

Hamstreet S106 Contribution for Play

Consultation Evening Evaluation

2nd November 2016

Background

S106 funding arising from the Lancaster Close development is available to improve play facilities and open space in Hamstreet. The total available will be £109,945. £72,140 is for play improvements and £37,785 is for open space improvements. It is expected that this money will be released from the developer December 2016/January 2017.

Ashford Borough Council has been in discussions with Orlestone Parish Council over a number of years regarding the options for spending the funding including the possible locations where the funding might be spent. Locations considered were Lancaster Close Play Area, Victory Hall Play Area and Pound Lees. All areas were assessed in terms of access to site, current use, scope for extension and visibility to identify the two most appropriate sites where S106 funding might be invested. At a Parish Council meeting on 1st February 2016, the two sites chosen were Lancaster Close and Victory Hall.

The two options drawn up for the two sites can be seen at Appendix 1.

It was agreed at the same Parish Council meeting that a public consultation would be undertaken via leaflets/flyers to identify resident's preferred option.

Flyers were subsequently delivered to a number of homes in Hamstreet asking for residents to vote for their preferred option. Unfortunately it became clear that residents felt the consultation flyers were not distributed widely enough to provide a clear mandate, so it was agreed with the Parish Council to hold a public open day rather than a formal meeting to inform residents of the options available. This enabled them over a longer period of time to talk in detail with representatives of the Council and Parish Council, to ask questions and vote on their preferred option. This would be the end of the consultation regarding the location for the spend of S106 funding. A letter was sent to all dwellings in Hamstreet informing them of the open day and of the importance of attending and voting for their preferred option. See Appendix 2.

The open day was held on 2nd November 2016 from 2pm to 8pm at the Victory Hall. Details of the options available and frequently asked questions (see Appendix 3) were displayed along with an illustration of the types of modern play equipment that might be available for the redeveloped play area.

The Victory Hall Committee also believed the public open day was an opportunity to inform residents of their desire to the redevelop the victory hall and the immediate surrounding area should funding become available.

Consultation Open Day Assessment

The open day was hosted by Michelle Byrne, Funding and Partnership Officer, and Amanda Scott, Play and Open Spaces Project Officer, from Ashford Borough Council. Angela Bromfield, Chair of Hamstreet Victory Hall Management Committee, along with other members of the committee, were also present to explain the options and answer questions from residents.

The open day was well attended with a steady stream of local residents of all ages coming in throughout the day. A number of parents came to the open day and returned with their children later on. Members of the Parish Council including the Chairman and the Parish Clerk also attended.

Residents had the opportunity to read the information available on display boards and discuss ideas and suggestions, ask questions and give their opinion to the officers present. They were given the opportunity to vote for their preferred option by completing a voting slip provided and putting it in a voting box. Votes were counted after the event had ended.

There were a number of diverse opinions and questions on the proposals and how and where the S106 funding should be spent, but the main concerns and questions were:

- **Why is there not a third option to split S106 funding for both locations?**

The borough council has been very clear from the start of the process that its preferred option is to invest in and maintain one play area only. The Parish Council informed officers in September that residents would like to see both play areas redeveloped and maintained for the foreseeable future. Thus officers investigated this option in more detail. It has become clear that it is not viable for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Victory Hall Management Committee requires the new play area to be sited elsewhere on the green to accommodate their desire to redevelop and re-site the hall. The cost of this would require all of the S106 funding, leaving none to invest in Lancaster Close. The committee has told us this is the only viable option for them as far as investment in the Victory Hall Play area is concerned.

- a) Investing in one play area enables funding to be maximised for all ages.
- b) Play equipment and the soft surfacing required is costly and splitting the S106 funding between two sites would not enable a significant impact on either site.
- c) It is also unusual for a village the size of Hamstreet to have two play areas in such close proximity to each other and is not financially effective or sustainable in the long term.

- **What will happen in Lancaster Close if it is not the chosen option and the play area is gradually decommissioned?**

The space is currently managed by ABC using its resources to inspect, repair and renew play equipment and mow and cut shrubbery. The area will be retained as open space and can continue to be used by residents for informal play and recreation. However, as the play equipment declines it will be removed and not replaced.

- **Ashford Borough Council should use the S106 funding not to develop one play area but to maintain both play areas to ensure they both remain available for use in the future.**

S106 funding is required from developers to plug a gap arising from the development in the facilities currently available in an area and must therefore be used to enhance the play value available and not to maintain what's currently there. There is some funding available to maintain the new enhanced facilities but not all of the S106 funding can be used for maintenance.

- **S106 funding could be spent on redeveloping Victory Hall Play Area and Ashford Borough Council should improve and continue to maintain Lancaster Close play area from its own budgets.**

It is unusual for a village of Hamstreet's size to accommodate two play areas in such proximity. Current best practise recommends focusing play facilities on one site to accommodate all ages in one location. This means that the whole family can use the play area at the same time. The borough council has always been clear that we need to maximise benefits and maintenance contributions by investing in one site only.

- **Not all funding will be spent on play facilities but will be used for other things such as removing whichever play area is not the chosen option.**

All available S106 funding will be spent on developing and maintaining play facilities in the chosen location. There was an early suggestion that S106 funding could be used to take out the equipment in Lancaster Close if this was not chosen for investment, but it was confirmed by officers that this was not an appropriate use for S106 funding. No S106 funding has been spent on the consultation process or administration to date. The Borough Council will continue to fund and manage the site including repairing play equipment, but will not invest further Council funding to enhance the play equipment.

- **Showing proposals for the future redevelopment of the hall and surrounding area has confused the issue and it might not happen anyway.**

The Victory Hall Management Committee, along with Ashford Borough Council, thought this would be a good opportunity to tell residents about their ambitions to improve the facilities provided by the hall and to alleviate the current parking problems for the benefit of the local community and surrounding areas. The Village Hall Committee is optimistic that possible future S106 funding, plus the already proven fundraising capabilities of residents, makes this a real possibility in the future. These plans have an impact on the play proposals because it means the village hall play area would need to be moved to accommodate any future re-siting of the hall. Thus, such developments were incorporated in the design of a possible new play area for Hamstreet.

- **If the chosen option is to redevelop the village hall play area, would it have to wait until plans to redevelop the hall are underway?**

No, the S106 agreement requires the play contribution to be spent within 5 years of receiving it. We are expecting to receive the S106 funding in December 2016 or January 2017, so we will progress this project as soon as possible.

Consultation Results

Number of returns = 164

Number for improving Lancaster Close Play and Open Space = 38 (23.17%)

Number for improving The Victory Hall Play and Open Space = 117 (71.34%)

Number who abstained = 9 (5.49%)

Conclusion

Victory Hall Play Area has clearly been chosen by residents attending the open day as the facilities they would like developed using S106 funding.

This result reflects the results of the previous consultation via flyers distributed by the Parish Council, which also showed Victory Hall play area to be the preferred location for S106 investment.

A number of residents left comments on the back of the voting cards and they will be contacted directly to address these comments if contact details were given.

Next Steps

- The Parish Council, Victory Hall Committee & Ward Members will be presented with the results of the consultation. Residents will be notified of the results.
- The Borough Council's S106 working group will also receive a report and agree the application of the funding. The agreed project will be scoped further, including children and young people being consulted on the types of activities they like, such as swinging, jumping, climbing; and play equipment will be chosen for the design to ensure the most popular activities will be catered for.
- An overall plan showing the play area and associated landscaping with pathways will then be produced to meet the needs of the local community. Local children and residents will have the opportunity to comment on this plan to further shape the scheme before work starts on the ground.