

Northleach Play Area Project



Background

Northleach is a small rural market town with a population of about 1,850. There is poor access to services, with very few activities available for children and young people in the town.

One of the few activities for children locally is the play area on the King George V Playing Field. It contains traditional swings, slides, climbing frames, rockers and some picnic benches. The play area is well used by parents and children, especially on a sunny afternoon after school.

In spite of its popularity, the equipment is very old and outdated. The current Council is not sure exactly how old, but it is thought to be at least 25 years old. It compares unfavourably to modern play areas elsewhere, which provide more stimulating physical and creative challenges.

In 2013, the annual health and safety check on the play area revealed that the large metal climbing frame was at the end of its life and it has since been removed. The report also noted that the rest of the equipment was old and due for replacement. There is now some urgency required in the refurbishment of the play area.

The Town Council has now formed a small project group to work out a detailed plan for improvement and expansion of the play area, by consulting with local people and with equipment providers on the design and scope of new equipment, and then raising the necessary funds to make the project a reality.

Cllr. Pauline Rigby, Cat Crompton & Mary Cassidy

23 March 2014

“My father painted the play area nearly 20 years ago and it has hardly been touched since... We probably have the worst play area in the county and action needs to be taken.”

Comment by local resident

“There are so many children in Northleach and every day mine make a beeline for the playground, but in reality, there isn't really that much there for them to play on - most of it resembles scaffolding!”

Comment by local resident

Project stages – Progress to date

Public survey and feedback ✓

Design new play area with advice from suppliers

Selection of the preferred design in consultation with the local community

Apply for funding

Install in phases, as funding allows

Public survey

SURVEY DISTRIBUTION AND RESPONSE

In February 2014 a survey was distributed to the children and young people in Northleach asking them what kinds of activities they would most like to undertake in the play area, and general comments on how they think the facility could be improved.

Over 200 paper surveys were delivered via the mother and toddler group (30 copies) and the primary school (180 copies). The survey was also available to download from the Town Council website www.northleach.gov.uk. It was promoted on the community email list, via the community newsletter and on a local Facebook group.

We asked children to complete the survey, with help from parents if necessary. Surveys could be returned to collection boxes in the school or in the Westwoods Community Centre. We also received comments from parents via email and the website.

The response rate was very good. Over 100 responses were received, mainly from the 4 – 7 and 8 – 10 age groups – the age groups best targeted by the survey distribution at the primary school. In these age groups, the response rate was better than 50 percent.

Based on 2011 Census Data, we estimate there are around 375 children and young people under the age of 18 living in the town, which equals an overall response rate of about 30 percent.

The 11 – 16 age group was under-represented in the survey responses and we are considering other ways to get feedback from this group.

KEY FINDINGS

Children were asked to tick a box representing their age group and to rate the following activities on a scale of one to five:

Balancing, Climbing, Rocking, Sliding, Spinning, Swinging, Training, and Gathering.

Five points were allocated to activities the children liked best, four points to the next, and so on. Where activities were not rated at all, they received no points. Then the points were totted up to give a picture of their favourite activities.

The results are summarised in the table:

Age Group	No. Responses	Most Liked Activity	Second Liked Activity	Third Liked Activity	Least Liked Activity
1 – 3	15	Sliding	Swinging	Rocking	Training
4 – 7	47	Sliding	Climbing	Swinging	Training
8 – 10	29	Climbing	Training	Spinning	Gathering
11 – 16	9	Training	Climbing	Balancing	Rocking
No age given	4	-			-
Overall	104	Climbing	Swinging	Sliding	Rocking

There was also a space for children to suggest any other activity they would like to do.

The most popular “other” activity was the zip wire, which was requested by 12 respondents. Six respondents said they would like a “themed” play area for role play, such as a pirate ship, castle or house. Three respondents said they would like to bounce on a trampoline. Outdoor gym equipment for older children was also suggested.

COMMENTS

A number of comments were received. Generally these reinforced the need for new equipment, as the current equipment is old and some respondents felt it was not up to modern safety standards.

Respondents pointed out that the current equipment is not suitable for very young children, and would like new equipment to cater for a wider range of ages but on the same site, so that parents can supervise all their children at the same time.

ALL COMMENTS

<p>Prefers metal equipment to wooden Loves the play area location at Northleach Would stay longer, buy coffee, cakes, if there was more to stay for!</p>
<p>Some play areas in Oxfordshire are amazing; they have built in trampolines in the ground as well as the other usual climbing equipment. It is about time Northleach caught up with other counties. The current playground is dated and unsafe.</p>
<p>It would also be nice to have one area for older children and one for younger children, perhaps slightly separated to discourage young children from running off and going onto something inappropriate age wise.</p>
<p>I think we would really benefit from an all weather surface at the park</p>
<p>Need a wide range of activity play for all ages as most families have 2+ children. Families want somewhere to relax and enjoy and have fun in a safe area.</p>
<p>Needs something more for little ones - and for them to be in an area that is safe for them to be around bigger ones as well. Also something for older children i.e. 14+ skate park, goal posts etc.</p>
<p>Really good parks are Broadway. We would stay in town and use facilities if they were better</p>
<p>My father painted the play area nearly 20 years ago and has hardly been touched since. Both councils should be very ashamed of themselves as we probably have the worst play area in the county and action needs to be taken.</p>
<p>Something with a nice mixture of activities for children of different ages. If you have two children of different ages/abilities you need to be able to see them both so not an area that's too large. Very frustrating taking children to the park, everything is too big (too old) for them to safely play on. Safe surfaces to play on – such as the park in Cirencester. Both my children have hit their heads on the lump of concrete at the bottom of the slide. I hope these improvements take place before our children outgrow the park – it is desperately overdue!</p>
<p>Something that can take children from one year up to and including teenagers. Outdoor gym for teenagers/adults is brilliant. Encourage activity/fitness/fun at all ages. The park in Broadway is AMAZING! Would absolutely love something like this. We drive there for the children to play quite often. If we had a park like this people would come to Northleach for the same reason. Making it all weather-proof is a great thing i.e. flooring not grass as this gets the equipment muddy in wet weather. Can we increase the size of the plot? As Northleach has grown, the park maybe hasn't... And in nice weather there just isn't the space. Definitely would want the play area for all ages on one site (otherwise as a parent you can't watch them all).</p>
<p>It would be nice if there were things adults could participate in.</p>

Look forward to helping and supporting this cause as have three children that love play areas but sadly get bored very quickly with what we have to offer at the moment. Also for when kids older, basketball court netball or skateboard park, possibly up by Westwoods. Looking at future and next development.

The play area is very limited. I think it should not only be extended but divided into 2 areas.
Toddlers – 9 yrs
10 yrs plus.
Apart from the swings the equipment is very poor and unimaginative.
A visit to the new Charles Church estate would be a good idea. It is situated on the the other side of the by-pass on the way into Cirencester.
Equipment should encourage children to be adventurous.

A large number of comments about the play area were received in response to the Robinson's "readyforten" campaign to improve playgrounds in 2011.

<http://readyforten.com/parents-for-playgrounds/1/stages/1/candidates/1045>

[Unfortunately, this website has been taken offline since this report was written.]