STILTON PARISH COUNCIL

REPORT ON THE USE OF THE PLAYING FIELD FOR AN UNDER 12'S PLAYGROUND

1. Views from the village on the three short-listed sites proposed for the under-12's children's playground (primary age) had a number of suggestions to use the village playing field. The Parish Council had previously discounted that site, in agreement with recommendations from its Amenities Management Committee (AMC) and the Sub-committee on Children's and Youth's Amenities. It concurred that the playing field is not centrally located, is remote, and of a size making it difficult to accommodate a fenced playground. The Parish Council agrees that equipment suitable for youths (12+ years) could, and indeed should, be placed in a separate area such as the playing field; this is described in outline in section 3 (below) and will be the subject of future exercise (Stilton Playground, Phase 2).

2. However, since there were suggestions to reconsider the issue, the Parish Council has revisited its decision and has prepared a more in-depth evaluation. For this, it has not only looked back on information previously gathered for earlier reports and but has consulted with two playground providers. It has also sought guidance from relevant Internet sites, including RoSPA and Ipswich Borough Council's comprehensive Play Area Strategy.

3. **Site description** Although the largest area of green space in the village unallocated space within the playing field is limited. As seen from the satellite pictures (Figures 1a and 1b), football pitches (senior, colts and junior) occupy most of the available space. It should be noted that the pitches are subject to being moved North to South to enable recovery of excessively worn areas.

The remaining areas include: a skate park (area A on the satellite image); an area already planned to be fenced for use with the Pavilion facilities (area B); an area reserved as the only possibility for extending the Pavilion storage, and providing outside toilets and additional football facilities (area F); and, a relatively small area over the foul water tank previously earmarked for a youth club building (area D).

In addition, area C should be kept clear to provide access for field maintenance equipment and area E for access for football teams between the changing rooms and football pitches. Area J was planned as a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) when sufficient funds become available, though this will require some of the football pitches to overlap. Area J could be used for other purposes if funds for a MUGA were not forthcoming, however, the Parish Council is keen to retain this area for the future; a MUGA would provide all-weather facilities for netball, five-a-side football and other games.

Area E is available for alternative use though this is only about 220 square metres since there must be a 3-metre "run-off" from the football pitch and allowing 1 metre distance from the roadway/patio. This area would require high fences to protect children from footballs from the football pitch. Area H, a raised area consisting of spoil from the Pavilion foundations, is also available for use; this would need much preparation to make it usable though it could be considered for Phase 2 of the play area plan as it might be made suitable for older children and adults. It should be noted that for general recreational purposes there is always a significant part of the field not being used for football matches since all three pitches are never in use at the same time.

4. School children and the School Council. In October 2019, a member of the Working Group for Children's and Youth's Amenities (requested by the Parish Council to plan for the playground) was invited by the Head Teacher of the school to a School Council meeting. This meeting was to discuss the children's views and suggestions for a new play area for Stilton. Children throughout the school had previously discussed the topic in their classrooms sharing their views and ideas. Their class representatives (2 from each year group) then met in the School Council meeting to bring together all those views and discuss the children's proposals for a play area. The Working Group member was able to listen to the views expressed and noted the suggestions and conclusions reached by the children. Their enthusiasm and mature attitude to developing the playground was most impressive. The children were particularly concerned about safety aspects and adequate signage. In addition, they were especially keen that the play equipment was suitable for a range of ages up to 12 years and, where possible, was accessible for those with disabilities. The location was discussed and all children reported support for a playground near the centre of the village where they could walk. One child noted personally that she felt the need for some play equipment on the playing field when her older siblings were playing football. The Parish Council took special note of all these views and agreed to give them due weight. Such consideration is appropriate as being in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [1].

5. Safety and security. This is an important aspect of site selection so the Parish Council have sought advice from Wicksteed and Streetscape, major providers of playground equipment. Of particular importance they stressed the value of having a playground within the village, and not remote, to ensure safety of children and play equipment. This is consistent with **RoSPA's play area design recommendation that a playground "must be easily visible to ensure children's social safety and reduce vandalism".** They also noted the requirement for high fencing where a play area is located adjacent to the likes of football pitches.

Even more importantly, the Parish Council considers that the playing field near the Pavilion, being outside the built up area, could be vulnerable for young children as it is not visible to passers by most of the time. The nearest house is some 300 metres away and the new

[1] "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ratified by the UK in 1991.

development will not be much closer. Although young children are likely to be accompanied by a carer when visiting a play area, safety concerns for young children, voiced in some of the comments made in responses to the Council's leaflet inviting views on locating the playground, have been recognised by the PC. The Parish Council agrees that the wellbeing and safety of the Under-12's is of paramount importance and that the playing field is not the most viable option for this age group.

6. Walking distance to a playground. Guidance from the representatives of playground suppliers has suggested that the playground should be sited within 5-10 minutes walking for most users. The Six Acre Standard (Table 1) recommends a walking distance of 400 metres for a Local Equipped Play Area (LEAP) – which is the size of play area the Parish Council is aiming to construct. From the Pavilion even a 500metre zone (see Figure 2) would barely extend across the most southern part of the village and would not include Oak Road, Church Street and the northern end of Church Close. The Parish Council are of the opinion that the playground should be within easy walking distance for most of the village. Clearly the playing field does not meet that requirement.

7. Stilton Playground, Phase 2. While space at the playing field is limited, making the provision of a fenced-off playground difficult, the Parish Council fully intends to make use of the playing field for Phase 2 of its plans for the village. In this, provision of exercise (trim trail) and play equipment (e.g. zip wire) for older children and adults can be distributed around the field whilst avoiding interference with the football pitches. There is not the need for fencing equipment for older children. Research has shown that young persons are prepared to walk about 15 minutes (more than 700 metres) to reach a designated site, so a more distant location, such as the playing field is more appropriate for this age group. As soon as the playground for the under-12's is built, the Parish Council will turn its attention to plans for the playing field. It already has a fund for bringing the young people of Stilton together and canvassing their views on what they would like to see in the village. This will be done as soon as the current situation on Covid-19 allows. Taking note of the child on the School Council and some comments made in responses from the village survey, the Council is considering providing some equipment that might also be suitable for the under 12s.

8. Conclusions.

Taking all of the above into account, on the basis of risk-benefit the Parish Council has decided not to take forward the option of placing the playground for the under-12's on the playing field. It stresses that, as outlined in 3 above, it fully intends to make recreational facilities for older children and adults on the playing field as soon as funding permits.

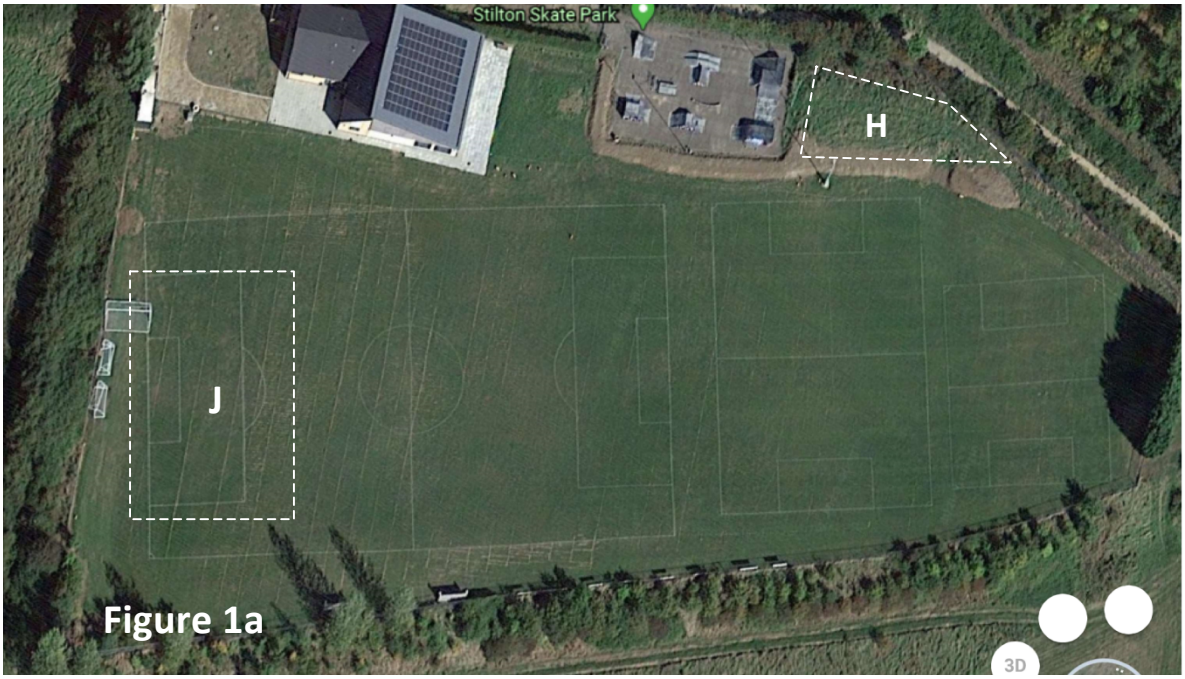
Table 1

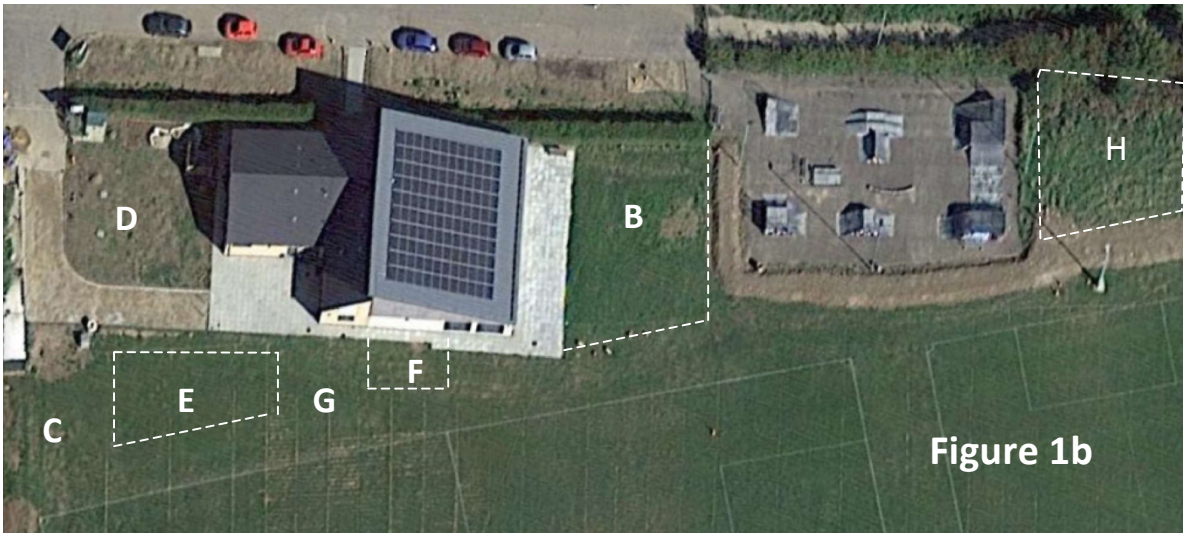
The Six Acre Standard

The National Playing Fields Association's recommended minimum levels of provision for different types of facility:

Facility	Time	Walking distance	Radial distance	Minimum size	Nearest dwelling	Characteristics
LAP Local Area for Play	1 min	100m	60m	100m^2	5m from activity zone	Small, low-key games area
LEAP Local Equipped Area for Play	5 min	400m	240m	400m^2	10m from activity zone	Five types of equipment, small games area
NEAP Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play	15 min	1,000m	600m	1,000m^2	30m from activity zone	Eight types of equipment, opportunities for ball games or wheeled activities

Source: Ipswich Borough Council Play Area Strategy 2014-21





Figures 1a and 1b. Satellite images of Stilton playing field (east is to the top of the images) showing areas earmarked for future development (for key see text).


Figure 2
Fen Drove
Fen St
Oak Rd
High St
North St
Church St
Church Close
Stilton
Mill Rd
Norman Dr
Walnut Way
St Mary's Rd
Caldecote Rd
500-metre circle
from Pavilion
Washingley Rd