

DALE PLAY AREA ASSOCIATION REPORT FOR DALE FORUM MEETING 21/3/18

Members of the Forum will be aware that a Play Area for Dale was included as an aspiration in the most recent Dale Action Plan.

On 22/2/18 Mr Ryder informed the DPPA Trustees that he was no longer willing to lease the Association any land on Dale Meadow for a play area.

Mr Ryder had agreed, in two formally minuted meetings with the DPAA in 2013 to lease us an area of land to the south and west of the Car Park. Indeed he himself had suggested this particular area of land to us. Being aware that we needed a lease in place before we could receive funding, Mr Ryder followed this up in May 2015 by making a Head of Terms Agreement with the Association and instructing his solicitors to draw up a lease in line with this.

After consultation with Mr Ryder, ensuring that he was fully supportive of the plan, we applied for and obtain Planning Permission in September 2015. Then followed two years of negotiating a lease for this area, involving ourselves, solicitors for both parties and Mr Ryder's land agent. During these lengthy negotiations it appeared to us that the only issues to be settled were minor details. By September 2017 we had signed the lease and were assured that Mr Ryder was just about to sign it when we were told, via his land agent, that he would not agree to sign it; he would only agree to lease us a small area (about 1/5 of the original area) at the east end of the site.

On the basis of the agreements made by Mr Ryder in 2013 – 2014 we have held regular fund raising events and have received considerable donations as well. These funds were used to pay for the surveys, plans and legal costs associated with obtaining planning permission and the lease. We still have a healthy bank balance.

We also carried out a questionnaire and held a consultation event in the Coronation Hall with local people and received overwhelmingly positive responses to our proposals. We have had plans of our proposals on display in the village and have advertised our Annual General Meetings in Peninsula Papers always making it clear that we welcomed any resident to express their opinions to us. This resulted in 160 residents and visitors both adults and young people becoming members of the DPAA.

In order to ensure that the Association was regulated under charity laws and to be able to benefit from grants the Association applied to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and the Charity Commission approved this in January 2015.

In the meantime we had applied for and passed the first hurdle of an application to the Welsh Government Rural Communities Development Fund for a grant to construct the Play Area. This involved obtaining estimates for the cost of the groundwork and installing the play equipment and the total came to over £100,000. This figure may seem surprising. However given the tendency for the ground in this area to become water-logged a large percentage of the total cost was involved in raising the land by a small amount and installing drainage to create a pitch area that would not become unusable after heavy rainfall. This had been fully discussed with Mr Ryder's land agent. Another costly feature was to be a path for disabled access and for young children to scooter / learn to ride bicycles. Given the total lack of any green public space in Dale as defined in the Local Plan, and the lack of pavements both these items were considered very important. (The "Fields in Trust" minimum standard for the provision of public recreational

space, which is used in Local Plans, would indicate that, for a village the size of Dale, there should be 0.5 hectares of open recreational space and this Play Area would have created 0.2 hectares.) Another very important feature of the DPAA plans was to ensure that the Play Area would meet the needs of as wide a section of the Community as possible. This seemed right for two main reasons – the demographics of Dale, and the increasing evidence of the importance and benefits for health and wellbeing of physical exercise for all ages, particularly that which takes place outdoors.

The Trustees and members were very excited that the Welsh Government had deemed our initial proposal to be worthy of further scrutiny as if we had obtained the grant it would have meant an investment of over £100,000 in Dale. 20% match funding was also required. We believe this scheme would have benefitted all the residents, the local economy and made Dale a more attractive place for young families to live. We have been informed that once through the first stage, applications are usually successful.

Once the grant had been agreed, and indeed we had written this into our grant application, we were planning to hold another consultation exercise to find out views about the detail of the type and range of equipment that would go into the Play Area, which again everyone would have been invited to take part in.

Following on from September 2017 we made several requests to meet with Mr Ryder or his representatives. A meeting was finally held in January in which Mr Ryder reiterated that he would only lease the DPAA the small area. Initially we found this set back devastating. However with the assistance of a very helpful play area specialist we devised a plan in which elements to benefit all ages could have been included in this area (apart of course from the pitch and the path). We offered to arrange for this specialist to give Mr Ryder a presentation of this plan but he did not take up this offer and informed us on 21/2/18, through his land agent, that he would not lease the DPAA any land whatsoever. We have not yet been informed of the reasons for him not being willing to lease us the small area but he told us his main concern about the larger area to the west was to do with noise pollution. He had also previously mentioned, through his land agent, that he was concerned about this area becoming an “ungoverned” area where young adults would congregate.

It is the view of the DPPA that the type of area we had planned would be likely to mitigate against poor behaviour in the village of Dale rather than increase it. This is the evidence from other projects, especially when local young people have been fully involved from the start.

Those of you with long memories will recall that back in 2008 that there was some minor vandalism in the village about which the Community Council was concerned and they asked Dennis White to set up a Youth Group to try address this issue. The young people who attended this Group decided that Dale ought to have a play area and researched this, making a presentation to the Community Council on 11/10/10. The Minutes of that Meeting record “It was noted that the Community Council has discussed this project in the past and has agreed that it is not appropriate for the Community Council to take a leading or management role in this matter and has asked that the organisers of the Youth Club should take on this role – supported by the Community Council as, when and how the Community Council is able and as, when and how the organisers request. The project should, therefore, be run by a committee set up by the organisers of the Youth Club, who should arrange funding, find (and obtain use of) land and source and erect equipment etc. It was noted that the Community Council has received permission from the Castle Estate and the County Council to

take over the lease of the land in front to the Coronation Hall for this purpose, but it was agreed by this meeting that this area is too small to accommodate the requirements of the youngsters, while interfering with use of this popular site for a wide range of current users. The Community Council agreed to support the organisers in their efforts and wished them well in the project. The Community Council thanked the young members of the community for a professional and competent presentation which had been helpful and clear.”

On 6/1/14 the DPAA gave a full presentation of their plans to the Community Council and it was noted -

The meeting thanked Mrs Marshall for her report and confirmed the continued support of the Community Council. It was noted, however, that Dale Community Council has limited financial resources and that there was little in this respect that the Community Council can offer.

The Welsh Government is helpfully keeping our application for a grant on the table whilst we explore all possible avenues to achieve our aim - a Play Area for Dale. One of these avenues was to ask the Dale Community Council, to give due consideration as to how it might be able to assist the DPAA given that on, at least two occasions, the Council had pledged its support for this project.

Therefore on 25/2/18 the DPPA sent a letter to Dale Community Council outlining the situation as above and asked the Community Council to consider whether it could give the DPAA any assistance. We informed the Community Council that we were aware that recent Welsh Government legislation gave the power of well-being to community councils enabling a council to “do anything which it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of their area.”

Rosemary Mecklenburgh, one of the Trustees, and Sean Kehoe a member of DPAA attended the Community Council meeting held on 5/3/18 when this letter was discussed. The Council was informed by one of its members that it did not have the powers quoted above. Another Councillor suggested that the Council could write a letter to Mr Ryder asking him to reconsider his decision given that the idea of Play Area for Dale was so popular. Another Community Councillor felt that this was not true. It was decided that a letter should not be written.

The DPPA will be holding its AGM on Wednesday April 25th at 7 pm in the Jubilee Suite. At this meeting the Trustees will present a view of the future of the Association given that it now seems very unlikely that we will achieve our original aim. We invite any interested residents to attend with the proviso that only members will be able to vote on any resolutions.

Rosemary Mecklenburgh
On behalf of the Trustees of Dale Play Area Association

20/3/18