



Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board

Alvechurch Multi-Use Games Area Inquiry

OCTOBER 2010
JOINT OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY BOARD

Supporting Officer: Michael Carr



Bromsgrove
District Council

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk



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Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation One

The Future of Alvechurch Multi-Use Games Area Facility

That the Alvechurch MUGA be left in situ.

Financial Implications

Most of the remedial measures associated with leaving the MUGA in situ would have to be met within existing budgets.

There are ongoing costs already budgeted for the MUGA, including site inspection, cleaning and repairs. As an estimate, changing one seat per year would cost £162 pa. Annual inspection costs are estimated at £50 pa. The line marking within the area needs reapplying every 3 years at an approximate cost of £200.

The depreciation costs of the facilities would be approximately £3,500, based on a life expectancy of 15 years.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications for the Council are envisaged. Regular visits to the site would be required with or without the MUGA as there is another play facility on the recreation ground.

Recommendation Two

House Calls

That the Community Safety Officers for Alvechurch make periodic house calls to vulnerable residents living in close proximity to the MUGA.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

Recommendation Three

The Alvechurch Youth Club

That the Alvechurch Community Together (ACT) Trust consider extending the opening hours of the Alvechurch Youth Club until the later time of 10pm in the evening for the older teenagers to actively discourage young people from socialising around the MUGA area late in the evening.

Financial Implications

Potential financial implications have been requested from Alvechurch Communities Together.

Resource Implications

Potential resource implications have been requested from Alvechurch Communities Together.

Recommendation Four

Engaging With Young People

That the Alvechurch Youth Club carry out targeted outreach work on the MUGA itself to engage with the young people who use the site as a social meeting point in the evening after dusk.

Financial Implications

Potential financial implications have been requested from Alvechurch Communities Together.

Resource Implications

Potential resource implications have been requested from Alvechurch Communities Together.

Recommendation Five

Monitoring Anti-Social Behaviour

That the Performance Management Board monitor the levels and types of reported Anti-Social Behaviour at Swanslength over the next 12 months to assess the levels of reported ASB compared to the previous 12 months. This should also be compared to general ASB trends across the district.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

Recommendation Six

The Community Safety Partnership

That Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership monitor the levels of reported Anti-

Social Behaviour around the MUGA to identify emerging issues of ASB and coordinate remedial action in partnership with the local police service and the Bromsgrove District Council Community Safety Team.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

Recommendation Seven

Police Presence

That West Mercia Police allocate a higher level of uniformed presence of the Swanslength area between 9pm and 1am at night.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged for the Council.

Resource Implications

There would be a significant financial implication should there be a requirement to dedicate an officer to be at this location, for the duration of the times given.

Comments from West Mercia Police

Recommendation Eight

Street Lighting

That the street lighting located near to the MUGA facility be relocated further away from the MUGA site to discourage this area from being a social meeting point for people in the evening.

Financial Implications

Financial implications - £4,500 to be met from the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) budget. Bromsgrove CSP are requested to meet this cost.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

Recommendation Nine

The Wall

That the full length of the perimeter wall running alongside Swanslength be removed and the ground re-banked to remove the makeshift seating that the wall provides for people using the MUGA area as a social meeting point in the evenings.

Financial Implications

- a. To remove the small section of wall near to the MUGA, to remove the trees and hedging between the wall and the MUGA and to level/bank and re-seed - estimated cost £1,000.
- b. To remove the long section of wall running from the Junior/Toddler natural Play area to the MUGA area and level/bank with topsoil, remove the trees and hedging between the wall and the MUGA and re-seed - estimated cost £2,000.

Total: £3,000.

There is no existing budget provision to meet the above costs and therefore the Cabinet is requested to categorise such works as high priority as part of the budget process for 2011/12 and to recommend that the necessary financial provision be made available.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

Recommendation Ten

Landscaping

That a programme of landscaping be completed to create an open space recreation ground to increase visibility of the site and reduce the number of ASB acts that are obscured by undergrowth.

Financial Implications

Financial implications are encompassed within recommendation nine, if contracted within the same job.

Resource Implications

No additional resource implications are envisaged.

Recommendation Eleven

MUGA Modifications

That the seating panels provided as part of the MUGA facility be removed and replaced with blank panels and the swing frame and seat be removed altogether.

Financial Implications

Potential financial implications are being ascertained.

Resource Implications

Potential resource implications are being ascertained.

Members of the Inquiry



Councillor
S. R. Colella
(Chairman)



Councillor
A. N. Blagg



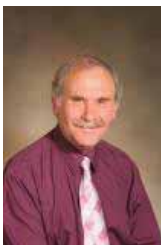
Councillor
Mrs. M. Bunker



Councillor
R. J. Deeming



Councillor
Mrs. R. L. Dent



Councillor
D. L.
Pardoe



Councillor
C. R. Scurrell



Councillor
Mrs. C. J.
Spencer



Councillor
C. B. Taylor



Councillor
L. J. Turner



Councillor
C. J. Tidmarsh

Aims and Objectives of the Inquiry

Aim:

To investigate the crime and disorder issues highlighted by residents and to consider the future options for the Multi Use Games Area facility at Swanslength, Alvechurch.

Objectives:

- i. To investigate the reported crime and disorder issues around the MUGA
- ii. To consider the value of the MUGA to local residents
- iii. To identify the possible options and associated costs and benefits for the MUGA.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. On 15th June 2010 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board (JOSB) received 3 petitions on the Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) at Swanslength in Alvechurch. One petition called for the MUGA to be removed and claimed that it attracted anti-social behaviour into the local neighbourhood. The two others supported the MUGA facility as a community resource that should remain at its present location.
- 1.2. The JOSB resolved that an Inquiry be held into the future of the MUGA facility to investigate the reported crime and disorder issues and the future options for the MUGA and to make recommendations to Cabinet.
- 1.3. The Swanslength MUGA was installed in June 2008 by Bromsgrove District Council following a request from the Alvechurch Local Neighbourhood Partnership to increase access to youth facilities in the village. Available funding enabled the installation of additional equipment in the form of a climbing facility to complement the MUGA facility.
- 1.4. The installation of the MUGA has however, in the opinion of a number of residents, had a negative impact on the well-being and quality of life of residents who live closest to the facility. This has been highlighted through engagement with local residents, as well as the many letters received in response to the Inquiry.
- 1.5. Many residents feel that the removal of the MUGA is the most effective way to improve the quality of life of those who live closest to the facility and to address their fears and concerns. This has to be balanced against the needs of young people to have access to safe and accessible recreational play facilities, such as the MUGA provides and the Inquiry has attempted to weigh up these competing priorities and to find a way forward.
- 1.6. The Inquiry has considered written and oral evidence from key stakeholders and conducted site visits of the Alvechurch MUGA site. At the beginning of the Inquiry, an open invitation was made for people to submit written evidence to contribute to the investigation and Members of the Inquiry have received a substantial amount of correspondence and submissions of written evidence from local residents, both for and against the MUGA and all submissions have been taken into account.
- 1.7. On 15th June 2010 each of the petition organisers was allowed up to 5 minutes to introduce their petition and were questioned by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board and this evidence has been taken into account. On 22nd July 2010 Members of the Inquiry heard evidence from a range of key witnesses including the police, Bromsgrove District Council community safety officers, ward councillors, local residents representatives, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust and Worcestershire County Council Youth Support. For a full list of those

interviewed during the Inquiry see Appendix 1. For a list of the documentary evidence considered see Appendix 2.

1.8. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires local council and police authorities, in partnership with other agencies, to consider crime and disorder reduction and community safety when undertaking all of their duties and responsibilities.

1.9. Section 17 states:
"Without prejudice to any other obligation imposed on it, it shall be the duty of each authority to which this section applies to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area".

1.10. Community safety issues impact on all areas of local government services. The responsibilities placed on all local government departments by Section 17 provides the impetus for them to consider how their service area can contribute to reducing crime and disorder, as well as their impact on social and community factors that affect crime levels.

1.11. The Inquiry has contributed to meeting the requirements under Section 17 by considering the reported anti-social behaviour issues around the MUGA site and making recommendations on how these might be ameliorated.



Aerial view of Swanslength Open Space

2 Options for the MUGA

- 2.1. The Inquiry has considered various options for the MUGA, including, in particular, removal and storage of the MUGA, removal of the MUGA to an alternative site and leaving the MUGA in situ with various other remedial measures taken to alleviate ASB in the vicinity. The costs and benefits of each of the key options identified by the Inquiry have been taken into account.
- 2.2. The Inquiry explored the possibility of the removal and storage of the MUGA. This would remove the facility altogether in the hope of removing the associated anti-social behaviour reported around the site. This would of course also remove the recreational play facilities for young people without re-installing them anywhere else and salvage the equipment use at an alternative site elsewhere in the District, should the need arise at some point in the future.
- 2.3. Removal and storage of the MUGA would entail estimated financial costs of £5,500 to remove the facility in a manner which will allow it to be reused elsewhere and re-instate the land back to open space. This cost could be met either through existing mainstream budgets or within the existing budgets of the Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership. Costs for re-location would however have to be determined if/when a suitable alternative site can be found.
- 2.4. There would also be associated financial savings such as a reduction in staff costs that are currently incurred to deal with street cleansing, maintenance of the facility and possibly the costs of responding to reported incidents of anti-social behaviour (depending on the effectiveness of removal on reducing ASB in the area).
- 2.5. The Inquiry explored the possibility of removal of the MUGA to an alternative site. This would be to remove the facility in the hope of removing the associated anti-social behaviour reported around the site, but moving the facilities to a more favourable site elsewhere in Alvechurch.
- 2.6. The problem with this option is that the main alternative sites available, which were assessed prior to the installation of the MUGA, were found to be less favourable locations. The risk assessment of the main alternative site “the Meadows” considered in 2008 by PC Stan Baker of West Mercia Constabulary assessed the Meadows as being “very close to residential properties. I feel they will suffer from noise and potentially anti-social behaviour”. Swanslength by comparison was assessed as “some distance from the nearest residential property and so there will be a reduced impact”. The assessment concluded; “my preferred option that would provide a safe facility for the young people and reduce the risk of incidents of crime and disorder is the Swanns Length site”.
- 2.7. The cost to remove and relocate the MUGA; to remove the ball court (but not the tarmac base) and relocate, create a new base and re-install elsewhere was quoted to be at approximately £60,000.

- 2.8. The Inquiry explored the option of leaving the MUGA in situ and implementing a range of remedial measures to alleviate the risk of ASB in the vicinity. This would retain the amenity of recreational facilities for young people in Alvechurch, which in many ways may also help to alleviate the general problem of ASB and nuisance behaviour of young people with nowhere else to go and nothing to do. It would, however, mean that community partners would have to find other ways of dealing with reported ASB and find ways to discourage anti-social and nuisance activities around the site.
- 2.9. Some of these remedial measures would have to be met within existing budgets, but could be carried out by giving extra focus to the MUGA and the young people who congregate there. There may be an increased role for the youth service, the police and Community Safety Officers (CSOs) in engaging with young people in that area in the evening. It could also entail “designing out” ASB by looking at the site and re-landscaping features that may encourage anti-social or nuisance activities.
- 2.10. There are ongoing costs already budgeted for the MUGA, including site inspection, cleaning and repairs. Regular visits to the site would be required with or without the MUGA as there is another play facility on the recreation ground. Bromsgrove District Council has spent £324 so far in replacement parts (such as vandalized seats due to fire damage). As an estimate, changing one seat per year would cost £162 pa. Annual inspection costs are estimated at £50 pa. The line marking within the area needs reapplying every 3 years at an approximate cost of £200.
- 2.11. The depreciation costs of the facilities would be approximately £3,500 pa based on a life expectancy of 15 years. The structure also includes a tarmac base which is difficult to assess for life expectancy.
- 2.12. The Inquiry has balanced the needs and concerns of the community for a safe and secure environment and with facilities for young people in the village and on balance has concluded that more can be done to alleviate the reported anti-social behaviour around the site without actually removing the facility altogether. Although it is important to deal with the concerns of the residents who feel aggrieved at the impact of nuisance and ASB around the site, it is also important to consider the views of the local residents who value the site. It is also apparent that, due to the focal point created by the nexus of the recreation ground and footpaths, this area may well be a natural meeting point for young people with or without the MUGA and nuisance and ASB may well persist even if the MUGA were to be removed. The adjacent road is also likely to contribute as it provides a parking space where people might pull up in their cars playing loud music or to meet people congregating around the site.

“Removing the MUGA will not remove the teenagers who wish to gather to socialize it will only mean that they will meet elsewhere. The problem is not with the MUGA but with the few who will persist in anti social behaviour”

– An Alvechurch resident

- 2.13. It is therefore recommended that the Alvechurch MUGA be left in situ (Recommendation One). The evidence for this conclusion and the remedial measures recommended to reduce the risk of ASB and nuisance behaviour are explored further in this report.

3 Consultation and Engagement

- 3.1. Installation of the MUGA facility at Swanslength was carried out after consultation with local residents and other stakeholders. Consultation was carried out with young people in October 2007, which identified that a MUGA facility was the preferred choice¹. Other options were a skate park and a climbing facility. The consultation gave three locations in Alvechurch for young people to state their preference for such a facility: the Wiggin Memorial (sometimes referred to as “the Meadows”), George Road and Swanslength Open Space. The Wiggin Memorial Ground was the preferred location with young people followed by George Road and then Swanslength.
- 3.2. Consultation was carried out with local with residents, contractors and the crime risk manager for West Mercia Police. Feedback from contractors and the Crime Risk Manager identified Swanslength Open Space as the most suitable location of those available based on build feasibility, user safety; the views on the suitability of both the Wiggin Memorial and Swanslength Open Space were given to residents as part of the residents’ consultation.
- 3.3. There was a consultation with local residents through a postal survey during the early part of 2008. 1600 households were consulted within the village. 21% (339) of residents responded of which 65.5% (222) of respondents were in favour of the facility being built on Swanslength Open Space².
- 3.4. After consultation with residents, young people and stakeholders, and the assessments from contractors, a MUGA was built at the preferred location at Swanslength and officially opened in June 2008.
- 3.5. During the summer of 2009 there was an increase in reported ASB complaints to Bromsgrove District Council and West Mercia Police and this prompted the Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to hold a special meeting of the Steering group to discuss the issue. The group decided to deliver a programme of community engagement including door to door surveys, targeted patrols to engage with residents and young people and an Open Public Forum.
- 3.6. On 19th November 2009 an Open Public Forum was held in the village to offer all residents an opportunity to voice their concerns of ASB in Alvechurch Village. A select panel of officers representing various agencies undertook this exercise and residents vocalised their concerns. This meeting was attended by over 60 local residents.
- 3.7. All residents concerns from the Open Public Forum were noted and 20 residents were nominated by the forum to form a focus group. The focus group met on 4 occasions and prioritised the concerns that had been raised and considered options for addressing the issues raised with the Swanslength MUGA and the available provisions for young people in the village. A small group of young people intermittently attended the focus group meetings.

- 3.8. The focus group considered all available locations for the MUGA within Alvechurch. A crime risk analysis conducted by the Crime Risk Manager from West Mercia Police identified however that each location was inappropriate due to its proximity to residential areas or hazardous to the safety of the facilities users.
- 3.9. The focus group requested Bromsgrove District Council officers to compile a report for Cabinet which highlighted the concerns of residents. This report was considered by Cabinet on 2nd June 2010. Cabinet will consider the issue again in the light of this report.
- 3.10. The Inquiry welcomes the attempt to consult local residents, including young people specifically, on the location of the MUGA and the subsequent consultation and engagement on the reported anti-social behaviour problems around the site. There were however found to be aspects of the consultation process which could have been carried out better.
- 3.11. In particular, the consultation with local residents carried out in April 2008 “An Opportunity to Give Your Views.... MUGA and Risk Play”, whilst it provided options for the 2 key possible sites, does not appear to have offered residents the choice of “No MUGA”, which might have been informative if many residents felt there was either no suitable site for a MUGA in the village. This consultation also only provided 2 options for the site and no room to suggest alternative locations.
- 3.12. It appears that no map was included in this consultation, which may have been helpful as many Alvechurch residents may have been unaware of the precise location of the sites mentioned. Indeed, the sites mentioned are frequently referred to by different names; the “Wiggin Memorial” is also known locally as “the Meadows”. So some residents may have been unable to take an informed view based on location.
- 3.13. The evaluations of the sites provided with the consultation form as advice could also be viewed as extremely leading and gave a clear preference for the Swanslength site. Of all of the “Pros” and “Cons” listed for each site in the evaluations by Bromsgrove District Council and the police, there are no “Cons” listed for Swanslength whatsoever, only “Pros” and the alternative option (Wiggin Memorial Park) lists several. In the absence of alternative information (such as a clear knowledge of where the sites are), this could have led consultees to favour the Swanslength site. Indeed, in view of the amount of risks highlighted it may be that the Wiggin Memorial site was not a viable option in the first place.
- 3.14. The consultation with young people carried out on 10th October 2007³ revealed that Swanslength was not in fact the favourite site for young people consulted. The Wiggins Memorial playing field and the George Road site were more favoured in the consultation. A significant 33% of consultees responded with “Other” indicating another site or possibly even no site for a MUGA.

- 3.15. The consultation with local residents did however return a clear preference for the Swanslength site and in addition to the risk assessment by West Mercia Constabulary probably provided enough evidence to show that Swanslength was and still is the most suitable location.
- 3.16. It is important that consultation and engagement with local residents is continued and particularly engagement with young people socialising around the MUGA in the evenings and local residents directly next to the MUGA facility. It is likely that a lot of the problems of nuisance behaviour can be challenged through direct engagement with young people at the site after 9pm and issues picked up through engagement with residents directly facing onto the MUGA. In particular, it is recommended that Community Safety Officers liaise with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust and the local policing team to identify and make periodic house calls to vulnerable residents living in close proximity to the MUGA (Recommendation Two), as determined by the needs of individual residents.

4 Young People in Alvechurch

- 4.1. The MUGA facilities were introduced to provide recreational play facilities for teenagers and young people in Alvechurch village. A need for these facilities was identified after consultation with local residents and part of the rationale was in fact to reduce incidents of ASB by giving young people something to do and somewhere to go.
- 4.2. The Inquiry considered the provision of recreational play facilities for young people in Alvechurch and the role of the MUGA in supporting these. It has also considered the views of the wider village that use the MUGA facilities in the appropriate manner, including young people and families that would be disappointed to see the facility removed. Many residents have written in to say how much the MUGA facilities are valued by young people in the village.

This play area is for all age groups, I have seen toddlers through to teenagers using this facility. It's just not fair to take it away as the vast majority of children who use it have done nothing wrong, so why should they be punished"
- *An Alvechurch resident.*

- 4.3. Two of the petitions presented to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board in June 2010 were supporting the preservation of the MUGA as a valued community resource and facility for young people. One of the petitions, presented by Miss Emily Wightman (herself a teenager) entitled "Join if you want to keep the MUGA in Alvechurch" was signed by over 100 people, mostly teenagers. Another petition, presented by Mr Alex Cooke, was also signed by nearly 100 people and encouraged the Council to keep the MUGA.
- 4.4. It is important to note that not all of the consultation with local residents or correspondence submitted by local residents to the Inquiry was concerned about ASB on the site; indeed some residents were from their experience unaware of ASB around the MUGA or thought that it had been exaggerated. One local resident told the Inquiry "I feel that the young people of Alvechurch get a really bad press from some local residents and they have expressed to me that they feel that certain residents are worse than the Victorians in their attitudes to young people".

I live at xx Birmingham Road with my garden backing onto the playing field – albeit some 50 metres away from the MUGA – but I have never heard or experienced the antisocial behaviour described by other residents"
- *An Alvechurch resident.*

- 4.5. The Inquiry heard from Kim Caves, Team Manager for Bromsgrove and District Youth Support, who has been associated with the delivery of youth work in Alvechurch. She was asked for feedback from young people on the MUGA. She said; "Not all of them use it, those that do, use it for its designed activity and enjoy it. They are aware of the feelings within the village and some are reluctant

to go up there for fear of being ostracised or moaned at by older people in that area”.

4.6. A new youth club opened in the village in June 2010⁴. This currently operates once a week through the Alvechurch Community Together (ACT) Trust. This youth group has been set up as a social enterprise organisation. The youth club is well attended and in the first four sessions delivered between April and May 2010 an average of 50 young people attended aged 12-17 years old, although the main contingent of attendees are aged between 12 – 14 years old.

4.7. The Inquiry received a written statement from ACT, supporting the MUGA;

“The directors of ACT strongly urge the Scrutiny Committee and Bromsgrove District Council to abolish plans to remove the MUGA from Alvechurch”.

ACT supports the MUGA not only as an important part of the recreational facilities in Alvechurch, but also as part of the package to discourage ASB. “we strongly believe that removing the young people’s recreational facilities will actually make the situation worse, not better”.

4.8. The youth club can play an important role in encouraging young people in Alvechurch to get involved in more sociable social activities and away from nuisance behaviour and in mediating between young people and local residents. It also provides young people with somewhere to go and something to do in their spare time other than congregate on the street.

4.9. The youth club currently runs one evening from 7 - 9pm and will be extending to 3 evenings from 6.30 - 9pm. It is recommended that the Alvechurch Community Together (ACT) Trust consider extending the opening hours of the Alvechurch Youth Club until the later time of 10pm in the evening for the older teenagers to actively discourage young people from socialising around the MUGA area late in the evening. (Recommendation Three). It is also recommended that the Alvechurch Youth Club carry out targeted outreach work on the MUGA itself to engage with the young people who use the site as a social meeting point in the evening, to engage with the young people to encourage acceptable usage of the facility and challenge anti-social behaviour, alcohol misuse and rowdy behaviour that adversely effects the quality of life of Alvechurch residents (Recommendation Four).

“The Youth Group seems to have the right approach and I hope they can engage young people effectively – no easy task and needs very careful thought and support from the community at large” – *An Alvechurch resident.*

5 Anti-Social Behaviour at Swanslength

- 5.1. The main concern of people petitioning for the removal of the MUGA at Swanslength is the reported rise in anti-social behaviour around the site and its impact on local residents. A year after the installation of the MUGA, during the summer of 2009, there was an increase in reported Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) complaints to Bromsgrove District Council and West Mercia Police. The reports came from residents who live in close proximity to the Swanslength Open Space and consisted of youth related ASB, alcohol misuse, vehicle related nuisance, inappropriate sexual activity, litter and noise.
- 5.2. The Home Office defines ASB as “any aggressive, intimidating or destructive activity that damages or destroys another person's quality of life”⁵. As such, it is a very broad category and there is a lot of scope for differing perceptions about what is ASB in practice. There is also scope for “nuisance” behaviour, such as socialising in residential areas and making noise, to be perceived as ASB, alongside more serious or criminal ASB. It is important to distinguish between different kinds of nuisance and ASB, but what is also significant is the perception of local residents who may feel intimidated or whose quality of life is significantly diminished by the activities around the MUGA in the evening.
- 5.3. The Inquiry has considered a great deal of correspondence submitted from local residents concerned about anti-social behaviour at Swanslength around the MUGA, as well as testimony submitted by residents in previous consultations. This has demonstrated a genuine concern by many residents with anti-social behaviour from a large number of residents.

“I have to convey to you the level of anti-social behaviour outside my house. There is high levels of noise, large groups of 15+ of children/young adults, there is total disrespect for people trying to sleep in their houses. This often occurs from 11pm onwards up to 2am”.

- 5.4. The Inquiry has considered the reports of ASB around the MUGA over a 12 month period; July 2009- June 2010. Figure 1 below shows the type of ASB incidents reported in the Swanslength area. It shows that by far the most frequently reported incidents (69%) are to do with rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour. 20% of reported incidents on the MUGA site mention alcohol and most of these were between July and September on Thursday, Friday or Saturday evenings.

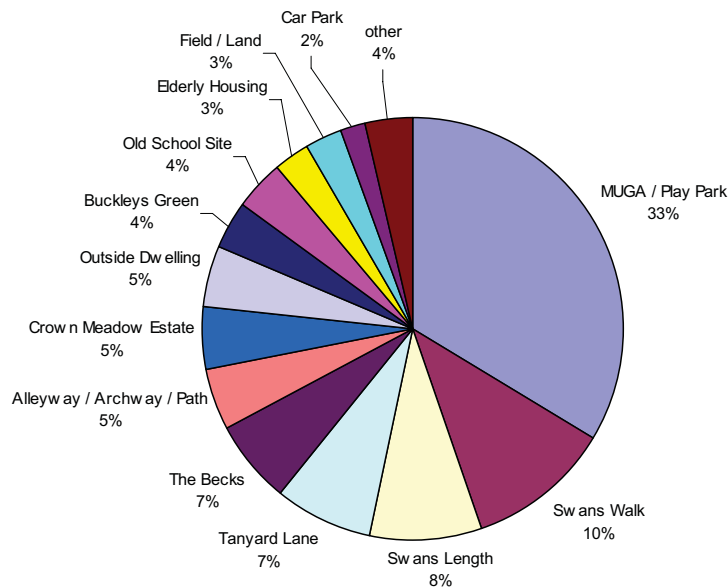
ASB Category	No. of Reported Incidents
Rowdy / Inconsiderate Behaviour	94
Vehicle Related Nuisance	17
Malicious Communications	8
Nuisance Neighbours	3
Abandoned Vehicles	2
Noise	2
Total	137

Figure 1: Incidents by ASB Recording Category, Swans Length area, July 2009 to June 2010⁶

- 5.5. 20% or 15 reported cases of ASB around the MUGA over this period were alcohol related, 8 of which were located on the MUGA itself. It is illegal for all young people under the age of 18 to consume alcohol and the whole of Alvechurch is a Designated Public Place Order (Alcohol Free Zone), so drinking around the site is prohibited.
- 5.6. It is recommended that the Performance Management Board (PMB) monitors the levels and types of reported Anti-Social Behaviour at Swanslength over the next 12 months to assess the levels of reported ASB compared to the previous 12 months. This should also be compared to general ASB trends across the District (Recommendation Five). It is expected that, if the remedial measures recommended in this report are put in place, there should be a fall in ASB over this period, but monitoring by PMB will help to see if these measures are working.
- 5.7. It is also recommended that the Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership monitor the levels of reported Anti-Social Behaviour around the MUGA to identify emerging issues of ASB and coordinate remedial action in partnership with the local police service and the Bromsgrove District Council Community Safety Team (Recommendation Six).
- 5.8. It should be noted that not all ASB reports relate to the MUGA itself, although the MUGA has become a focal meeting point and a site frequently mentioned in reports. 40 out of 108 relevant reported incidents in the Swanslength area expressly mentioned the play facilities and only 19% specifically mention the MUGA facility. The chart below gives a picture of the reported ASB incidents in the Swanslength area from July 2009 to June 2010. It shows that about a third relate to the MUGA facilities. 42 reported incidents came from 5 repeat complainants over the 12 month period⁷. The disproportionate effect of ASB on the small number of residents living directly opposite the MUGA should also be taken into account.



“Alcohol Free Zone” signage next to the MUGA site, Alechurch.



- 5.9. The peak time for ASB reports for this period was between 6pm and 11pm in the evening and reported incidents that specifically relate to the MUGA were most frequent after 8pm. Circumstantial evidence suggests that this is a time when older teenagers and young people hang around the area socialising. It is also a time of night when noise and disturbance to local residents may be exacerbated.

“anti-social behaviour tends to occur at night when noise becomes exaggerated. Many residents feel intimidated by the youngsters particularly when they are in large groups and fuelled by alcohol. Many residents feel threatened and distressed. The area of the MUGA is in darkness, so when looked at through windows of near by homes, it can appear threatening, especially at night”.

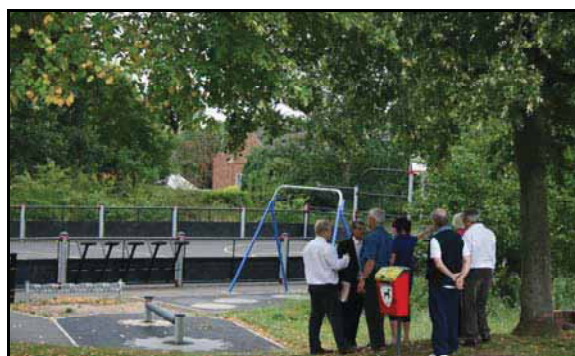
Sarah Morgan – Petition organizer – statement to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board 15th June 2010.

- 5.10. A breakdown of the reported data by days of the week show that reported incidents were fairly evenly spread over the course of the week with a slight prevalence from Thursday to Saturday.
- 5.11. The Inquiry interviewed Chief Inspector Angie Burnet, PC Stan Baker, Crime Risk Manager and Inspector Julian Smith, a district police inspector. They informed the Inquiry that the police had been carrying out a higher level of patrols around the Swanslength area in recognition of the reported ASB. They are determined to involve other agencies, partners and the community in resolving the problem. One problem is that the Community Safety Officer who patrols the area only works until 10pm and a lot of the reported ASB occurs after this time.

- 5.12. In view of the particular problem of reported ASB at peak times, it is recommended that West Mercia Police allocate a greater presence in the Swanslength area between 9pm and 1am at night (Recommendation Seven), with routine impromptu visits during these times, targeted to deter ASB when reports are most prevalent.
- 5.13. The rise in reports of anti-social behaviour prompted the Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to instruct the Community Safety Analyst to set up a Task Group to investigate and assess the impact the installation of this facility on Alvechurch Village and in particular Swanslength Open Space.
- 5.14. The investigation concluded that the level of reported ASB within the whole of Alvechurch village was of a similar volume following the installation of the MUGA when compared prior to the installation. Appendix 3 shows the intensity of ASB 12 months prior to the installation of the MUGA and the intensity of ASB 12 months post installation for comparison.
- 5.15. The analysis also revealed a shift in the locations of ASB within the village. Since the installation of the MUGA, ASB had decreased around the village but had become more focused on Swanslength. For the 12 months following the installation of the MUGA reported ASB in Swanslength had increased by 29% when compared to the 12 months prior to the installation.
- 5.16. The analysis also identified that post installation of the MUGA there has been a reduced volume of reports of alcohol misuse, inappropriate ball games and trespassing but increased reports of noise, throwing incidents, criminal damage, youth gathering, verbal abuse, banging on doors, and ASB involving motorbikes and mopeds.
- 5.17. The prima face evidence suggests that the introduction of the MUGA may have reduced overall anti-social behaviour around the village but increased it around Swanslength. This is however an indicative picture only as the relatively low statistical base and level of repeat complainers could mean that that reported ASB may not provide a totally representative sample.

6 Planning for the Future

- 6.1. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) states that all relevant authorities have a duty to consider the impact of all their functions and decisions on crime and disorder in their local area. The Act recognises the role of the planning system and police authorities in formulating and implementing strategies and guidance to reduce crime.
- 6.2. Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation section 17 says “Local authorities should: i. avoid any erosion of recreational function and maintains or enhance the character of open spaces”⁸. The Inquiry has considered how the MUGA facility might impact on ASB, as required by the Crime and Disorder Act and the impact of removing the MUGA on the erosion of the recreational function of the site.
- 6.3. The site inspection carried out as part of this Inquiry provided an insight into how the layout of the MUGA area may provide concourse and encourage young people to socialise in the evenings, how it might contribute to incidents of ASB and how it might impact upon residents living closest to the MUGA.
- 6.4. The MUGA facility is in fairly close proximity to residential dwellings, so it will impact on those living closest. If those residents have young children this may have advantages, but all residents living nearby will be adversely affected by noise and ASB in the evening. The pathway to and from the MUGA and Swanslength Open Space playing field runs right along the side in between the MUGA and the houses. This will contribute to noise and encourage people to congregate along the path.
- 6.5. A site visit was carried out on the King George playing field MUGA in Sidemoor and the Lytteton MUGA in Charford, by way of comparison. This helped to assess the logistics of the site and the surrounding area. The proximity of the MUGA to nearby houses was noted. The proximity of the MUGA to an adjacent no through road was noted and a half demolished derelict wall running to one side of the MUGA. There is clear “Alcohol Free Zone” signage around the site and the adjacent road.
- 6.6. All the way down the Swanslength foot path running in between the path and the MUGA and all the way along Swanslength there is a derelict wall. The derelict wall adds to a sense of dilapidation which may in itself encourage disrespect for the area and anti-social activities. The wall provides, in places, just enough height to be used as makeshift seating for people congregating by the MUGA.



Members of the Inquiry conducting a site visit of the Alvechurch MUGA

6.7. There is a street lamp at one side of the MUGA at the head of the pathway, which increases visibility but may, in conjunction with the wall, encourage people to congregate in the evenings. It is therefore recommended that the street lighting located near to the MUGA facility be relocated further away from the MUGA site to discourage this area from being a social meeting point for people in the evening (Recommendation Eight). It is also



Perimeter wall along Swanslength

recommended that the full length of the perimeter wall running alongside Swanslength be removed and the ground re-banked to remove the makeshift seating that the wall provides for people using the MUGA area as a social meeting point in the evenings (Recommendation Nine).

6.8. There is an adjacent road running right next to the MUGA in between the MUGA and residential properties. It is possible that road contributes to reported ASB, as it provides an opportunity for people to park up to meet the people congregating around the site, possibly playing loud music or making engine noise late at night. As such, these contributory factors would remain with or without the MUGA facility.

6.9. There is an outgrowth of shrubbery and foliage to one side of the MUGA between the MUGA and the road. This diminishes visibility of the MUGA site and may encourage nefarious, criminal and anti-social activities to be carried out secretly obscured from view. It is therefore recommended that a programme of landscaping be completed to create open space at this section of the recreation ground to increase visibility of the site and reduce the potential number of ASB acts that are obscured by undergrowth (Recommendation Ten).

6.10. The MUGA itself consists of a ball court and climbing activity equipment on soft tarmac. There is a small amount of vandalism damage and graffiti, but it is generally in good condition. A swing frame is part of the facility, although the giant swing seat has been removed due to health and safety concerns. The MUGA facility provides seating, which may be useful in the daytime for proper use, but may be used inappropriately in the evening by people socialising around the site. It is therefore recommended that the seating panels provided as part of the MUGA facility be removed and replaced with blank panels (Recommendation Eleven). The giant swing and frame should be removed altogether.

6.11. 72 new dwellings are to be built on the old school site on Tanyard Lane which will immediately back onto the MUGA facility and the Inquiry has considered the likely impact of this development on the Swanslength MUGA area.

6.12. This new development may impact on the MUGA site in 2 key ways:
i. it will increase the need for recreational facilities for children and young people in the area and

- ii. it may increase the usage of the site by children and young people in the area, along with other people who may be responsible for ASB in the evenings, along with the associated nuisance to local residents.

6.13. The new housing development will, in particular, encourage increased use of the Swanslength pathway to and from the MUGA next to residential dwellings. This could potentially add to the noise and unintentional nuisance of people going to and from the MUGA site in the evenings. This is already a concern.

“My wife and I suffer with anti-social behaviour. We are positioned at the top of the walk and crowds of youths very often gather outside our gate before going to or returning from the MUGA. They shout, girls scream, use bad language and damage the hedge. These problems only happened since the introduction of the MUGA” – *An Alvechurch resident.*

6.14. PC Stan Baker of West Mercia Police told the inquiry “We reviewed the planning application in January 2010 and made a report to the planning officers and raised concerns about the pedestrian links between the new site and the play facilities in view of ASB problems there”.

6.15. The impact on potential ASB around the MUGA site should have been taken into account in the consideration of the new housing development. The potential impact on ASB around developments should in future be given greater consideration in the planning stages of such developments. In the case of the Tanyard Lane development, this might have encouraged a different layout of the route to and from the MUGA facility, which could for example have re-directed the footpath away from the residential properties or other mitigating measures.

“on Swans Walk, en route to the MUGA, there is a sign which states ‘QUIET PLEASE ELDERLY PERSONS IN RESIDENCE’. It is the residents of this sheltered accommodation complex who I am most concerned about”
- *An Alvechurch resident.*

7 Conclusion

- 7.1. The Inquiry has considered a good deal of evidence from local stakeholders, including local residents, the police, young people and youth services. It has considered the data for ASB around the MUGA and the Alvechurch area. It has examined other possible sites identified for the MUGA and the consultation carried out with local residents and young people on the location of the MUGA and the feasibility and risk assessments carried out by West Mercia Police and Bromsgrove District Council. It has carried out site inspections of the Alvechurch MUGA and other MUGA facilities in the District to assess how the geographical and structural dimensions of the sites might affect ASB.
- 7.2. There has clearly been an increase in reported anti-social behaviour (ASB) and complaints from residents who live within the proximity of the MUGA. This has led to extensive public engagement which has captured the impact this facility has had on local residents, which together with the three petitions has instigated the Inquiry by Bromsgrove District Council Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board.
- 7.3. The Inquiry has found, through analysis of reported ASB that the impact of the installation of the MUGA has not only resulted in Swanslength Open Space becoming a focal point for young people in the evening, but also for related ASB and nuisance behaviour, such as loitering and noise. Although levels of reported ASB around the Alvechurch Village has reduced since the installation of the MUGA the levels of reported ASB at Swanslength has increased.
- 7.4. The impact of ASB on residents of Swanslength has been further inflated as a result of other environmental factors and design such as street lighting and the location of natural seating areas such as the derelict perimeter wall, which attracts young people to congregate at the open space and several entrance and egress points to the open space which makes the area difficult to police.
- 7.5. Public engagement has explored the impact of this facility to the residents who live closest to the facility and also explored the views of residents who would be sad to see this facility go and expressed the importance to have provision for local young people. The Inquiry has weighed up evidence from the different perspectives and set out recommendations in this report.
- 7.6. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires the Council to consider the impact of the MUGA on crime and disorder in the area and to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime, disorder and re-offending in the area. This Inquiry has contributed to the fulfilment of that requirement and the recommendations put forward should, if accepted, contribute to a reduction in reported ASB over the following period. The evidence suggests that whilst there has been an increase in reported ASB around the MUGA site, there has in fact been a slight reduction in reported ASB in Alvechurch village overall.

- 7.7. The package of recommendations suggests ways in which Bromsgrove District Council, along with local partners and the local community can deal with nuisance and ASB problems without removing the MUGA facility altogether, recognising that the MUGA is for many a valued community resource for young people in Alvechurch.
- 7.8. In addition to the specific measures outlined, there is a need for members of the Alvechurch community and community partners, including young people themselves to constructively engage with the young people congregating around the MUGA site in the evenings to encourage greater respect for local residents and to discourage ASB and nuisance behaviour around the site. Young people themselves involved in congregating in the evening should encourage a respectful attitude to local residents and discourage noise, loitering and should report any criminal activity (including alcohol consumption). Neighbourhood police, CSOs and youth workers should continue to engage with young people around the site to facilitate this relationship building.
- 7.9. Bromsgrove District Council should review its processes when installing open space facilities to capture the potential impact on local residents. The consultation with residents carried out prior to the installation of the Swanslength MUGA, identified a majority level of support for the facility to be installed at Swanslength. There should, however, have been more consideration given to those who live directly near to any proposed open space development, as they are disproportionately affected. Future consultation on such developments should also provide a more balanced view of the options and clearer information so that the consultation can be seen to be clear and objective.
- 7.10. It is hoped that the recommendations resulting from the Inquiry, if accepted, will ameliorate the ASB and nuisance behaviour reported around the MUGA site and improve the quality of life of local residents, as well as the young people who enjoy the MUGA facilities in the appropriate way. This should produce a reduction in the levels of reported ASB around the MUGA and additional monitoring by the Council's Performance Management Board and by the Community Safety Partnership should check and keep the situation under review.

Witnesses to the Inquiry

Cllr Hollingworth – Ward Councillor, Alvechurch - Bromsgrove District Council
Cllr Griffiths – Ward Councillor, Alvechurch - Bromsgrove District Council
Cllr Luck – Ward Councillor, Alvechurch - Bromsgrove District Council

Ruth Bamford - Head of Planning and Regeneration - Bromsgrove District Council
Sue Hanley - Executive Director & Deputy Chief Executive Leisure, Culture, Environment & Community Services - Bromsgrove District Council
Angie Heighway – Head of Community Services, Bromsgrove District Council
Guy Revans - Head of Leisure and Cultural Services - Bromsgrove District Council

PC Stan Baker – Crime Risk Manager - West Mercia Police
Chief Inspector Angie Burnet – West Mercia Police
Julian Smith – West Mercia Police

Kim Caves – Team Manager Bromsgrove, Youth Support, Children's Services Directorate - Worcestershire County Council

Andy Humphries – Vice Chairman of The Village Society, Alvechurch

Marie Green - Assistant Director - Bromsgrove District Housing Trust

Alex Cooke – Petitioner organiser
Sarah Morgan – Petitioner organiser

Emily Wightman – Petitioner organiser

Mike Webb – Portfolio Holder for Community, Bromsgrove District Council

Chris Santoriello-Smith – Senior Community Safety Project Officer, Bromsgrove District Council

List of Documentary Evidence

1. Alvechurch Youthink – Consultation 10th October 2007.
2. Alvechurch Consultation – Multi Use Games Area and Risky Play Proposal, April 2008.
3. Site comparisons in Alvechurch, Memo from PC Stan Baker, 10th January 2008.
4. Risk Assessment Swanns Length, Alvechurch – West Mercia Police, 26th October 2009.
5. Open Public Forum – Alvechurch ASB, 19th November 2009.
6. Anti-Social Behaviour in Alvechurch Village, Update July 2010. Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership.
7. Comparisons in Reported ASB between Alvechurch and other MUGA Sites in Bromsgrove.
8. Planning proposal (old school site).
9. Alvechurch Parish Council Minutes of the meeting held 12th July 2010.
10. ACT – Statement for Scrutiny Committee – Alvechurch MUGA.
11. Extract from Village News magazine July / August 2010.
12. Transcript of Petitioner One (Mrs Sarah Morgan) presentation to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board 15th June 2010, submitted by Mrs Sarah Morgan.
13. Correspondence on the MUGA received 1st June -2nd August 2010.

References

- ¹ Alvechurch Youthink Consultation 10th October 2007
- ² Alvechurch Consultation – Multi Use Games Area & Risky Play Proposal, Bromsgrove District Council April 2008.
- ³ Alvechurch Youthink Consultation 10th October 2007)
- ⁴ Kim Caves, evidence to the Inquiry 22nd July 2010.
- ⁵ Home Office Website www.homeoffice.gov.uk/anti-social-behaviour
- ⁶ Anti-Social Behaviour in Alvechurch Village Update July 2010, Bromsgrove District Council.
- ⁷ Anti-Social Behaviour in Alvechurch Village Update July 2010, Bromsgrove District Council.
- ⁸ Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation).



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e-mail: equality@bromsgrove.gov.uk