three years previously when temporary fencing had been put up for the grazing. DEFRA had said that under no circumstances could the Parish Council fence the land, unless for ground under repair. It was a categorical statement.

OF 8 The statement was made that it was staggering that people saw the need for a formal play area and asked what that said about the children enjoying the Common up to now.

OF 9 The statement was made that there are 3 good primary schools, all three have play areas. Children get structured play there and needed an unstructured play area.

OF 10 "I have grown up in Chorleywood and played on the Common. I respect people's view of the need for a play area in Chorleywood but have concern with respect to Site 13 – what is the provision for disabled access and will it require tarmac path access. Also was Shepherds Bridge classified as suitable for pedestrians? If site 13 went ahead what would be the cost of a public enquiry and the timescales and the % risk if the scheme was rejected by public enquiry? Cllr Barbara Green responded that there would be no tarmac, disabled access would be the best that could be done with the surfaces allowed which wouldn't be ideal. With respect to the cost of a Public Enquiry, she advised that TRDC had agreed to pay for any costs associated so it would not be the Parish Council who would be paying. The resident stated that it was still public money. Cllr Barbara Green stated that she had no idea of how much a public enquiry would cost and reiterated that it would not fall to the Parish Council therefore had not taken that much interest in this aspect. The resident asked what the time delay would be if a public enquiry was involved to which Cllr Barbara Green responded that it would be a substantial delay. It could be a year, it could be 18 months but if the decision is that it should go on the Common, 18 months was not long given the ten years it had taken to get to this stage. The resident asked if the Common was rejected as a site would the Council be able to go back to the CWHE site. Cllr Barbara Green stated that this would be up to TRDC, The Parish Council owns the Common and Grovewood, CWHE is TRDC owned land.

OF 11 "I am a local teacher and mother, I teach three year olds. For people to say running around on the Common provides exercise, this does not build upper body strength. Anyone that uses the Swillett play area knows that it does not provide suitable equipment for older children. TRDC have

already put aside the money, we just want somewhere". She thanked the group for the work that they had done noting in the ten years a large amount of money had been spent on the issue. She stated that Chorleywood had the best primary school in Hertfordshire with parents prepared to work for the schools. Schools were spending money to implement play areas. She felt that people needed to stop looking into the past and start looking to the future. The money is available for a play area. She stated that she would visit a play area wherever it was placed.

OF 12 Question directed at Michael Clare raising the fact that three years ago Site 13 was rejected under safety grounds from the police report. Michael Clare responded that a colleague had done the survey and raised various issues e.g. that of Shepherds Bridge. Neither his colleague or himself lived in the area. They had looked at the 4 sites, Chorleywood is a low crime area but there are the dangers of traffic. There is also the need for children to be able to play and exercise, to be able to go to an area for them. When he had looked at the areas he had looked at and made comments on Site 13. This was a pragmatic view as well as taking other things into consideration. The resident responded that nothing had changed in the three years there were still dog walkers, steep banks, horse riders, why did the PAAC still have two sites when there were key factors of the legal issues, the long and protracted timescales and fencing issues at site 13. There was a very good site at CWHE – why had the PAAC not just said this was the chosen site. He understood that there was a requirement for TRDC to maintain the play area. He asked what if, in a few years time money was tight, would the maintenance costs then fall on the Parish council. £100K was a great deal of money, all the enquiries would be a great deal of money and whether this is footed by the Parish Council or TRDC was not relevant and he urged the committee to push for CWHE alone.

Cllr Barbara Green responded as that far as they were aware the Parish Council would not be expected to fund these costs. They had been assured that all costs associated with the implementation will be borne by TRDC and money had been put aside by TRDC for an enquiry. With respect to the Police report, in 2012/13 the report had been provided last minute and had not been taken as direct comparison between sites. This time the sites had been compared and contrasted with other sites.

OF 13 The Secretary of the Golf Club advised that the Golf Club have members from age 7 to 90. They were not adverse to a play area but had concerns about site 13 on the Common and in particular its proximity to one of the fairways. They also had concerns over access and parking. The parking areas nearby were already over subscribed, the by laws did not permit fencing and children could run straight out of the play area and onto the fairway, He asked what would be the cost to the Parish Council for the public liability insurance for this.

Cllr Barbara Green responded that, playing devil's advocate, she could not deny that the Golf course was written into the Deeds but the Golf Club takes 20% of the Common, the Play area would be just 0.3% of the Common. There was a lot of difficulty with some members of the Golf Club (not the gentleman present) who had been very vociferous towards others. She stated that the police report had not been concerned about the proximity to the Golf Course.

OF 14 " I am a teacher and a mother. I had some opinions that I came with and some have changed tonight. The obstacles of getting hit by a golf ball, dogs and horses were already there. There is a need for the play area, not for selfish parents. Money has been identified by TRDC, it is important not to lose it, why will they hang onto it indefinitely. In my opinion we are going round and round in circles. This is for our children. Paving has never been mentioned. Parking at a weekend in CWHE is impossible. Why should golfers or cricketers have more rights than other users of the Common. Children are underrepresented".

OF 15 The next speaker echoed the previous speakers comments stating that his child played football at CWHE. He had seen a number of accidents happen and felt that walking to CWHE was not safe. The Golf Club voting against the Common was bad taste. The speaker on the environment – said nothing, he had played some nice sounds of birds but the impact? He had a question for FoCC and FoCWHE – had a demographic study been done.

OF 16 “ I have been a PCSO for 2 months and the kids I have met are all very bored, 11-14 year olds don’t have anywhere to go. They need somewhere to go to play, to talk to have genuine childish fun”.

The Chairman of the meeting advised for the minutes that the views expressed by the PCSO were her views and not the views of the Hertfordshire Constabulary.

OF 17 “I am 16 years old, the only park I have grown up with is the Swillett. Kids are always on their phones, their computers, they don’t go out. Giving them a playground, gives them an incentive to go out. We need to change, to have a playground where children can grow up”.

OF 18 Statement was made that the CWHE site was OK and the Common but that it wouldn’t solve the obesity issue. The speaker questioned Air Quality - if trees were cut down wouldn’t this affect air quality and had this been taken into account. Paul Evans from CMS responded to this by saying that if trees were removed it may affect air quality but there was not sufficient evidence on this. He was not sure if any trees would be removed as there was no final design to assess therefore it would depend on this design. Simone Tyson also responded to this speaker by stating that the last time round when site 13 was considered there was a lengthy debate. Site 13 is in the clearing and in her understanding they were not discussing the loss of any trees there.

OF 19 Cllr Steve Watkins stated that TRDC recommended 1160sq m for a play area, site 13 had only 800 sq m clear therefore at least 300sq m would need to be cleared and that people had been misinformed. He also asked whether people were aware that there were now two play areas in Chorleywood as one had just been built in The Queens Drive. Questions were raised as to whether this was in Chorleywood or not. Cllr Steve Watkins confirmed that the new play area was in the Parish of Chorleywood.

OF 20 Cllr Jane White stated that as a Councillor it would fall to her to be part of the debate and decision making process. She would personally be interested to learn if people preferred CWHE or the Common and their reasons.

OF 21 The speaker stated she had a strong preference for the Common. She was concerned about her children crossing the road on the A404 on her own and preferred somewhere that did not involve crossing a road. Cllr Barbara Green advised that the A404 is just about to have a pelican crossing at the junction of the A404 and Common road. This would involve pedestrian phase lights. She added that it was not ideal for a play area i(IN CWHE) as it was a way down from the entrance to the grounds.

OF 22 The next speaker stated that she definitely wanted the play area on the Common as this was nearest to the centre of the Village. She stated that she felt that this would bring people to the shops and help the shops. She stated that every time she went to the play area at Scotts Bridge and the Rickmansworth Aquadrome she saw people from Chorleywood.

OF 23. The next speaker stated that as a resident of Chorleywood for 42 years he was a regular walker on both the Common and Chorleywood House grounds but had recently given up walking

dogs at CWHE due to the traffic. The recent survey by Chorleywood Residents had said that for CWHE 75% of respondents would drive. He stated that they would not get as far as CWHE as the roads were gridlocked. He acknowledged that the football season was during the winter and it was not as bad in the summer. He thanked the PAAC for the time that had been spent by them on this matter and hoped that there would be a recommendation forthcoming. He suggested a round of applause for the PAAC.

OF 24 The next speaker said that she regularly enjoyed walking to the Common but had been put off by the Golf Club. Her children were often told off by golfers. She went on to say that she was thrilled to hear of the A404 crossing. She had been shocked to see Clement Dane pupils dashing across the traffic. She thanked the Parish Council for getting this done. She wished to build on the comments made earlier in the meeting by the Dr. Children's development skills needed to be built so having somewhere that children could go to would be good. It was not a gaudy, bright area but a natural play area that was being proposed. The play area is somewhere children can meet and also parents can meet. Having somewhere to meet not at your house was important.

At this point the Chairman of the meeting clarified that there were no proposals on what the play area would look like, this meeting was about location.

OF 25 The next speaker questioned that Cllr Green had stated that she didn't feel qualified to answer but that TRDC would on the aspect of Social Return on Investment – was this Value for Money? Cllr Barbara Green confirmed that it was. The speaker then went on to say that he could not see how the CWHE site represented value for money. TRDC may think that CWHE does not add value for money, please don't just go forward with one site – CWHE and one site on the Common please".

OF 26 A new resident to Chorleywood stated that the Common was most attractive and she was all for the protection of it, however she had been alarmed at the statistic of the Golf Club taking 20% of the Common and the Play area taking 0.3%. The Play area would benefit children, parents, grandparents. She questioned the ratio of people who would benefit vs golfers and cricketers etc. 100 years ago when the Golf club was proposed did it take 10 years?

OF 27 The next speaker stated that she had grown up in Kent, when they had moved to Chorleywood, part of the reason was the Common. She enjoyed the facilities of the Common but a play area was also need. If the play area goes on the Common she stated that she could introduce her children to grass, trees etc. She did not care where it goes but had a preference for the Common but there should be a play area.

OF 28 This speaker had spoken earlier in the meeting and had been listening to parents who were desperate for a play ground. His children had grown up building dens on the Common. He stated that he walked the Common regularly and saw large groups of children enjoying the Common. No one is saying to not have a play area but why spoil the Common.

OF 29 The next speaker stated that she used the Swillett and drove to others in the area. She had asked her six year old his preference who had chosen the Common. She stated that elsewhere people have put play areas on Commons, AONB etc.

The Chairman of the meeting interjected that each Section 38 referral was considered on its own merits with its own Planning Inspector assigned. The speaker stated that precedent had been set and other applications would be looked at as part of the consideration. The Chairman restated that each case was considered on its own merits.

Cllr Barbara Green stated that one of the reasons they had gone for Site 13 was that it was closest to the centre of population that don't have gardens, don't have access to Open Spaces.

OF 30 The final speaker stated that his preference was for CWHE. "If site 13 was chosen the Council would be taking the risk that Chorleywood may end up with no site, it would take considerable time".

The Chairman of the meeting wrapped up the Open Forum session thanking everyone who had contributed to the meeting and attended the meeting.

The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Tony Edwards thanked David Moore for chairing the meeting and asked the meeting to express their appreciation by giving him a round of applause. He went on to thank all the attendees, the members of the Committee and the Officers.

4. **CLOSURE**

The meeting have started at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.40pm

These minutes have been checked by the Chairman.

Signed Dated

These minutes have been agreed at Full Council and signed by the Chairman.

SignedDated.....

APPENDIX 1

OPEN FORUM SPEAKERS

Toni ???

Mrs Barrett

Chrissie Booth

Amanda Deighton

Rachel Edwards

Naomi Faulkner

Katherine Fawcett

John Griffiths

Richard Hartley

Greg Hill

Sandra Hirschberg

Mrs King

Robert Mann

Lisa Mclean

Mel Peel

Zana Perry

PCSO Harriet Robinson

Peter Rodwell

Myfanwy Ronchetti

Katie Simons

Nancy Stanway

Josh Stanway

Rob Tyson

Nicola Varnals

Simon Varnals

Steve Watkins

Bill Webb

Jane White