

Analysis of feedback about a new play space for Hawkhurst at the KGV Playing fields August 2020

Introduction

When a new community centre is built at The Moor, the current playground needs first to be moved to another area of the KGV playing fields. This is an opportunity to review and renew the whole play area which is anticipated to be completed in 2021/22. The new Community Centre is expected to be built in 2022/23.

It was felt that before any plans move forward, it was important to consult key stakeholders and most importantly the children and young people of Hawkhurst about the new play area.

Methodology

It was intended to hold a series of consultation meetings with children and parents but the Covid 19 pandemic meant this was not viable. Instead a short questionnaire was distributed in July through a number of channels and to local organisations via the Hawkhurst Scouts. Responses were requested to be sent to:

hawkhurstcommunitycentre@gmail.com

The questionnaire contained the following questions:

1. What is special to you about Hawkhurst?
2. What do you like now about the play areas in Hawkhurst? What else would you like to see?
3. Tell us about the games (not online) that you like to play on your own or with your friends - you can describe it; you can draw us a picture or make a model.
4. Is there anything else you would like us to think about?

People answering were asked if they wished to give us their age. The questionnaire advised that under 5-year olds responses should be completed by a parent, those aged 5 to 11 might like to respond with the help of a parent and those over 11 could complete a questionnaire themselves.

Response Rate

The response rate was disappointingly low. Although the Scouts did a great job in distributing the questionnaire to organisations within Hawkhurst, the U3A, for example did not pass on the questionnaire through their networks, which was a missed opportunity.

19 questionnaires in total were returned, some responses representing more than one child.

4 respondents did not give their names but did give their ages and were children.

2 questionnaires were completed by grandparents on behalf of grandchildren.

3 questionnaires were completed by adults, one of whom represented the "Toddler Train".

1 questionnaire was a collective response from the Scouts in Hawkhurst.

1 response also submitted some helpful pictures of what two children wanted to see in the new play area.

Therefore, most responses were all from children under the age of 11, a key target audience of the consultation.

**Analysis of feedback about a new play space for Hawkhurst at the KGV
Playing fields
August 2020**

Of those respondents giving their ages	
Under 5 years	2
5-11 years	10
Over 11 years	4

Numbers responding to each question	
Question 1	14
Question 2: Part 1	15
Question 2: Part 2	18
Question 3	12
Question 4	15

Summary of Responses

Question 1: What is special to you about Hawkhurst?

Common themes in responses were:

1. A friendly place with a tranquil and village feel.
2. People liked being able to talk to people they know and local shopkeepers.
3. Real appreciation of open spaces in the village.
4. Real appreciation of the surrounding countryside especially being in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the wildlife found here.
5. One respondent was concerned that proposed new developments could severely impact on what people found special about Hawkhurst.

Question 2: Part 1: What do you like now about the play areas in Hawkhurst?

Children liked	Number of times mentioned
Slide	6
Roundabout/Merry go round	5
Swings	5
Climbing Frame	5
Horse	2
Seesaw	2
Mini - castle	1
Spinning games	1

Other comments

1. The slide had most comments. Two respondents said that the slide should be a bit lower for toddlers whilst one child wanted a wider slide so two could go down together.
2. People liked the fact that there are two play areas in Hawkhurst although the one at The Moor is preferred because it is “more fun”.

**Analysis of feedback about a new play space for Hawkhurst at the KGV
Playing fields
August 2020**

3. Respondents said how important a play area was for young families and play areas are used regularly.
4. There is enough space to run around in the play area and one respondent said they liked the fact there were things for older children in the play area.
5. Having the playing fields close by, trees for shade and toilets nearby were seen as big positives.

Question 2: Part 2: What else would you like to see?

One respondent did not answer this question.

Not surprisingly there were a great many ideas in answer to this question, some common themes are given below.

Most common play items asked for	Number of times mentioned
A zip wire Flimwell play area was cited as an excellent example of this. One respondent mentioned a Flying Fox which operates on a similar principle.	7
Obstacle course or trail Most responses were not specific, but respondents are indicating through this that having some problem solving/challenge items are important in play. One respondent said this should include balancing challenges, co-ordination elements and stepping stones.	4
Climbing structures and nets This combined with the responses about the climbing frame demonstrate that climbing is seen as an important component of play. One respondent summarised this as “more things to climb on or through”.	4
Big climbing frame Specifically for children of all ages – equipment that allowed all age groups to play together was mentioned more than once. The castle at Knockhatch was cited as a good example.	3
Big pirate ship Similar to the one at Bedgebury.	3
A Tunnel This could be standalone, but a couple of respondents asked for this to be through a “mud mound” and/or a mound over which children could ride their bikes.	3
Chunky wooden play fort/tower and wooden play equipment	2
Wendy house (with roundels)/Play House Calverley Park in Tunbridge Wells was cited as a great example.	2
Sand pit	2

**Analysis of feedback about a new play space for Hawkhurst at the KGV
Playing fields
August 2020**

Bowl was cited as a good example. Running water was also asked for combined with the sandpit and Calverley Park was again cited.	
Swings (more swings than currently)	2
A wide slide	2
<p>The following play items were mentioned once only in responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horse (please keep the one currently in the play area) • Roundabout • Mud Kitchen • Some sort of bridge • Willow hideout • Drum wheel (like the one at Bexhill on Sea) • Rope swing • Boats/cars for imaginative play • More things to climb on or through • Mini trampolines built into the floor • More items for under 3-year olds 	

In addition to specific play items, feedback also included “housekeeping” items such as:

- A water drinking fountain (encourage avoidance of single use plastic)
- More rubbish bins including re-cycling bins to teach children about re-cycling rubbish
- Picnic tables and benches which should include children size benches to encourage children to socially interact together sitting down. This could also be tree stack seats in a circle
- There should some areas offering shade.

Under this question a request for a skateboarding area and an outdoor adult gym (such as at Ticehurst) were also requested. One respondent asked for the return of a Tennis Court, but the refurbished Tennis Court is now open and was probably not ready when the questionnaire was completed.

Question 3: Tell us about the kind of games (not online) that you like to play on your own or with your friends – you can describe it, or you can draw us a picture or make a model.

Seven respondents did not answer this question.

Responses – Outside Play	Number of times mentioned
Climbing Frames	4
Chase games (including on bikes and scooters)	3
Playing on a scooter	3
Hide and seek	3

**Analysis of feedback about a new play space for Hawkhurst at the KGV
Playing fields
August 2020**

Slide	2
Tennis	2
Ball games	2
Football	2
These types of play were mentioned once only:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pirates/Treasure • Hiding treasure in a sandpit • Trampoline • Skateboard • Frisbee • UFO flyer games • Half pipe • Quarter ramp • Slide rails • Gym • Cycling • Obstacle course (balancing beam, cones, climbing elements, tunnels) • Playhouse/treehouse 	

Responses – Indoor Play	Number of times mentioned
Lego	2
Building games	2
Puzzle games	2
Board games	1
Connect 4/Jenga	1
The floor is lava	1

Question 4: Is there anything else you would like us to think about?

Four respondents did not answer this question

These items were mentioned twice:

- Area to ride bikes
- Skate park so older kids can play
- Areas of shade to shelter from sun

These items were mentioned once only:

- Giant see-saw like the one at Bedgebury
- Horse like the one already in current KGV play area
- Really big slide
- Seats for Mum and Dad
- Drinking water fountain
- Kid sized tables

Analysis of feedback about a new play space for Hawkhurst at the KGV Playing fields August 2020

Several other locations have been cited as good examples of play facilities. By far the most inspiring amongst respondents was Calverley Park in Tunbridge Wells. Bedgebury was mentioned more than once. Play areas at Battle and Ticehurst were signposted too. Maidstone Mote Park was given as an example where “little brothers and sisters can play too”. One respondent said they liked what they had at Drusilla’s Park although this is a theme park and probably a little too ambitious for this particular project.

Other comments concern the general environment of the play area such as:

- Ensuring disabled access (this is a legal requirement)
- Ensure there is a variety of equipment accessible for all ages
- Use sustainable materials for the play area as far as possible
- Ensure appropriate soft ground surface especially under equipment where there is risk of falling or tripping
- Use the area to highlight artwork made by children, for an example, an art wall or sculptures by a local artist that children could paint.

Conclusion

Constructing a new play area is never easy as all the desires and wants of the children who will play there can’t be accommodated. The key constraints usually include; budget, space, safety and design. For example, children love playing by and with water, but to have a moving water feature in a play area is often very costly and high maintenance.

Disability is an important consideration, not only for access but to ensure that at least some of the equipment can facilitate play for disabled children.

Feedback has also included the desire for areas where bikes can be ridden and there is skateboarding. These would need to be separate areas as there will not be sufficient space to accommodate these activities in the new play area and they would need to be kept separate anyway from other equipment to prevent accidents to other children. Thought needs to be given about building these types of play spaces into future plans of the Parish Council, especially as there is little dedicated space for teenagers in Hawkhurst.

The consultation has highlighted that children really like slides, swings, merry go rounds and climbing frames. Climbing and obstacle type play equipment is often requested with the most popular wish to have a zip wire. The new play area provides an excellent opportunity to update and increase the variety of play equipment. Not all equipment needs to be complex or expensive. For example, imaginative play and obstacle type play can be accommodated through simple, low maintenance equipment. Having equipment for all ages groups is also seen as key and this is likely to be welcomed by parents who are much more likely to use the area if they can take all their children to the play area at the same time, especially when they are younger. Visiting some of the play areas cited in the consultation will be important to help formulate ideas for the new play area in Hawkhurst. One of the respondents very

**Analysis of feedback about a new play space for Hawkhurst at the KGV
Playing fields
August 2020**

helpfully signposted the following website to assist with the principles of playground design.

Website:

<https://playgroundideas.org/10-principles-of-playground-design/>

A new play area is an exciting opportunity to increase amenity in the village and based on use of the current play area on KGV is likely to be very popular in Hawkhurst.

Report compiled by David Veale 21st August 2020.
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