

REPORT TO PICKMERE PARISH COUNCIL

8th September 2020

AGENDA ITEM 8.3 – REOPENING OF CLOVER DRIVE PLAY AREA – REVIEW

1. Background

1.1 The Village Hall, Pavilion and play area were closed on commencement of the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. At your July meeting Council resolved not to reopen either facility for the time being.

1.2 As two months have now passed it is thought appropriate that the matter should be reviewed.

2. Report

2.1 In that period, arrangements as to how to deal with the risk of Covid in the community have become ever more complex. So far as play areas and village/community halls are concerned government advice has not changed in substance but various minor amendments have been made.

2.2 It is apparent that some councils are now reopening their play areas – some with specific Covid precautions and protocols as advised by Government but some simply with warning notices that contain statements such as that the items of equipment are not cleaned; that members of the public should make their own arrangements to do so; that social distancing should be maintained; and possibly notices indicating the appropriate maximum number of persons that can use the play area as a whole or a particular item of equipment at one time. Sample notices that have been seen are attached for information.

2.3 Government advice includes the following:

“Owners and operators responsible for playgrounds... will have discretion over when they consider it safe to open for activity permitted by legislation, and may decide to keep these areas closed should they feel they are not able to facilitate their safe usage....To help owners and operators decide what action to take, and to ensure the equipment in their playground and outdoor gym is safe, they must carry out an appropriate Covid risk assessment...[which is] about identifying sensible measures to control risk. If the owner/operator has fewer than 5 workers, they do not have to write anything down as part of the risk assessment... Failure to complete a risk assessment or completing a RA but failing to put in place sufficient measures to manage the risk of Covid-19 could constitute a breach of health and safety law.”

2.4 The advice then comments on how to achieve, or encourage the achievement of, social distancing, which remains 2 metres, or 1 metre with risk mitigations (where 2 metres is not viable). Signs are one method of reminding the public of this advice. However the guidance acknowledges that adherence to social distancing guidance can be particularly difficult in a playground setting, meaning that *“other ways of minimising transmission risk should also be considered and communicated to the parents, guardians and carers, who should remain aware of the residual risk.”*

2.5 One such method is using signs for instance:

- to identify the maximum number of users able to use the playground,
 - to limit the number of users of a particular piece of equipment,
 - to request those using the area to have only one parent present.
 - To limit e.g. the number of swings available.
- 2.4 On the cleaning of surfaces, owners *“are advised to manage any potential risk, cleaning high traffic touch points frequently”* thus adopting appropriate cleaning regimes for equipment, gates, benches, etc. In addition (but importantly not as an alternative) they should “encourage effective sanitation by users, parents, guardians and carers.
- 2.5 Again the use of signage is recommended to encourage parents (etc) to adopt appropriate hygiene practices.
- 2.6 There is some advice about face coverings including comments about their use by children and by others in a playground setting.
- 2.7 Communication with parents is important in order to promote responsible behaviour.
- 2.8 Finally, (in this summary), *“owners/operators must take into account the requirements of children with additional needs”*, and some advice is given in this respect.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 Although there appear now to be local councils making different decisions on whether to open play areas, even in the absence of cleaning regimes, it is hard not to conclude that – as noted at para. 2.4 above – Government’s intention and strong preference is that if play areas are to open, they should be the subject of appropriate cleaning regimes. It would appear that this would involve cleaning equipment, benches and touch points on at least a daily basis – probably more. As with many other small councils, this does not seem feasible in Pickmere’s case.
- 3.2 However it is understood from discussions with the Council’s insurers that Government has been made aware that their full guidance in respect for instance of the cleaning of playground equipment in open air play areas cannot practicably be carried out by many councils, in particular smaller councils with very few or single employees. Our insurers therefore are content that subject to the carrying out of a Risk Assessment, and the implementation of measures identified in that Assessment along the lines of providing signage for the various aspects mentioned, then they would not at the present time raise any issues with such play areas being reopened. Clearly that position might change were it to become apparent that play areas were becoming a noticeable source of transmission.
- 3.3 It has to be noted that the provision of signs warning users that the equipment is not cleaned is a solution that some councils have adopted, but it is considered that in such cases there remains the possibility (probability) that users will not observe the guidance offered, and therefore that the risk of transmission remains.
- 3.4 It is considered that despite the words in the guidance (para. 2.3 above), if the reopening of the play area is to happen, then a written risk assessment should be prepared. It is considered that the Council’s insurers would not find satisfactory the idea of a risk assessment that is not documented.
- 3.5 The decision as to whether to open the play area is therefore one for the Parish Council. In this context, Councillors Bold and Read have proposed the following:

- That the Council be minded to reopen the children's play area, subject to a review of the facilities to ensure their continuing fitness for purpose, to the preparation of a Risk Assessment in relation to the reopening, including the risk of Covid-19 transmission, and to the implementation of the measures detailed in the Risk Assessment that are considered to mitigate to an acceptable level the risk of such transmission.

3.5 In the context of this proposition, it is considered likely that the carrying out of the Risk Assessment, together with the implementation of the measures identified in it, which might include the preparation of appropriate signage, will take a minimum of two weeks – perhaps a little longer – and may incur some expenditure. It is therefore further recommended so as to facilitate the process that:

- If the above proposition is agreed by Council, authority be given to the Clerk in conjunction with the Chair to authorise specific expenditure up to the normal limit referred to in Standing Orders for emergency expenditure between meetings (that is £750) to carry out such measures as are identified in the Risk Assessment.
- Subject to all of the above and the implementation of the measures described, the play area be reopened.

4. Recommendation

4.1 That Council note the above and decide how to proceed.

J Steel
Parish Clerk



Help Keep this Playground and Play Equipment COVID -19 Secure

This Playground is not supervised, and equipment is not regularly cleaned:-

- Do not use this equipment if you are unwell.
- Social Distancing of 2m **MUST** be always maintained (or 1m with risk mitigation where 2m is not possible)
- Only one child is allowed on each piece of equipment at any one time
- No eating or drinking in the playground
- Parents/Carers : You will need to clean the equipment before your child uses it. Use hand sanitiser or wipes to clean your children's hands before and after use.
- Do not touch your face. Remember to cough or sneeze into a tissue. Take tissues home with you or put them into the bins provided (use an arm if a tissue is not available)
- Children's clothes should be washed when they get home
- Families with clinically vulnerable members: **DO NOT** use the equipment without first cleaning it.

Beadnell Parish Council Playground

**This play area is not supervised
and equipment is not cleaned.**



Please practice social distancing.



Sanitise your hands before, during and after using the play area, especially after touching equipment and the gate.



Wash your hands thoroughly when you get home.



If the play area is busy, please come back another time.



No food or drink and please bin your litter.

Please help us keep this play area safe for all to use.
Thank you.

**STAY
ALERT**

**CONTROL
THE VIRUS**

**SAVE
LIVES**

Tel: 01289 30636 Mobile: 07836 345 489

