



Committee Report

Application no DC/24/0695/FUL

Location

Darsham Village Hall
Cheyney Green
Darsham
Suffolk
IP17 3FA

Expiry date 25 April 2024

Application type Full Application

Applicant Darsham Village Hall Management Committee

Parish Darsham

Proposal Creation of a play area measuring 180sqm to the side of the village hall.

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1. Summary

- 1.1 The application seeks permission for the creation of a play area measuring 180 square metres on land adjacent to Darsham Village Hall.
- 1.2 The application was presented to the Referral Panel at the request of the Ward Member who has commented on the application as follows:

"I have been lobbied extensively about this application. As a member of the Northern Planning Committee, I have been careful not to offer support or opposition to the application and my comments now are not intended to indicate support or opposition either. I note that the application has received a large number of public comments, thirty-three in total. A majority has been in support but there have been nine objections. The proportion of objections is higher amongst those living closest to the proposed play area. The parish council supports the application but not unanimously. Their vote was four in support, two objections and one abstention. This application is of significant interest within the parish, there are strong views on both sides and, although in the minority, there are significant objections. Given the level of interest, I think it would be wise for the application to be determined by the planning committee, in public and with the opportunity for interested parties to make their representations. I ask that the Planning Referral Panel is given a chance to consider this request."

- 1.3 The Referral Panel discussed the application on 30 April 2024 where it was decided that the application should be presented to Planning Committee North for determination given the local interest and differing views within the village.
- 1.4 The proposed development is of a larger scale than that previously indicated however it is not of such a scale that is considered to be harmful visually or to residential amenity. It would provide a valued facility for residents of the village (and visitors). As a play area was originally proposed in this broad location prior to development of the wider Cheyney Green development and this proposal is not so significantly different to this, it is recommended for approval.

2. Site Description

- 2.1 The application site comprises an area of approximately 180 square metres and is located to the south of Darsham Village Hall on part of the area of open space surrounding the hall. The northern boundary would abut the village hall car park. The village hall and its associated open space was granted planning permission as part of a wider development with the neighbouring twenty residential properties within the cul-de-sac now known as Cheyney Green.

3. Proposal

- 3.1 The proposed play area would be situated to the south of the village hall and car park area on the corner of the open space and one 'fork' at the head of the cul-de-sac. This area, in general was indicated to be a play area within the original planning permission for the development of the wider site (DC/13/2933/OUT and DC/17/4682/ARM). The details of any proposed equipment were not indicated at the time of the approval of the Reserved

Matters, nor was there any requirement within this planning permission to carry out such a development.

3.2 The current proposal includes an area of 180 square metres. There would be a fenced boundary around the area with a hedge also planted around the highway and driveway boundary. Pedestrian access gates would be provided from the car park as well as the end of the cul-de-sac.

3.3 The play area would include six pieces of equipment:

- Tower multiplay including net climbing rope, covered platform and slide. Top of covered platform is 3.65m high. Platform/top of slide is 1.5m high.
- Roundabout
- Noughts and Crosses board
- See-saw
- Swings (one baby swings, one seat swing , one basket swing)
- Springer

4. Consultees

Parish/Town Council

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Darsham Parish Council	6 March 2024	14 March 2024
Summary of comments: At the Darsham Parish Council meeting held on the 12th March, it was agreed by a majority vote to support the application.		

Non statutory consultees

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Leisure And Play	6 March 2024	10 April 2024
Summary of comments: Following the Fields in Trust definitions of a LAP, LEAP and NEAP, the size of the area would fall into the Local Area for Play and thus meaning that a 5m separation between the activity zone and the nearest property containing a dwelling is observed. The location of the equipment will have good natural surveillance of the site, from those using the village hall, the green and walking/driving past the area. There is no play area within Darsham for young people and the leisure team full support this application		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Ward Councillor (Cllr Paul Ashton)	N/A	8 April 2024

Summary of comments:

As discussed here are my comments on this application as ward member. I have been lobbied extensively about this application. As a member of the Northern Planning Committee, I have been careful not to offer support or opposition to the application and my comments now are not intended to indicate support or opposition either. I note that the application has received a large number of public comments, thirty-three in total. A majority has been in support but there have been nine objections. The proportion of objections is higher amongst those living closest to the proposed play area. The parish council supports the application but not unanimously. Their vote was four in support, two objections and one abstention. This application is of significant interest within the parish, there are strong views on both sides and, although in the minority, there are significant objections. Given the level of interest, I think it would be wise for the application to be determined by the planning committee, in public and with the opportunity for interested parties to make their representations. I ask that the Planning Referral Panel is given a chance to consider this request.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
SCC County Archaeological Unit	6 March 2024	7 March 2024

Summary of comments: No objection to the development and do not believe any archaeological work is required. All archaeological works were completed on the previous application, no further archaeological works on the site are needed.

5. Publicity

None.

Site notices

Site Notice Type	Date Posted	Expiry date	Reason
General Site Notice	14 March 2024	4 April 2024	General Site Notice

6. Third Party Representations

6.1 A total of 35 letters of representation have been received.

6.2 20 of these support the proposal, 8 object and 7 make comments not indicating whether they specifically object or support the proposal. A number of the 'comments' suggest that they would support a play area in principle as previously indicated but not that as now proposed.

6.3 Those in support make the following comments/points:

- The village has grown in the last few years and currently has no available area for young children to play.
- This playground is an absolute must for the families of Darsham and the more space they have for the playground the better.
- The Village Hall has adequate parking for any parent who wishes to use the proposed play area
- The tower piece of equipment has a platform height of 1.5m not the 3.65m indicated by some objectors. The roof is part of the noise reduction plan.
- Fields in Trust have been consulted regarding the equipment and have stated that in their opinion the play area would be a LAP. This means the proposal comfortably meets the 5m away rule.
- The installation of the proposed play area is a long overdue facility for Darsham.
- The area indicated within planning permission DC/17/4682 for the play area and landscape buffer is approx. 209 square metres.
- The VHC sent a questionnaire to the village based on two sizes 105 sq metres and 180 sq metres which returned a 60% approval for the 180sq metres.
- The application is for children up to the age of 8 and is still classified as a LAP. The remainder of the village green is available for older children to use now and has not caused any problems.
- No clear evidence to suggest that there will be noise and anti-social behaviour. There is CCTV on the hall to monitor any such use should it did occur.
- This could be beneficial to the village hall to as more people would hire it, bringing in income for the hall

6.4 The objections raise the following main points:

- The issue is whether this current planning application for the play area submitted by the Village Hall Management Committee (VHMC) accords with the original plan for the development.
- The proposed size of the playground slide is 3.65m - removing the 'hut' element would be less intrusive for residents.
- An effective vegetation screen and buffer zone is required to give those residents overlooking the play area their privacy.
- Playground is significantly larger than originally proposed, and now includes structurally tall play equipment designed for children up to age 14.
- Potential to impact significantly on the residential amenity of those living nearby due to increased noise, loss of privacy, littering, anti-social behaviour and/or vandalism.
- Should not be treated as a LAP

6.5 Comments made by those neither objecting or supporting can be summarised as:

- It is very close to some of the houses in Cheney Green.
- A playground of this size is desirable but perhaps the site chosen could be reviewed and repositioned further away or sited somewhere else at the edge of the village.
- Some of the planned equipment (at over 3m tall) is likely, on the present site, to impact on privacy and outlook of the residents.
- Users of the playground will need to park on a private road
- The original plan for a play area was smaller than the proposal and was originally for children up to the age of 6 years old.
- Older unaccompanied children could cause a nuisance and vandalism
- The proposed tower is too high, aesthetically hideous.

- The Village Hall Management Committee is playing a very active and constructive role in developing the social life of the village
- Communication with the villagers on the play area has not been given the priority it deserves.
- Drainage - The swale was full to overflowing during the recent heavy rain.
- Parking on The Street is already busy due to the popular pub that was recently extended.

7. Planning policy

National Planning Policy Framework 2023

SCLP8.1 - Community Facilities and Assets (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP8.2 - Open Space (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP11.1 - Design Quality (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP11.2 - Residential Amenity (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

8. Planning Considerations

- 8.1 The proposal seeks permission for a children's play area on land at Darsham Village Hall. The application has been made by the Village Hall Management Committee. The Village Hall is a relatively new building within Darsham as part of a larger, recent development including residential properties and a village green adjacent to the village hall.
- 8.2 As part of the earlier permissions that granted permission for the wider development, a children's play area was indicated in a similar position to that now proposed, however the area shown for this (105 square metres) is smaller than that now being proposed (180 square metres). The earlier permission for development of the wider site did not grant specific permission for any particular play equipment, nor did it condition a specific sized area or any requirement for any play equipment to be installed. It was, however, subject to a legal agreement which, in part, sought a contribution towards play space within the Parish. It is understood that the Village Hall Management Committee will seek to use this funding to enable the development to proceed. As there were previously no conditions or specific details of the play area indicated, this does not have any bearing on the application now being considered which is a new, full application in its own right. The idea of providing play equipment in this approximate location has previously been indicated and the principle of providing play equipment on village green land, adjacent to another community facility (the village hall) is acceptable.

Principle of Development

- 8.3 The Local Plan recognises the importance of open space and recreational facilities and the continued management of these areas across the plan area noting they are vital for the promotion of healthy communities and active lifestyles for all and their importance for

people's mental and physical well-being. The Local Plan states, at para. 8.12 "The Council supports the provision of open space and recreational facilities (or expansion of existing facilities) across the plan area to encourage active lifestyles and community well-being and this should be delivered alongside new development. The National Planning Policy Framework acknowledges the need for open space and recreational facilities and how these contribute to social interaction and the creation of healthy, inclusive communities."

- 8.4 Policy SCLP8.2 relates to Open Space and states:
"The Council supports the provision of open space and recreational facilities and their continued management across the plan area. Primarily to encourage active lifestyles and to increase participation in formal and informal recreation for all sectors of the community, and also to support the biodiversity, promote effective water management and to enhance the public realm. New residential development will be expected to contribute to the provision of open space and recreational facilities in order to benefit community health, well-being and green infrastructure."
- 8.5 The principle of providing some formal play equipment as part of a larger area of open space within a development is therefore supported.
- 8.6 Play areas can be classified in the following ways to identify their effective target audience utilising Fields in Trust (FiT) guidance. The East Suffolk Play Area Strategy sets out the different types/sizes of play areas as follows:
- LAP - a Local Area of Play. Usually small, landscaped areas designed for young children. Equipment is normally age group specific to reduce unintended users.
 - LEAP - a Local Equipped Area of Play. Designed for unsupervised play and a wider age range of users; often containing a wider range of equipment types.
 - NEAP - a Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play. Cater for all age groups. Often contain an extensive range of play equipment.
- 8.7 A number of the objections received, as well as some who have commented on the application have suggested that the original plans indicated that the proposed play area would be a LAP but that that now proposed is a LEAP, or even a NEAP.
- 8.8 The Council's Leisure Team has considered the application and confirmed that, following the Fields in Trust definitions of a LAP, LEAP and NEAP, the size of the area would fall into the Local Area for Play and thus meaning that a 5m separation between the activity zone and the nearest property containing a dwelling is observed. While only guidelines, the noted minimum size of a LEAP is 400 square metres which this proposal is notably smaller than. While it is noted that the manufacturers guidelines for the age range of some of the play equipment extends to 14 years (notably the Robina tower), the overall size and scale of this piece of equipment, alongside the other equipment and size of the enclosed play area as a whole does not suggest that it should be considered to be a LEAP or NEAP.
- 8.9 One public comment includes an email from Fields in Trust (FiT) regarding the classification of the proposed play area. The questions posed to FiT were based around the degree to which the specific equipment within a play area defines its classification, compared to its area. FiT responded saying "Given that buffer zones provide a degree of protection from noise for neighbours it must follow that they are related to the equipment and the target age group rather than the size of the area." FiT also confirmed that the answer to the question "if a play area of 200 sqm has equipment aimed at older children (8- 14yrs) does

it then become a 'NEAP', regardless of its size?" was 'yes'. Despite this, the local planning authority, supported by the Council's leisure team, consider that, taking the proposal overall, it amounts to a LAP, not a LEAP or NEAP. Considering the characteristics of the proposal as a whole, against FIT's guidance, the size of the area and equipment proposed is not considered to attract either large numbers of visitors or older children such that it is felt that the buffer distance to neighbouring properties should be 30m (as for a NEAP).

Impact on Residential Amenity

- 8.10 Concern has been raised regarding the potential impact of use of the area on residential amenity of neighbouring residents. Many of the letters of concern cite impacts such as noise and disturbance, loss of privacy and anti-social behaviour. The application has shown that there is a minimum 20 metre buffer in between the proposed equipped area and the nearest residential dwelling. This is the suggested minimum separation distance for a LEAP, a noticeably larger play area than that proposed here. This separation distance is therefore considered to be acceptable.
- 8.11 In relation to privacy, the properties immediately opposite have open site frontages with their front gardens/driveway and windows being visible to existing users of Cheyney Green. Although views currently available would not be from a raised platform, the play equipment is further from these properties than the existing foot path and access road. It is therefore not considered that there would be any significant additional loss of privacy as a result of the play area than the current situation. Further to this, the slide which is accessed from the raised platform would face towards the village hall. Although users would be able to face in any direction from here, the nature and orientation of the play equipment would direct views away from neighbouring properties.
- 8.12 The proposed play tower, while is of a noticeable height, would not be so large as to adversely impact on outlook from the windows of neighbouring properties.

Design and Visual Impact

- 8.13 The design of the proposed play equipment is not unattractive. It would mainly be constructed from wood, a natural material, and not be out of keeping with its location as part of a wider community facility and open space. The smaller pieces of equipment would be of a height that, in time, would be screened from Cheyney Green and while it is likely the larger play tower would remain visible, in part, its appearance would not be dominant within, or harmful to, the wider development.

Landscaping

- 8.14 The proposal includes a hedgerow around the perimeter of the proposed play area. Currently the plans indicate that this would be Portuguese Laurel however more specific details are required in terms of the number of plants and therefore details are sought to be agreed by condition. It is also recommended that the applicant considers a more native hedge mix as a more appropriate choice in terms of appearance and biodiversity value.
- 8.15 Public comments have included that the proposed hedge should be fully grown/established prior to play equipment being installed however this would not be reasonable and the proposal is not considered to be harmful without the proposed hedge planting.

Drainage

8.16 Concern has been raised that the swale struggled to cope in recent periods of heavy rain. The application includes removing leftover builders' waste material from the top layer of the site and levelling it. The grassed area would have land drainage installed and laid to fall, discharging into the adjacent swale included as part of the wider development. The play area would have a sub-base with a black wet pour rubber surface which is porous and free draining. The proposal would therefore have little impact on surface water runoff.

9. Conclusion

9.1 The Local Plan is supportive of the provision of play space and recognises the many benefits it brings. While the planning permission for the wider Cheyney Green development did not specifically require the installation of an equipped play area, this was indicated on the plans and funds were secured such that this could be achieved. The location of the proposed play area is as previously indicated, albeit covering a larger area. Despite this, the proposed play area is considered to be of a suitable size for its location and it is not considered that it would result in any demonstrable harm to the residential amenity of nearby residents given its modest size. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with policies SCLP8.2, SCLP11.1 and SCLP11.2

10. Recommendation

10.1 Approve, subject to controlling conditions.

Conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun not later than the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
Reason: This condition is imposed in accordance with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).
2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in all respects strictly in accordance with Caloo Product Data Sheet, Elevations E.3 and proposed Block Plan GA1 all received 23 February 2024 and Site Plan received 29 February 2024, for which permission is hereby granted or which are subsequently submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority and in compliance with any conditions imposed by the Local Planning Authority.
Reason: For the avoidance of doubt as to what has been considered and approved.
3. The materials and finishes shall be as indicated within the submitted application and thereafter retained such, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the local planning authority.
Reason: To ensure the satisfactory appearance of the development in the interests of visual amenity
4. Within 3 months of commencement of development, satisfactory precise details of the hedge planting scheme (which shall include species, size and numbers of plants to be planted) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.
Reason: To ensure the submission and implementation of a well-laid out scheme of landscaping in the interest of visual amenity.

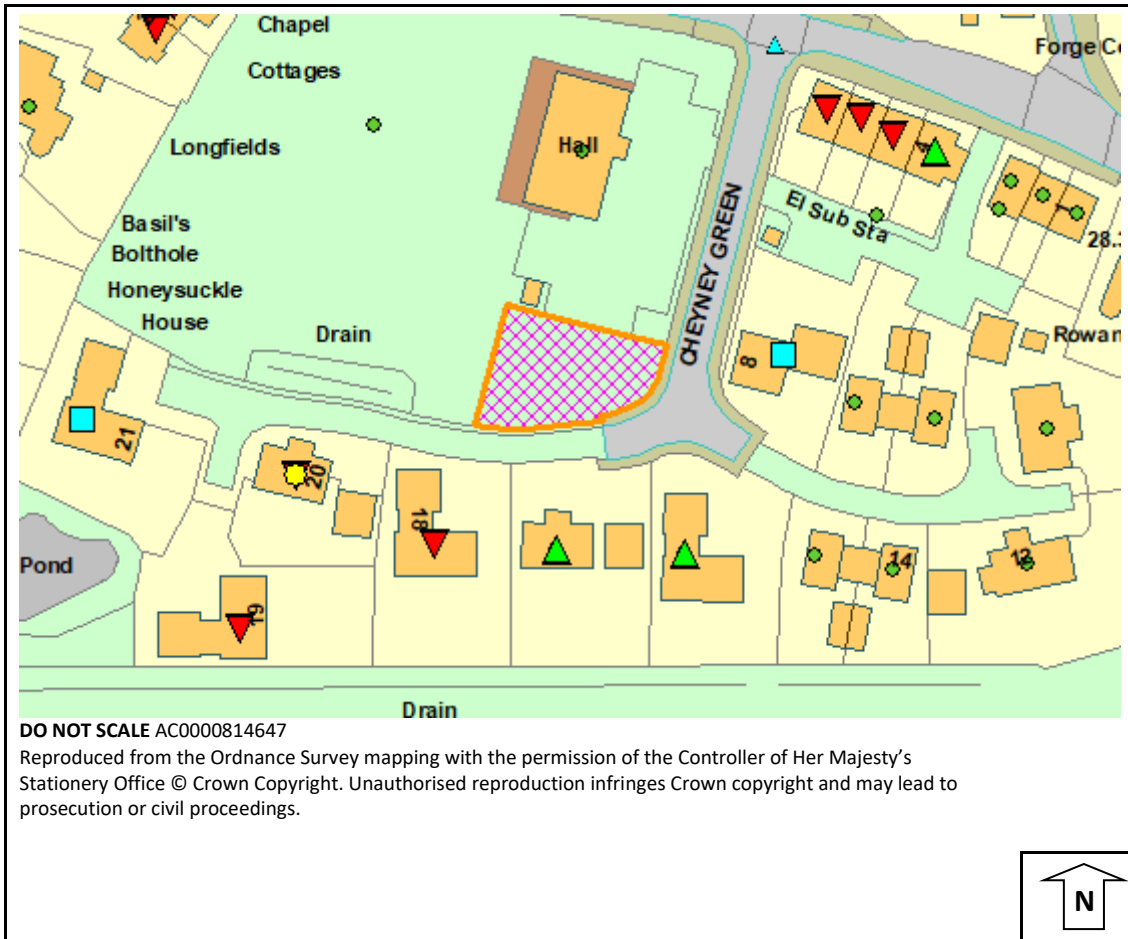
Informatives:

1. The Local Planning Authority has assessed the proposal against all material considerations including planning policies and any comments that may have been received. The planning application has been approved in accordance with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework and local plan to promote the delivery of sustainable development and to approach decision taking in a positive way.
2. In relation to condition 4, it is noted that the application indicates that a laurel hedge would be planted. The local planning authority would encourage use of native hedgerow plants.





Background information

See application reference DC/24/0695/FUL on [Public Access](#)

Map



Key

-  Notified, no comments received
-  Objection
-  Representation
-  Support