

2016 Consultation: Note, this is not the result of the most recent consultation in 2016.

This is an old document and the Council is not planning to implement the scheme recommended in this consultation. Background information only.



Howard Lewis Play Area

ASSESSMENT REPORT AND FEASIBILITY STUDY
FOR YATE TOWN COUNCIL

Alison Brown | Landscape Architect | February 2017

INTRODUCTION

Howard Lewis Play Area in Yate is in a quiet residential area, set in a circular green space behind houses whose gardens back onto the park. There are two narrow entrances, between the houses, into the park. There are several mature trees and a good network of tarmac paths that link through the site.

Whilst the play area is well maintained, the equipment is outdated and would benefit from some new additions, replacements or refurbishment. This report investigates the potential for upgrading the play area and makes recommendations for a brief to accompany a tender process for a design and build contract for the new park.

EXISTING EQUIPMENT AND PLAY VALUE

The park includes a tarmac area surrounded by a chain-link fence. This is marked out with two tennis courts, although there are no nets and the notice on the fence describes the courts as being for “football training and netball” and directs those wishing to play tennis to Sunnyside Playing Fields. There are floodlights installed, although the lights are not currently used.

Play areas are assessed for their play value based upon the different types of activity that each piece of equipment provides for various age groups. Howard Lewis Play Area is classified as a Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) under the Fields in Trust guidelines and currently has a play value score of 39.

The park includes the following play equipment:

2 climbing frames in bark pits

The two climbing frames are not dissimilar, with ladders, platforms, slides and tunnels. The larger unit has the following:

- 1 double slide
- 1 single slide
- 2 access ramps, one steep slope with a chain
- 1 curved ladder
- 2 monkey bars
- 1 hoop tunnel
- 2 looped climbers
- 1 climbing wall (with cut-out handholds)
- 3 platforms
- 1 fireman's pole
- 1 circle climber



Large climbing frame

The smaller unit has the following:

- 2 ladders
- 1 ramp
- 1 single slide
- 1 fireman's pole
- 2 platforms
- 1 abacus play panel
- 1 tunnel



Small climbing frame

Both units are metal frames, painted in primary colours and are well maintained, but are dated in appearance and offer little scope for imaginative play.

In terms of play value, the two units offer the following activities, for the age groups indicated:

- Sliding (conventional) Ages 4-8, 8-11, 11+
- Sliding (pole) 4-8, 8-11, 11+
- Climbing <4, 4-8, 8-11,
- Scrambling 4-8, 8-11
- Hanging 4-8, 8-11

- Crawling (tunnel) <4, 4-8, 8-11
- Games (panels) <4, 4-8
- Bridges <4, 4-8, 8-11
- Platforms <4, 4-8, 8-11

Total play value score = 24

Metal framed tyre swing in bark pit

This swing allows more than one child to ride at a time and is suitable for older children. It offers the following play activities:

- Swinging (cantilever) ages 4-8, 8-11, 11+
- Sitting (social) ages 4-8, 8-11, 11+

Total play value = 6



Small spinning unit on rubber safety surface

A small metal, sit-in roundabout, providing for young children, but requiring adult help to spin it. Dated equipment

- Rotating (several children) <4, 4-8
- Rotating (1/2) <4, 4-8

Total play value = 4



Seesaw on rubber safety surface

Metal seesaw, catering for young children, but very dated and not meeting current standards

- Rocking (<4) 4-8, 8-11

Total play value = 3



Single bay 2 seat cradle swing, on rubber safety surface

Metal framed unit

- Swinging (conventional) <4, 4-8

Total play value = 2



QUALITY ASSESSMENT

In addition to play value, Play England's Quality Assessment techniques take into account how welcoming the site is, its accessibility, its safety and its maintenance.

Being flat, the site is readily accessible to wheelchair users, although the access to the bark pits in which most of the equipment sits in more limited. The site is easily accessible by cyclists and, although cycling is prohibited by the entry signs, the consultation revealed that children do cycle in the park. The site has some notices, with one older sign referring to "The Ridge Recreation Area" with out of date contact details.

There are "no dog" signs at the park entrances, but the consultation results show that dogs are walked in the park. The play equipment is not separately fenced, but dogs do not appear to be a problem.



The park has two narrow entrances and is overlooked by the surrounding houses, providing informal supervision, although some anti-social behaviour has been reported as part of the consultation process and several residents are concerned about this. However, the police have no recorded incidents of anti-social behavior and the Town Council had received no reports prior to the consultation.

There are several wooden benches, some of which were donated by the Ridge Tennis Club in 1997. Access to the seats is over the grass, making them less inviting when the

ground is wet and muddy. There are several mature trees around the site, which offer shade at different times of the day and, due to the surrounding houses and garden boundaries, the site is very sheltered.



The site is largely well maintained and clean, with close mown grass throughout and several mature trees. Graffiti does not appear to be a problem.

The play area is close to both infant and junior schools. A private children's nursery backs onto the park, along with a few local shops. There are no toilet facilities on site.

Consultation

In order to gather information to determine a design brief for improvements to the play area, questionnaires were distributed to children by both Broadway Infants and The Ridge Junior Schools. A slightly different questionnaire was also distributed to all properties in the immediate neighbourhood.

25 residents questionnaires were returned and 16 schools questionnaires, the results of both consultations are included in the appendices but the key points are summarised below. Several letters were also received from residents, mainly voicing their concerns over anti-social behaviour.

Results:

Whilst very few people used the park every day, most people went occasionally or once or twice a week, with some respondents using it as a through route.

We asked what people would like to see in the park, with wooden play equipment and more seating being the most popular response in both groups. Wildflower areas were supported more strongly than flower beds and the response to exercise equipment was roughly split 50:50. Picnic tables were supported by some, but others were concerned that they would attract anti-social activity at night.

We asked about the use of the tennis courts and whether the floodlights should be removed. Of the residents, 11 wanted the floodlights to go, 3 wanted them to remain and the school responses were evenly split, where a preference was given. Only one

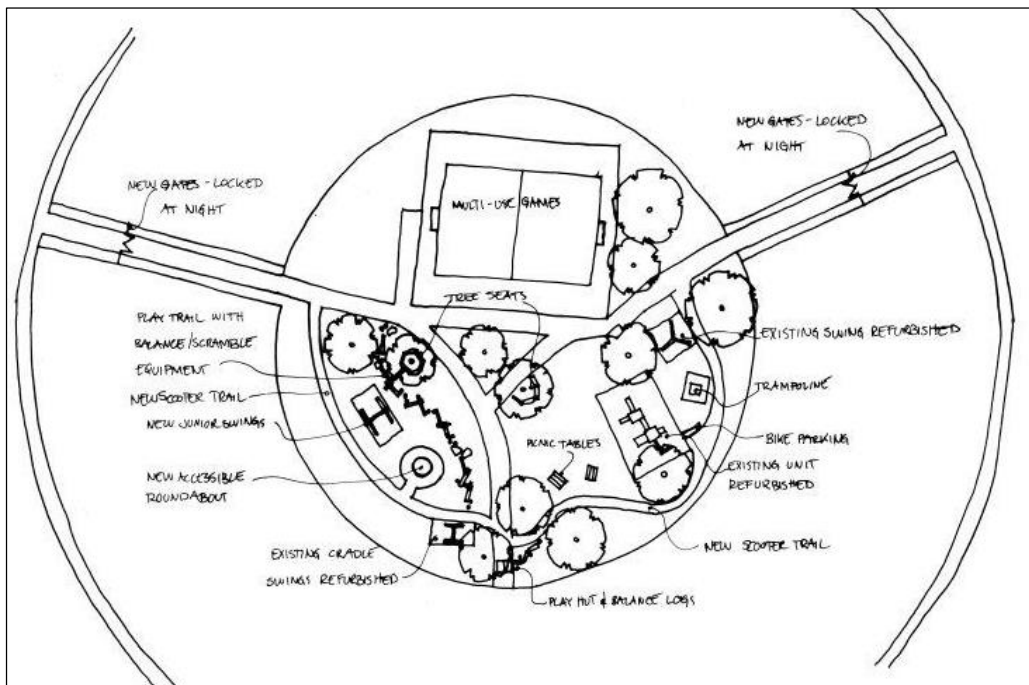
respondent wanted to use the tennis courts. There was overwhelming support for football and basketball in the courts, with some mentioning netball as well. Several people liked using this space for children to learn to cycle or to use their scooters.

Overall, the majority supported cycling in the park, although one respondent, who is registered blind, was concerned about the potential conflict between cyclists and pedestrians.

In response to questions about specific equipment, extra swings were the most requested item – particularly for older children, and a roundabout was also mentioned in a few replies.

Conclusions and Proposals

The main concern of neighbours who back onto the park is the occasional anti-social behaviour by teenagers using the park late at night. To combat this, the park could be locked overnight. The two narrow entrances would be relatively simple to secure, with a 1.8m fence and double gates. On the accompanying sketch layout, these are shown set back from the current gates, as some neighbouring properties have low walls or hedges at the front of the property that could easily be climbed to circumvent the gates. It should be noted that there will be a revenue cost as well as a capital cost to this, but Yate Town Council does already lock other parks at night, so Howard Lewis could be added to this schedule.



Sketch Layout

Overall, the results of the consultations suggest that a low-key design with timber play equipment in a garden setting to support a strong community feel will be supported. A sketch layout has been produced to reflect this and to form the basis for a design brief for the park improvements.

Multi Use Sports

In order to make better use of the courts, a MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) is proposed, with a single pitch marked out to accommodate football and basketball. Dual purpose goals would be installed on an East/West orientation, to minimise the risk of balls being kicked or thrown beyond the chain link and over neighbouring fences. As the recommendation is to lock the park at night, the floodlights should be removed.



Cycle / Scooter Trail

Because cycling was so popular in the consultation results, the Council should consider amending the byelaws to allow cycling, perhaps installing a notice instead that encourages sensible cycling that respects other users. This may be something that the schools could contribute and that could tie into their curriculum.

In order to avoid conflict between cyclists and sports users, the sketch design shows a new cycle / scooter path winding around the southern half of the site. This would be narrow and could incorporate different textures to provide extra challenge and fun to children. Examples are shown below.

The path wraps around the site and amongst the mature trees. In order to avoid damage to the tree roots, a no-dig construction method should be used within the rootzone, using a Cellweb honeycomb technique or something similar.



Play Equipment

This new path also forms a link between the play features, old and new, with each item of equipment dotted along it like beads on a thread. From East to West, the first item is the existing tyre swing, which would be refurbished and provided with a basket swing to replace the tyre. Installers would need to ensure that this can be achieved to meet safety standards, alternatively a new basket swing frame would need to be provided.

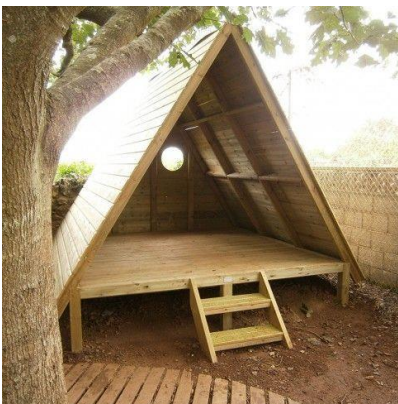
The second item is a new in-ground trampoline. This item can also be used by a child in a wheelchair as they can be wheeled onto it.



The existing large multi-unit is next. This offers several play activities, but some of these are currently duplicated in the smaller unit, so the smaller unit will go and the larger one will be refurbished. Play panels could be added to this if required. The drawing also shows a space to park bikes and scooters here and a log or tyre construction is suggested as these are also playable in themselves.



The path then passes a couple of new picnic benches before heading back between the trees to the play hut. This is placed on the existing, redundant, tarmac path that leads to an old, blocked up gate to the park. Extra shrub planting around this space would help to make it more den-like.

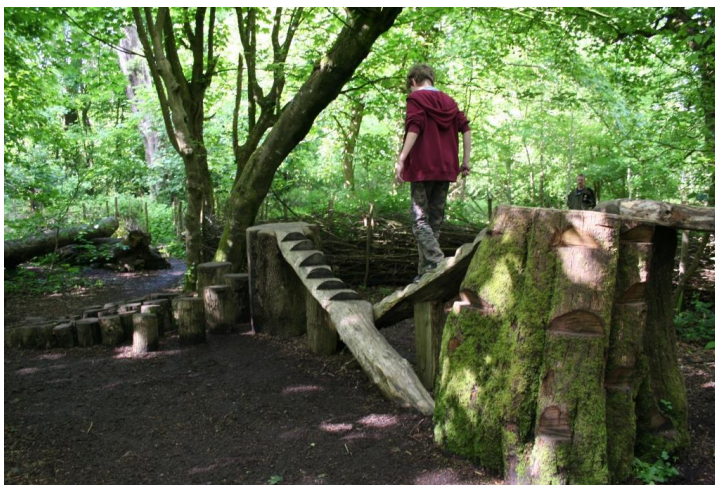


The existing cradle swings are the next bead on the thread – these would be repainted. A new accessible roundabout follows that and finally a new set of junior swings



Play trail with balance/scramble equipment

Finally, an extra loop of balance equipment is proposed, separate from the scooter trail, and linking into the new seating. This should be low level timber and rope equipment, with a variety of balancing activities



Seating

The sketch layout shows the existing seating replaced with benches that are better incorporated into the landscape, with tree seats providing more scope for conversation than a straight bench. These also offer play value in themselves and some could become wider decks to lounge or play on or even be raised a little to make a low level tree house platform. They would also form part of the play trail mentioned above.



Planting

A wildflower meadow was popular in the consultation results, so the whole of the area beyond the new bike trail would be given over to meadow and only be mown a couple of times a year. The park is named after a previous head teacher of the Ridge school so there would be value in maintaining the link with the school by inviting them to be involved with planting bulbs and wildflowers. This will also encourage children into the park who might not have used it before and will help to foster pride and ownership, which goes some way to reducing anti-social behaviour such as graffiti and littering.