

## **EAST HOATHLY WITH HALLAND PARISH COUNCIL**

### **PROJECT – IMPROVING PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT ON THE EAST HOATHLY RECREATION GROUND**

#### **OUTLINE OF ACTIONS SO FAR**

Sept 2019. It has been suggested that the development of the EH recreation ground forms part of and should be integral to the emerging Neighbourhood Plan and that a landscaping contractor is hired to provide an overall vision. If agreed, this will put the project on hold until results are forthcoming.

Apr 2019. At the Council meeting, it was resolved that no further action be taken regarding fencing. A plan to fence the existing play equipment areas had been discussed at length.

2017/2018. In view of the feedback (see below) that a zip wire would be the most popular addition, Council agreed to seek quotations and discuss locations to install this equipment. Costs ranged at the time from £8000 to £14000. The ideas were proposed in a newsletter sent out in 2018, which regrettably provided very little additional definitive feedback from residents. So far, Council have not agreed on the manufacturer/type to pursue or the exact location. In parallel, the drainage of the playing pitch by means of a landraise project has been extensively discussed (see Landraise Project Summary). As the likely location of the zip wire for minimum noise and disturbance on the recreation ground is within the area that would be involved in extensive long-term earthworks for landraise, this part of the project has been shelved.

#### **FINANCE**

As of Sept 19, an earmarked reserve of about £14000 is in place for this project.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Improving and maintaining the recreation ground facilities has been the subject of a lot of discussion at Parish Council meetings. In 2019, the existing play equipment was refurbished by the original suppliers. Fortunately, this time around, we were able to take advantage of a grant offer to offset the routine maintenance cost. We organise regular inspections of the playground to ensure that all safety regulations are being met. These inspections also point out where maintenance and repairs are needed. Most of the structural components are timber based and residents will be aware of the toll that our climate takes on outdoor woodwork in addition to normal wear and tear. Maintenance is expensive and ongoing and a factor to be considered when buying new equipment – the capital cost is of course significant, but we also have to be prepared to fund its continual upkeep as well. Competitive tendering for repairs is not always applicable, as we are often drawn to the original equipment manufacturer for specific spare parts. During summer 2018, the safety surface of wood chippings was replaced – these are gradually lost to compaction, rot and dispersion.

We have also considered plans for extra equipment and made attempts to understand what the children and young people of the villages would like to have in the future. We felt that younger children were reasonably well served, but there was a lack of more adventurous equipment for older children (and also facilities for adults with outdoor gym type equipment). A survey that was taken of children at the East Hoathly school by their peers (pupil governors) in 2017 resulted in a large majority favouring a zip wire, with gym equipment coming second. Previously, a survey of parent's opinions (42 responses) had shown that the preferences were :-

- 1) Multi age swings
- 2) Improved family seating
- 3) Zip wire/Fencing for the very young play area – equal third
- 4) More interesting climbing apparatus
- 5) Adult exercise equipment
- 6) Climbing wall
- 7) BBQs

Interestingly here, 4 out of 10 responders here said that they used the current play area at least twice a week and nearly 9 out of 10 said they would use it more with improvements. Most parents said that they would make additional use of the facilities if they were made more family friendly. This survey data is available on the website. All this leaves the Council with a set of difficult choices. As will be appreciated, there are limitations on funding we can provide and the space for locating new features – we need to leave adequate margins for other users and still maintain the open feel of the area.

Previously, requests had also been received from residents (around 2015) for skateboard facilities and this was discussed by Council but not pursued.

The recreation ground is used by a multitude of organisations as well as local residents on an ad hoc basis. When considering changes in the facilities available (layout, additional fixed equipment, etc.), the requirements of ALL users must be taken into account.

The organisation list is as follows in no particular priority order :-

- 1) Carnival Society
- 2) Tennis Club
- 3) Cricket Club
- 4) Rifle Club
- 5) Football Club (This is currently non-operational at present and without a trainer. The primary difficulty here is the pitch being unplayable in the winter months, due to the drainage issue. A viable all-weather pitch would enable other sports to be considered in future)

The drainage of the playing pitch is being addressed as a separate issue, but does have a bearing on the ideas that have been discussed for additional installations of play and outdoor gym equipment, particularly a zip wire. If a new installation has to be temporarily

removed to allow access for the landraise and drainage process in future, this would result in an unjustifiable extra cost.

Investigations so far have focused on a zip wire with some research on adult outdoor gym equipment. There is also an evident interest in other additional play equipment and to make major upgrades would imply costs well beyond our current budget. To achieve a more ambitious plan would require additional fundraising.

To apply for grants, we have to have a firm costed proposals in place that also demonstrate we have consulted the whole parish adequately. We are aware that some projects, such as a zip wire/aerial runway, may have noise implications that would upset some residents living close to the recreation ground. Hence, we encourage consultation through the regular Parish Council meetings and comments at any time from residents to the Parish Clerk.

TP - 07/10/2019