

# Tewin Parish Council

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## NEWSLETTER

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### **Proposal: A Small Playground for Young Children in Tewin**

Tewin Parish Council is applying for planning permission for a small playground on Upper Green, Tewin for young children aged 0-8years.

This newsletter has been distributed to every household in the Parish.

### **Background**

In 1996 the swings, slide and climbing frame behind the tennis courts on Upper Green were removed upon the advice of East Herts Council, as they were not up to modern safety standards. Since then Tewin has not had a public playground, the nearest is currently just north of the Parish at Burnham Green.

In 2004 in response to a petition requesting a playground the Parish Council sent out a questionnaire to the 600+ households in the village. 100 responses were received, which is deemed to be a high return, given that there was no co-ordinated drive to get people to reply. Of these, 92 were in favour of the provision of a playground. When asked about location with the options Near Lower Green/Near Upper Green/ Elsewhere (please specify), there were 59 indications for Lower Green and 43 indications for Upper Green. (This implies that 10 responses probably ticked both options)

### **Proposed Site on Upper Green**

The Parish Council is recommending that a playground is installed on Upper Green, just north of the copse that borders the car park – see map. No trees will be removed.

The site is centrally located in the parish being between the Lower Green settlement and the Tewin Wood settlement.

The Parish Council has a long term lease on this land, which is owned by Herts County Council, and in preliminary discussions with HCC there has been no objections to this proposal. A copy of the planning application has been submitted to HCC Rural Estates Dept.

The Parish Council feel that the playground as a recreational structure is in accordance with the rights associated with the use of the green.

### **Equipment**

It is hoped to install a two seat cradle swing, a two seat normal swing, a multi-play unit including a slide, and a spring rocker. These will be in metal for durability and ease of maintenance. There will also be a bench.

The Parish Council feel that given the larger scale of Upper Green that the playground will fit in without excessive visual impact on the rural scene. The equipment will be painted in muted colours rather than the vibrant colours of urban playgrounds. The safety surface allows the grass to grow through. The playground will be surrounded by bow topped green painted metal railings, which present less of a visual barrier.

### **Safety Issues**

The Parish Council has met with the East Herts Council Playground Inspector who has no objections and regards it as a suitable site. With regard to the possibility of incoming cricket balls the Parish Council has spoken to Tewin Cricket Club and is aware that this will be limited to summer weekends. The Playground Inspector advises us to display prominent notices warning of the danger. The playground is intended for younger children who, given the location of the playground, will invariably be accompanied by adults.

Equipment, fencing and safety surfacing will all be in accordance with RoSPA requirements

The playground is visible from the road and thus meets visibility criteria from a safety aspect.

### **Access**

The Parish Council acknowledges that in walking up from Lower Green, there is no pavement beyond Godfries Close, but pedestrians acting responsibly can, and do, use this road in safety. The recent upgrading of Back Lane to an easy access route enables parishioners to get from the Rose & Crown to Upper Green with buggies and prams using this route. There is also FP15 which runs from Upper Green Road to Upper Green which could be improved. There are several footpaths giving access from the Tewin Wood area.

In a rural area, some residents will always prefer driving, and one of the main advantages of the Upper Green site is the adequate parking facility. It also has the advantage of being associated with the main recreational area of the village where tennis, cricket and football all take place.

### **Security/Policing**

The Parish Council accepts that there is likely to be opposition from residents in the immediate vicinity of any proposed playground site, and that this arises from the real fear that the playground will act as a magnet for older children. The Parish Council aim to keep local residents informed and has a very good relationship with the local Police, who recently did an excellent job in curtailing nuisance behaviour around the bus shelter opposite the Rose & Crown. We expect to work with them again, to ensure that the Upper Green site does not become a problem area.

### **Funding**

The Parish Council has been awarded a grant of £10,000 from the Big Lottery and £7,000 grant from the Local Network Fund for Children and Young People towards a playground in Tewin. The Parish Council is extremely grateful to the Friends of Tewin for their support and in particular Ben Roberts for his substantial time and effort in achieving the latter grant.

With these grants and funds from the Parish Council there will be enough funds to pay for the entire playground.

### **Conclusion**

The Parish Council has agreed to submit a planning application to EHC for the playground, whilst this is not strictly necessary it does give parishioners a formal means of expressing their opinion.

Any comments should be sent to East Herts Council, Development Control, Wallfields, Pegs Lane, Hertford SG13 8EQ where the plans will be available to view shortly (01279-655261). The plans will also be available for viewing by appointment only with the Clerk (01438-798969).

The rest of this newsletter contains a summary of the other sites considered. It is fair to say that if the Upper Green site is not adopted, then the Parish Council sees no other viable alternative site, and no further work will be done on this project in the foreseeable future. It then follows that we must return the £10,000 Lottery grant and the £7,000 Local Network Fund grant, which were specifically awarded for the construction of a playground.

## **A Summary of Other Sites Considered**

### **Tewin Cowper School**

In the vicinity of Lower Green, the Parish Council spent a significant time investigating the possibility of putting a new playground on the primary school site in Cannons Meadow, where it was known that the school was thinking about upgrading its own equipment.

One of the concerns of the school was that public use of the playground should not disturb pupils during lessons. Schools also need to have a secure boundary. Therefore the playground would have required a separate public entrance together with lockable gates to be able to switch the playground between school use and public use. There were potential problems in providing public access to the playground at both ends of the school day when parents with younger children came with the older children to the school. During the short winter days the playground would effectively only be open to the public at weekends and school holidays.

A problem also arose with physically providing the separate public access to the playground. The only option appeared to be to go across land currently rented from a private landowner to provide allotments for the village. Not only would these have caused disruptions to the allotments, but also the Parish Council would have had no security of tenure. It is also land where the owner has already tried to get planning permission for housing.

The playground would also have aggravated the existing car parking problem in the area.

It was finally concluded that the school site was not viable.

### **Lower Green**

The EHDC Playground Inspector considered Lower Green to be a high risk site because it is surrounded by roads and there are no parking facilities. Given the relatively small size of the Green, the playground would have created a major visual impact. The provision of a playground would have impacted the annual village fete, a successful fund raising event for the Memorial Hall, which already uses all the available space on the Green.

There were also issues with electricity cables and water pipes running under the green and the incidence of swallow holes in the vicinity.

### **Grass Warren**

This is not central enough, being on the extreme southern edge of the residential area.

### **Bowls Club car park**

When the Bowls Club gained planning permission, there was a section 106 condition for the provision of a play area on land adjacent to the car park. Subsequently conditions set by EHC were found to be unenforceable and the bowls club would not give a long term lease or right to buy the land if they sold.

Since the petition in 2004, the Parish Council has approached the Bowls Club and has been advised that circumstances are not deemed to have changed.

The Parish Council has also been advised by EHC that the 106 condition is not enforceable. It is not an ideal site anyway because of pylons and parking.

## **Other Sites**

Green area adjacent to Back Lane by the Rose & Crown: Too small, no parking

To the rear of the Memorial Hall by the "Scout Hut": Private land, too small.

Open land along School Lane: Privately owned. Not available.

Other suggestions of "land behind xxx": These generally fail the visibility criteria of current safety standards. The land will be privately owned, often with aspiration to eventual housing development.

Offers of playgrounds in association with housing: There have been two offers to provide land for playgrounds in association with housing developments. Both of these developments were opposed by villagers. Also very difficult to make sure that the end result lives up to the initial promise.

### Upper Green

Apart from the site currently being proposed, two other sites on Upper Green need to be mentioned.

**Area of the original playground:** The original playground was at the far end of the tennis courts behind the pavilion. This was already quite a small area and there is now a tennis practice wall there. Also not visible enough.

**Area at the far side of Upper Green:** Even though it is directly accessible via Back Lane from Lower Green, this area feels like being "in the middle of nowhere". Also there would be a permanent problem with parents trying to reach it by car using the private right-of-way across the top of the Upper Green.

### **Great Crested Newts (GCN)**

We are aware that GCN have been reported in a pond in the garden of 51 Upper Green.

The area proposed for the playground is mown several times a year and thus unlikely to be a GCN resting habitat. When the playground is completed, any GCN will be able to pass through the area as easily as they can do now. The site is already part of a recreational area.

No GCN have been reported within the copse adjacent to the proposed site. There are a number of well worn paths within the copse, so it is not an undisturbed habitat. None of the vegetation in the copse is being removed anyway.

Between the pond in 51 Upper Green and the proposed site are two houses and a busy road. The work on the site is unlikely to affect any GCN at the pond.