

**Review of Mid Devon's play area provision**

**Cabinet Member** Cllr Neal Davey  
**Responsible Officer** Head of Housing and Property Services

**Reason for Report:** To inform Members of the latest consultation with parishes, town council's and the public on-line consultation on the future provision of play areas.

**RECOMMENDATION:** that Members note the responses to date and receive a further report on 24 November 2015 with recommendations for proposed closures.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** A review which identifies little-used play areas and identifies funding for future provision will ensure the continuation of the maximum number of play areas. Community well-being will be enhanced when residents have the confidence to use well maintained play areas.

**Financial Implications:** When a play area is closed there is often a cost to decommission the site. Any overall reduction in play area provision, or contribution from parish and town councils, will help to reduce our revenue budget to meet further government cuts in grant.

**Legal Implications:** The Council must have an inspection and maintenance regime for play areas it maintains as stated within the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

**Risk Assessment:** There is a potential cost of litigation should the Council be found negligent with regards to maintenance of its play areas.

**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 A report was brought to this group on 10 March 2015 to inform Members of the consultation with parish and town councils on the future provision of play areas and offering them the opportunity to take ownership.
- 1.2 As a result of that report, the PDG requested that officers should consult with town and parish councils regarding the future of 27 play areas listed in annex 5 of the report and to set up a questionnaire on survey monkey to allow the public to also comment on the future of the identified play areas.

**2.0 Consultation with town and parish councils**

- 2.1 There are 90 of Mid Devon's play areas located within the parishes of Tiverton, Cullompton, Crediton and Willand; which accounts for 84% of our total number. Taking this into account, arrangements to meet with each of these councils has been arranged. Consultation with the remaining parishes has been through letters and emails.

- 2.2 A spreadsheet has been prepared which gives the individual cost of maintaining each play area for year 2016/2017. The figures have been broken down into headings which include the costs of inspection, insurance, maintenance of equipment and grounds maintenance. A copy of these costs has been made available to Tiverton, Cullompton, Crediton and Willand councils.
- 2.3 Officers have met twice with the Tiverton Town Council's Finance Committee, who appeared to be receptive to offering financial assistance. The Town Clerk put a proposal to the finance committee on 14 September that Tiverton Town Council make a contribution to Mid Devon of £18,000 for the maintenance of Tiverton play areas. There has been no formal feedback regarding proposed play area closures to date.
- 2.4 Officers have met with Cullompton Town Council on one occasion and have received the following points in a letter from the clerk.
- Cullompton Town Council has no objections to the closure of the play areas at Ash Drive and Conifer Close.
  - The Town Council's preference is that the play areas at Cross Parks and Swallow Way should remain open but it has no objections to the closure of any three of the following play areas: Spindlebury, Siskin Chase, Starlings Roost, Chaffinch Drive, Dove Close or Bullfinch Close.
  - That Tufty Park and Headweir Road are protected from closure and the Town Council will work with MDDC to upgrade these play areas using section 106 and public open space monies and grant funding, with the proviso that Mid Devon keeps the Town Council informed of what it intends to do.
- 2.5 Officers arranged meetings with Willand Parish Council and Crediton Town Council for 9 and 10 of September respectively. A verbal update shall be given on the result of these meeting at the PDG meeting.
- 2.6 There has been some feedback from the remaining parishes which remains on going, some of whom are awaiting costs before making a final decision. Consultation with town and parish councils is ongoing and therefore final recommendations at this stage are unable to be made.
- 3.0 **On Line Survey**
- 3.1 A survey headed "This Play Area may be closed" was posted onto Mid Devon's website on Monday 29 June for six weeks until Friday 7 August. Signs were placed at the entrance to each of the 27 play areas and a letter was sent to each school in the immediate vicinity of the play areas, making them aware of the survey and giving them the link.
- 3.2 The survey consisted of 10 questions; there have been a total of 490 responses, 289 of which opted to leave additional comments. Two sites received the majority of responses; these were Tufty Park with 106 and Headweir Road with 92. Pathfields and Worcester Crescent both received 29

responses, Beech Park 28 and Hawthorn Road 20. The remaining sites received below 20 responses each with the lowest receiving 3.

- 3.3 An analysis of the survey produced the following results, figures are a combined total of all sites, analysis for individual sites is also available; unsure responses are not included:

Question 1:	Select play area
Responses:	There were 490 responses.
Question 2:	How often do you use the play area?
Responses:	There were 310 people who stated that they use the play area daily or more than once a week, while 18 stated that they had never used the play area.
Question 3:	How would you rate this play area?
Responses:	There were 438 people that rated the play area fair to good and 44 who rated it poor.
Question 4:	How important is this play area to you and your family?
Responses:	There were 433 people who thought that the play area was important or very important whilst 16 thought the play area was unimportant or not very important.
Question 5:	Do you use other play areas within walking distance from your home?
Responses:	There were 395 people who stated that they used another play area within walking distance and 54 who did not.
Question 6:	Are you aware of the other play areas that are near to this one?
Responses:	390 of the people who replied were aware of other play areas near to this site and 54 were not aware.
Question 7:	Do you agree that this play area should be closed which may allow us to improve other play facilities in your area?
Responses:	18 of the people who responded thought that the play area should be closed, 19 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 392 disagreed to closure.
Question 8:	Do you have any additional comments?
Responses:	See 3.4 below which gives an analysis of comments received.
Question 9:	How many children are in your household?
Responses:	The responses showed that there were 349 under 5's, 239 6 to 12 year-olds and 80 children over 13 years of age.

### 3.4 An analysis of question 8 comments are as follows:

- Play areas are an important meeting place and are especially important when sited near to a school, they allow children to improve their mental and physical health and encourage independence from their parents.
- Many properties do not have gardens large enough for children to play in, whilst some parents do not have transport and are unable to travel to a suitable play area.
- Larger play areas are more popular because they offer a chance to kick a ball and run around and can promote a sense of a community.
- Small play areas are convenient because they are often close to home which is ideal for use by toddlers and younger children. Their position often reduces the need for children to cross roads; parents are concerned about their child's safety.
- Many respondents feel that a budget should be made available to stop any closures, whilst a few have offered to purchase a site if it were to close.

## 4.0 **Petitions to the Council**

### 4.1 Mid Devon has received three petitions regarding play area provision:

- From Leah "I would like to see the playground equipment replaced within the Rivermead Playground in Cullompton. It currently consists of 3 climbing frames. I would like to see swings, a raised walkway etc." there were 32 signatures.
- From Mrs Taylor "Objection to the proposed closure of Worcester Crescent and Chestnut Drive play areas in Willand" there were 27 signatures.
- From Miss Olivia Hubber objecting to the proposed closure of Beech Park play area Crediton, there were 61 signatures.

## 5.0 **Play Areas subject to review**

### 5.1 Set out below is a list of the 27 play areas to be considered for closure and the Town or Parish Council's current position.

<b>Town/village</b>	<b>Play area</b>	<b>Town and Parish Council view to date</b>
Bow	Godfrey Gardens	No comments received.
Bow	St Martin's Close	
Crediton	Beech Park	As the result of officers meeting with the Town Clerk, an item has been placed on the agenda of Town Council's meeting for the 22 September
Crediton	Fulda Crescent	
Crediton	Greenway	
Crediton	Spinning Path Gardens	
Cullompton	Ash Drive	Agreed to closure of both these play areas
Cullompton	Conifer Close	
Cullompton	Clover Drive	No comments received
Cullompton	Starlings Roost	No objections to closure of three of these play areas; TC did not specify which ones to remain open
Cullompton	Dove Close	
Cullompton	Spindlebury	
Cullompton	Chaffinch Drive	
Cullompton	Siskin Chase	
Cullompton	Spindlebury	
Cullompton	Tufty Park	The TC feel strongly that these two play areas should remain open and be upgraded; no offer to cover maintenance costs
Cullompton	Headweir Road	
Copplestone	Fernworthy Park	No comments received
Morchard Bishop	Greenaway	No comments received
Tiverton	Coles Mead	As the result of officers meeting with the Town Clerk, an agenda item has been placed onto the full Council's meeting for the 14 September.
Tiverton	Halsbury Road	
Tiverton	Hawthorn Road	
Tiverton	Priory Road	
Tiverton	Trickey Close	
Willand	Chestnut Drive	Officers are meeting the Parish Council on 10 September.
Willand	Mallow Court	
Willand	Worcester Crescent	
Uffculme	Pathfields	Interest has been shown to fund maintenance.

**Contact for more Information:** Adrian Cook (01884 234339)  
acook@middevon.gov.uk.