Barn Close Play Area report

Julianne Lawrence - Clerk

March 2026

At the February Parish Council meeting a course of action was suggested regarding forward movement on the refurbishment of Barn Close Play Area. As Clerk, I highlighted an alternative option and below, will suggest an estimated timeline for both along with concerns for each method.

History

March 2022 – Clerk asked to create a survey to see how residents would like to use Barn Close Play area.

July 2022 – Resident feedback that Barn Close should remain an U6 play area. Clerk asked to research equipment and grants available to fund refurbishment.

October 2022 – PC resolved Barn Close to remain a play area for Under 6 children and Clerk requested to apply for Lottery Grant for £35,000 following feedback/an indicative price from Fenland Leisure for £29,049 (adjusted for inflation, this would now be £33,846).

September 2024 – Cllr Ayres/Clerk met Barn Close residents re planting needs. Confirmation residents in the area will be consulted on the new equipment.

Clerk under time pressure - Grants Working Group asked to research available grants.

July 2025: The Clerk and Cllr Murtagh asked to draw up a list of companies to recommend for invitation to quote for new Barn Close play equipment including resurfacing and play equipment focus for the under 6's to ideally include swings/the carousel from the Pavilion Play Park. A tender pack, evaluation matrix and budget suggestion all drawn up.

Aug 2025 The Clerk and Cllr Murtagh presented alternative options following research instruction. The Clerk outlined going to tender now (all documents prepared and ready) and then providing residents with the choice of a shortlisted final design. Cllr Murtagh proposed engaging with a play provider firstly in a feasibility study before consulting with residents to determine equipment requirements and then going to tender after needs are confirmed.

Cllr Murtagh contacted Proludic re feasibility study for Barn Close Play Area. Once the feasibility study was then returned and presented to council, tender requirements were to be discussed and confirmed before sending out. Indicative price of Farmyard design from Proludic of £29,532 (all in).

September 2025 – Barn Close Play area closed as falling into disrepair and expensive to fix.

February 2026 – Open meeting takes place (Proludic unable to attend). Posters on noticeboards, in SCAN, YES invited childminders and parents of young children, on school online newsletter.

6 children attended to advise on preferred equipment. Cllr Murtagh presents findings.

Options:

1. To look for 'soft quotes' then consult with residents which equipment/layout is preferred. Then apply for grants before going to tender. A play area based on the preferred soft quote option to be the design basis. Tender submissions to then be presented to residents enabling a final decision to be made (hoping I have this correct).
2. Use the 2 'soft quotes' already known to apply for grants and go to tender. Residents chose from the shortlisted designs that fit both available budget and design brief.

Predicted timeline (suggest reading column all the way down for each option, not across):

OPTION 1:	TIMELINE:	OPTION 2:	TIMELINE:
Send out invitations to provide 'soft options' for Barn Close equipment/layout/style - bronze, silver and gold designs	March 2026 PC meeting approval. Prices outlined at April 2026 PC meeting (best case scenario).	Agree to spend CIL to fund project if no grant awarded. Use 2 x soft quotes already known to form max budget of £40,000 (suggested) and use equipment needs from former survey/feasibility study for refining tender requirements – go to tender (docs ready).	March 2026 meeting. Tender closing date: 01/05/26.
Options to be published for resident feedback (open meeting, Facebook, school visit?)	Okayed at April PC meeting but unknown plans for public engagement. Clerk under time pressure as year end and prep for Annual meetings so prefer Councillors to do unless happy for timeline to be delayed. Estimate feedback to June meeting.	Apply for National Lottery £20K grant	March application. Result should be known by June 2026 (3 months).
Once options known, PC to finalise needs and apply for funding	June application - National Lottery takes 3 months so successful application known by September 2026. If more than £20K applied for, 9-month time frame to find out if successful.	Parish Council to shortlist 3 designs based on budget availability, to then be displayed at the Annual Parish Meeting in May, put in SCAN and on FB for resident final decision.	May 2026
Funding in place – go to tender	September meeting for tender invitation. Feedback re successful contractor at October meeting.	Successful contractor determined at the June PC meeting and if the grant application result from the National Lottery known, contract awarded. If no grant successful, CIL used to fund.	June 2026
Tender returns	Consult with public to decide final design – October onward.		
Contract awarded	November meeting – works to begin earliest December 2026 (winter).	Contract awarded	June or July meeting – works to begin from August 2026 (summer).

Concerns:

Option 1:	Option 2:
• Publishing 'soft quote' designs to residents that will not be the final design could be misleading and foster a negative perception of the PC (ie, why are we voting for a design we aren't getting?) • A National Lottery grant for £20K is quick and straightforward to apply for. Over £20K you need to meet a lot of criteria and go through 2 stages. This is more time intensive re for play area completion and with Councillor/Clerk work to apply and provide documentation. • Consulting with the public a second time for the final design – are residents fed up hearing about the play area and just want some action? Resident apathy might be why there was low attendance at the open meeting.	• Clerk time to apply for the grant (unless delegated to the Grants WG or YES who suggested they would be happy to help and are skilled in this area). Clerk busy and hasn't found time to do this since being asked in 2022. • CIL money is being requested for extra solar batteries, burial upgrades and the Neighbourhood Plan help. There is only £47,912 left of undesignated CIL (£54,465 if the Net Zero CIL unused CIL comes back) and no sizeable amount scheduled to come in.

Funding:

National Lottery – Awards for All – up to £20,000. 1 stage application process.

National Lottery – Reaching Communities – over £20,001. 2 stage process. On average it takes 9 months to get the funding, if you're invited to apply for stage 2.

There are other places to find funding – from a time point of view, it requires more work to apply for more grants and put funding proposals together so may lengthen timeframes further.