



Note

Maitland Park – Play Equipment (2021/6108/P & 2022/0007/P)

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This note regards two applications submitted by the London Borough of Camden to amend proposals for providing play equipment for young people (aged 11+) within the Maitland Park estate. The proposals are to amend the play provision strategy as is set out in planning permission 2014/5840/P (as amended by 2015/6696/P and 2019/4998/P). Because the proposals extend beyond the redline boundary of this permission, it has been necessary to submit two applications – one full application for the equipment itself, and a minor-material amendment application under section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to vary the conditions attached to the existing permission for the redevelopment of Maitland Park.

2 Background

- 2.1 Planning permission for the redevelopment of the northern section of the estate was granted in 2015 (2014/5840/P, as amended). This allowed for the demolition of Aspen House, garages and the gymnasium that was immediately west of Aspen House. The gymnasium provided play and recreation facilities for young people aged 11+, however, the building was in a poor state of disrepair and consultation undertaken whilst preparing the proposals made clear that residents of the estate found it outdated and undesirable. The proposals therefore included re-providing these play facilities for older children within the estate in the form of a multi-use games area ('MUGA'), east and roughly equidistant between Rowan House and Whitebeam House (i.e., close to the location of the existing playground for young children).
- 2.2 Following the approval of this planning permission, however, it became clear that the proposals for the MUGA were not supported by the local community. It was deemed that the MUGA would create a lot of noise through its use which would unfairly impact those residents closest to it. There was also concern that the MUGA would attract anti-social behaviour. A petition with 53 signatures was submitted in 2016 opposing it.

3 Formulating alternative proposals

Consultation

- 3.1 After it became clear the MUGA was not popular with local residents, work began on identifying an alternative means of re-providing the play space that had previously been at the gymnasium for older children. This involved considering alternative locations for the MUGA. Despite much consultation with the TRA, CWG and other local residents, however, it was deemed that there were no such location that would: a) be sufficiently overlooked as to deter anti-social behaviour; and b) avoid causing undue noise impacts within a particular location within the estate. Finding locations that were also on flat ground (much of the land within the estate is sloped) and also avoided impact to the much-loved trees within the estate was also unsuccessful. Alternative options were therefore explored that could be enjoyed by a larger cross section of the estate's residents (as the MUGA was deemed to be a facility primarily for boys of a certain age).



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- 3.2 A 'meet the contractor' event was held in September 2019 across two days, with each having a strong turnout. There was general support for a gym trail, on the conditions that it would be spread throughout the estate, avoid the loss of green space as much as possible and avoid any loss of trees.
- 3.3 Following these events, greater effort was put into hearing the views of those for whom the play space and equipment would be intended – i.e., children aged 11+. The covid pandemic delayed these efforts, but events were held in summer 2021 to better understand what older children in the local area would like to see. There was an overwhelming sense that more play equipment would be welcomed by local young people because although the estate benefits from generous open areas that are available for informal recreation, facilities for older children were lacking. Very strong support was given to proposals for a table tennis table and outdoor obstacle course (monkey bars, steps, climb overs etc.).
- 3.4 The idea of a gym trail was positively received, especially at the second of these engagement events which was a series of activity sessions focussed around encouraging fit and healthy lifestyles. An online survey was run, with 12 out of 15 respondents giving an answer of 8 or above to the question 'how likely are you to use the outdoor equipment on the estate if free?' (1 being not likely, 10 being very likely). What was also clear from the consultation is that the equipment should not be overly prescriptive in its use – it should invite creative engagement that would allow for it to be used by a wider cross section of society (though still focussing on older children aged 11+). The equipment proposed will enable and encourage girls and young women as well as older and less able people to participate to make use of the facilities provided in ways that they are not currently able to. MUGAs tend to be exclusive, dominated by young men and make inclusion including intergenerational inclusive almost impossible.
- 3.5 The last two years has highlighted the impact of lockdown on the mental health of all people and young people in particular especially those whose education have been compromised and their concern about their future.
- 3.6 Following this, more detailed design appraisals focussed on how a gym/play trail could be delivered within the estate to allow for this.

Design process

- 3.7 The first step in the design process was to undertake a site visit and thorough review of the estate. This established an opportunities and constraints plan that highlighted areas there unsuitable for intervention, and others where there were opportunities to enhance the existing provision and wayfinding. This site visit was undertaken alongside neighbourhood wardens, tree officers from the Council and members of the Green Spaces team to ensure that the local constraints were properly understood, and the proposals could reflect these.
- 3.8 Further information on the design process and the final proposals are provided in the Design and Access Statement that supports the full planning application (2021/6108/P). An assessment of the proposals against relevant planning policy is provided in the accompanying Cover Letter, which makes clear the very strong policy support for this type of proposal, which seeks to enhance the public areas and deliver play space in well over-looked areas, thereby encouraging legitimate use of these areas.



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4 Material considerations

- 4.1 We note that a report is to be discussed by LB Camden's Cabinet at their meeting on 02 March 2022 which sets out the Council's aims for improving the borough for young people – a far reaching aim that covers multiple topics, of which encouraging healthy and active lifestyles is one. The report is backed up by survey findings which indicate that young people in the borough have a “*strong preference for sports and physical activities*” (paragraph 3.6).
- 4.2 Whilst the aims of the proposed strategy clearly reach far beyond planning, it is also clearly indicative of the Council's desire to improve the 'soft' social infrastructure forces that allow young people to develop into well-rounded, happy and healthy members of society. The proposals put forward by the Applicant for Maitland Park can be clearly seen as contributing to this. This report should be factored in as a material consideration that weighs in favour of the planning application.

5 Summary

- 5.1 This note has sought to provide further background to the application submitted by LB Camden which would replace the proposed MUGA (which is currently set out in the extant planning permission for the estate's redevelopment), with alternative play proposals that would meet the needs of older children.
- 5.2 It sets out that the process has been a long and thorough one in which the views of the local community have been sought at each step. This has crucially involved seeking the views of those for whom the equipment is intended to benefit most, i.e., young people in the estate. There is clear support amongst this group for this kind of play/activity equipment, which will serve to provide local residents with enhanced opportunities to live full, active, and playful lives within their estate.