

CHORLEYWOOD PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the EXTRA ORDINARY MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL held in the War Memorial Hall, Common Road, Chorleywood, on Thursday 4th June 2015

MEMBERSHIP & ATTENDANCE

Chairman: * Tony Edwards

Councillors: Jo Clarke * Ken Morris
John Copley * Alison Preedy
* Harry Davies * David Raw
Barbara Dickens Martin Trevett
* Barbara Green * Steve Watkins
* Raj Khiroya * Jane White
* Rodney Kipps Jenny Wood
* Jill Leeming * Jackie Worrall

*Denotes Member present

Officers Present: Yvonne Merritt - Clerk
Michelle Putman - Admin Officer
Laura Hamilton - Admin Assistant

The Chairman opened the meeting by confirming the reason for calling the meeting and welcomed the members of the public

PUBLIC FORUM

There were 65 members of the public present.

The Council heard representations from

- Nils Blythe, from Grovewood Close speaking against a play area in Grovewood.
- Mel Peel, from Grovewood Close speaking against a play area in Grovewood
- David Walker, from Whitelands Avenue, speaking in favour of keeping the play area process
- Maryilyn Leadbetter, from Homefield Road asking details regarding fencing on the Common
- Janet Cullen, from Grovewood, speaking against a play area in Grovewood.

15/01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Jo Clarke, John Copley, Barbara Dickens, Martin Trevett and Jenny Wood.

15/02 GROVEWOOD

The Chairman opened the meeting explaining that the Extra Ordinary Meeting had been requested by two councillors to discuss the removal of Grovewood, at this stage of the process as a potential site for the location of a play space. He advised the Council that residents of Grovewood had formulated a fully Constitutional Friends Group which would be recognised by the Council. He stated that he would ask Cllr Davies to speak first, followed by Cllr Leeming who was both in favour of the motion, he would then ask Cllr Green to speak as Chairman of the Play Area Advisory Committee and through the debate open in order that all members could have a say.

Cllr Davies stated that he had called the meeting because he was deeply concerned that in its desire for a site for a play area the identification of Grovewood as a possible site had give rise to considerable worry by the residents of Grovewood Close who fear that the character of the Grovewood would be fundamentally damaged and they, the residents, would lose forever the quality of life, tranquillity, and enjoyment of their environment that has existed in Grovewood Close for many years. He felt that this was grossly unfair.

Knowing Grovewood close very well, Cllr Davies thought it would be disingenuous to say that he did not have considerable doubts as to the suitability of Grovewood as a play area although he was open to being convinced that it is the most suitable site, if compelling arguments were to be produced in favour, but so far none of the arguments seen convinced him that this is the case.

Grovewood is the only prospective site surrounded by residents, therefore unlike the other sites under consideration there is an exception reason why its suitability should be considered – the human factor. He stated that he would find it intolerable if the Parish Council continued to inflict misery upon the residents for possibly months ahead when that unnecessary burden could be lifted at this meeting.

He stated that he was aware that the removal of Grovewood as a potential site may appear unfair to the opponents of the other prospective sites, but he felt Grovewood was exceptional, as it is the only site where the uncertainty is causing much anxiety, stress and unhappiness to local residents.

He went on to add that if the opponents of other prospective sites could demonstrate similar concerns for the well-being of so many residents then the Parish Council should not prolong the misery of those residents either, although as stated he felt Grovewood was exceptional. He asked members of the Council to put themselves in the position of the residents of Grovewood Close and ask themselves how they would like to be in such an intolerable situation.

He went on to state that he did not feel that Grovewood could fit the criteria, as

- it is not centrally located in the area of greatest need.
- It is equidistant to the Swillett from the area of greatest need and therefore a waste of taxpayers' money
- It is a heavily wooded area and a play area would necessarily result in the destruction of much of the natural vegetation including trees.
- Because of its location it would encourage car parking in a street that is narrow and largely unsuitable for on-street parking, and poor lines of sight could create a danger for children dashing into the road
- The creation of a play area would be detrimental to the residential amenities of the residents in Grovewood Close adversely affecting their quality of life that they have previously enjoyed
- The noise level would be substantially increased.

For these reasons along he could not see how the site would get planning approval. And he asked his fellow councillors in the interest of natural justice to support the proposal that Grovewood be removed from further consideration.

Cllr Leeming stated that Councillors had heard the concerns and reasonable anxieties about the siting of a possible playground in Grovewood Close, not only from the residents who it would affect very much, but also from many other who like to walk there. From all the evidence it seems that 100% of the residents are against the play area in this site. In the Parish Council's own publication 'A Four Year Vision 2012-2016' it states under the heading strategic objectives on page 2 that the Council will be considerate of the needs and views of their parishioners. She hoped fellow Councillors would be tonight.

She went on to say that she also had a copy of the Grovewood Management Plan; this was constructed with the advice from the Countryside Management Service which has been commissioned in the last 15 years. The CMS had suggested 'creating a shrub layer around the edge of the woodland which would mean a more diverse habitat for wildlife'. This has been implemented and there is now a hedge about 8" to 10" high. Thirty years ago it was possible to see across Grovewood from one side to the other with fewer trees and shrubs and the floor of mostly brambles. Now there is little possibility of oversight from the surrounding houses or even the road during the summer months, and the interior is now a series of quite glades with paths through it. Residents mention seeing owls, woodpeckers, bats, badgers, squirrels and deer. She added there was insufficient time to list the number of butterflies, moths and other insects that had been reported to. In short Grovewood has become a woodland nature reserve, possibly because of the Parish Council's

management plan. It is lovelier than it used to be and if a playground was put there almost all the wildlife would disappear.

So with all this and the entirely reasonable concerns about the dangers of traffic and possible accidents she would respectfully suggest that Grovewood Close be removed from the list of possible places for a playground. It has caused an awful lot of stress and anxiety for all the people who live there, and who love what Grovewood Close's woodland has become, and it would be good to relieve them of this worry.

Cllr Leeming added that if she was allowed to say more she would question the need for a playground at all, especially as Chorleywood already has one in the Swillett. Ed Balls was, she is told, the Minister who allocated the funds for playgrounds to improved deprived areas and she thought he was right to do so, but Chorleywood is not a deprived area, it is very lucky to have the open spaces and woodlands that it has, and with the increasing urbanisation everywhere and the Green Belt being threatened we do need to hang on to Chorleywood's rural aspects which are its most attractive features.

Cllr Green said as Chairman of the Play Space Advisory Committee I do not feel that Grovewood, or any other site, should be removed from the short-list at this stage, for the following reasons,

1. You, as Council Members appointed the Advisory Committee to take on the task of identifying potential sites for a new play-space. This was always going to be an onerous task, given its history.
2. However, you agreed the committee membership and terms of reference and it was also agreed that we should undertake this task alongside representatives of the wider community.
3. The Advisory Committee has kept the Council fully informed of their deliberations and of their progress and at no time have any issues been raised by Councillors in relation to the work of the committee.
4. Now, as a result of pressure from one group within the community, the Council is being asked to remove one of the sites from the short-list.
5. This not only undermines the Advisory Committee but threatens to cause the collapse of the whole process of selection.
6. If this motion is accepted and Grovewood is removed from the short-list at this stage of the process, what is to stop residents who live adjacent to any of the other sites demanding that their site is also removed? The whole process then becomes untenable.
7. Whatever Councillors' personal views about the appropriateness or otherwise of Grovewood as a potential site, your duty, as representatives of the whole community, is to support the process and reject this motion. You may have friends who live in Grovewood Close, or you may have been lobbied by residents of the Close. Whatever your personal position on this, you are not on the Council to express your personal views – whether Grovewood is, or is not, a suitable site for a play-space is immaterial to this debate.
8. We as Councillors, have a responsibility to ensure that this selection process, which is only part way through at this stage, continues to completion. We represent the whole community and that includes residents of course, but what gets forgotten in all this is that it also includes the children, who actually do not have a voice. We must ensure that this process does not fail for their sakes.
9. However, Cllr Green knew one of the concerns of Grovewood residents is that they have no representation on the Advisory Committee. Grovewood has now formed a legitimate Friends Group and she was happy, should the Council agree, for a representative to sit on the Advisory

Committee alongside other representatives. They will have an opportunity to make their case in an appropriate manner within the remit of that committee.

10. To sum up she respectfully requested that members of the Council vote against this motion, in doing so they would make it possible for the Advisory Committee to progress with their task and reach a proper, fully coherent and considered conclusion.
11. She reminded members that they would have the final decision as to the final choice of the site when the time comes.

Cllr White advised that before she gave her thoughts on Grovewood, she would briefly introduce herself, who had been a parish Councillor for five years, and for three of those had chaired the parish planning committee, which had given her an insight into the stress and uncertainty the planning process can cause to neighbours. This situation is not dissimilar and she really does understand the distress and worry this can cause and she was taking the residents of Grovewood situation extremely seriously.

She advised that Councillors were not debating the suitability of the site per se, but its removal from the shortlist before the completion of the process, having given this a great deal of thought, and somewhat controversially she said she was minded to think that the early removal from the shortlist may actually do Grovewood More harm than good and she went on to explain why.

Taken on a standalone basis, many of the arguments for removal are compelling. But these concerns come mainly from those closest to Grovewood, and may not fully represent the thoughts of the wider community. We must balance them against the official reports on this site which we've yet to receive and consider.

Also, the case against Grovewood has been presented in isolation, without equal scrutiny of the other contenders. Who is to say, as our evaluation processes, that the other three sites may not make equally strong-or even stronger cases to be similarly removed? It is impossible for us, as Councillors to know at this stage that Grovewood isn't actually the best option, however unlikely that may seem tonight.

Sometimes there is no right answer, just one answer that is marginally less wrong than others. Should it be the case that Grovewood is the 'least bad' option, it doesn't mean a green light for a play area. It may be that even our chosen site is unsuitable, and there is in fact, no suitable site in all of Chorleywood parish for a new play area.

And this is a key point, in order for our conclusions to be accepted by the vocal and proactive play-area lobby, we must explore every option thoroughly: our conclusions have to be watertight, and in her view, this means not striking out a location ahead of time.

She went on to say that she had enormous sympathy for the case made by Friends of Grovewood. Personally she believed their arguments will outweigh those against competing sites, but she was anxious to avoid a situation where, if Grovewood was to be removed now then the chosen site proves to be unsuitable, calls would be made to reopen consideration of Grovewood on the basis that it wasn't completed properly in the first place. Furthermore, if the parish does not follow process in a way that is fair to everybody by treating each site the same, we prejudice the whole exercise: resulting in stalemate and demands for yet another re-run of the selection procedure.

So to be fair to other sites and their supporters, but moreover, to protect Grovewood against being the only site not to go through the full process and therefore open to appeal, Cllr White suggested that the Council keep Grovewood on the shortlist.

Cllr Khroya stated that he had listened to both sides and he understood the principal of the process, however parishioners had chosen the Councillors to act on their behalf and therefore he felt that Grovewood should be removed from the process.

Cllr Preedy stated that she felt stuck in the middle – she had come to the table with an open mind, she felt for the residents of Grovewood but felt it was right to wait for the reports to be received in order that she could make the right decision.

Cllr Kipps said he was also split- obviously there were a lot of people present who were against Grovewood as a suitable site, but to take this location out at this stage would invalidate the process. He added that it was a shame that there was no Friends Group at the beginning of the process as they could have put their point across at that time.

Cllr Raw said that the Advisory Group was working hard on the process and for the good of the Community and democracy Grovewood should stay on the list.

Cllr Watkins said that he had been on the Council for 13 years and on the Play Advisory Committee for the past four years. In 2011/12 the Committee had looked at all sites in Chorleywood and at this stage Grovewood was not considered. During the current process, new sites had been looked at and discounted including Warings Field off Furze View, Valley Road. He was not present at the site meeting but had he been he would have agreed with residents that Grovewood was not suitable. He felt that as this was a Three Rivers project that any play area should be put on Three Rivers Land. He felt that residents of the Close should not be made to suffer and therefore Grovewood should be removed from the process.

Cllr Morris stated that he had listened to the arguments and felt that the remarks so far lead to his opinion that Grovewood should be removed from the process, furthermore he felt that Chorleywood Common should be also be removed as Chorleywood House Grounds was the best place for a play area.

Cllr Worrall said that she had also been a Councillor for 13 years, and she appreciated that there was a strong desire for a play space for Chorleywood. She felt that the Grovewood report was excellent and but the arguments equally applied to other sites. She felt that the residents of Chorleywood should be working together looking at a site that was suitable for the health and safety of the Children, it would be so much better if everyone was pulling in the same direction.

Cllr Edwards – completed the speeches, by stating that the Advisory Group had commissioned experts to look all aspects of the process, these included the Police, Three Rivers Play advisors, and the Countryside Management services who were all totally independent. Whilst some reports had been received due to the time of year, the environmental surveys were not expected back until August. Having asked for unbiased opinions it would be in appropriate at this stage to withdraw any sites from the process.

Having listened to all Councillors the Chairman asked Cllr Harry Davies to make his proposal

Cllr Davies said he felt saddened that this colleagues were substituted with bureaucracy instead of the human factor but proposed

That Grovewood Is withdrawn, at this stage of the process, as a potential site for the location of a play space.

This was seconded by Cllr Jill Leeming.

Cllr Morris put an amendment to the motion (under section 1. R. i. of Standing Orders) that Chorleywood Common should be added to the list, this was seconded by Cllr Worrall

The amendment was voted upon and carried with 6 in favour, 2 against, with four abstentions.

Cllr Green stated that this proposal would make a mockery of process as to remove three sites from the list would leave only one. Public money had been spent on the surveys and therefore the sensible decision would be to wait for the reports.

The chairman read the amended motion proposed

That Grovewood and Chorleywood Common is withdrawn, at this stage of the process, as potential sites for the location of a play space.

The votes were 6 in favour and 6 against.

The Chairman having the casting vote said that as the Advisory Committee had yet to receive the independent reports he did not think that it was fair to remove any sites from the process and therefore voted against the amended motion

The Council therefore

RESOLVED

That all four sites remain on the list for potential sites for a play area within the parish of Chorleywood.

15/03 CLOSURE

The meeting have started at 8.25 pm, closed at 9.20 pm

These minutes have been checked by the Chairman.

Signed Dated

These minutes have been agreed at Full Council and signed by the Chairman.

SignedDated.....