

Chorleywood Play Space Project
Three Rivers District Council's Leisure Officer Site Assessment

The brief has been set as follows:

To assess the relative merits of each site in relation to their suitability for a formal play space. This should be achieved by employing the following approach:

- To itemise the positive factors of each site
- To itemise the disadvantages for each site
- Where possible, to quantify the relative increase in risk for each disadvantage compared with the normal, e.g. potential for anti-social behaviour on this site compared to other play spaces.
- To suggest, for each site, how these disadvantages could be minimised or removed.
- To note any other relevant matters from your experience of other play spaces in TRDC.
- To consult with TRDC planning department where appropriate.

The 4 locations to be considered are:

1. Site 13 on Chorleywood Common
2. Site 15 on Chorleywood Common
3. Grovewood
4. Site 1 on Chorleywood House Estate

Introduction

What is play?

“Children play in many different ways according to their own interests and abilities, and enjoy different forms of play at different times and places. Approximately 15 different play types have been identified, all of which are of importance to children’s enjoyment and day-to-day experience.” (Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces).

According to the Design for Play guidance, there are 10 broad principles, which should be considered when creating inspiring play spaces for children and young people to play.

These 10 principles are:

1. **are ‘bespoke’** – they should be individual to the local and to the community they serve. They should fit and enhance their environment and where possible, utilise existing natural features.
2. **are well located** – successful play spaces are located carefully to be where children would play naturally and away from dangerous roads, noise and pollution. Whilst children often enjoy feeling as if they are away from adult

oversight, there is a fine balance between a space that is pleasantly secluded and one that is remote and hidden away.

3. **make use of natural elements** – children benefit from access to natural environments – making it a more attractive and playable setting for equipment.
4. **provide a wide range of play experiences** – play spaces should be suitable for all ages and different interests and can be used in different ways for all – including children and their parents/carers.
5. **are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children** – children with different abilities can play together as well as the ability to gain access to the site itself. It is important to recognise that there are many different types of disability or special need – not just physical.
6. **meet community needs** – successful community engagement is needed in order for it to be well used.
7. **allow children of different ages to play together** – avoid segregation; equipment and features should be able to be used by all age groups.
8. **build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge** – children need to take risks to learn how to manage risks.
9. **are sustainable and appropriately maintained** – good play spaces are designed and constructed using recycled or sustainably sourced materials.
10. **allow for change and evolution** – play spaces benefit from a process of ongoing change and refurbishment.

Three Rivers District Council utilises these principles when identifying suitable locations for new play spaces and / or refurbishing and upgrading existing ones. For the purpose of the request by Chorleywood Parish Council, which relates to location, only items 1-5 and item 10 will only be considered.

In addition to the above, the following is also used when assessing locations for play spaces:

Checklist for assessing locations for play spaces

1. **Accessibility:** how accessible is the site for people with physical and or learning disabilities as well as for parents with pushchairs and prams? In addition children and young people being able to access the site independently.
2. **Natural surveillance:** is there ample opportunity for natural surveillance either from people naturally passing by, or from residential properties or from car parks or main roads? How accessible is it for the local police to pass by and monitor activity?
3. **Proximity to residential areas:** this can be twofold – 1) in terms of noise nuisance for residents and 2) ensuring the play space is not too isolated

4. **Parking - including disabled parking bays:** proximity to parking (whether it be free or paid) and ideally must include at least one disabled parking bay
5. **Ground conditions:** this includes – 1) accessibility for construction vehicles, 2) installation of equipment and foundations and 3) ground levels i.e. will any excavation be required to level the ground
6. **Natural features:** are there any natural features that will need to be removed or that will provide further enhancement to the site?

Location 13 – Chorleywood Common

Positive factors

- Natural surveillance – this is from users of the Common and from cars passing by (although not as much as at site 15).
- Children would naturally play on the Common, therefore the addition of a play space would enhance the opportunity for play.
- Natural environment – access to the natural environment and wildlife species / habitats – previous designs at this site, incorporated the woodland area in order to enhance the play experience.
- Informal car park located close by
- Accessible from the main village area and from across the Common, which means that a higher density of the population of the Parish of Chorleywood would be able to access the site (see attached mapping).
- Would encourage more users to access and take enjoyment from the Common
- Part of existing leisure facilities / users on the Common, including golf and horse riding.
- This site has been extensively resourced and investigated previously – both from an environmental perspective and from a design perspective.
- Previous residential consultation highlighted that it was the preferred option for the local community (61% selected the Common) due to its proximity to the village and accessibility.
- People are more likely to walk to the proposed site, which assists with other key objectives of Three Rivers District Council, such as increasing levels of physical activity and reducing levels of obesity.
- Already identified and established suitable location and access for construction works.
- Potential of removing trees/woodland from the Common (which is an undesirable habitat in this location), some of which could be replaced with grassland habitat (which is desired on the Common).

Disadvantages

- Land is subject to the Commons Act 2006 – therefore additional planning applications would need to be submitted to the Secretary of State Planning Inspectorate.
- Land owned by Chorleywood Parish Council so would require their agreement.
- Fencing would not be included
- Dog walking area
- Pedestrian access from the village would mainly be via the Shepherd's Bridge, which currently does not have enough width to cater for pedestrians and vehicles crossing.
- The informal car parking area is of a small capacity, currently used to over-capacity by the existing Common users at various times throughout the year

- Certain items of traditional play equipment, such as swings and slides would need to be aesthetically included into the overall design.
- Protected species site and a designated County wildlife site.
- A major part of the play area site is not subject to effective surveillance from the road or car parking area, and none of it is subject to any meaningful surveillance from any residences in the locality.

Risks associated with the disadvantages along with possible solutions

Planning Inspectorate

- Additional time and resource would need to be accounted for with regards to the additional planning application to the Planning Inspectorate. In addition, there is the potential for a Public Inquiry, which again would incur additional time and resource. These would be included as part of the project delivery plan and costs included as part of the overall project cost to Three Rivers District Council.

Chorleywood Parish Council - landowner

- Imperative that TRDC work in partnership with Chorleywood Parish Council on development of designs and on agreement of final location.

Fencing and Dog Walking

- *“Fenced boundaries around play spaces tend to make them feel segregated from their surroundings and there is a growing view that the presence of fencing can discourage some children from using the play space....On the other hand, although there is no legal requirement or recommendation for industry standards, a barrier may sometimes be desirable. Planting a hedge, creating a change in level, siting the whole space in a shallow hollow in the ground....”* (Design for Play: a guide to creating successful play spaces).
- Previous designs for this site included siting the play space within the woodland area to the left of the clearing and creating natural bunding to the entrance of the clearing (the Parish Council confirmed they could do a seed harvest, which could then be used for the grass for the bunds). These natural boundaries would be used to discourage dogs and to prevent small children from leaving the play space.
- In addition, dog tethering posts and signs were also included in the previous designs, which again add to the overall discouragement of dogs using the site.
- Fencing has not been included in 2 play spaces in Three Rivers District and there have not been any reported problems. These are at Leavesden Country Park and South Oxhey playing fields.

Pedestrian Access from the Village / lack of car parking

- Officers previously identified this as an issue and therefore worked to produce safe walking routes from the village to the site (attached). Pedestrians would

be encouraged to use the cattle creep in order to travel underneath the railway line and then up to the site.

- In addition, road safety signage would be erected in close proximity to Shepherds Bridge, warning of children being in the vicinity.

Traditional items of equipment

- Community expectations would need to be addressed that not all elements of play equipment could be included due to the nature of the setting.
- Previous designs have been developed to be sensitive to the aesthetics of the natural surroundings and this would need to be included in any future developments of designs.

Protected species and wildlife site

- Any work would need to have a full environmental impact survey carried out – this would have resource implications.

Lack of effective surveillance

- Due to this lack of natural surveillance and slightly hidden location, there is the potential for ASB and the police would need to routinely check the site.

Planning Considerations

- Wildlife site and LNR
- On greenbelt land
- Application to the Planning Inspectorate Required

Location 15 – Chorleywood Common

Positive factors

- Natural surveillance from residences in the locality, users of the Common, station car park and Shepherd's public house, and, from cars passing by.
- High visibility due to exposed nature of the site.
- Children would naturally play on the Common, therefore the addition of a play space would enhance the opportunity for play.
- Located next to the Station Car Park
- Accessible from the main village area and from across the Common, which means that a higher density of the population of the Parish of Chorleywood would be able to access the site (see attached mapping).
- Would not need to cross the railway line in order to access the site.
- Would encourage more users to access and take enjoyment from the Common
- Previous residential consultation highlighted that it was the preferred option for the local community (61% selected the Common) due to its proximity to the village and accessibility.
- People are more likely to walk to the proposed site, which assists with other key objectives of Three Rivers District Council, such as increasing levels of physical activity and reducing levels of obesity.
- Compound for construction would be located on site.

Disadvantages

- Land is subject to the Commons Act 2006 – therefore additional planning applications would need to be submitted to the Secretary of State Planning Inspectorate.
- Land owned by Chorleywood Parish Council so would require their agreement.
- Fencing would not be included
- Site adjacent to Station Car Park access road and Chorleywood Bottom
- Visibly exposed to residents living in the roads overlooking the Common.
- Certain items of traditional play equipment, such as swings and slides would need to be aesthetically included into the overall design.
- Protected species site and a designated County wildlife site.
- Play area users may park within the Shepherd's PH car parking area (causing friction with the publican, etc), on the station car park access road and on various parts of the Common.

Risks associated with the disadvantages along with possible solutions

Planning Inspectorate

- Additional time and resource would need to be accounted for with regards to the additional planning application to the Planning Inspectorate. In addition, there is the potential for a Public Inquiry, which again would incur additional time and resource. These would be included as part of the project delivery plan

and costs included as part of the overall project cost to Three Rivers District Council.

Chorleywood Parish Council - landowner

- Imperative that TRDC work in partnership with Chorleywood Parish Council on development of designs and on agreement of final location.

Fencing & Site Adjacent to the Station Car Park access road and Chorleywood Bottom

- *“Fenced boundaries around play spaces tend to make them feel segregated from their surroundings and there is a growing view that the presence of fencing can discourage some children from using the play space....On the other hand, although there is no legal requirement or recommendation for industry standards, a barrier may sometimes be desirable. Planting a hedge, creating a change in level, siting the whole space in a shallow hollow in the ground...”* (Design for Play: a guide to creating successful play spaces).
- The overall design could include the creation of natural bunding around the play space (the Parish Council confirmed they could do a seed harvest, which could then be used for the grass for the bunds). These natural boundaries would be used to discourage dogs and to prevent small children from leaving the play space.
- In addition, dog tethering posts and signs could be included in designs, which again add to the overall discouragement of dogs using the site.
- Fencing has not been included in 2 play spaces in Three Rivers District and there have not been any reported problems. These are at Leavesden Country Park and South Oxhey playing fields.

Visibly exposed to residents living in the roads overlooking the Common

- A play space sited at this location is more likely to receive objections from local residents due to its prominent location. There is a small woodland area to the left of this site, which could be incorporated into the design and would include the larger structures, in order to soften the impact. The smaller, low level and natural play elements could remain on the grassed area.
- In addition native planting could also be included as part of the overall design in order to again soften the impact but also to create a natural boundary to the site.

Traditional items of equipment

- Community expectations would need to be addressed that not all elements of play equipment could be included due to the nature of the setting.
- Previous designs have been developed to be sensitive to the aesthetics of the natural surroundings and this would need to be included in any future developments of designs.

Protected species and wildlife site

- Any work would need to have a full environmental impact survey carried out – this would have resource implications.

Parking

- Residents can park within the station car park (if spaces are available at a cost). Consultation would need to take place with the publican on the proposal to see if there could be any partnership work surrounding parking.
- In addition, the local community will be encouraged to walk or cycle to the route, due to its proximity to the village.
- Whilst travelling to the play area could be discouraged by the use of appropriate signage, it is likely that some parents would nonetheless travel by car. Introducing bollards to prevent parking at various areas may not be feasible and it may become necessary for Chorleywood Parish Council, the publican/company, Transport for London and the Police to take appropriate measures to discourage and/or prosecute drivers to control unauthorised parking within their respective scopes.

Planning Considerations

- Wildlife site and LNR
- On greenbelt land
- Application to the Planning Inspectorate Required

Groewood

Positive factors

- Natural surveillance – this would be from residents living in Groewood.
- Existing road signage indicating the presence of children.
- Neighbourhood watch area
- Natural environment – access to the natural environment and wildlife species / habitats – designs would incorporate the existing woodland area in order to enhance the play experience.
- Three Rivers District Council has experience of developing a play space in a similar environment (Prestwick Road North Play Area – photos included)
- Could include fencing as part of the overall scheme.
- Would be able to include more traditional elements of play equipment such as swings, slides and roundabouts to address the needs of all children and young people.
- High levels of accessibility from the main village area and from the main residential area, which means that a higher density of the population of the Parish of Chorleywood would be able to access the site (see attached mapping).
- People are more likely to walk to the proposed site, which assists with other key objectives of Three Rivers District Council, such as increasing levels of physical activity and reducing levels of obesity.
- Compound for construction would be located on site.

Disadvantages

- Land owned by Chorleywood Parish Council so would require their agreement.
- Small woodland area surrounded by houses – residents may object to the proposal due to the close proximity to their homes.
- Trees within the area are under Tree Preservation Orders and any designs or installations would need to take this into account.
- Pressure to remove protected trees (to enable construction and for sightlines) and the potential to damage protected trees during construction of a play area.
- Due to the nature of the site, there is potential for anti-social behaviour.

Risks associated with the disadvantages along with possible solutions

Chorleywood Parish Council - landowner

- Imperative that TRDC work in partnership with Chorleywood Parish Council on development of designs and on agreement of final location.

Close Proximity to residential area

- Consultation will need to take place with the local residents to ensure they are happy with the proposal and design.

- They may raise issues associated with parking, but due to the close proximity to the village, it is envisaged that the majority of people will walk to the play area.
- It is an existing Neighbourhood Watch area, so the residential community are already active in natural surveillance.

Tree Preservation Orders / potential for damage during construction

- Planning could reject the proposal if designs are not sympathetic to the natural environment.
- In order to site the play area, some of the undergrowth and small saplings would need to be removed – this would need to be done in partnership with Three Rivers District Council's Trees and Landscape department and with Chorleywood Parish Council.
- The larger trees could be incorporated into the overall design, however foundations for equipment would need to consider the root systems for these trees.

Anti-social behaviour

- The area is densely wooded and any installation of a play space would need to take this into consideration.
- Shrubbery and smaller saplings would need to be removed in order to increase natural surveillance into the site.
- Three Rivers District Council has experience of this type of site in an area where anti-social behaviour was perceived to be high. However, through opening up the site and engaging residents, this has now resulted in a play area, which is well used by the community with no reports of ASB (Prestwick Road North Play Area, South Oxhey).

Planning Considerations

- TPO's on trees – what will the impact be on the existing trees?
- Proximity to residential area (but not really an issue in planning terms)

Chorleywood House Estate (Local Nature Reserve)

Positive factors

- Natural environment – access to the natural environment and wildlife species / habitats – designs would incorporate the existing woodland area in order to enhance the play experience.
- Land is owned by Three Rivers District Council
- Would encourage more people to access and take enjoyment from visiting Chorleywood House Estate.
- Three Rivers District Council has experience of developing a play space in a similar environment (Prestwick Road North Play Area – photos included)
- Could include fencing as part of the overall scheme.
- Would be able to include more traditional elements of play equipment such as swings, slides and roundabouts to address the needs of all children and young people.
- Existing leisure facilities / provision on site, including tennis and football.
- Compound for construction would be located on site.

Disadvantages

- Not accessible by foot from the main village due to the busy A404 – this will impact on Three Rivers District Council’s aims of increasing physical activity and reducing obesity.
- Limited number of parking spaces. Furthermore, the availability of parking spaces could potentially be problematic, especially when football matches take place (normally Saturdays) within the grounds as all of the spaces are usually utilised.
- Located next to the busy A404 with high levels of pollution, noise and car fumes (point 2 of the design principles).
- Children and young people would not be able to access the site without being driven by parents/carers, which is against the Council’s aim of encouraging outdoor, unsupervised play (Play Rangers project) and providing doorstep provision.
- Low numbers of families accessing the site due to inaccessibility, therefore the cost of investment to install a play space would not achieve the required benefits of more children and young people taking part in play.
- Lack of any realistic natural surveillance on an ongoing basis, making it more susceptible to anti-social behaviour.
- Residents living within Chorleywood House Estate may object to the proposal.
- The whole of the estate is designated a Local Nature Reserve and further intensification of use could degrade the purpose of the Reserve.
- Large trees within the site have extensive root systems, therefore the installation of equipment and associated foundations would need careful consideration and it may impact on what can and can’t be installed.

- Lack of proximity to other facilities – closest facility would be The Junction situated at Christchurch, which would mean people having to cross and re-cross the busy A404 to use it in association with the play area.

The Junction is only open (due to church benevolence) during the term times of Hertfordshire schools (Monday to Friday, between 10:00 and 12:00 and 14:00 and 15:00). It is closed at the weekends and during all school holidays, i.e. during all periods of play area peak use.

- Previous consultation with the local community indicated that only 34% of respondents wanted to have the play space located within Chorleywood House Estate.

Risks associated with the disadvantages along with possible solutions

Not accessible by foot / lack of car parking

- As the site is not accessible by foot, people will drive to the play area and parking is already at capacity, particularly during peak times at the weekend, when football takes place.
- There are no other solutions for increasing parking at the estate.
- The mapping shown for this site indicates that there are a very limited number of houses within the 440m radius and based on experience, the distance people would need to travel, even if the A404 weren't an issue, would be too far for people to walk.
- As people are more likely to drive and walk it reduces the numbers taking part in physical activity and will have a negative impact on levels of obesity.

Located next to busy A404

- The site is located adjacent to the busy A404 with the potential for children and young people to be exposed to noise and pollution – although this is very low risk.

Children and young people unable to access the site independently

- Three Rivers District Council want to encourage children and young people to be able to access play provision independently (subject to their age and maturity) and due to the location of this site, they will not be able to.
- This will again add to the increased numbers in cars that will be parking at the site.

Low return on investment

- Three Rivers District Council want to ensure a high return on their capital investment and this will only be reflected through the numbers of children, young people and their families using the site.
- Again, due to the location (distance from the village and busy A404) the numbers using this site will be less than the other 3 sites, resulting in a low return in investment.

Lack of natural surveillance and potential for increased ASB

- The site is hidden behind the fence line of the A404 and next to the access road for Chorleywood House Estate.
- Natural surveillance would only come from people driving to the cemetery or accessing the back of the site for dog walking or football.
- Some natural surveillance may come from the residents living on site, however this would be very limited.
- Due to this lack of natural surveillance and slightly hidden location, there is the potential for increased levels of ASB and the police would need to routinely check the site.

Local residents objecting

- The proposed location is within the sight line of the residents living on the estate; therefore consultation will need to take place to ensure they are happy with the proposal and design.

Large trees

- The proposed area has large trees, which fall within the Conservation area, therefore any work done would need permission. Equipment cannot be placed within the root zone of these trees and the zone is 12 times the diameter of the tree, making this site more complicated for the installation of play equipment.

Lack of other facilities

- This is a minor factor to take into account, as facilities are not usually included as part of a play area development and there are other play areas across the district where there isn't any access to toilets or cafes.

Previous consultation results

- Extensive consultation has already taken place, whereby the local community were asked to select their preferred location for the play area. Siting the play area at Chorleywood House Estate would go against the choice of the local community. This would need to be carefully managed and resident expectations dealt with. Further consultation would therefore be necessary, which will have resource implications, both in terms of time and money.

Planning Considerations

- Trees
- Ecology / Local Nature Reserve – would need to consider biodiversity impact
- Conservation area
- Greenbelt land
- Not ideal in terms of pedestrian access and natural surveillance

Other considerations

Environmental Surveys

- An environmental survey has already taken place at site 13 on the Common. Other sites would be susceptible to further environmental investigation and this will have resource implications and a budget would need to be identified.

Anti-social behaviour

- Local residents are often concerned about anti-social behaviour and the potential for this to develop or increase when a new play area is installed. However, from experience, this has had the opposite affect, whereby ASB levels have reduced.
- Examples of refurbished play areas include: Barton Way and Baldwins Lane play areas, Croxley Green Hayling Road and Ashburnham Drive play areas, South Oxhey, South Way play area, Abbots Langley and King George V play area Mill End. Examples of new play areas, where residents were concerned about ASB and where these concerns did not come to fruition, include: Eastbury play area, Eastbury and Prestwick Road North play area, South Oxhey.

Equipment and Consultation

- Extensive consultation has already taken place with the local community and children and young people in relation to their preferences for the play area. However, due to the time lapse between then and now, further consultation will need to take place.
- Consulting children and young people and then making sure their needs are taken into account, ensures that they take ownership of the site and are less likely to engage in ASB. This has been TRDC's experience at all of the refurbished and newly installed play areas.

Demographics for each site location by Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)

Site Location	LSOA	0-4 yrs	5-7 yrs	8-9 yrs	10-14yrs	15+ yrs	Total 0-15 yrs	Total for site
Site 13	E01023817	69	44	23	98	27	261	575
	E01023816	92	51	44	112	15	314	
Site 15	E01023817	69	44	23	98	27	261	575
	E01023816	92	51	44	112	15	314	
Groveswood	E01023818	61	48	39	118	28	294	640
	E01023815	116	53	57	106	14	346	
Chorleywood House	E01023814	68	41	31	120	28	288	549
	E01023817	69	44	23	98	27	261	

- The demographics for children and young people for each of the proposed sites are detailed above. Groveswood provides the highest return on investment in

terms of servicing the local community, followed by the 2 sites on the Common and, lastly, Chorleywood House Estate.

Public Space Protection Orders

- Dogs have been raised as an issue with all of the sites – particularly where fencing would not be installed. New legislation could support controlling dogs within public open spaces and this could be something to focus on moving forward.