

**THE FRANK MONTGOMERY PLAYING FIELD TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
EXTRAORDINARY MEETING MINUTES HELD ON 09 APRIL 2025 AT 6.00PM IN
WICKHAMBREAUX VILLAGE HALL, THE STREET, WICKHAMBREAUX**

Present: Linda Lodge
Caroline Rees (C.Rees)
Elizabeth Stewart
Charles Rees (CH. Rees)

Chenice Howard-Sparkes, Secretary

25 Members of the Public

1. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

L. Lodge welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Mary (Family Commitments) and Paul Mills (Other Commitments).

2. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED EQUIPMENT

C. Rees provided a brief background on why a MUGA is being proposed and what action has been taken to date.

Back in 2022, the Committee consulted with children and teenagers using the playing field what additional facilities they would like. The feedback received was for a roundabout and a goal/basketball hoop. Following this feedback, an all-inclusive roundabout was installed in the playing field in 2022, which has been very well received by users.

With regards to the MUGA, the Committee has been busy fundraising, submitting grant applications and meeting with contractors to obtain quotations. The prices originally obtained in 2022 to give an idea of the amount needed to be fundraised have increased substantially, and prices are due to increase again from May 2025.

C. Rees has attended the playing field on several occasions and at various times of the day to speak to parents and children to ask the best location in their opinion. The School has also been consulted to ask their opinion as they use the field often, including for sports day. All residents bordering the field have been written to inviting them to attend the meeting this evening asking for feedback. The meeting has also been advertised on the Parish Council website and on social media, encouraging as much feedback as possible. C. Rees wished to thank everyone in attendance for taking the time to attend the meeting and to those who have sent feedback prior to the meeting.

The main factors to consider when deciding whether to proceed with the installation of a MUGA and, if so, where the best position would be are as follows:

1. Safety of the younger children using the play equipment.
2. Safety of children using the MUGA with regards to the risk of balls going into the road.
3. Disturbance to residents bordering the field, including noise disturbance and the risk of balls going into gardens.
4. Ensuring the best location is chosen to get the most out of the item (direction of the sun, where the children play the most now, etc).
5. The Nature Area remaining a quieter space.
6. Not restricting the use of the whole open space of the playing field when considering other events, for example School sports day and community events.

3. FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A summary of the points raised at the meeting are as follows:

Facilities in the Local Vicinity

Littlebourne already has facilities for older children which local children could visit. It was raised that there is no safe road for children to get to Littlebourne on their own from the parish. There are no facilities in Ickham so many local children from Ickham use the facilities in Wickhambreaux.

Alternative Suggestions

As the zip wire is arguably the most popular piece of play equipment, a suggestion was made to either install another zip wire (which is used by older children too) or create an undulating area for bikes for older children instead. This suggestion was not discussed further during the meeting.

Need for Equipment

The provision and sense of community for younger children appears well catered for in the parish. However, there is a gap in provision for young teenagers once they become 'too old' to use the play equipment. By installing a MUGA or similar piece of equipment, this will build continuity for families in the parish and further afield.

It was acknowledged that the benefit to teenagers in the parish needs to be considered against the potential disadvantages to ensure that this is the right decision for the community as a whole.

Children of primary school age are learning basketball and netball skills so a MUGA will also benefit them. It was however noted that in most MUGA designs the basketball hoops tend to be too high for younger children.

Use of Playing Field by Children Outside of the Parish

It was acknowledged that families from across the Canterbury area and beyond visit the play area. Whilst the playing field is open for everyone to use, not just residents, there were concerns that a MUGA could increase the number of outside visitors and therefore the number of vehicles parked in close proximity. It was noted that some vehicles are left by dog walkers visiting the area rather than users of the playing field.

Use of Playing Field Outside of Opening Hours

There continues to be issues with users of the playing field staying after 8pm when the field should be shut, especially in the summer months. Concerns were expressed that a MUGA will encourage users, especially teenagers, to stay in the playing field after 8pm. C. Rees volunteered to be point of contact for residents to call to enforce the 8pm closing time as required.

Potential Increase in Anti-Social Behaviour and Noise Disturbance

Whilst problems of anti-social behaviour remain low compared to other play area facilities, there have been incidents in the past including young people smoking cannabis, damage to fencing where children try to retrieve balls from resident gardens, urinating through resident fences, and general noise disturbance (especially in the summer months and outside of opening hours). There were concerns this could all increase with the provision of a MUGA.

Alternative views were expressed that having a MUGA could have a positive impact on anti-social behaviour. Teenagers engaged with sport are arguably less likely to commit anti-social behaviour like taking drugs, and having a MUGA to aim at could reduce the number of balls being kicked into resident gardens. It was also raised that the majority of the playing field users who are respectful should not be penalised due to a small minority.

Additional signage was suggested to limit ball games until 7pm and to ask children not to urinate in problem areas. Any signage would need to be enforced, and C. Rees volunteered to be 'on call' to local residents to respond to any anti-social behaviour and users in the playing field after closing time. The Parish Council is exploring having a Caretaker, who could take on the role of opening and closing the playing field and assisting with enforcement.

L. Lodge encouraged all residents and users of the playing field to report any anti-social behaviour to Kent Police, either online or using the 101 phone number. Any threats to safety should use the 999 phone number. Wickhambreaux is considered a low crime area by Kent Police and therefore there are not active patrols like in other 'problem' areas. The more incidents that are formally reported, the more likely Kent Police will allocate resources to Wickhambreaux to address problems.

CCTV

A suggestion was raised to install CCTV at the playing field. C. Rees and L. Lodge advised that a survey was carried out previously but the playing field was deemed unsuitable for CCTV. The main barriers were GDPR/safeguarding issues, lack of power and high costs.

Future Projects

A question was raised whether there are any future projects in the pipeline for the playing field. C. Rees confirmed there are no other projects planned.

4. PREFERRED CONTRACTOR AND LOCATION

Four contractors have provided quotations; Sutcliffe Play, Commercial Play, Play Cubed and Playdale. None of the contractors have provided a hardstanding surface at the request of the Committee to minimise noise disturbance from bouncing balls. It was noted that the materials used by Sutcliffe Play help to dampen noise further compared to the other contractors, which would be better for neighbouring residents. CH. Rees proposed and E. Stewart seconded, and all voted in favour, that Sutcliffe Play be the preferred contractor.

Four possible locations were identified following discussions with specialist companies as follows:

1. 13m from the boundary fence at the southern end.
2. Between vehicle gate and first bench along the road boundary fence facing East.
3. Between second bench from vehicle gate and large cluster of trees in adjacent strip on road boundary.
4. Between large cluster of trees in adjacent strip and last bench on road boundary.

Currently, makeshift goals by users of the field are positioned near Option 1. In terms of safety of users of both the play equipment and a MUGA should it be installed due to the close proximity of the road, Option 1 is arguably the better option. Impact on the majority of neighbouring residents would also arguably be less with Option 1 as it should direct footballs away from most of their boundary fences. It was acknowledged that one neighbouring resident whose boundary would be behind the MUGA with this option could be disproportionately affected compared to the others.

C. Rees asked for a show of hands which members of the public present would be in support of Option 1. 18 people voted in favour, three against with four abstentions.

In consideration of the points above and the public vote, on balance L. Lodge proposed and E. Stewart seconded, and all voted in favour, that Option 1 be the preferred option.

5. **PERMISSION FROM PARISH COUNCIL**

As owners of the Frank Montgomery Playing Field, the Parish Council has the final decision on whether to proceed with the installation of a MUGA and, if so, which contractor to appoint and the positioning.

The Playing Field Committee will be making the above recommendations under Item 04 to the Parish Council at its next meeting on Tuesday 15 April 2025 at 7.30pm in Wickhambreaux Village Hall. Attendees at the meeting were invited to attend the Parish Council meeting as well should they wish to address councillors with their views and hear the discussions/debate.

L. Lodge wished to stress that should the Parish Council agree with the recommendations and proceed with the installation of a MUGA, the Committee will actively monitor the situation and liaise with Kent Police and other relevant parties to minimise disruption to local residents and tackle any problems.

The meeting closed at 6.58pm

Signed..... (Chairman)

Date.....