



FAIR OAK & HORTON HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

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UPPER BARN COPSE PLAY PARK

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Who owns Upper Barn Copse

A: Fair Oak & Horton Heath Parish Council. It was previously owned/managed by Eastleigh Borough Council who formally transferred the asset to the Parish in 2020.

Q: How is the play area funded?

A: New play areas are funded by Section 106 Developers' Contributions as part of the legal planning permission for a new development. This is then transferred to the principal authority, (Eastleigh Borough Council) and is either retained by them or later transferred to the Parish. It is now the default of the Borough to seek transfer over to the Parish Council.

The Parish Council is then responsible for the upkeep (including annual safety inspections) of the play area. The annual maintenance cost is put in the main budget and taken out of the Parish precept (Council Tax).

Q: Why didn't the Parish save for a new play area?

A: We can't. The financial regulations prohibit Parish Council's from having 'sinking' funds. If we need to replace equipment/play areas, then we must include that in the next precept. As the cost of play areas starts at approximately £50k+ this cause a hike in the Council Tax for all Parishioners.

Q: Can we Crowdfund for a new play area?

A: We'd love to say a straightforward yes. However, this creates several questions/variables, such as who 'owns' the equipment? Would this be a Parish asset with regular inspections and insurance? If the community retained ownership a

legal agreement would need to be drawn up as it would be placed on Parish land. Who pays for the maintenance and what happens if/when the equipment fails a safety test and must be removed/replaced? The cost of equipment can range from £5k for a simple set of swings and safety surfacing to anything up to £65k+.

Q: Why have you removed equipment?

A: For safety reasons. The equipment had rotted and was not deemed safe. It was therefore removed for the safety of the children which is of upmost paramount importance.

Q: What about external sources of funding?

A: The Parish has made initial approaches to the Borough Council for funding support. As they are currently undertaking a review and new approach to play provision, they have initially indicated that they would offer some match funding up to the value of £8k for an alternative play provision. Preferring more sustainable approaches and imaginative play.

The Council could look at alternative sources of funding such as heritage lottery fund if it felt this was appropriate.

Q: Why didn't you anticipate that the equipment would need replacing?

A: The previous inspection only showed the play equipment as moderate risk. The extremes in weather (hot and wet) have accelerated the rot and deterioration of the wooden equipment at a much faster rate. This could not have been predicted.

Q: Why cant you replace the play area?

A: Simply – we do not have the money for this. All our Ear Marked Reserves are set aside for longer term projects. To pay for a like-for-like replacement traditional play area, we would need support from the wider taxpayers in the Parish.

Q: Are you the Borough Council? And if not, what is the political make-up of the Parish Council?

A: We are a separate corporate body to Eastleigh Borough Council.

The Parish Council has 15 elected representatives. 9 are Liberal Democrat, 5 Independent and 1 Conservative Member. In its Corporate Plan the Parish Council states that we wish to deliver services to residents 'without the politics'.

Q: There are too few play areas in Fair Oak and Horton Heath.

A: The Parish owns and maintains (not including UBC):-

- 5 play areas with one on the way.
- 1 skatepark
- 1 splashpad
- 2 tennis courts
- 2 football pitches
- 2 cricket wickets
- 2 formal kickabouts
- 1 site with outside gym equipment
- Over approximately 120 acres of public open space

Q: What is the age range for play areas?

A: Play areas are aimed at children 0-10 years. Children must be supervised at all times whilst using play equipment.

Q: Why is the Council pushing natural alternatives? You've already made up your mind!

A: No, we haven't. However, we have to be honest about what we can do. Maintaining the status quo/same level of provision is very unlikely due to the cost and also the fact that a traditional play area serving the same age range of children is only a stone's throw away. In this financial year (24/25) we are only likely to achieve a budget of £20k. We would have to raise the precept next year by at least £80k for a like-for-like replacement.

Additionally, the Borough and other funding sources are more likely to support natural/sustainable alternatives. This is why we are asking residents to open their minds to helping us create a more natural play space as we are likely to be able to afford this and get support from the Borough Council.

Q: What happens to the play area whilst a final decision is made?

A: The play area will open as a part de-commissioned site with all the unsafe equipment being removed. The remaining equipment will be maintained and checked as in previous years. Should equipment and fencing deteriorate during this time, the Council may have to make the decision to remove this also. Safety is paramount.

Q: Why is this taking so long?

A: The Council needs to make a decision on the level/type of provision and seek funds for it. Currently, the Council (with support from EBC which has not been formally approved) could find £20k of immediate funding. Should more funding be needed, we would either have to raise the precept, in which case the funds wouldn't be released until April 2025 or fund other sources, which could take an unknown amount of time.

If you have any further questions or wish to discuss something further, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the Parish Clerk – clerk@fairoak-pc.gov.uk