



Report of: Executive Manager Community Services

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Fowler

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SUBJECT: LITTLE DIGMOOR PLAY AREA

CAB36/CAL

The following ward is affected:- Digmaor

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To outline issues of anti-social behaviour linked to teenage play equipment at Abbeystead, Little Digmaor, and seek guidance as to the preferred way forward to deal with these issues.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Members consider the information set out in this report and advise as to the preferred actions to be undertaken, as detailed in paragraph 6.
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3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2004, as a result of public demand, verified by a public consultation exercise, funding was successfully sought from Sport England - New Opportunities Fund to develop a multi use games area (MUGA), teenage shelter, and childrens play area at Abbeystead, Little Digmaor.
- 3.2 The scheme was implemented and no problems were reported for two years from its construction. In 2006 instances of anti-social behaviour (ASB), were reported and a meeting was held between local residents, police and the council. At this meeting instances of drug related issues were raised and it was agreed to monitor the situation for the following 3 months, and as no further reports came forward no further action was taken.

- 3.3 During the last 12 months, however, more reports of ASB have been passed to the council. Several further meetings have been held with the community, council officers, and police where some residents blamed the teenage equipment (i.e. teenage shelter and MUGA), for attracting undesirable characters to the site and creating the drug related ASB. As a result of this claim surveys were undertaken in the area to establish whether local residents wished the teenage facilities to be removed.
- 3.4 The council surveyed 25 properties adjacent to the site and whilst we only received 7 response, all asked for the equipment to be removed. This was followed with a press release asking for views and received 2 positive and 2 negatives views of the teenage equipment. A wider survey of 400 properties undertaken by the police on a range of neighbourhood issues received 40 replies, none of which highlighted these teenage facilities as a particular problem.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Despite receiving some strong views from a small number of residents the research by the council has been inconclusive, and the lack of police reports do not substantiate these claims. However, this does not necessarily mean that a problem does not exist as it is claimed that some residents do not have the confidence to report issues to the police.
- 4.2 It is still being reported to the council that issues of ASB, drug use, and disturbance late into the evening are causing great distress to some residents, particularly those that live close to the site.

5.0 ISSUES

- 5.1 In a situation where play equipment is the direct cause of ASB and consequently great disturbance to local residents it can be justified that it is removed. However, this is usually backed up by undertaking a survey of local residents to ensure that this course of action is supported. In this case general public support for removal has not been substantiated.
- 5.2 It is also not clear whether the equipment is directly to blame for problems that are occurring or whether it is a wider issue that is endemic to the area, in which case more direct policing may be the preferred course of action.
- 5.3 The locking and unlocking of the MUGA had been undertaken by a local volunteer, however, they can no longer undertake this function and the facility is permanently open. This is causing some of the issues of late night nuisance and the local police have now offered to undertake the locking of this facility to prevent late night ASB.
- 5.4 The provision of all of this play equipment was initially requested by local residents as a need for their community. Assuming this need still exists the removal of this equipment at Abbeystead would reduce the leisure provision for young people in the area, unless an alternative site could be found.
- 5.5 There will obviously be a cost associated with any removal/re-location of play equipment which would have to come from the play budget, reducing availability elsewhere.

6.0 PROPOSALS

- 6.1 In taking decisions as to the way forward in solving the problems outlined in this report Members may want to consider the following options.
 - 6.1.1 Remove teenage shelter but retain MUGA, subject to police undertaking the locking of the MUGA to prevent late night ASB
 - 6.1.2 Remove both teenage shelter and MUGA, and investigate sites for re-location in the local area
 - 6.1.3 Leave all equipment in situ, and request further police action regarding drug and ASB, possibly involving the MAPS team
- 6.2 It would appear that some of the actions outlined in this report are criminal activities and the role of the police cannot be underestimated in solving this problem. Further liaison, perhaps involving the MAPS team, and monitoring of the situation would also be strongly recommended.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 7.1 It would appear that the problems currently associated with the teenage equipment at Abbeystead are creating a reduction in the quality of life for some members of the local community.
- 7.2 The equipment in question was installed by public demand and justified by a need for teenage provision in the area. To remove this equipment without providing an alternative would create a reduction in leisure provision in the community.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Should the Council decide to remove any of the equipment there would be a cost associated with this removal, ground reparation and storage. Some of this cost may be mitigated should an alternative site be found which would be suitable to satisfy the need in the Little Digmoor area, however, further installations costs would then also be required.
- 8.2 To remove the teenage shelter would cost in the region of £1,000, and to remove the MUGA would cost in the region of £4,000

9.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 The Council needs to work with partners to try to achieve a solution to the problems outlined in this report. Failure to do so would leave us open to criticism for not dealing with an issue that is reducing the quality of life of local residents
- 9.2 Moving the equipment in question may not solve the ASB issues as they may possibly be endemic to the area. The enclosed MUGA in itself reduces problems by confining ball games to a confined area. There was an identified need for this type of teenage activity equipment in the Little Digmoor area, and this would remain should the equipment be removed.

10.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1 Some residents in the Abbeystead area have a strong belief that the teenage shelter and MUGA installed in 2004 are now attracting significant ASB and drug related nuisance to the detriment of the local community.
 - 10.2 Although reports and surveys by the Council and police have not conclusively confirmed these views it is felt that there is a lack of confidence in some local residents to report issues due to the fear of possible reprisals.
 - 10.3 The teenage equipment in question was installed at the request of the local community with a consultation at the time showing overwhelming support for the scheme, confirming local need.
 - 10.4 It needs to be recognised that simply removing the equipment may not resolve the problems and that the ASB, and in particular the drug related issues, need more sustained input from the police to reduce this criminal activity.
 - 10.5 Whatever course of action the Council decides upon it is clear that there needs to be a partner approach to solving these problems with on-going monitoring and review of the situation.
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Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is no evidence from an initial assessment of an adverse impact on equality in relation to the equality target groups.

Appendices

None