

## Darsham Playground.

I would like to make a formal complaint on behalf of the Darsham Village Playground Working Group against the Darsham Village Hall Committee (VHC) regarding the way the last seven months of the proposed playground project have been handled.

### Background

On 11<sup>th</sup> October 2022 the Darsham Village Playgroud Working Group (DVPWG) was formed and within the terms of reference was to "Investigate **options** to develop the play area and proposing a design for the play area". At that meeting Keith Rolfe confirmed that "we need planning permission in the first instance even though it was in the initial plans for the new estate".

A series of formal meeting happened over the next two months based on the information produced initially, by the chair, John Meggison.

We were informed that the LAP, which was the only practical option, could be no larger than 100Sq m. This we subsequently found out to be incorrect as it can be between 100 and 399sq m.

It became clear, as the meetings progressed, that whilst we were looking at the options for the whole village John was, and we understand why, looking at it from a residents point of view. He mentioned he had canvassed the residents of Cheyney Green and that there was "Little support for anything larger than the original LAP (option 1) and there are likely to be objections if the design proposal is not considerate to their feelings. *We know this was not the full picture from Cheyney Green and although there may be some who would object, there are also those in full support.*

He also stated the "The LAP was only designed to be for the Cheyney Green development (as per the guidelines). It was never meant to be a play area for the whole village. "

On the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2023 John and Alan resigned and the DVPWG ceased but continued in an informal role.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023 and on behalf of the remaining members of the working group I presented a plan with two options based on the actual measurements of the deeds provided to me. The initial size of the playground was 10.5 by 18.5, 194sq m. By adding a small semi-circle to the space this could increase to 231sq m. It was pointed out that the original 98sq m would be impossible for having a working playground and it was felt that it would not be used. (see attached)

On the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2023 I was told that "Having had an estimate from a groundworks company it would appear that the costs of pursuing this size are prohibitive. So, at the meeting on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup>, we have agreed to get estimates for two sizes of area, the original 98sq m and an enlarged area of 170sq m."

On 4<sup>th</sup> April 2023 we were informed that "The village hall committee voted on three options at its' last meeting, by a majority of 8 - 2 we decided to proceed with the two areas as described last night at the parish council. These are the areas of 98sq m and 170sq m. The larger area of 210sq m was rejected by the committee. "

On the 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023 Mark Hemingway called and told me that they had decided to go with just the 98sq m option.

I responded to Heather, Mark and Paul with a series of question that as yet I have not had a reply. (See attached)

### **Summary**

The reason for our complaint is that throughout the process the playground working group have not been confident in the accuracy of the information passed by John Meggison to the VHC. We have raised the concern with the joint chairs of the VHC that he has a conflict of interest and that we are concerned that his reports to the VHC have not been factually accurate. These concerns were dismissed. As a charity Darsham Village Hall has an obligation to deal with conflicts of interest and loyalty, while all trustees are obligated to act in good faith, and only in the interests of charity. It is not clear that this has been the case during this process.

The playground working group also feel strongly that the village should have been informed of the various options/proposals and invited to put forward ideas, suggestions and/or to comment on these at a stage where they could have made a difference. We still have no indication that anything is to be put forward to the village and, when options have already been voted on by the VHC, it seems that even if consultation does happen it will be nothing more than a tick-box exercise.

While we have not been made aware of how and/or why the decision to propose a playground, smaller than on the original plans has been made, it appears that little consideration has been given to the children and young people in our village who at present must travel at least 2 miles to access the nearest playground at Westleton. While this may be practical for some it certainly will not be accessible for all, neither is it ideal for environmental reasons (travel by car) or reasons of community (less opportunity to form friendships within the village). We are thus concerned that the VHC have made their decisions without taking into full account the best interests of all the charity's beneficiaries.

If funding is of concern, we would like to point out that whatever is decided the whole 460sq m area will have to be levelled in order to put playground equipment onsite. We recognise that the cost of this will be high, however it can be offset by fund raising and sponsorship. Information relating to persons around that could help were mentioned at the playgroup meetings and I have also last week passed this onto Paul Diamond. The DVPWC have indicated they would be happy to assist with this. We know that other local villages have managed this and we feel strongly that Darsham could do the same.

Based on the above, only the VHC members know what was discussed during this time. The process has not been transparent and it appears that decisions may have been based on what people feel, or on what they have been inaccurately led to believe, rather than on fact. I believe that the Parish Council should be aware of the events that have taken place and hope that some members of the VHC would be prepared to put all the options to the village. If a decision is made by the village rather than just the VHC or the DVPWG it would at least be democratic.

On behalf of the DVPWC 24<sup>th</sup> June 2023