

STILTON PARISH COUNCIL

SUMMARY REPORT ON SITING A VILLAGE PLAYGROUND FOR THE UNDER 12s

9th June 2020

(to be updated as agreed by the Parish Council)

1. Introduction

1. For almost two years Stilton Parish Council, together with villagers, a number of whom have been members of a Parish Council Working Group and Sub-committee, have worked to provide a playground for the under-12s in the village. Fund-raising events have been held, the school children and their parents have been consulted and Parish Council discussions have taken place. The Council recognizes there is overwhelming support for a playground in the village.
2. As part of its recently adopted Green Spaces Strategy, the Parish Council reaffirms that its first priority for developing the few green spaces in Stilton is for a children's playground for the under-12s.
3. The Council agreed from the start that there was no perfect site for a playground and villagers were unlikely to agree on any particular location. Furthermore, Councillors recognized that wherever it was agreed to position the playground there were likely to be objections. As part of the democratic process for deciding on a playground site for the 250 or so under 12s, the Council's Amenities Management Committee (AMC) established the Sub-committee for Children's and Youth's Amenities (SCCYA) to consider each possible location for a children's playground. The Sub-committee consists of 4 Parish Councillors and 6 parishioners with an interest in children's and youth amenities (e.g. with children or grandchildren at the school/ playgroup or with experience of working with children). The parishioners volunteered to help in 2018 after a Council invitation in SCAN. The Sub-committee was charged with preparing a draft report identifying the benefits and drawbacks of all the options for siting a playground in the village.
4. The Sub-committee's report was submitted to the AMC in May 2020. The Committee approved it and recommended its submission to the Parish Council for its meeting of 26th May 2020.
5. At this meeting, the Parish Council agreed that the report provided important and useful information for its future deliberations and for future consultations with villagers. However, to give more clarity to the process of decision making, the Council agreed to provide this simple summary report highlighting the key criteria it considered most important. It hoped this would provide a better understanding of its thinking regarding any future decision.
6. Since the decision-making process for selecting a site for a children's playground is still continuing, this report will be updated at regular intervals to provide an indication of the current situation.

2. Possible green spaces for a playground

7. The following sites, listed in alphabetical order, were considered by the SCCYA as possible green spaces in Stilton that might be used for a children's playground: Apreece Way,

Barn Close, Cooper-Thornhill Close, Ermine Crescent, Gala close, The Glebe, Meadow Close, Mill Road, the Playing Field and Queen Eleanor Close.

8. The Parish Council has acknowledged that these are the only options for a playground in Stilton, and has decided that these be evaluated.

3. Key criteria for selecting a site

9. The Parish Council has recognized that the SCCYA has brought together a great deal of information on the various sites but feels that a more simplified approach, using key criteria, will help eliminate unsuitable options and make decisions easier. The Council has decided the criteria in paragraphs 9-13 below will be used for analysing each site's viability and potential for selection.

10. Size. Of paramount importance is the size of each available plot. If a plot is too small for the equipment required (less than 450 square metres) the Parish Council has accepted it should no longer be considered. Areas have been measured, both on the ground and using Google Maps, to identify those sites that are suitable.

11. Location. The Council has agreed that a playground should be accessible on foot for all villagers. To this end it believes a fairly "central" location would encourage users to walk to the playground; remote or secluded locations should be avoided. This was the overwhelming view of the children on the School Council; it reflects a majority of responses from a playgroup questionnaire. It was also one of two major suggestions from a questionnaire to school parents (the other being the playing field).

12. Planning permission. This is what might be considered a "conditional criterion" - if planning permission is needed then obtaining it will be essential. Without this, the Parish Council must judge a site unsuitable.

13. Ownership. This is also a "conditional criterion" - not all green spaces are owned by the Parish Council. Permission would be needed to use/buy/lease sites owned by others. Without this, Council will consider a site unsuitable.

14. Costs. There are a wide range of criteria that might be addressed if the Parish Council had sufficient funds; examples include: dealing with traffic issues using traffic calming measures; improving sites by levelling, draining and fencing; and, ensuring security by installing CCTV. If all criteria in paras 9 to 12 are met by more than one site the Council has acknowledged that cost may be an influencing or even a determining factor.

4. Analysis

15. Of the ten sites, the Parish Council has accepted that four are too small (< 450 square metres) for the planned playground and has decided not to consider further Barn Close, Cooper-Thornhill Close, the unallocated space at the Pavilion playing field and Queen Eleanor Close (the Pavilion playing field is also considered a possible security risk, it is often secluded and is located far from the centre of the village so few will walk to it).

16. Of the remaining six sites, the Council has acknowledged two, Ermine Crescent and Mill Road, are towards the edge of the village and far from being centrally located. It also

believes Meadow Close is not sufficiently central. (Furthermore, all of these sites are owned by the District or County Councils and would require planning permission.) The Council has decided not to consider these sites further.

17. The Parish Council has agreed to consider the remaining three sites in more detail: Apreece Way, Gala Close and the Glebe.

18. Regarding planning permission, the Parish Council has decided to explore the need for planning permission at the sites. Discussions with planning experts are taking place in order to decide upon the best way forward. Planning officers from the District Council have previously visited Apreece Way and indicated that planning permission is not required since it is already designated as a village amenity area.

19. Regarding ownership, the Parish Council has acknowledged the following:

(a) Gala Close is owned by Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC). As part of its Green Spaces Strategy, the Parish Council has written to CCC and asked about the possibility for the Parish to use this green space;

(b) The Glebe is owned by the Church and discussions with representatives of the Church Commissioners have indicated a willingness to lease part of their land for use as a playground; however, the area of land offered is too small so an adjoining piece of land, owned by the District Council, would be needed; a District Council officer has indicated the District Council would be willing to consider use of the land by the Parish when there was a definitive offer from the Church Commissioners;

(c) Apreece Way is owned by the Parish Council.

5. Public consultation

20. The Parish Council had planned to await the results of its investigations on ownership and planning before moving on to the next step in its decision making - public consultation. However, the Council has recognized that the current situation may mean that ownership and planning enquiries will take some time.

21. Consulting with Stilton residents is an important step before a final decision is made. The Parish Council had intended to hold a public meeting to present its short-listed options for the playground and invite those attending to voice their views and identify possible problems. Unfortunately the current situation has prevented such a meeting from taking place. The Council has therefore discussed alternative approaches to canvassing village views. It has decided to present information in SCAN and to circulate its plans in a leaflet to be delivered to every household in the village. Information will also be available on the Council website (www.stiltonparishcouncil.org), on the notice boards and via Facebook. Residents will be encouraged to provide their views to help the Council with its decisions.