

## **Report on an inspection of the equipment in the Playing Field, 28<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

Ian Sage and I met on the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> September to assess the state of the play equipment following the repairs carried out by Mainstay Projects.

### **Zip wire**

The repairs to the zip wire appear to have been successful. There is no movement in the bracing legs to the post at the top of the field. The post at the bottom of the field shows movement but it is braced with steel. The brake on the carrier has failed but this is not considered a hazard.

### **Seat at the top of the field**

The frame of the seat appears to be sound but the seat and back rest need replacing. Since we met the Parish Council has discussed the seat repairs. Issues around the supply of the timber have to be resolved before the work can proceed.

### **Fort**

The fort has been the focus of concerns about the state of the supports of the structure. After demonstrating that the main supports of the fort were suffering from rot Mainstay agreed to effect repairs.

Their initial proposal was to cut off the bottom of each support and replace it with a steel member attached to the remaining support. Instead the actual work undertaken was to bolt timber members to the supports. Those members do not connect with the concrete base of each support. The additional timber members serve a cosmetic purpose only.

All the supports exhibit significant rot with a trowel penetrating several centimetres into the supports. Additionally, the damaged floor timber in the fort has not been replaced as agreed by Mainstay.

Our conclusion is that the fort poses a significant risk of failing a ROSPA inspection in the fairly near future. We considered a number of options. These included:

- 1 Asking Mainstay to carry out the work initially agreed
- 2 Demolition of the fort
- 3 Replacement of the fort
- 4 A programme of repairs over a period of years

Each of these carries costs and risks. Some solutions are more likely to be successful than others.

We did discuss how repairs / replacement might be funded. Fund raising so soon after the Keep on the Grass Campaign might face opposition within the village. Staging repairs over time might be more feasible within the revenue budget.

### **Willow features**

We discussed the willow tunnel and the willow arbour around the bench at the bottom of the field. Both features were based on initiatives by individuals who no longer live in the village.

Concerns had been expressed about the height of the branches of the willow tunnel. As a result, earlier in 2017 Jane Batchelor and Jo Addison worked on both features. Their work on the bower has been successful but they were not able to deal with the top growth on the tunnel as it was beyond a safe working height.

Our view is that a decision is required on both features. Willow is fast growing and to be effective needs annual attention to restrain it. Voluntary contributions are invaluable but the Parish Council needs to determine whether it can rely on **annual** voluntary work, whether it is prepared to fund work if volunteers are not forthcoming or remove the features entirely.

### **Finance**

The playing field is the most significant asset owned by the Parish Council. It has the most impact upon the village and has benefited all the generations growing up in the village since its inception. It is the most visible manifestation of the precept.

Apart from staffing costs the playing field imposes the greatest financial impact on the Council's finances. The council needs to address the implications of providing a recreation area that is more than just an area of grass, though even that incurs costs.

### **Conclusion**

Our report identifies some key concerns about the sustainability of the playing field and its equipment. It provides an assessment of some of the options facing the Council over the next few years. If the fort is to be repaired / replaced, if other initiatives or equipment planned, the Parish Council will require a longer financial planning framework than we currently use in our annual budgeting process.

The Parish Council has provided recreational facilities since the 1930's. The question to be addressed is, how is that commitment to be sustained in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in a very different social and financial environment?