

SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Cabinet Member for Safer Communities
Meeting date:	7th September 2011
Report from:	Head of Environmental Services
Report Author/Lead Contact Officer:	Chris Barr, Principal Officer for Streetcare, Forestry, Parks and Open Spaces
Wards affected:	St Alphege, Blythe and Shirley South
Public/Private report:	Public
Exempt by virtue of Paragraph:	N/A of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Subject/Report Title:**HILLFIELD PARK PLAY AREA PETITION****1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To advise the Cabinet Member of a petition received on the 18th July 2011 requesting the Council reinstate fencing around Hillfield Park play area and to seek approval for the recommendations outlined in this the report.

2. Decision(s) Recommended

- 2.1 Cabinet Member to receive the petition requesting that fencing is reinstated around Hillfield Park play area.
- 2.2 Officers acknowledge residents concerns regarding fencing surrounding the play area and recommend that the Council support the petition and that the fencing is reinstated.
- 2.3 Therefore, Cabinet Member is asked to approve reinstatement of the fencing at a cost of £7000 to be funded from the parks revenue budgets.

3. Background

- 3.1 In 2008 Solihull MBC were awarded the Playbuilder grant from the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) now known as the Department for Education to invest in outdoor play spaces for children and young people.
- 3.2 The grant funding equated to £942,260 which was delivered over a three year period and has enabled Solihull MBC to redevelop and improve 20 of the 30 Council play areas. These were identified as priority play areas following an independent play

value assessment of each area. The remaining 10 were identified as low priority and future developments were deemed to be manageable using Council revenue budgets.

- 3.3 The DCSF identified Solihull as an exemplar authority for the way in which the Playbuilder project was both managed and delivered and the Chief Executive was invited to be a guest speaker at a Department for Children, Schools and Families event in March 2010 to launch *Embedding the Play Strategy* giving the opportunity to showcase Solihull's good work and innovative working practices at a national level.
- 3.4 However, under the Playbuilder grant conditions the installation of fencing was not supported. Therefore, if a play area was extended beyond its previous area or the original fencing removed because it was no longer compliant, the Playbuilder funding would not fund installation of new fencing.
- 3.5 Furthermore under the *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces* (DCSF, 2008) guidance, local authorities were actively discouraged from installing perimeter fencing around play areas, because the guidance identified this action as restricting play and interaction with the wider park environment.
- 3.6 Officers recognise the value of this guidance in that providing open play areas can increase the overall play value to children and young persons. However, Officers also recognise that each park presents different challenges and that there are some parks where there are high levels of dog walking activity in close proximity to play areas, therefore these play areas may need fences and protective barriers.

4. Evaluation of Alternative Option(s)

- 4.1 Officers have explored alternative barriers to prevent dogs from entering play areas including earth mounding, tree trunks and dense planting of shrubs and hardy plants.
- 4.2 These preventatives have been trialled in areas such as Dorridge Park, however, although these barriers offer a further deterrent and may prove suitable for parks with minimal dog walking, Officers have found that parks with regular high level dog walking activity do require more robust perimeter barriers around play areas.

5. Reasons for Recommending Preferred Option

- 5.1 Officers recommend that perimeter fencing is installed around Hillfield Park play area for the following reasons:
- (a) The Playbuilder program has now ended and although Local Authorities are encouraged to continue to support the DCSF guidance, including the provision of play areas open to the surrounding environment, Local Authorities can provide fencing provision around play areas where required without any impact of grant conditions.
 - (b) Officers have reviewed Hillfield Park play area and believe that due to the close proximity of the play area in conjunction with predominantly dog walking areas, permanent fencing would be the most suitable option, therefore supporting the petition.
- 5.2 Moving forward Officers appreciate that although the guidance and conditions

stipulated as part of the Playbuilder project are relevant and provide a value in supporting the governments free play concept. In some instances there are areas whereby fencing is needed due to issues such as high level dog walking activity.

- 5.3 Therefore, moving forward Officers have reviewed the remaining Playbuilder play areas without fencing and the following parks have also been identified as areas in need of fencing around play areas. This is due to the play areas being in close proximity to high frequency dog walking areas. The areas have now been scheduled for fencing work.

- Elmdon Heath – Fencing to be installed in October 2011
- Elmdon Coppice – Fencing to be installed in April 2012

6. Scrutiny

- 6.1 This report has not been considered by Scrutiny Board.

7. Implications

7.1 Policy/Strategy Implications

- (a) None as a result of this report.

7.2 Meeting the duty to involve

- (a) Officers have listened to park users and local residents and support there request to install fencing around the Hillfield Park play area.
- (b) Hillfield Park Friends of Group support the installation of fencing around the play area.

7.3 Financial Implications

- (a) Officers can confirm the installation of fencing around Hillfield Park play area will cost £7000. This will be funded as a priority through the 2011/12 Parks revenue budget.
- (b) Officers estimate the installation of fencing around Elmdon Heath play area will cost approximately £13000. This will be funded as a priority through the 2011/12 Parks revenue budget.
- (c) Officers estimate the installation of fencing around Elmdon Coppice play area will cost approximately £8000. This will be funded as a priority through the 2012/13 Parks revenue budget.
- (d) Rules of contracts will be implemented, in that three quotations will be obtained to select the appropriate contractor.

7.4 Legal implications

- (a) None as a result of this report.

7.5 Risk Implications

- (a) A risk benefit assessment has been undertaken on all Playbuilder play areas. The risk benefit assessment acknowledges that some play areas may need to provide further preventative barriers for dogs.

7.6 Equality Impact Assessment

- (a) Solihulls Parks and Open Spaces have been assessed under the Councils Fair Treatment Assessment process and any new perimeter fencing will ensure appropriate access to all through the appropriate sized gates and entrances.

7.7 Carbon Management/Environmental

- (a) None as a result of this report.

7.8 Partner Organisations

- (a) None as a result of this report.

7.9 Safeguarding/Corporate Parenting Implications

- (a) The addition of fencing around Hillfield Park play area will contribute to safeguarding children in areas identified as a risk.

7.10 Customer Impact

- (a) The addition of fencing around Hillfield Park play area is in response to a petition with 121 signatures from local residents and park users requesting fencing around the play area.

7.11 Other implications

- (a) None as a result of this report.

8. List of Appendices Referred to

- 8.1 None as a result of this report

9. Background Papers Used to Compile this Report

- 9.1 Hillfield Park Play Area Petition