Confidential report - Playground concerns- Version 2

Capital Commitment

SPC has £20,132.60 in its Capital account. There is £15,000 of the £35,000 loan owed to capital in the current account, leaving £20,000 outstanding but no credible way of paying that back at the moment. The PC has not paid the £15,000 back in case it may be needed again. PC finances are under stress with reduced Pavilion income under Covid-19 restrictions (Tier 4) and an inadequate level of reserves (hence using capital funds as a safety net.)

Reserves:	FY20-21	FY21-22	Adequate
	£16,152.55	£21,152.55	**£60,000.00**

Capital works authorised this financial year include £900.00 on plumbing at the Pavilion and new signs at a cost of £915.00. This is due to be withdrawn from capital this financial year (subject to a minimum £2,000.00 spend.) The new playground will require match funding of £10,000 under current plans.

Account:	Balance:	Payments:	Receipts:	Balance:
Capital	£20,132.60	£2,000.00		
		£10,000.00		**£8,132.60**

There can be no doubt that spending £10,000.00 from capital places the Parish Council in a vulnerable position when the £35,000.00 continues to be outstanding, future income is uncertain and general reserves are low. Selling of other PC assets has not been approved.

Cost

The playground account has £48,721.25 in it with some loose change to be added so circa £48,800.00 plus the £10,000 capital match funding giving a balance of £58,800.00. Cllr J Leonard provided an estimate of £61,215.00 for the playground build at Gala Close. Cllr Angus has provided a further costing of £51,552.00 for a base scheme at GC and £59,604.00 with all items included.

GALA CLOSE PROJECTED COSTS

Playground costs est:	Playground fund:	Match funding:	Total available:	Balance:
£61,215.00	£48,800.00	£10,000.00	£58,800.00	**-£2,415.00**
£51,552.00	£48,800.00	£10,000.00	£58,800.00	**£7,248.00**
£59,604.00	£48,800.00	£10,000.00	£58,800.00	**-£804.00**

The Parish Council could renovate Barn Close play area. The cost for this option is below with Cllr Angus projecting £45,918.00 (base option) and £53,805.00 for the all-inclusive scheme.

BARN CLOSE PROJECTED COSTS

Playground costs est:	Playground fund:	Match funding:	Total available:	Balance:
£45,918.00	£48,800.00	£10,000.00	£58,800.00	**£12,882.00**
£53,805.00	£48,800.00	£10,000.00	£58,800.00	**£4,995.00**

RoSPA report

Concern from residents has highlighted the lack of a RoSPA report to be able to explain why the Pavilion playing field has been omitted from the narrowed site selection. In order to be able to provide concerned residents with an expert opinion as to the unsuitability of the playing field or indeed, suitability of Gala Close, there would be a cost of £395.00 for one report or £450 + VAT for both.

In order to fully address public concerns over siting of the new play area, it seems prudent to do these surveys. However, due to restricted PC funds, this cost would likely be taken from the playground fund, further reducing the monies available for use.

New Developments

The new Bellway development on North Street incorporates a new playground for use by village children. The developers are open to working with the Parish Council in this endeavor, alleviating the urgency/need for an additional provision nearby.

Residents

It is clear that some residents have concerns around PC plans for the new playground, especially around Gala Close. The current Covid environment and strain on resident's mental and financial health is an issue some members of the PC would like to consider and place greater importance on, alongside exploring alternative solutions to minimise this if possible.

Clerk's time

16 hours per week is not enough to cover all clerk and RFO duties. I am concerned that the true financial cost of the new play area is being obscured by my willingness to work extra hours without pay. I currently allocate 22/23 hours per week to the clerk/RFO role yet am struggling to complete PC basics despite this. There are many essential tasks that are being put to one side so that I can deal with playground related issues, not to mention the additional commitment that comes from my undertaking of the CiLCA qualification whereby the portfolio must be completed by 01/12/21 without further costs being incurred.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Parish Council abandons current plans for the new playground until April 2022 and then reconsiders the requirement for play provision in Stilton.

Financial – as shown above, the lack of reserves, depleted capital and compromised fiscal environment is placing the Parish Council into a difficult financial situation, whereby the additional strain of supplying a new play area is likely to add to these stresses.

By April 2022 the PC will know the outcome of the rates appeal re the Parish Room and, if successful, could use the returning monies to pay back capital money owed or bolster reserve funds. If unsuccessful, the rates arrears will have been paid back (a 2 year repayment was arranged with HDC for FY20-21 and FY21-22,) alleviating pressure on council finances. Hopefully by April 2022, Covid-19 restrictions will have lifted enabling the Pavilion to resume full activities and generate funds for the village to benefit from. Less pressure on finances would also make commissioning reports for potential play areas, more affordable.

Grant – given the time conditions on the grant, this would have to be returned but could be re-applied for when the PC is ready to implement the revised playground provision. This also means the criteria for the grant can be restated, should the PC wish to vary the play provision covered under the terms of the current grant. Returning the grant also means the commitment to allocate £10,000 from capital can be removed, providing greater financial security for SPC (imperative whilst reserve levels are inadequate.)

Current funds raised from the village – these would be safeguarded in the Playground Account until ready to be used on an under 12's playground.

Location – in April 2022, the Parish Council will have far greater knowledge of the play provision by Bellway Homes on the North Street development (and possibly the Golf Course development) enabling greater understanding of the need for further play equipment in the village and subsequently, being able to identity pockets of potential for play opportunities across all age groups.

Clerk's hours – by April 2022, the CiLCA will be completed and enough time to attend to all outstanding PC essential matters allocated, which would then allow for commitment to the new playground within set hours. Less demand on finances, with the Pavilion generating income again and the rates arrears cleared, would also allow for further staff capacity to be accommodated, if required.

This report would like to acknowledge the work of the Children's and Youth's Sub-Committee to date, the many hours dedicated by councillors to the current project and generosity of residents - in donating funds for a new playground (including all donations in Olive Main's memory,) responding to the village consultation leaflet and providing the council with feedback on the new play area.