
A New Chorleywood Play Area



**This report is written by:
Simone Tyson, Myfanwy Ronchetti and Nancy Stanway
Representing Chorleywood Mums**

Images: Examples from Infinite Playgrounds

Chorleywood Play Area

What are we trying to achieve

Chorleywood has significantly fewer play areas for the size of population compared to any other parish in the district despite having had a Three Rivers District Council budget in place for 4 years, waiting for a decision on location to be made. This project is attempting to finalise a location for **a new play area** with the aim of achieving the following for the community:

- **Additional Play opportunities** for the children in Chorleywood without any further delays
- Provide **additional play within a potential walking catchment** for as many additional families in the area as possible (i.e. **minimising catchment cross overs**)
- Encourage children, parents, grandparents and carers to **exercise more** and drive less where possible
- Allow **additional play provision to enhance and be in keeping** within the setting in which it is located
- Assist the Parish council to fulfil its duties in **representing the established views of the whole electorate** and utilize the independent professional advice it has received.



Example: Infinite Playgrounds

Bespoke Natural Play

The style of equipment is key when it comes to a play area in Chorleywood. Local parents do not want a design that would not fit into the surroundings in the area. The images in this report indicate the style of equipment we support.

Factors to remember

There are Pros and Cons to all sites under review, balancing these and ensuring the children of Chorleywood do not lose the funding, or suffer any further delay, for an additional play area is hugely important.

Achieving the best result for the children in our community who do not get a vote on this will mean that some people in the community have concerns with the outcome (whatever it is), this is inevitable due to strong and opposing views in the community.

A final decision must be made based on evidence and fact (rather than personal opinions) to ensure it will stand up to community scrutiny.

Conclusions

Independent experts were commissioned by the parish council and detailed reports produced. Overall the experts are in general agreement in their view on most of the locations. All have some potential issues but, with the exception of Grovewood, any issues flagged in these reports can be overcome.

Countryside Management Service has identified Grovewood as Ancient Woodland which cannot be replaced, therefore this report considers the site should be removed from consideration.

Based on the expert information, whilst not completely free of potential concerns, this report considers that **the best place for the play area is Chorleywood Common**, providing the highest return on investment, doorstep provision and meeting the design for play principles.

[Wildlife and environmental surveys were completed in 2013 at Site 13 with no protected species identified and therefore would be the lower cost of the two common locations.]

Recommendations

- Grovewood should no longer be considered (Ancient Woodland).
- Propose Chorleywood Common to full council as the recommended location
- Undertake wildlife surveys during appropriate window to ensure no protected species are impacted by the project
- Work closely with TRDC to ensure there are no further delays

Background

Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) identified a lack of play facilities for children and young people in the Chorleywood area a number of years ago as part of their review of the provision of play in the district.

£95,000 is set aside to create the play area with an additional annual maintenance budget. Insurance costs are the district council responsibility as the provider of the play area wherever it is located (on Parish or District owned land).

In 2012 TRDC did consultations regarding design and preferred location of a play area (**Chorleywood Common was the community preference 61%**). Designs were put to the public as part of a tender process. The designs and location were not approved by the parish council in 2013 on ground of Health & Safety. The process was started again in 2015.

Demographics

The demographics for the parish are continuing to change with more young families moving to the area since the last census. Between 2001 and 2011 we see increases in both the young and elderly in our community. Balancing the needs of these two groups, who have very different preferences is a delicate matter.

Young peoples' views were discounted by the parish council from the TRDC consultation despite their increasing proportion within the community and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has a specific guiding principle about the right to be heard [UNCRC Article 12].

Population Census Data - Chorleywood Parish						
	2001		2011		Change	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Age Under 18	2,558	24%	2,822	25%	264	2.5%
Age 19 - 24	547	5%	535	5%	- 12	0.1%
Age 25 - 44	2,424	23%	2,310	20%	- 114	1.1%
Age 45 - 65	3,336	31%	3,422	30%	86	0.8%
Age 65 +	1,889	18%	2,197	19%	308	2.9%
Total	10,754	100%	11,286	100%	532	4.9%

Community Plan

The Parish council included a question regarding the play area in the community plan questionnaire to see for themselves whether local people think additional play facilities are needed.

'To what extent do you agree that there are adequate play facilities available to children within Chorleywood?'

An overwhelming majority of 62% of the Target Users (Age 25-44) disagreed with this question and support the need for a new play area (All age groups except 65 + also disagreed).



Example: Infinite Playgrounds

Prior Consultation

The play area designs from the 2012 design consultations had an area of approx. max. 60m x 40m or 0.24 ha

This would represent the following approx. **proportions of the locations** under discussion:

Grovewood **30%**
 Chorleywood House **0.04%**
 Chorleywood Common **0.03%**

Total Size in hectares

Grovewood 0.8
 Chorleywood House 69
 Chorleywood Common 80

To put that in perspective on Chorleywood Common:

Based on estimate average sizing
 Golf club approx. 21%,
 Cricket club approx. 2%

The smallest proportion of the total location is therefore on Chorleywood Common.

For map of locations under consideration and 400m walking catchments see page 4

Evaluation of Locations

We have evaluated the Advantages and Disadvantages of each location using our local knowledge and the independent expert advice commissioned by Chorleywood Parish Council from the following organisations:

- Three Rivers District Council Leisure Officers (TRDC)
- Hertfordshire Police Crime Prevention Design Adviser
- Countryside Management Service (CMS)

Each of the experts has provided their views on the locations and has also given mitigations for the risks they identify.

By using the 10 principles for creating successful play spaces developed by Play England 'Design for Play' (June 2008) the best choice can be made, ensuring a new play location is well utilized therefore providing a good return on investment.



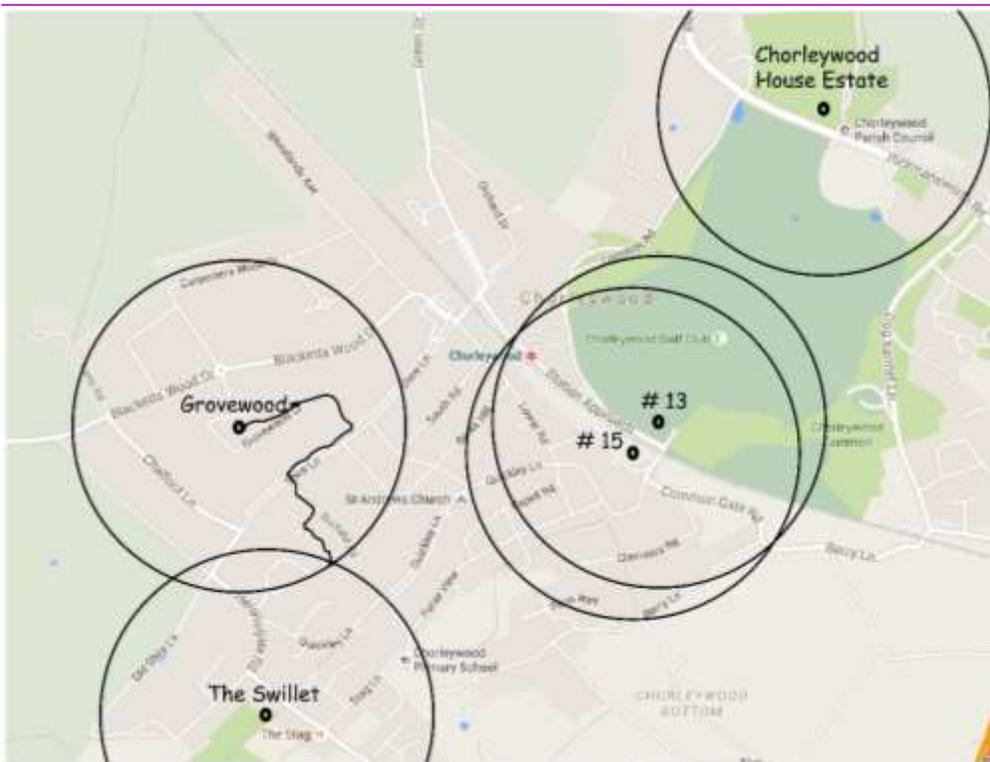
Example: Infinite Playgrounds

Antisocial Behaviour is raised as an issue on all locations – TRDC has clear evidence that in play areas installed across the district antisocial behaviour actually reduced rather than increased.

All sites have constraints on planned tree works (Tree Preservation Orders or Conservation Areas)

Chorleywood Common (Common Land, Local Nature Reserve, Green Belt, Conservation Area, S41 NERC Act Habitat, Local Wildlife site), Grove Wood (S41 NERC Act Habitat), Chorleywood House Estate (Local Nature Reserve, Green Belt, Conservation Area, Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

Where visible to local residences there is a potential for objections from residents able to see the site therefore design and exact location within the site should be sympathetic to local residents



○ Walking Catchment
 — Walking Route

Chorleywood Common Locations (#13 and 15) are both well located being central within the parish and could provide **new additional doorstep play opportunities** for the largest number of families when considering the four sites.

Grovewood shows the highest number of residences within the circle but has some cross over with the swillett existing play area therefore **does not maximize new additional doorstep provision.**

Chorleywood House Estate has very few buildings inside the 400m circle (two nursing/care homes, parish offices, Chorleywood House) with residences mainly located across the A404, **therefore has the smallest catchment.**

Chorleywood Common Locations 13 and 15

- Land owned by the Parish Council therefore needs Parish and District to work together
- Friends of Chorleywood Common passed a resolution at their AGM on 28th Feb 2014. 'The Friends of Chorleywood Common oppose the proposal for a play area with climbing and other play equipment at a single location on the Common' 6 abstentions, No votes against and 23 votes in favor
- 2014 Members Ballot, 150 responses. Supporting Nature Trail: For 133 (89%), Against 12 (8%), Abs 5 (3%)
Against a Play area: For 94 (63%), Against 48 (32%) Abs 8.(5%)
- CMS highlight additional wildlife surveys that would need to be undertaken but at present do not highlight any factors which rule the common sites out

Play Areas on Commons 2012-2015

- **Since 2012 there have been 11 approved planning applications under Section 38 for new or refurbishments to existing play areas**, some with fencing, self-closing gates and others unfenced, and some also introducing new planting and sand. [Approval ref list below]
- **Chorleywood Common is larger than any of the other commons where approvals have been given. The potential area under discussion is a significantly smaller proportion (0.03%) of common land than all 11 applications approved since 2012.**
- Within the approvals since 2012 there are examples of objections from; Commoners, Open Spaces Society, various residents and community groups; Concerns raised regarding; perceived dangers to children from falling trees, cricket balls, cars, pond, dog fouling, traffic, alcohol/drug abuse, littering, paedophiles and other issues.

Approval References: COM-317, COM-403, COM-437, COM-472 / COM-629, COM-477, COM-543, COM-548, COM-549, COM-641, COM-643, COM-648

Chorleywood Common Location 13

Advantages

- Within walking distance of the users
- Potential links in with the planned Nature Trail enhances learning opportunities
- Significant work already undertaken on this location in last consultation (wildlife surveys etc)
- Can be accessed from multiple routes (walking or driving when linked with the Nature Trail)
- Natural surveillance sufficient as beside well used footpath and car park (walkers, parish rangers, residents, dog walkers, horse riders)
- Fits with the criteria of Leisure elements within the Common Land Act (11 play area locations approved on common land since 2012)
- Location helps to assist TRDC objective of increasing levels of physical activity and reducing levels of obesity
- Increase interest in the Common with young families (who will conserve it in the future)
- Allows play to develop from formal to informal within the natural environment on the common
- The Common was community's preferred site
- Popular path runs along southerly boundary and informal desire line path runs through site
- Species poor neutral grass with little interest and low current wildlife value, regularly mown

Disadvantages (Mitigations)

- Common Land Section 38 Planning Process
- Unfenced (Use of natural barriers, fencing has been approved in S38 play area applications)
- Common Location has an impact on Design / Style of Equipment (Sympathetic design)
- Dog walking area (Dog tethering posts, Dog control orders, Signage for dog owners)
- Pedestrian Access (Highlight safe walking routes, road signage, reduce speed limit from National to 20mph around Shepherd Bridge)
- Car Park at Shepherd Bridge is sometimes busy (encourage walking and links between nature trail to disperse users with cars)
- Potential for protected species (wildlife surveys for Bats, Badgers, Great Crested Newt, Nesting Birds and Reptiles)
- Potential for Antisocial behavior (ASB) (As noted above and Increased focus from PCSOs)
- Site borders protected grasses therefore could potentially increase acid grass resource (develop other bordering areas instead)

Other

- Common location provides 2nd highest Return On Investment for TRDC [Budget Holder]
- Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor 3rd Choice location
- CCTV suggested as a mitigation for ASB – not feasible / necessary

Chorleywood Common Location 15

Advantages

- Within walking distance of the users
- Increase interest in the Common with young families (who will conserve it in the future)
- Natural surveillance good due to high visibility location and near station car park, local pub (walkers, rail station users, residents, dog walkers, road traffic, houses)
- Location helps to assist TRDC objective of increasing levels of physical activity and reducing levels of obesity
- The Common was community's preferred site
- Pedestrian desire lines show that this is a commonly walked to location already with footpath access directly from the village center
- Fits with the criteria of Leisure elements within the Common Land Act (11 play area locations approved on common land since 2012)
- Allows play to develop from formal to informal within the natural environment on the common, provides a starting point to link into the parish council's nature trail
- Site closest to the village centre (shopping area)
- Roads generally busy at times when play area is not likely to be used before 9am and after 5pm
- Common location provides 2nd highest Return On Investment for TRDC [Budget Holder]
- Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor 2nd Choice location
- CCTV suggested as a mitigation for ASB – not feasible / necessary

Disadvantages (Mitigations)

- Common Land Section 38 Planning Process
- Unfenced (Use of natural barriers, fencing has been approved in S38 play area applications)
- Impact on unimproved acid and neutral grasses (relatively undisturbed site, but other possible habitat restoration opportunities elsewhere on common e.g. center of common)
- Potential for protected species (wildlife surveys for Bats, Badgers, Great Crested Newt, Nesting Birds and Reptiles)
- Site next to roads (roads could have 20mph speed limit, signage)
- Common Location has an impact on Design / Style of Equipment (Sympathetic design)
- No free parking at the site (NCP train station carpark has spaces during the school holidays and weekends, if there is no parking people are encouraged to walk)
- Potential for relationship management issues between local residents and publican / NCP regarding any parking (parking restrictions could be set up)
- Potential for Antisocial behavior (ASB) (As noted above and Increased focus from PCSOs)
- Dog walking area (Dog tethering posts, Dog control orders, Signage for dog owners)

Other

Groewood

Advantages

- Natural surveillance sufficient at certain times
- Could fence at this site
- Footpath and road access
- Located close to a primary school
- Design would not need restrictions as seen on common land
- Natural environment – incorporate into play
- Neighbourhood watch area

Disadvantages (Mitigations)

- **CMS state this is Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland which is Irreplaceable seemingly ruling the location out**
- Planning Legislation does not allow development in Ancient Woodland
- Friends of Groewood has been formed and **100% of residents living in Groewood Close are against a play area being located in this location.**
- Only one road access into the site which is already busy during school term time
- Potential for Antisocial behavior (ASB) (As noted above and Increased focus from PCSOs) (**removal of vegetation and trees to improve sight lines – ancient woodland means this is not possible**)
- Walking catchment includes crossing Shire Lane – where police speeding patrols were required
- High Potential for Bats and Potential for protected species (wildlife surveys for Bats, Badgers, Great Crested Newt, Nesting Birds and Reptiles)

Groveswood Other

- Groveswood location provides the highest Return On Investment for TRDC [Budget Holder]
- Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor 1st Choice location
- Land owned by Parish Council therefore needs Parish and District to work together (evidence to date shows this relationship is poor)
- **Note:** Ancient / Veteran Tree Root Protection area = 12 x trunk diameter (to a Max 15m radius). Source: Woodland Trust Trees & Development Dec 2011

Chorleywood House Estate

Advantages

- Friends of Chorleywood House estate currently do not object to the site being considered (however they have stated they feel the site is not close to the intended users)
- TRDC own the land
- Existing leisure facilities on site
- Design would not need restrictions as seen on common land and can fence
- Parking available during week days
- Amenity Grass Park Land
- Disturbance on surrounding ecology to the site is likely to be lower at this site

Disadvantages (Mitigations)

- Football club has objected to a play area being located here as the site is extremely busy at weekends. Current notice on CCYFC website: 'Help Avoid Car Park Chaos at club we ask all drivers to be considerate and patient when parking. Also please do not block the lane and entry / exits or the passing bays.'
- Children and young people will not be able to access the site without being driven by parents /carers, which is against TRDC's aims of encouraging outdoor, unsupervised play (play rangers) and providing doorstep provision
- Not accessible by foot from main village due to busy A404
- Previous consultation indicated only 34% of respondents wanted to have a play area at this location
- Site located next to the busy A404 with higher levels of pollution, noise, and car fumes than other sites
- **Mature and Veteran Trees noted by CMS as having significant value for a range of wildlife. Root protection areas would be required as noted in Groveswood above – this may rule out the site**
- Potential for Antisocial behavior (ASB) (As noted above and Increased focus from PCSOs)
- Limited natural surveillance

Other

- Site represents the lowest return on investment (due to the smallest catchment)
- Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor 4th Choice location
- Friends of Chorleywood House Estate are not against a play area on this land, however they have stated they feel the location is not sufficiently close to its intended users



Examples: (Image 1) Walstahmstowe Natural Play Area, (Image 2) Infinite Playgrounds - National Trust at Seaton Delaval (Image 3) Infinite Playgrounds - Step & Swirl Hollow Ponds

Changes since 2013

Antisocial Behaviour

Previously the play area construction was halted by the parish council due to health and safety concerns arising from a police report commissioned in isolation in 2013 by the parish council regarding site 13 on Chorleywood Common. The report raised concerns regarding antisocial behaviour and potential paedophilia etc.

The current police report, commissioned by the Parish Council to look at all four sites, raises low level antisocial behavior potential on all sites and does not raise any concerns regarding paedophilia etc. In addition TRDC have provided the following information regarding play area installation.

*"In TRDC assessment Eastbury play area is this nearest comparator to Chorleywood. Eastbury play area had a **71% decrease** on the baseline year (58 incidents baseline)*

*To put this in context the **total number of ASB incidents reported** to the Police in 2014-15 across the **whole of Chorleywood was 62.**"*

TRDC have also stated that concerns about **potential use of drugs** in proposed play area sites are common but **have never materialised in Three Rivers.**

Safe Walking Access



The Parish council also raised concerns regarding safe walking access. The Pavement Routes that could be used via the village include Green Street public footpath, North Road, Betjamin Gardens, Colleyland, Chorleywood bottom and the cattle creep can be used to avoid Shepherd Bridge if approaching from this direction.

TRDC proposed some changes in road signage and publicising safe pedestrian walking routes (which could be incorporated into the existing information boards on the common as part of the proposed nature trail) this would ensure families use the safest route to access a play space.

The speed limit on a small section of Station approach is currently 60mph (difficult to reach 60mph given road conditions). As part of a proposal on a common site, a 20mph speed limit application to highways agency could be undertaken.

Additionally the roads around these common locations are busier during commuter rush hour, when a play area is less likely to be used (before 9am and after 5pm). **The A404 is a busy and fast road at all times of day.**

Dog Fouling

Dog fouling is an issue that is not a result of creating a play area. It is something that needs to be addressed at all locations under review. TRDC are currently consulting on a Control Order which would help with these issues. Locating a play area on any location would encourage dog owners to pick up and be more responsible for their animals. Families and children playing would also be able to help to encourage dog owners to pick up after their animals, therefore benefiting the whole community.

How it could work

The Play area and the parish council's proposed nature trail could work together, encouraging families to move around the common, combining the natural opportunities to play with something natural but structured. Thus servicing a **wider catchment** within the community and also **reducing any impact on surrounding protected grasses** as footfall would naturally be encouraged to follow the circular walk / nature trail. The combination of the play area and nature trail will **encourage people to access the common on foot** from all areas of Chorleywood and dilutes the concentration of cars parking in one place. There are some amazing natural bespoke play areas already in existence, some examples include:



Example: Infinite Playgrounds

Ashridge

Wild Wood Den at Ashridge is a man-made climbing structure out of natural materials and includes carvings of local wildlife. This provides great play opportunities for children at this location and was referenced in the initial plans for a play / nature trail.

Wendover Woods

Formal and informal "Den building areas" have been created next to the formal unfenced play area and also on the Gruffalo trail. This is as simple as having appropriate shaped logs and sticks being left in a specified area near trees with low branches.

South Oxhey sculpture trail

Three Rivers District Council recently installed a xylofence within the sculpture trail in South Oxhey woods. The trail has multiple smaller sites through the woods and encourages more families and young people to visit the site than before it was installed.

Nature Trail

Natural Features

Gun Dell, Air Raid Shelters,
Holly Archway

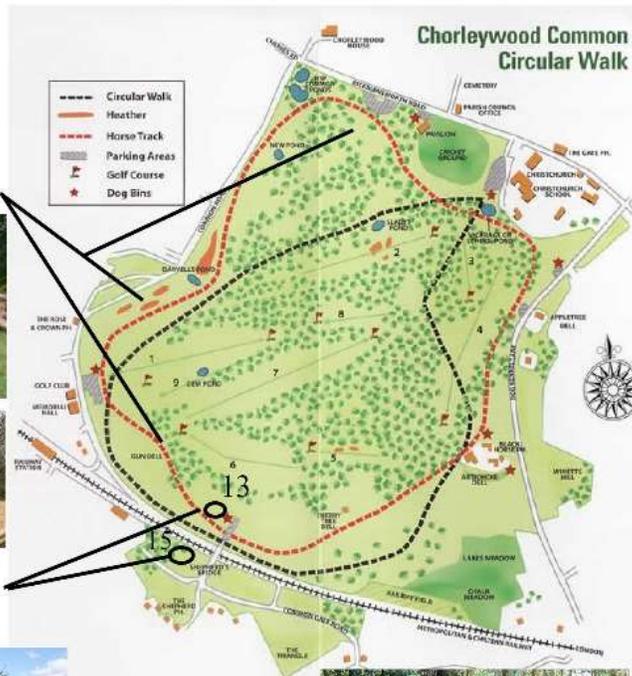


Potential Play Area

Examples of bespoke natural play



Designated Den Building



Nature Trail Ideas Wild Wood Den



Xylofence



Sculptures

