

# Play Area Advisory Committee

## Report to Open Spaces Committee

January 2012

### 1. Summary

This report for Chorleywood Parish Council includes the review of potential locations across the parish of Chorleywood for formal and informal play spaces.

The Advisory Committee has adopted the general approach of recording all considerations which might be relevant: we are not a decision-making body, and therefore should not rule anything out by omitting to mention it. In some areas where explanation may be appropriate, a wider context than specified in the terms of reference is provided in the separate briefing pack (which also includes a detailed analysis of all locations).

The review performed suggests that the only realistic location options for a new play space are; Chorleywood Common or the Chorleywood House Estate. Another alternative option for use of the Three Rivers District Council funding would be to enhance the existing Swillet play space. Updating the Swillet would not however satisfy the lack of play spaces that was identified by Three Rivers District Council in their review of play space provision in the Chorleywood area. [Section [Appendix](#) shows a map of existing play spaces in and around the Chorleywood parish].

The analysis of Chorleywood Common and Chorleywood House Estate has identified 19 sub-locations (15 on Chorleywood Common, 4 in Chorleywood House Estate) within these major locations that may be suitable for formal and / or informal play.

- There were four locations identified on the **Chorleywood House Estate** where play equipment could be located, although only one is free from significant disadvantages for formal or informal play equipment. [See Section 3.1 or the briefing report for further analysis of these locations]. Main advantages and disadvantages:
  - + already belongs to Three Rivers District Council; not subject to Commons Act 2006 section 38; already used by, for instance, CCYFC, and thus known to at least part of the community;
  - not within walking distance of residential areas; consequential pressure on parking space; on the "wrong" side of busy A404; not on a normal travel path for local families.
- There are five primary areas that were considered possible on **Chorleywood Common** for formal play equipment (Locations 6, 11, 13, 7, or 8) and a further 10 that were considered possible for more informal play equipment or individual items of formal equipment. [See Section 3.2 or the briefing report for further analysis of the locations]. Main advantages and disadvantages:
  - + central location and within walking distance of at least some residential areas; encouraging children and families to use and learn about the Common; pubs and other community facilities adjacent;
    - If the Parish council so decide, the Rangers could provide play materials and/or low-visibility low-impact equipment (e.g. "stepping logs", cut branches, felled tree trunks) using materials originating on the Common and available as a result of ordinary maintenance, without having to refer to Three Rivers District Council or spend any part of the Three Rivers play space budget;
  - any fencing (if required), and any equipment amounting to "structures" would need consent under Commons Act 2006 section 38; consequential constraints on location and design of equipment, to be appropriate to the particular surroundings; risk of Planning Inspectorate requiring a public inquiry if there is significant opposition (with a potential impact on available finance)

The sites that have been identified in Chorleywood House Estate and Chorleywood Common are all areas with no conservation issues in relation to significant impact on wildlife, or important grasses (Chalk and Acid grassland). The Chorleywood Parish Council Common Rangers had input in suggesting and providing feedback on all locations highlighted to ensure that none would pose any negative impact on the Landscape.

## 2. Locations considered

The Play Area Advisory Committee has considered all areas of open land across the parish as shown in the map in the [Appendix](#) and listed below. Only Chorleywood Common, Chorleywood House Estate and The Swillet have been formally inspected by the Committee.

- Chorleywood Common (PC)
- The Swillet (TRDC)
- Whitelands Wood (TRDC)
- Pheasant's Wood (TRDC)
- Little Lady's Wood (U)
- Stag Lane / Furze View Land behind Water Tank (U)
- Chorleywood House Estate (TRDC)
- Carpenters Wood (TRDC)
- Beechengrove Wood (TRDC)
- Home Wood (TRDC)
- Green Street Herts side (U)
- Valley Road/ The Clump Triangle of Land (TRDC)
- Grove Wood (PC)
- Hillas Wood (TRDC)
- Solomans Wood (TRDC)
- Round Spring (TRDC)

**Ownership:** Chorleywood Parish Council (PC), Three Rivers District Council (TRDC), Unknown (U)

## 3. Analysis of Primary Locations

### 3.1. Chorleywood House Estate

Figure 1



#### Advantages: Chorleywood House Estate

- Land owned by Three Rivers District Council i.e. the body who have the budget to spend
- Not subject to Commons Act 2006 section 38
- Other Recreation activities on site e.g. Tennis Club, Football Club

#### Disadvantages: Chorleywood House Estate

- Not close to majority of the residential housing the play area should service.
- Site has a lower level of informal oversight than other locations identified and is not on a normal travel path
- Site could be seen as “unsustainable” to local planning authorities as nearly all users would drive to the location

#### Conclusion: Chorleywood House

- The fact the A404 is a busy road between Chorleywood House Estate and much of the residential areas means there would be significant pressure from sections of the community on the parish and district council to ensure Highways Agency could provide walking access e.g. pedestrian crossing;
- There would be a perceived need to increased level of parking on the Chorleywood house estate given all users would have to drive to the location;
- Toilet and refreshment facilities would need to be considered at this location given distance and access issues to all other facilities (nearest current open public facilities would be at The Junction meaning crossing over A404.)

## 3.2. Chorleywood Common

Figure 2



### Location:

1. Split trunk climbing trees / clearing area in woods
2. Side of the Fire Ride in base of woodland
3. Woodland clearing behind the bench
4. Woodland clearing behind the bench
5. Immature trees where woodland maintenance is required to maintain the Fire Ride
6. Woodland Area behind and around Triple trunk Birch Tree (area could be made large enough to site a reasonable cluster of equipment) within sight of The Junction and Cricket Club
7. Tree already used for climbing with woodland clearing behind and natural tree barrier at rear
8. Area immediately behind location 7 with footpath leading up to the location (large enough to site a reasonable cluster of equipment and also considered ideal for formal play)
9. Informal path set between the horse track and the golf already has a small informal den building appropriate area under a tree
10. Area within the woodland could be cleared set back slightly to accommodate a location for play
11. Existing bench and well trafficked climbing tree could be enhanced further with additional informal play
12. Along the side of gravel track could be considered as a flat accessible area for informal climbing logs etc.
13. Existing bench with woodland on both sides set back from the horse track and close to the permitted parking area within walking distance of lower road
14. Bowl in Gun Dell has no chalk or acid grass and has many natural features suitable for setting up a collection of formal and informal play
15. Area this side of the railway line both sides of the car park access around have no acid or chalk grass and has an existing Bench (current antisocial behaviour issues)

**[Note 1: Old Shepherd Pub side of train station NCP car park was deemed unsuitable location due to the flood defence tunnel being located on this land]**

**[Note 2: although various trees on the Common are in fact, and very naturally, climbed by children, climbing (among other things) trees "without reasonable excuse" is at present contrary to the Byelaws.]**

**[Note 3: Sites circled in black above are those which have been identified as being possible locations for formal play]**

## Police Feedback Chorleywood Common

Police feedback from Tanya Stabler local PCSO and Antisocial Behaviour Officer Gary Sibson was as follows:

Locations

| Location | Antisocial Behaviour Issues | Sufficient Oversight                | Comments  |
|----------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1        | None                        | Yes – road and horse track          | Proximity to the pond could cause issues especially with frozen conditions  |
| 2        | None                        | Limited                             |   |
| 3        | None                        | Yes                                 | There are occasional antisocial behaviour issues on the golf course side of this location between this location and the fairway<br>It was commented that teenagers tend to walk past this location in the evenings<br>It was also commented that the teenagers want somewhere to sit in the shelter and that this location could be appropriate for this in an “in-keeping”, informal way given the tree canopy |
| 4        | BBQs & small fires          | Limited                             | Proximity to the pond could cause issues especially with frozen conditions  |
| 5        | BBQs & small fires          | Limited                             | Current Antisocial behaviour and lower degree of informal oversight would mean this location is less desirable  |
| 6        | None                        | Strong                              | <b>Preferred location for a collection of play equipment from both PCSO and Antisocial Behaviour officers perspective out of all locations reviewed on the site visit</b>   |
| 7        | None                        | Yes                                 | Seen as a good location by the police team<br>Potential to link locations 7 and 8 to create a wider play space with multiple functions  |
| 8        | None                        | Limited, although could be improved | Potential to link locations 7 and 8 to create a wider play space with multiple functions  |
| 9        | None                        | Yes                                 |   |
| 10       | None                        | Yes                                 |   |
| 11       | None                        | Yes                                 | This location was a higher priority choice location from the Police team  |
| 12       | None                        | No                                  |   |
| 13       | None                        | Yes                                 | Closer to the residential housing therefore likely to get a higher utilisation but with this is also the perception of an increased potential for Antisocial Behaviour (none noted at present)  |
| 14       | Some                        | No                                  |   |
| 15       | Yes - High                  | Yes                                 |   |

## Advantages: Chorleywood Common

- Land is central to the users who are currently not serviced by any play areas (an issue identified by Three Rivers District Council by allocating the budget for a new play area for the village)
- Land is owned by a body who have the Community Interest as their primary priority (i.e. Chorleywood Parish Council)
- Other Leisure Activities are onsite e.g. Golf, Cricket, Horse riding,
  - Common land shaping and wood chip surfacing already in use on Golf course with regular maintenance plans in place as evidenced by approval for works at Open Spaces meeting 8<sup>th</sup> November 2011

- Site has good access links i.e. bus routes, train links, permitted [currently free] parking areas on the common and proximity to [paid and free] parking in NCP train station / Lower Road 4 hour long stay
- Multiple refreshment locations within walking distance e.g. The Junction, Rose & Crown, The Old Shepherd, The Black Horse, lower road cafes
- Play space or spaces could help support the proposed education centre at Holly bush hall and the Nature Trail suggested by the Parish Council
- A location like the common allows identification and utilisation of existing features rather than starting with a blank site therefore saving money on design and landscaping elements usually required.
- Combination of parish council proposed circular nature trail and more formal play could encourage users from all areas of the village onto the common to better utilise and understand the common

### Disadvantages: Chorleywood Common

- Land is subject to Commons Act 2006 meaning that if fences or “structures” were proposed, an additional planning application would need to be submitted to the Secretary of State Planning Inspectorate which would raise the need for further consultation and the potential for a public inquiry, both of which may have time and cost implications.
- Community Concerns could include:
  - The need for Section 38 applications (commonly termed by the community as “DEFRA”)
  - Visual Amenity (depending on location, size and finishes of any equipment)
  - Potential for Vandalism
  - Potential need for safety surfacing
  - Potential need for fencing
  - Concern over setting a precedent for other potential proposals for Chorleywood Common

### Conclusion: Chorleywood Common

- This major location has a number of potential sites that could be considered as identified on the map
- Any play structures would need to be natural / sympathetic to the setting in construction to encourage natural play being consistent with Nature Reserve / Commons Act 2006
- Locations on the Common would not be an easy option but benefits to the community and the common may be considered worth pursuing
- Some of the current Byelaws in relation to Chorleywood Common would need to be discussed and potentially reviewed in the context of allowing play on the Common e.g. sections relating to “Climbing Trees”, “Games”
- There is a distinction to be drawn between facilitating informal play, by providing natural materials and “low-tech” equipment sourced on-site, and providing larger and more elaborate equipment for more formal play; the former may be thought likely to be easier to arrange, and to give rise to less public criticism, than the latter. Although as identified through this review both are possible and are not mutually exclusive.

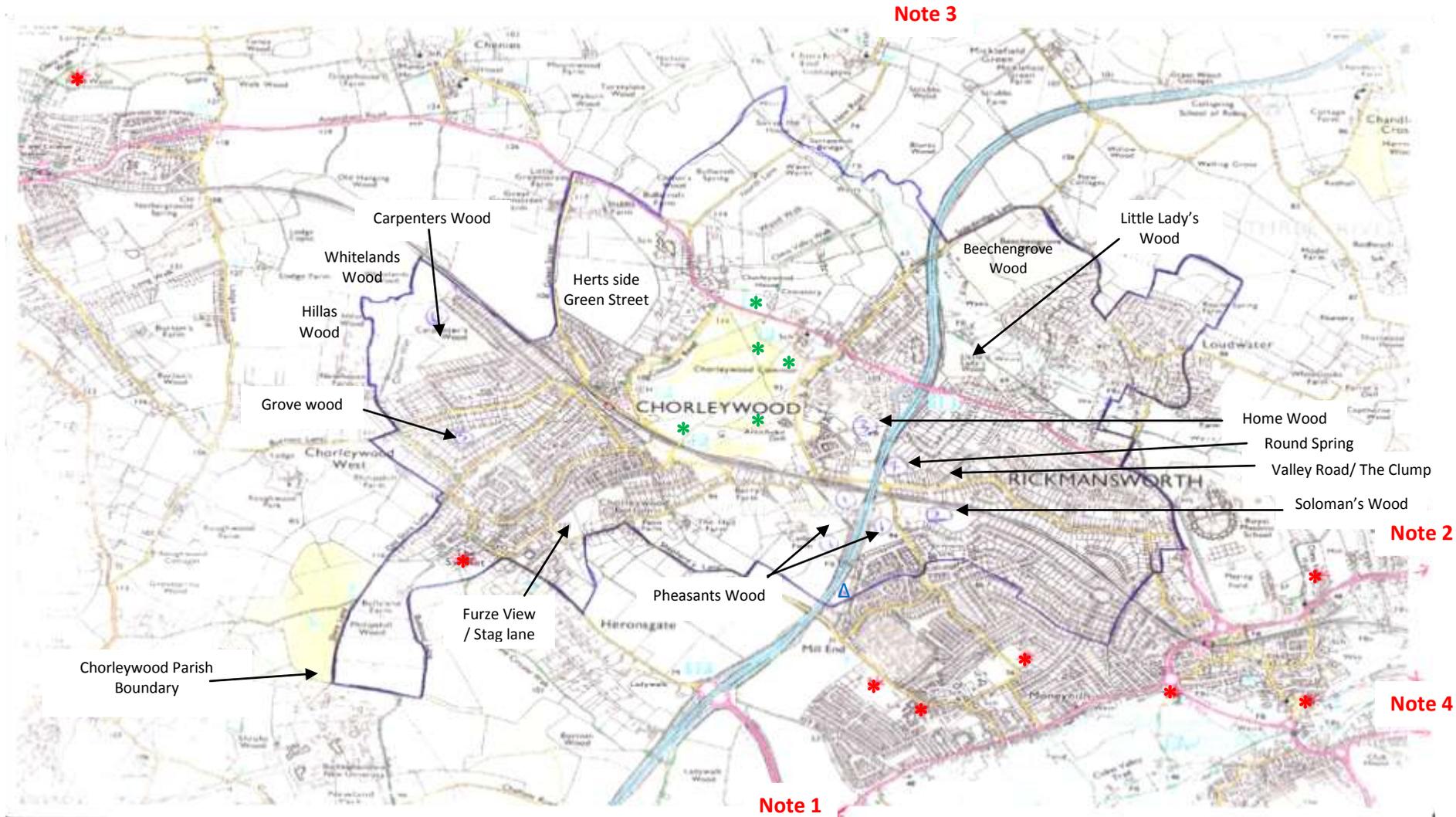
### 3.3. Update the Swillet Play Area

It is within our remit to identify The Swillet as a possible area for play equipment within Chorleywood parish, but our terms of reference go no further; no doubt Three Rivers will evaluate the desirability of further works to The Swillet, having regard to the results of whatever public consultation is undertaken.

## 4. Further Information

An additional briefing document has been prepared to go along side this report which provides more detailed analysis and information on all locations considered, appropriate guidance issued around good play locations and the issues and topics relevant to these discussions in relation to Chorleywood (e.g. Commons Act 2006, Fencing & Boundaries, Managing Risk, Safety Surfacing, Insurance, Dog fouling) and feedback from the Chorleywood forum and summary of correspondence received by the Parish Council in relation to a play space.

## 5. Appendix: Map of existing play spaces in and around the Chorleywood parish



**Note 1** Maple Cross Play Areas: (Hornhill Road; Denham Way; Longcroft Road (Beechen Wood Play Area))

**Note 2** Croxley Green Play Areas: (Barton Way Play Area; Baldwins Lane Play Area; Cassiobridge Play Area)

**Note 3** Sarratt Play Areas: (King George V Play Area)

**Note 4** Eastbury Play Area Batchworth Lane

\* Existing Play Areas Within the Boundary Map

△ Basket Ball Net & Football Net

\* Key Potential Locations Identified in this report for formal play