

# ITEM 5(a)

## PLAY AREA REVIEW GROUP

25 SEPTEMBER 2012

### PLAY AREA SITE VISITS

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#### 1. Introduction

1.1 The Play Area Review Group, as part of its consideration of play areas across the borough undertook site visits to a number of play areas within Milton Keynes to provide background to the Group's consideration of policies and strategies in respect of the provision of play facilities within the borough.

1.2 The site visits took place on 13 September 2012. All three Members of the Review Group, Councillors Douglas McCall, John Hawthorn and Rob Middleton were present throughout the whole of the site visit. Councillor Jenni Ferrans was present at the site visits to Broughton Skate Park, Claridge Park and Oakgrove new development site. Officers in attendance were Rob Ward (Neighbourhood Manager), Robbie Caddock (Neighbourhood Improvement Team Leader), Stephen Gee (Planning Manager (HCA)), Mark Haynes (Senior Landscape Architect), Jamie Chalmers (Open Space Adoptions Officer), and Lesley Sung (Overview & Scrutiny Officer)

#### 2. Site Visits

2.1 The Review Group visited the following play area sites / designated sites:

##### Existing sites at:

- (a) Broughton Gate Skate Park
- (b) Claridge Park
- (c) Two Mile Ash
- (d) Piggot Drive, Shenley Church End
- (e) Bradwell Common

##### Designated sites at:

- (a) Oakgrove development site
- (b) Site at Garden behind Centrecom Community Centre, Central Milton Keynes

### **3. Broughton Gate Skate Park**

3.1 This is an existing play area which opened in August 2011, which caters for different age groups and provides a skate board facility for all abilities. **(Annex A - Broughton Skate Park Photos 2, 3 and 5).**

3.2 This is a popular facility that is attracting a number of users outside of the local community. The Council began to receive complaints about the park being used late into the night and very early morning by adult skaters making full use of the facilities. Allegedly this was coupled with the installation of lighting systems and the playing of loud music.

3.3 There is no other space in the Broughton Gate area large enough to locate a neighbourhood play area. A 5m space around the back of the park, as dictated by the Council's policy was influential in the play area's design and resulted in play equipment being installed at both ends of the skate park **(Annex A - Broughton Skate Park Photos 3 and 4).**

#### **3.4 Environmental Health Report**

In March 2012, Environmental Health carried out noise monitoring to establish if there was a statutory nuisance and noise monitoring equipment was placed in the bedroom of residents homes which overlooked the park. Due to the shape of the landscape (amphitheatre style), noise travels up the bank and hits the properties adjacent to and close to the park rather than being absorbed by the bank and hedges. The environmental health report established that the difference between the background traffic noise and skateboard impact constituted a statutory nuisance and subsequently, the Parks Trust was served a noise abatement notice.

The evidence showing that uncontrolled use of the skate park represents a statutory nuisance has three strands:

1. Assessment of the likely impact of noise from the park by officers highly experienced in noise control.
2. Measurement of noise levels in a bedroom of a nearby house (noise levels of up to and over 70 dBa.
3. Evidence from residents from nearby properties regarding the type of noise and its duration.

Environmental Health Officers have judged that the noise from uncontrollable use of the park at any hour of the day would be considered to be unreasonable by 'ordinary average people of average sensibility'. One of the main issues is the sudden impact sound of skateboards on concrete surfaces and although of limited duration, the nature of the sound and the sound level make it intrusive.

3.5 Officers have been liaising with the Parks Trust about the results of the environmental health report and its recommendations. The Parks Trust

considered the recommendations and options available. Following, consultation with their own acoustic sound engineer, the Parks Trust did not feel that the noise could be satisfactorily abated within reasonable cost.

3.6 A noise abatement notice has been served on the Parks Trust, which contains various conditions which, if met, could reduce the noise to a level that would no longer be considered a nuisance.

3.7 Fencing around the skate park has been introduced which allows limited access to the facilities between the hours of 10am to 7pm  
**(Annex A - Broughton Skate Park Photo 1)**

3.8 **Comments / Questions and Observations made by the Review Group:**

- No noise modelling had taken place prior to the skate park being built
- Separation of the two play areas on either side of the skate area leads to the use of one play area close to the access path and the other used not so often.
- Issues around noise would seem to be about the intensity of the use of the skate park.
- Acknowledge that the majority of residents want a play area but recognised the results of the environmental health report.
- There is a delicate balance between the issue of overlooking and noise. Noisy play may be better located within linear parks or open space close to a redway route and some distance from houses. (see minutes of last meeting about including skate parks within L8 of the local plan).
- Thorough noise analysis should be undertaken for any play area, particularly where noisy play is likely to occur.
- Equipment plans showing detailed drawings should be made available to Ward Councillors, Parish and Town Councils with no significant changes allowed unless formal approval has been given.
- Could detailed plans of any proposed play areas be supplied with a planning application?

#### **4. Claridge Park**

4.1 This is an existing play area which has resulted in a number of complaints about anti-social behaviour. The park has since been closed and fenced. The equipment installed caters for toddlers to 8yrs, but attracts large numbers of teenagers. Equipment was selected for play value (swinging, climbing, balancing, social interaction etc) & for the context, juxtaposing a conservation area & small woodland.

#### 4.2 **Comments / Questions and Observations made by the Review Group:**

- Again the issue of surveillance and nuisance is a main issue for consideration.
- Rather than a new site built at Claridge Park, the expansion of Milton Keynes Village play area could have been a much more appropriate option. The Group recognised that the area in MK Village was not considered a 'walkable distance', the area would have been more suitable for the provision of equipment for older children and teenagers. (see policy L3 of local plan)
- Flexibility is needed within the council's policies to take account of examples such as Claridge Park where consideration of alternative options would have been more appropriate, although out of scope of the council's policies.
- Members felt that due to the type of residents likely to live in large houses, they would not necessarily gain as much play value than families living in smaller, family type housing.
- The secondary school situated 200m away should have been taken into consideration prior to a decision being made on the type of equipment being installed.

#### 5. **Oakgrove New Development Site**

5.1 This is an area designated for the installation of a play area. The proposed play area meets policy L3 of the Local Plan.

#### 5.2 **Comments / Questions and Observations made by the Review Group:**

- Members / Ward Councillors should be more fully informed about the type of play area to be built, including the type of equipment and for which age range the play area would be catering.
- Ward Councillors could be used as part of the negotiations with Officers and developers.

#### 6. **Garden Behind Centrecom Community Centre**

6.1 This is an area designated for the installation of a play area (**Annex B - Garden Behind Community Centre – Photos 1 to 5**). This is a site that was approved by the Development Control Committee but had been recommended for refusal by the Planning Officer as it was out of scope of council policy.

6.2 This is an example of where the provision of a play area has had the full support of the community.

### 6.3 **Comments / Questions and Observations made by the Review Group:**

- A good example of effective community engagement in the process.
- Community should be fully informed about the type of equipment available prior to installation.

## 7. **Two Mile Ash**

7.1 This is an example of an older play area that has been well renovated, providing good quality mixed age range play. **(Annex C - Two Mile Ash – Photos 1 to 4)**. According to the Council's policies, Two Mile Ash does not have enough play areas, however, the quality of the neighbourhood play area means that the population is well catered for with regards to quality of equipment and play value. The play area had been renovated by the use of 'Play Builder' monies. There were 3 other parks in Two Mile Ash that specifically catered for very young children.

### 7.2 **Comments / Questions and Observations made by the Review Group:**

- Residents are more likely to travel to a well provisioned, good quality play area than use a very local facility that has very little play value and where the equipment is in need of renovation.
- A very good example of how a play area should be designed if there was one play area per grid square.
- The area was overlooked but situated far enough away from houses so that there was little noise issues.
- Appropriately situated, mixed play facilities with a high play value for all ages.

## 8. **Piggot Drive, Shenley Church End**

8.1 This is an example of an older play area that one year ago was in a state of disrepair. Renovations had been undertaken by the Council's 'FixIt' Team. Due to the type of equipment that had been installed in this particular play area, renovation could be undertaken relatively cheaply as materials used were mainly wood, tubing and netting. **(Annex D – Piggot Drive, Shenley Church End – Photos 1 to 5)**

### 8.2 **Comments / Questions and Observations made by the Review Group:**

- Recognise the need to look at the type of materials used for play equipment so that renovations / improvements can be made relatively cheaply.

- What about other areas? What can be done once the play area has come to its 'end of life' and no maintenance budget is attached to the area?

## **9. Bradwell Common**

9.1 This is an example of an older play area which no longer complies with current policies. **(Annex E - Bradwell Common – Photos 1 to 4)**. There is a question of what can be done to improve it, or if it should be kept at all. The area is remote and is not overlooked. The intended use of the 'cycleway' is obstructed by tree roots and so cannot safely be used for its intended purpose. **(Annex E - Bradwell Common – Photos 1 and 2)**. Equipment is not easily renovated due to the materials used, such as steel moulded frames.

### **9.2 Comments / Questions and Observations made by the Review Group:**

- Recognise that there is little that could be done to the area without a substantial budget. Possible suggestion to consider setting up a Capital Programme Fund alongside a maintenance budget.
- Would it be better value to remove some of the older play areas and 1 / 2 piece play areas in order to provide less, but better quality play areas?
- 1 / 2 piece play areas have little play value whereas a larger neighbourhood play area has better play value and more importantly, interactive.