



# *Parish of Castle Heddingham*

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**CASTLE HEDDINGHAM RECREATION FIELD  
MINUTES OF A PUBLIC MEETING, MONDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2019  
7.30 PM MEMORIAL HALL, CASTLE HEDDINGHAM**

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**Present:**

**Castle Heddingham Parish Council:**

Cllrs Hood, Moffat, Philp, Scrivens, Southgate, Worley, Toocaram, Veater

**Heddingham Castle:**

Mr Jason Lindsay & Mrs Demetra Lindsay

**In the Chair:** Cllr Southgate

**Clerk:** Claire Waters

**Also Present:** Approximately 50 parishioners

**1. Apologies for Non-Attendance.**

District Cllr Hylton Johnson apologised for absence due to a Braintree District Council Budget meeting. Mr Guy Pewter apologised for non-attendance and submitted a question.

**2. Introduction and welcome by the Chairman of Castle Heddingham Parish Council**

Good evening ladies & gentlemen and thank you for attending this evening.

Can I from the outset state this meeting is the opportunity to discuss the future of the proposed site for a community open space next to the Memorial Hall, which is being made available by Heddingham Castle. We are not here to discuss any future plans that may or may not be put forward for the land at New Park as this is a totally separate issue.

This meeting has come about after decades of stalemates and inactions during which time our village has not had a playground fit for purpose. Following discussions with Heddingham Castle we were formally served notice last year to vacate the New Park site. Part of the council's legal obligations was to clear the site and remove the existing equipment.

After taking legal advice regarding our position and looking at all possible options, the Council has come to an amicable agreement with Heddingham Castle to ensure that the village will have a playground area. This agreement gives our village an immense opportunity for the future and I hope we are able to take it and move forward.

**3. Statement on behalf of Castle Heddingham Parish Council**

by Cllr Trevor Hood, Chair of the Playing Field Committee

As Garry has said, this meeting is to look at a proposal to install new play facilities at the site of the old allotments, the alternative location offered by Heddingham Castle following the closure of the existing site.

In fact this would be part of a large area, maintained by the Parish Council, and open to the whole community, which is formed by the whole of the old allotments site with the exception of that part which fronts Church Lane. This area is within the village envelope and will be retained by the Castle for possible future development.

Any plans will be subject to public consultation, and any objections and concerns will be given due consideration during this process. We will assess any health and safety concerns, such as the overhead lines that cross the area, and the security of those using the site. We will also seek input

from relevant organizations and village groups about what equipment would be best suited to our needs.

So, this will not be a speedy process. Following the public consultation process we will need to apply for grants in order to maximize the potential for the whole site, and provide best value for public money. We will need to put the work out to tender, and apply for planning permission before we can commission the work to begin. I cannot provide a timescale at the moment, but I think we should be prepared for a period of twelve months before we have a new playground, and that assumes that we can overcome any hurdles, and planning permission is granted.

It is unfortunate that we will have a period without play facilities, but the granting of the new lease was dependant on our vacating the existing site. If we try and rush this through we could miss a wonderful chance to make the most of this opportunity, we have to get it absolutely right from the start.

I want to emphasize that absolutely nothing has yet been decided other than to accept the offer of a lease over the new site. Even if it was clear that the majority of the village were against the playground being put on this site, we would have to properly consider that view and potentially end up with nothing. There is no alternative land in the village that we can use, nothing else has been offered, and none exists in the centre of the village, which is where this needs to be. Although we would expect the initial play equipment to be designed for younger children, we have other ideas for the future that may include some facilities for older children, outdoor exercise equipment, and a community allotment. We would not necessarily envisage levelling the land, the area is too small to allow for a football pitch, and the undulating nature of the land may be considered part of its attraction. We also need to be respectful of any archeological importance of the site. We would fence the playground area, but probably not the rest of the site, other than to prevent the unauthorized use of vehicles. Pet dogs would continue to be welcome except in the playground area, subject of course to being under control and clearing of any fouling.

It has not been possible to transfer any of the existing equipment to the new site as it fails to meet current safety guidelines. This includes the rocket, of which we are well aware of understandable local sentiments attached to it. Modern equipment offers so much more in terms of play value, and we want it to be exciting and accessible so all children can play together including those with disabilities and special needs. I want to make it clear that the old equipment was regularly tested and safe, but once moved it has to meet modern standards.

Other ideas discussed at a casual level include the possible extension to the car park, and approaching the Club to open for refreshments to park users. As I have said, everything is open to public consultation and scrutiny.

There are some visualisations available tonight to see what the new playground might look like. Again I would emphasise that we have not decided, or even considered what equipment we might have, these are just random selections provided by a potential supplier to provide some rough ideas. Please do look at them to see what could be done, and what improvement is possible over the old playground.

We believe that this is a golden opportunity to the first class facilities that this community and its children deserve.

#### **4. Public Forum: To invite the public to raise any matters of interest**

##### **Matters raised:**

- 4.1** Can we ask BDC for the use of their land at New Park for a play area?
- 4.2** Can we revisit that option and ask BDC again?
- 4.3** Can we find out what it would cost to buy the BDC land? By leasing land we are only pushing the problem to the next generation.
- 4.4** Did we approach Hedingham Castle and ask if they would sell us the land at New Park? We could raise the money as a village.
- 4.5** Concerns expressed about taking away an existing park and nothing else being available for maybe 12 months.
- 4.6** What about buying the allotment field?
- 4.7** Who will be involved with choosing any new play equipment?
- 4.8** Which bit of the old allotment field is being leased to the Parish Council?
- 4.9** Concern was expressed about the suitability of the old allotment field, with undulating land, overhead electric cables.

- 4.10 BDC stated that recreation areas would be protected and this has happened in other villages but not in Castle Hedingham. We are picked on because of the land BDC owns at New Park. Any planning application on that land will be considered and decided on by BDC as the planning authority
- 4.11 The land at the old allotments forms part of the old Norman defence network. Archaeological sites of importance such as this are protected under the Valetta Agreement which forms part of European Council regulations.
- 4.12 If we are to use the old allotment field, let's make it a real community area, such as exists in Chappel
- 4.13 Some of us would welcome housing development in the village as long as it is the right type of housing. The kids who play today will want to live in the village eventually
- 4.14 Concerns over security of the area by the Memorial Hall and Club. Will we have CCTV?
- 4.15 Will additional parking be part of the plans? Many elderly people drive to the Club and need to be able to park
- 4.16 If this is the only option, please get it done sooner rather than later. Also please increase the size of the car parking area as this would be an advantage to the whole village
- 4.17 Let us make the most of this opportunity and get on with it as quickly as possible. We can learn from other local parks.
- 4.18 How does the Parish Council plan to involve people in contributing to the design of the open space?
- 4.19 Is the land going to be surveyed before plans are finalised?

## **5. Summary of responses by subject:**

### **5.1 BDC land at New Park**

The Parish Council has repeatedly asked BDC for use of their land as a play area and the answer is always "No". BDC has clear policies about the proportion of open space and Castle Hedingham does not meet the minimum requirements but BDC has been very obstructive and won't budge on the issue. The Parish Council has not given up on this option and continues to believe the BDC land at New Park could be used as a play area. If a planning application is submitted for the land at New Park, residents and the Parish Council will be free to view it on its merits and support or object accordingly.

### **5.2 Removal of play equipment from New Park**

The Parish Council was given legal advice not to fight the lease of the land at New Park and was given notice to quit the New Park site last year. A new 25 year lease is being prepared for the old allotment field. This has been negotiated amicably with Hedingham Castle and was dependent on the Parish Council vacating the New Park site. While it is extremely regrettable that the village will be without play equipment for a while, it was a legal requirement in the terms of the New Park lease that the equipment was removed. Although it was ROSPA inspected annually and deemed safe in its New Park location, it could not be moved as it would suffer damage. It would be also assessed against the standards required for modern equipment if moved to a new location and would fail. Parish Councillors are sympathetic to the disappointment of families with young children. Some have grown up with the recreation field at New Park, had children of their own play there and some of them have grandchildren who live in the village.

### **5.3 Possible purchase of old allotment field**

The old allotment field is currently not for sale. A 25 year lease has been negotiated and agreed with Hedingham Castle and is long enough for the Parish Council to apply for funding towards play equipment. The area of land being offered is the section outside the village envelope so under current planning policy is unsuitable for housing development. A lease on this land is therefore less under threat as a community open space and the lease could be renegotiated in the future.

### **5.4 Plans for use of the old allotment field and consultation with residents**

The Parish Council intends to consult with all residents about possible uses for the open space. This may include an open day with activities to enable children to put their views.

Consultation with relevant local groups, school etc. is planned. Safety concerns will be taken seriously and the police asked for advice on security. CCTV will be considered.

**5.5 Comments and suggestions from members of the public (some in open forum, some contributed via post-it notes available at the back of the hall)**

- A longer lease is required
- Seek village business sponsorship
  
- Involve the children by approaching school, cubs, brownies etc.
- Daytime consultation sessions to allow maximum attendance
- Plan the consultation to make it fun and educate the children about democracy
- Present snapshots of other local parks to help the children choose
- Learn from other local parks
  
- Sensory play equipment
- “Birds nest” swing – disability accessible items
- Future phases for older children
- Some equipment for older children would be great. We should provide for as wide an age range as possible. Also they would probably congregate there anyway and it would save the risk of the younger children’s equipment being broken by too heavy teenagers
- May need a longer slide for older kids
- Ridgewell have a really good mix with a central feature (pirate ship)
- It would good if the central feature could be a castle to tie in with the village’s heritage
- Although the ground is not level it would be great if there was space for some basketball hoops
- Giant chess and draughts games would be brilliant for all ages
- Weatherproof table tennis tables
  
- Some adult size exercise equipment would be brilliant
- Include memorial garden to create community hub
- A seating area with nature reserve type area
- Plant plenty of trees
- Consider noise disturbance
- Increase parking space
- Consider the needs of the users of the Club and Hall

**6. Closing statement by the Chairman of Castle Hedingham Parish Council**

Cllr Southgate thanked everyone for attending and sharing their views. He reminded everyone that there is a local election on May 2<sup>nd</sup> when new prospective Parish Councillors are welcome to stand for election.

Suggestions and comments are always welcome to be sent to the Parish Clerk at [castlehedinghamparishclerk@gmail.com](mailto:castlehedinghamparishclerk@gmail.com). Residents are also welcome to attend any Parish Council meeting which are normally held at Castle Hedingham Club in Church Lane on the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of every month (or 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday when there is a bank holiday).

The next ordinary Parish Council meeting is on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March. The Annual Parish Assembly will be held on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May in the Memorial Hall. Everyone is welcome.

**The meeting closed at 9pm**