

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet

2nd June 2010

REPORT TITLE: Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) at Swans Length Open Space.

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Mike Webb
Relevant Head of Service	Angela Heighway – Head of Community Services
Key Decision / Non-Key Decision To consider the removal and possible re-location of the Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) facility at the Swanslength Open Space in Alvechurch	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 There has 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 an extensive public engagement which has captured the impact this facility has had on local residents.
- 1.2 This public engagement has highlighted residents wish for the local authority to consider the removal of this facility to improve the quality of life and well-being of those residents directly affected.
- 1.3 Analysis of reported ASB has evidenced that the impact of the installation of the MUGA has resulted in Swanslength Open Space becoming a focal point for youth related ASB. 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.
- 1.4 The impact of ASB on residents of Swanslength has been further inflated as a result of other environmental factors and design such as the location of natural seating areas (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.
- 1.5 Public engagement through a local resident's focus group has explored the impact of this facility to the residents who live closest to the facility but 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, in some form or another.
- 1.6 At the last meeting of this resident's focus group it was decided that the removal of the MUGA from Swanslength was an option that they would like the local authority to consider in order to address their concerns.

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2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To remove the MUGA facility including the removal of the hard-standing and the re-instatement of the land at Swanslength Open Space in Alvechurch to enable the re-location of the facility elsewhere within the District.
- 2.2 To leave the facility in situ and instruct officers to work in partnership to initiate alternative interventions in an attempt to alleviate the problems faced by local residents and monitor the situation.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Swanslength MUGA was installed in June 2008 by the Bromsgrove District Council following a request from the Alvechurch Local Neighbourhood Partnership to increase access to youth facilities in the village.
- 3.2 Consultation with young people identified that a MUGA was the preferred choice for an open space facility closely followed by a skate park and a climbing facility. Young people identified three locations for this facility the Wiggin Memorial sometimes referred to as the Meadow, George Road and Swanslength Open Space.
- 3.3 Consultation with residents, contractors and the crime risk manager for West Mercia Police followed. The consultation with contractors and the Crime Risk Manager identified Swanslength Open Space as the most suitable location of those available based on practicality to build the facility, and the safety of its users.
- 3.4 There was a consultation with residents through a postal survey sent to 1600 households within the village. 21% of residents responded of which 65.5% of respondents were in favour of the facility being built on Swanslength Open Space.
- 3.5 Due to the results of the 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. Available funding enabled the installation of additional equipment in the form of a climbing facility to complement the MUGA facility.
- 3.6 During the summer of 2009 there was an increase in reported ASB to West Mercia Police and an increase in complaints to Bromsgrove District Council. These reports were from residents who live in proximity to the Swanslength Open Space and consisted of youth related ASB, alcohol misuse, vehicle related nuisance, inappropriate sexual activity, litter and noise. Swanslength

Open Space has also been victim to various negative press in the local newspapers.

- 3.7 This prompted the Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Tasking Group to undergo a piece of analysis to assess the impact the installation of this facility has had on Alvechurch Village and in particular Swanslength Open Space.
- 3.8 This analysis identified that the level of reported ASB within the whole of the village was of a similar volume following the installation of the MUGA when compared prior to the installation. The analysis also displayed a shift in the locations of ASB within the village; since the installation of the MUGA ASB had decreased around the village but was dispersed into Swanslength making it a focal point. Appendix 2 shows the intensity of ASB 12 months prior to the installation of the MUGA and Appendix 3 show the intensity of ASB 12 post installation for comparison.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 The analysis identified that the installation of the MUGA had reduced the 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.
- 3.11 The findings of the analysis were considered at the October 2010 CSP Tasking Group. The impact of the installation of the MUGA was acknowledged but the level of repeat complainers raised concern that we did not have a true account of how this facility was impacting on the quality of life of all residents who live there. 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.
- 3.12 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 listening exercise and residents were vocal regarding their local concerns. There were two clear groups of residents, those who had concerns with the Swanslength MUGA and those who had other concerns of ASB around the village. This meeting was attended by over 60 residents

- 3.13 All concerns from the open public forum were captured and 20 residents from the open public forum were nominated by all attendees to create a focus group to work alongside officers and consider all concerns that had been raised and the available options to resolve them.
- 3.14 The focus group met on 4 occasions. This group prioritised the concerns that were raised and were split into two groups, one that would consider options for addressing the issues raised with the Swanslength MUGA and the other group would review the available provision for young people in the village. This focus group also had attendance from a small group of young people who attended sporadically at the meetings.
- 3.15 This focus group identified the availability of Alvechurch Middle School facility for hire from community groups for the purpose of organised and supervised activities. They established links with a local community group which was emerging within the village with the purpose of setting up a youth club. They also identified all available locations within Alvechurch which could be considered as an alternative location for the MUGA however, a crime risk analysis conducted by the Crime Risk Manager from West Mercia Police identified that each location was inappropriate due its proximity to residential areas or hazardous to the safety of the facilities users.
- 3.16 The focus group undertook a Friday evening walkabout in Swanslength and identified some key changes to the environment that could discourage disorder. It was clear to see the enclosed nature of the site and the design of the surrounding environment was contributing towards the ASB and disorder experienced by local residents (see appendix 1 for an aerial view of Swanslength). Some recommendations which can our of the group were removal of seats, removal of a wall which is used by young people to gather at, the re-location of some street lights, the removal of some vegetation to increase sight lines to the facility and the implementation of a plant scheme to create a barrier between the open space and homes adjacent to the area. All of these suggestions have either been completed or are being programmed for completion over the coming months.
- 3.17 The last meeting of this group was emotive and many residents who felt sympathetic to the need for youth provision they felt that the risk of not removing this facility outweighed the risk of leaving it in situ.
- 3.18 This focus group also acknowledged that many residents who live predominantly within other parts of the village do use the MUGA facility and would be disappointed if the facility were removed.

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- 3.19 The group also raised concerns that the impact of 72 new dwellings that are to be built next the MUGA will have on the situation.
- 3.20 Since the last meeting a new youth club has opened in the village which operates once a week with the support of youth workers from Worcestershire County Council Youth Support Team and is currently well attended. This youth group has been set up as a social enterprise organisation. It has been reported by this group that in the first four sessions which were delivered between April and May 2010 an average of 50 young people have attended aged 12-17 years old although the main contingent of attendees are aged between 12 – 14 years old.
- 3.21 The last meeting of the focus group concluded with a request for Bromsgrove District Council officers to compile a report for the cabinet committee which captured the concerns of residents, captured their commitment through an engagement process to work with the local authority to address these concerns, and forward the recommendations outlined in this report for elected members to consider.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The installation of the MUGA at Swanslength has had a negative impact on the well-being and quality of life of residents who live closest to the facility; this has been evidenced through an extensive engagement process with those local residents.
- 4.2 The installation of this facility has reduced some of the ASB from around the wider village but focused it into Swanslength by creating a focal point for youth gathering which has led to an increase in youth related ASB; this has been evidenced through analysis.
- 4.3 Bromsgrove District Council and West Mercia Police have attempted to address disorder at this location through high visibility presence and altering the built environment in an attempt to deter disorder however this level of support is neither sustainable nor good value for money.
- 4.4 Many residents clearly feel that the removal of this facility is the most effective way to improve their quality of life of those who live closest to the facility and to address their fears and concerns.
- 4.5 Bromsgrove District Council has a legal duty in Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to take due regard to the decisions it had taken to locate this facility at Swanslength and the impact that has had on crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

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- 4.6 Bromsgrove District Council is now in the possession of evidence that their decision to locate this MUGA has increased ASB and decreased the quality of life of local residents; this could not have been pre-empted at the time of installation based on the successful installation of 7 other MUGA facilities in other areas of the district. Under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Bromsgrove District Council is now once again faced with a legal duty to consider the impact of the decision to locate this MUGA at Swanslength.
- 4.7 Bromsgrove District Council must consider the likely impact of the 72 new dwellings which will be built on the old school site on Tanyard Lane which will immediately back onto the MUGA facility.
- 4.8 Bromsgrove District Council must also consider the views of the wider village that use this facility in the appropriate manner including young people and families and would be disappointed to see the facility be removed.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There will be 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 can be met within the existing budgets of the Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership. Costs for re-location will have to be determined if/when a suitable alternative site can be found.
- 5.2 There will be other associated savings such as a reduction in staff costs that are currently absorbed to deal with street cleansing, maintenance of the facility, responding to incidents of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour, which could be effected pending the decision for the MUGA to be removed or to remain.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Section 17, Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (and amendments)

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation – The removal of this facility would have a minimal impact on PPG17 as a new risky play facility has been installed at Swanslength Open Space and therefore there will still be sufficient provision in the absence of the MUGA facility.

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

8.1 CO3 One Community

9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

9.1 If the concerns of residents are not addressed the local authority may be liable to legal action for not fulfilling its duty under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which states that “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, disorder and re-offending in its area”

9.2 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 directly relates to this subject as it could be viewed that the decision of a local authority to install this facility at this particular location has contributed to the increase of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour. Although this could not have been foreseen at the time the decision was made to install the facility, evidence shows the facility has negatively impacted on the levels of ASB and the fear of crime amongst residents has increased; if the local authority chose not to re-address the decision to install the MUGA at Swanslength the local authority could be viewed as not fulfilling its section 17 duty.

9.3 The reputation of the local authority is also at stake with regards to how the local authority addresses crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour within Bromsgrove District in conjunction with our partners.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The levels of anti-social behaviour experienced by local residents of Bromsgrove District directly effects their wellbeing and quality of life. The decision to address the impact of having a MUGA facility at Swanslength may affect the levels of ASB experienced by those residents who live nearest to the facility.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 It must be acknowledged that the key implications of this report considers the impact of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour experienced by residents versus the right for young people to access play facilities.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

12.1 None

13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

13.1 None

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

14.1 None

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

15.1 None

16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

16.1 This report is directly linked to section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as previous decisions to install the MUGA have influenced the levels of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour and any subsequent decisions from this report could also impact on the future levels of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

16.2 The increased levels of fear amongst residents that live closest to the MUGA facility have been clearly made evident at resident focus groups; subsequent decisions made from this report could impact the levels of fear amongst residents

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

17.1 A decision to remove the MUGA facility will reduce the access to play equipment for young people which reduces the opportunity for young people to access physical recreation.

18. LESSONS LEARNT

18.1 The local authority will need to 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 which indentified a majority level of support for the facility to be installed at Swanslength however, there should be more

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consideration/importance given to those who live near to any proposed open space development.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

19.1 The concerns of increased levels of ASB were first raised through Alvechurch PACT meetings as well as an increase in the levels of reported ASB and complaint made to the local authority and other partners.

19.2 Officers responded to these concerns by holding a open public forum dedicated to residents raising concerns of ASB. From this open forum a residents panel of approximately 20 representatives were elected by the wider attendees to represent the public at a series of focus groups with community safety officers to review the concerns raised and explore options to deal with them.

19.3 A resident's panel (focus group) have therefore been involved from the start of this engagement process including influencing this report.

19.4 Other members of the Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership have also been involved with the focus groups including West Mercia Police (local policing inspector, local policing teams and the crime risk manager), and Bromsgrove District Housing Trust.

19.5 A representative from Alvechurch Parish Council and the Alvechurch Village Society has also been present at all focus group meetings.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	YES
Chief Executive	
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	
Executive Director – Leisure, Cultural, Environmental and Community Services	
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	
Director of Policy, Performance and	

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Partnerships	
Head of Service	
Head of Resources	
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	
Corporate Procurement Team	

21. WARDS AFFECTED

Alvechurch

22. APPENDICES

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1: Aerial view of Swanslength Open Space

Appendix 2: Temporal map to show the intensity and location of ASB 12 months prior to the installation of the MUGA facility.

Appendix 3: Temporal map to show the intensity and location of ASB 12 months following the installation of the MUGA facility.

24. KEY

AUTHOR OF REPORT

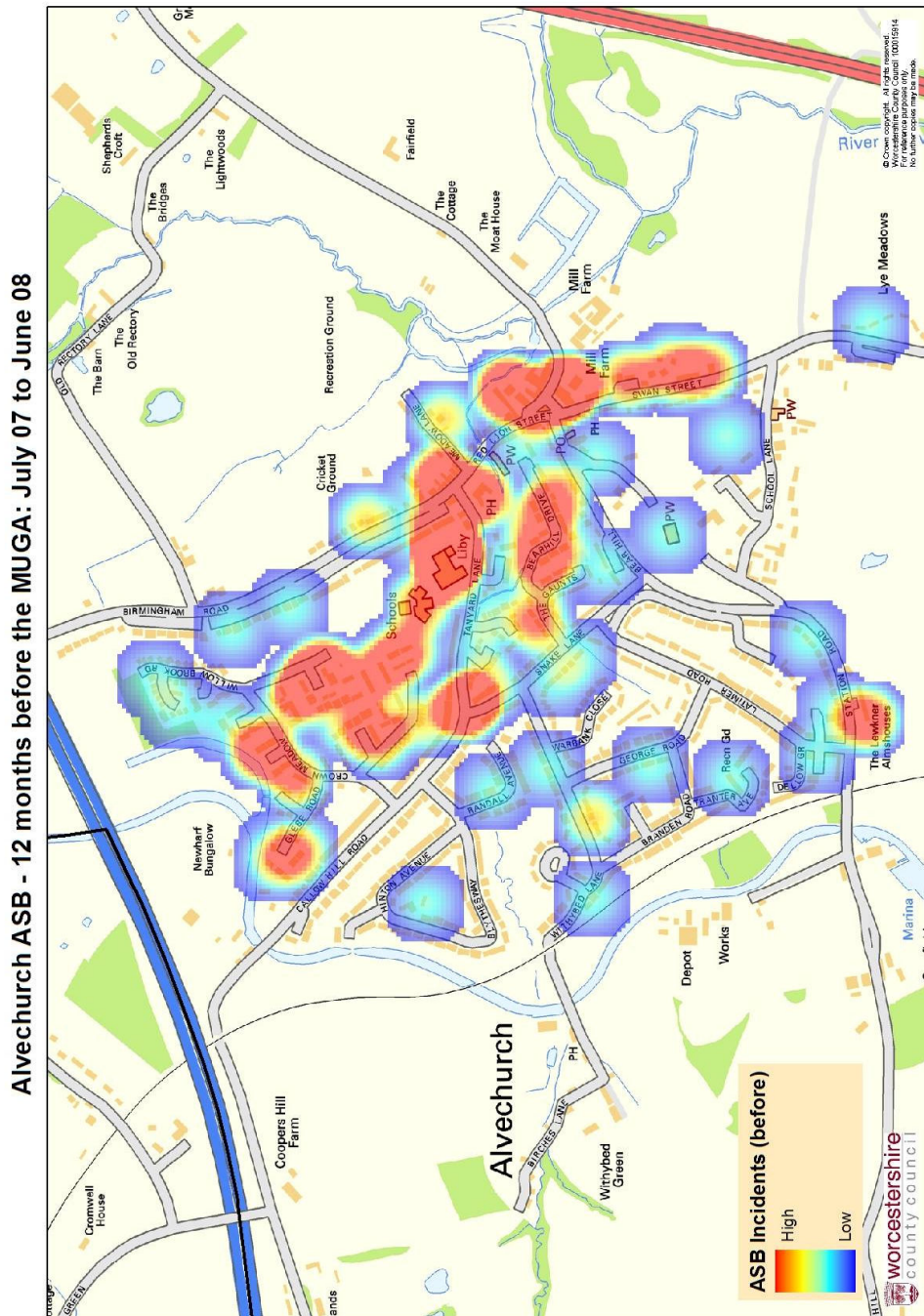
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**APPENDIX 1
Aerial view of Swanslength Open Space**



APPENDIX 2

Temporal map to show the intensity and location of ASB 12 months prior to the installation of the MUGA facility.



APPENDIX 3

Temporal map to show the intensity and location of ASB 12 months following the installation of the MUGA facility.

Alvechurch ASB - 12 months after the MUGA: July 08 to June 09

