



Chorleywood Residents' Association

Report to the Play Area Advisory Group

Purpose

This document is a review of the three independent reports from TRDC Leisure Officer, TRDC Police Crime Prevention Officer and Countryside Management Services for an additional play area within Chorleywood. As a point of note these reports have been commissioned by PAAC to give a balanced view and that any problems identified, should show how they may be mitigated wherever possible.

Background

Currently there is a play area in The Swillett (Chorleywood South). TRDC have identified the need for a second play area that serves the whole of the community, both North and South Chorleywood. TRDC Funding has been in place for over four years and a similar process was followed in 2013 resulting in the Parish Council rejecting a Play Area on the Common.

The need for a play area.

There are numerous reasons why we need a second play area in Chorleywood.

- Chorleywood is the least well provided locality in Three Rivers for play areas.
- There is seriously increasing obesity and overweight in children, as measured in the reception classes of Chorleywood primary schools and reported in the Children's Centre's paper on "Outdoor Play".
- The ability for the majority of children (and their parents) to be able to walk to the play area is an important part of their physical exercise
- The importance of children's play with physical exercise set out in the Hertfordshire Director of Public Health's letter to the Chorleywood Parish Clerk, and in the Chorleywood and Loudwater Children's Centre's paper of the Autumn of 2013 on "Outdoor Play", also in the TRDC Leisure officers report.
- Modern day lifestyles are increasingly of a sedentary nature, for children as well as adults. The Millennium Cohort Study has looked into the negative effects of the widespread use of computers, video games, smartphones etc. They have discovered that increased physical activity results in better concentration levels, positive social behaviour and higher self-esteem.
- Public Health England says there is a clear relationship between the amount of time spent on social media sites, such as Facebook and 'lower levels of wellbeing'



Play Equipment

The equipment for a play area on any of the sites would need to be of natural materials and of a design that harmonises with its environment. The bright metal structures with gravel or concrete surfacing have long gone and are rarely part of any design concept today. Fallen trees are incorporated into play schemes, either for climbing, stepping or acting as natural barriers. Examples below:



Chorleywood House Estate

The overall disadvantages of this site have been well documented in both the TRDC Leisure Officers report and the Police report.

The outcome of the TRDC public consultation in 2013 resulted in a 61% majority in favour of the Common as opposed to 38% for Chorleywood House Estate. (Note that at the time of that consultation Grove Wood has been rejected as a play area site)

It requires children and young adults to be driven there, which does not support aims of TRDC to encourage unsupervised play and also prevents additional exercise of walking there.

The existence of three significant veteran trees that provide environment for wildlife. These trees have extensive root systems that will impact on the foundations of any play equipment installed.

This location is also a local nature reserve and the play area site would represent less than 1% of estate area. However, the CMS report states that:

“Close to southern and western boundaries of the site are three significant veteran trees one Oak and two Sweet Chestnuts. The trees are in varying degrees of health. All provide significant value for wildlife for example for roosting bats, nesting birds, insects and fungi.

Surrounding the site are dense groups of planted semi-mature Cappadocium Maples to the northwest and north-east. There is a range of other planted trees of varying ages on the Southerly boundaries. Scrub and tree cover screens this site from the Rickmansworth Road to the south. Chorleywood House is visible from the site underneath the tree canopies to the west.”



Groveswood

The Groveswood catchment area overlaps the existing play area in the Swillett. Furthermore it would not be conveniently accessible for many residents in Chorleywood North. We note also that TRDC figures relating to LSOAs are incorrect.

Residents in Groveswood Close and neighbouring roads have objected strongly to a play area that is close to where they live and TPO is in place for the entire site.

Safety and other objections are well set out in the report from Friends of Groveswood, and their informed arguments need to be taken into account together with the TRDC Leisure officer's and police reports.

The CMS report states that it is ancient semi-natural woodland. It goes on to state:

"Ancient woodland is an irreplaceable resource of great importance for its wildlife, soils, recreation, cultural value, history and the contribution it makes to our diverse landscapes. It is a scarce resource, covering only 3% of England's land area. Veteran trees can be hundreds of years old, provide habitat for many different species and are a part of our landscape and cultural heritage. Local authorities have a vital role in ensuring the protection and conservation of ancient woodland and veteran trees, in particular through the planning system."

Location 13

The two shortlisted sites on Chorleywood Common are the only sites that serve the whole of Chorleywood, North and South. Neither of the site's catchment area overlap with the existing play area in the Swillett.

In the TRDC leisure officer's report, location 13 has a large number of advantages. The smaller numbers of disadvantages given are not considered significant for the reasons given below. In that same report, for location 15, there are a smaller number of advantages and again the majority of disadvantages are not considered significant.

Location 13 is not in sight of any residential properties. However natural surveillance is sufficient.

For those who live too far away to walk to these locations, there are parking areas all around the Common, within reasonable walking distance of both sites. Currently, all these parking areas have empty spaces for some of the time during the day, and most for much of the day. There is no reason to think that a play area on the Common would be dependent on the Shepherd's bridge car park.



It has been suggested that wherever a play space is put there will be a proportion of people who would have to drive but that if it is put in a place that a majority can walk to, less will need to drive and therefore the weighting of this factor is less. Will require a section 38 application to the Planning Inspectorate. We understand that the Planning Inspectorate has already approved a number of play areas on Common land in other parts of the country. The need for a section 38 application, is not therefore considered a significant disadvantage.

The CMS report states that this proposed location for the play area is less than 1% of the area of Chorleywood Common.

The location is described as “species poor neutral grassland with little interest and low current wildlife value”. With birch trees approximately 27 years old, these would play an important part of any play space.

The report also states that “visitors are likely to extend their activities into surrounding land”. This is good, since the Common is an important social amenity, so encouragement of parents and their children to explore the Common more widely is a plus point. We understand that the Parish Council wants to encourage more use of the Common by families, and that this is also one of the objectives of the proposed nature trail. Recreational facilities for golfers and cricketers are already provided on the Common.

Location 15

Location 15 is within sight of a small number of residential properties. Dog walkers use this less, although the proposed PSPO for the control of dogs would restrict dogs in all play areas whether fenced or not.

Land owned by Chorleywood Parish Council for both locations.

A major failing of the police report is that it fails to identify the fact that there are children in Chorleywood North as well as Chorleywood South, who would benefit from a play area within a reasonable walking distance.

The CMS report states that this site is also less than 1% of the area of Chorleywood Common. The site is similar to location 13, except that it has “a mosaic of unimproved acid grassland and grading to grassland with more of an unimproved neutral grassland vegetation composition to the South”. There is also a greater variety of wild flowers and common weeds than at location 13.

Safe walking routes from the village centre.



Conclusion

Based on the various independent reports and responses to subsequent queries we conclude the following:

Grovewood

Due to the location being designated as Ancient Woodland and the disadvantages insurmountable. We consider this option no longer viable.

Chorleywood House Estate

Large trees with extensive root systems, too far from intended users. Majority will drive and create parking issues near Lawn Cemetery. TRDC would not receive optimum return on investment. Therefore the least favoured option.

The Common

Locations 13 and 15 are the most viable in terms of the least disruption to the natural environment. Close proximity to the intended users and numerous options for access by foot or car at points surrounding the Common.

Finger signposts located at all parking areas showing distance to play area and location of nature trail would enhance the use of the Common.

The Section 38 planning process can be addressed as there is a precedent for consent to similar applications from the Secretary of State.

The appropriate surveys would be required to ensure minimal disruption to wildlife.

Ultimately a timely resolution is now needed to ensure the health and wellbeing of our children.

Research has identified “nature play” as the most common influence on life-long conservation values. If today’s children don’t get ample opportunities to play in natural areas and fall in love with them, who will protect those spaces 50 years from now?

“Investing in children is not only an investment in today’s young people; it’s a sound investment for the future. Healthy children are much more likely to become healthy adults”

Dr Hilary Cass, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health