

**APPENDIX 1 - Interviews with Key Witnesses 22nd July 2010 Summary
of Questions and Answers**

Inquiry – The Alvechurch Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)

Interviews with Key Witnesses 22nd July 2010

Summary of Questions and Answers

1. Questions to Ward Councillors

Councillor R. Hollingworth – Ward Councillor for Alvechurch.

Councillor Mrs. J. M. L. A. Griffiths – Ward Councillor for Alvechurch.

Councillor J. D. Luck - Ward Councillor for Alvechurch.

Q How did the MUGA come about?

Councillor Hollingworth: At a Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meeting residents were complaining about Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and wanted something done about it. The first option was a skateboard park, which was turned down and the second was a Multi-Use Games Area. We originally looked at approximately 7 sites, one which the police were unhappy with. After consultation with the residents, Swans Length was chosen as the site. Problems had arisen in this area before when a “half pipe” had been installed for the skateboarders; the police and Council’s Crime and Disorder Prevention Unit assured them that they would put more resources into it to prevent ASB problems happening again.

Most of the problems seem to be in the late evening and not during the day time when the children are using it.

Q In the consultation were any other sites offered to the residents in Alvechurch?

Councillor Hollingworth: 2 sites, Swans Length and the Wigan Memorial ground and the residents chose Swans Length. There was space on the questionnaire for residents to nominate another site if they wished.

Q What percentage of the questionnaires were returned in the consultation?

Councillor Mrs. Luck: 21%.

Q Was this funded through the Local Neighbourhood Partnership (LNP)?

Councillor Hollingworth: Yes the money was in a general grant, but allocated through the LNP committee.

Q *What was on this ground previously?*

Councillor Hollingworth: An open play area for children with 2 goals and has been a play area ever since the estate was built.

Q *Before the MUGA was built was there any ASB or noise issues?*

ASB problems round the area have been ongoing for a long time, due to the design of the estate, mostly due to the “rat runs” and people parking their cars and the police being unable to get to them without them knowing they are coming.

Q *In your consultation with stakeholder partners following that consultation were there any mitigating measures taken to tackle or mitigate any proposed forecast of ASB?*

Councillor Hollingworth: The police had agreed to keep a very close eye and have sorted out a couple of serious matters relating to young people coming in from outside Alvechurch. They did specifically look after the area and wardens did work with the children to get them to use it appropriately. But not as much work was done as was expected.

Q *Is there any route to the play area via the new housing estate?*

Councillor Hollingworth: Planners would be able to answer more accurately. I do not believe there is, but we have been speaking to Persimmon (site developers) to change the design they put in to try and alleviate the problems and asked them to put another route through so the children will not all be going in through the same route, but to date have not got anywhere with this.

(N.B. Planning Officer to be asked to attend next meeting to answer this question.)

Councillor Mrs Luck: Yes. 72 homes are to be built on that site, 9% will be for affordable family housing. On the plans we were shown there was no route through to the MUGA from the houses, but I attended an all day seminar on planning and this included the best options for new estates and we were strongly advised to put a route from the new housing estate to the MUGA so that the 2 sites would not be isolated from each other.

Q *Has any 106 funding been put towards extra lighting or other measures which might potentially mitigate problems?*

Councillor Hollingworth: Not as far as they were aware.

Q *Is it normal policy that the wider impact of such developments be taken into account or are they considered in isolation?*

Councillor Hollingworth: Impact assessments should have been considered as a whole but I understand that officers took it as a site in its own right and not as a whole.

Q *Do you think opening up the area would improve the situation?*

Councillor Hollingworth: We are advised that the wall is in fact to be removed, along with some of the bushes to open up the site.

From information available we believe that it is not the children that use the MUGA in the day time that are the problem, but the cars that go round there after 10 p.m. at night which cause the problems.

Q *In your view how do you think the ASB can be resolved and what do you think causes it?*

Councillor Hollingworth: It would be more appropriate for the police to answer but I understand that they are considering visiting individuals and people who are worried about it. A group of parents have also started up a youth club, which may help to alleviate some of the problems.

Q *What complaints do you have from this area?*

Councillor Mrs. Luck: That the MUGA is unsupervised, ASB mostly at night and drinking alcohol in the area.

Councillor Mrs. Griffiths: I personally have not had a complaint. I have spoken to the users of the MUGA and they do not complain. The evidence shows that the ASB problems are on the roadway not on the MUGA.

Councillor Hollingworth: Has received complaints from petitioner 1 and her neighbour and also from the "district nurse". Also, received letters from people on the main road and from people who live in Swans Length and the Becks, next door to the complainants, who say there is very little problem. Have also had complaints from the children about actions taken to stop them playing there and indirect complaints on behalf of the elderly and have asked for names in order for these to be passed on to the police, but these have not been forthcoming.

Q *Would you be happy if the changes suggested (i.e. lighting) were carried out?*

Councillor Hollingworth: We understand that the lighting currently in place will be moved and a further 2 installed. Mobile CCTV cameras will also be used to assist the police in identifying the problems. I am happy with these changes, but waiting to see the outcome.

Q *Do you think this is the right place to have the MUGA, and was there any other area that you would have liked it to have been?*

Councillor Mrs. Luck: No it isn't and made views clear at the outset. Very few places (in Alvechurch) that such a thing could go, as all the sites too close to residents. It has been suggested that the MUGA be moved to the partial MUGA at the new school site. So – yes there just might be an alternative.

Councillor Mrs. Griffiths: That site is an open space for children and it is the right place. It is one of the very few sites in Alvechurch that is suitable.

Councillor Hollingworth: Not appropriate to answer as will be on the Cabinet that will receive the Board's recommendations.

Q Is it an alcohol free zone?

Councillor Hollingworth: The whole of the village is an alcohol free zone.

2. Questions to Community Representatives

Mr Andy Humphries - Chairman of PACT.

Mr Humphries has been Chairman of PACT for last 2½ yrs and involved with other community groups for a long time. He has recently been co-opted on to Alvechurch Parish Council.

Q What is the feeling of the residents of Alvechurch and what, if any, complaints have you received?

No one coming to him personally, but whilst chairing PACT meetings on a regular basis large groups have attended complaining about various issues including ASB and the MUGA. PACT has always taken ASB issues seriously. Earlier on these were mainly about rowdy teenagers in other parts of the village, but not serious issues. The issue has become polarised in the last year and focused on the MUGA area.

Q So you have had complaints of ASB over the last couple of years?

Principle of PACT is that people come and bring their concerns. Over the years people have been concerned with ASB in other streets, but in the last year it has focused on Swans Length and the MUGA area.

Q Do you have any views on the impact of the new housing development on the MUGA site?

It may only add to the issue because more houses close to it and using it could lead to more complaints.

Q At the PACT meetings what priority was given to the MUGA on your list of issues?

It rose to the top fairly quickly, it first appeared in 2008 when BDC were doing a consultation and it was a case of panel members telling the public what was

happening and planned and what measures might be taken to anticipate problems. Last summer some of the issues around the MUGA started to move it to a less positive image. Sizeable groups of residents came to complain about the MUGA and in the absence of 1 or 2 members who could give more information; the issue was magnified and was rapidly at the top of the agenda.

Q *What were the problems/issues?*

My understanding is that most of the difficult issues are after 10 pm.

Q *Have you seen an increase in police activity in tackling these problems since the progression from the skateboard half pipe to the MUGA and is there scope to do more?*

Not involved when the skateboard half pipe was installed. But have seen the police doing their best over the last year or two, it is an issue which is difficult to resolve as incidents can happen at any time of the day or night any day of the week.

Q *Have you had any complaints about vehicle incidents?*

Only anecdotal evidence about cars racing around.

Q *What is the Parish Council's position on the MUGA?*

In most recent meeting discussed at length and the following proposals put forward:

- i) Request its removal – not agreed.
- ii) Ask BDC to fence and lock it - agreed.
- iii) Look at alternative locations – not agreed.
- iv) To move some of the equipment, which is more children's play equipment down to the Meadows in Alvechurch, where it would be more appreciated and used by younger children – agreed.

Q *With all those recommendations and proposals put forward was there any consideration taken as regards funding or costs of those actions? Is the Parish Council in a position to fund any of these?*

There was no discussion about the funding of these issues.

Q *Which part of the equipment was suggested to be moved?*

Between the MUGA and children's play area further north, a rope ladder and similar equipment.

Q *The equipment you wanted moved, is this more for the older youths or little ones?*

More for 7 – 12 year olds. If a decision was made to remove the MUGA it may be more appropriate to move this equipment to another site, where there was similar equipment for that age range.

Q *Cost was not discussed about any of this?*

Cost was covered at the last focus group meeting which the Head of Community Services chaired in May 2010 covering removing and/or storing the equipment.

(The Head of Community Services clarified that it would cost £5,400 to remove and storage would be within Council facilities.)

Q *How much would the cost be to re-install the equipment and the soft play surface?*

The Senior Community Safety Project Officer clarified that no exact quote had been received, but it is believed that it would be in excess of £50,000.

Q *Have these suggestions been put in writing to Bromsgrove District Council?*

He understood that this was being done.

(Confirmation of this to be sought in written evidence from officers.)

3. Questions to West Mercia Police

Chief Inspector Angie Burnet

Chief Inspector for North Worcestershire division responsible for local policing.

PC Stan Baker – Crime Risk Manager

Responsible for crime prevention and community safety issues within the Bromsgrove and Redditch districts.

Inspector Julian Smith

Bromsgrove District Police Inspector.

Q *Do you find a lot of young people come from outside of Alvechurch (i.e. Redditch) or are the majority local children?*

A few years ago this was the case, but currently the majority, if not all, of the ASB relates to local youngsters. There were 2 cases last summer of children coming from outside of Alvechurch.

Q *Can you give a run through of the incidents and the ASB that has been reported to you and on average how many a week?*

The Board will have access to a report on the statistics, prepared by CSP Analyst who is trained on the police intelligence systems data basis.

Youths gathering, bad language, noise, litter and alcohol consumption. Some are reported in the evening time as opposed to 10 pm.

Q *Does the local Community Safety Officer (CSO) visit the site?*

CSOs work until 10 pm the area is patrolled by CSOs, local response officers for the Alvechurch and Wythall area and constables from the response unit when able to.

Q *What was the police's stance prior to the installation of the MUGA?*

The police were asked by Graham Rock to consider the risk assessment after being advised that a MUGA would be going into Alvechurch, and given two sites to consider. A report was submitted to the Senior Community Safety Project Officer in January 2008 suggesting that out of the 2 sites Swans Length was the safest and offered the best natural surveillance, but made the point that the low wall should be removed together with some of the trees and shrubs.

Q *It has been suggested that a commitment was made to increase the police presence when the MUGA was installed, has this commitment been fully met?*

Not aware of who made that commitment, whether it was in writing or detailed. From the knowledge of particular and specific operations that were run both last summer and one already started this summer, the ASB issue in Alvechurch is being given a great deal of police time and effort. The police are determined to involve other agencies, partners and the community as much as possible.

Q *Is this a 365 day a year problem or is just a summer problem?*

The reports increase considerably in the summer, because the area gets more use.

Q *Is it correct that the number of ASB incidents has not increased, but are concentrated in this particular part of Alvechurch? And if that's the case, your staffing commitment doesn't require a higher level, just focusing on the MUGA?*

The figures would suggest that the MUGA has concentrated the ASB in that area specifically. We are not receiving considerably more calls, than this time last year to the Alvechurch area, Alvechurch does have the correct amount of police compared with the rest of Bromsgrove and the West Mercia area for ABS problems that are reported from there.

Q *Do you think there could be a question of “complaint fatigue” because they perceive that nothing is being done?*

That may be so and is a concern, we can only act on the information reported and make best efforts through PACT and any other community engagement function that we can to find out what the problem is.

Q *If the MUGA was removed what do you think would happen with regards to ASB?*

The total ASB in Alvechurch may remain the same, just be moved to somewhere else or remain in the area. It may solve a problem but may cause another problem somewhere else.

Q *One of the problems mentioned was alcohol, is there an off licence nearby where children are getting these drinks from?*

There have been test purchase operations run within the district of Bromsgrove and those in Alvechurch did not give any positive results. A lot of the work that has been done on ASB within the area and a lot of the youths engaged with get alcohol from parents, not premises selling them alcohol, or children get other people over the age of 18 to buy alcohol for them.

Q *Any views on the impact of the new housing estate on the MUGA?*

PC Stan Baker: 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. Having considered the whole application and the design and access statement, the MUGA is, in the wider scheme, part of the play infrastructure for the new residents on that development. This would have been taken into account by the planning officers as things stand at the moment, in planning terms you have to make a decision on what stands there now, not what might be there later on.

Q *Could you point to an increased number of convictions/actions/penalties against ASB over the last 2/3 years? Has the increase on the site being mirrored by the increase of interventions by the police.*

When a specific operation is set up, there is invariably an increase in activity, increased patrols and awareness amongst all officers that cover the area, there is always an increase in results, whether it be the number of stop searches, alcohol seizures, letters home to parents of youths involved in ASB, so yes.

Q *With hindsight do you regret the decision to install the MUGA here or is the problem we have containable?*

No, we do not regret the decision, as it was made on the best information and research available and to which we gave the appropriate and correct response. The police are doing what they can to contain this; they are doing what they can with what they've got in the Alvechurch area.

A new tactic this summer has been to send out Level 1 ASB warning letters to parents with details of ASB, which historically has been successful, but it is too early at this stage to gauge success. This will continue throughout the summer holidays.

Q *Are Neighbourhood Watch involved with any work that is being done?*

A new local policing officer has recently taken over in Alvechurch and is forging links within the local community and this will be one of the approaches that he will consider.

4. **Marie Green - Assistant Director. Bromsgrove District Housing Trust**

Q *Do you have any evidence of how the MUGA has affected your residents in the area?*

We have not had any complaints from residents in the area. A survey was sent out specifically for people who lived by the MUGA rather than further out, 5 responses were received and only 1 said remove the MUGA. No one has contacted us and said this MUGA is a nuisance.

Q *Is there a large sheltered housing complex on Swans Length and are the you landlords' for that complex and is there a warden on site?*

Yes, there is no on site warden, but floating support is available.

Q *Are you aware of any complaints made to yourselves or the wardens of ASB in the area from elderly residents, rather than directly to the police?*

There have been no complaints received about the MUGA. The complaints received say there has always been problems with noise in the area but do not specifically mention the MUGA.

Q *Do you have any information coming from the PACT meetings?*

They have representatives who attend the PACT meetings. They are doing some work on the garage area to shutdown some of the paths and fence off an area.

Q *What do you think the impact would be in the MUGA was removed/moved?*

Officers who deal with that area do not think there is anywhere more suitable for it to go as it is a children's play area. They feel they may still congregate there if it was removed because it is an established play area. Officers are more concerned with the areas around there where cars can park. The problems are with the people in cars, not with the play area.

Q *Can you see the new development having any impact on your current tenants?*

When speaking to their officers that deal with that area we only have concerns about the path rather than the MUGA. We have asked for changes to the plans but these have not happened as far as we are aware.

5. Worcestershire County Council Youth Support

Kim Caves - Team Manager for Bromsgrove and District Youth Support.

Delivery of work is associated with youth clubs that they have across Bromsgrove and district, part of YS has targeted youth work which does have some outreach which is fairly new, within last 18 months.

Q *Are you involved with Alvechurch Communities Together (ACT) and the setting up of the youth club in Alvechurch?*

We are assisting with the setting up of the club. A staff team from a club which is being refurbished had the time to assist with this and to set up youth provision within Alvechurch.

Q *Can you describe the facility that the youth club use and its location to the MUGA and its impact?*

Currently, we are using the upstairs floor of the social club and occasionally the Wigan Memorial if the weather is good. We agreed to a short development package which would work with a younger age group; 12/13 year olds to look at what their needs were and to feed into the establishment of a longer term youth club that is being set up from funding from the local council. They will be looking at establishing their own premises within Alvechurch village. Currently the club has been attracting up to 50 young people quite regularly, it runs for 2 hours once a week. They have advertised for their own staff and are due to transfer over to their own staff from September onwards and will be working on increasing the age range which accesses the facility, probably up to 18/19 year olds.

Q *Have you seen any positive impact on ABS from the MUGA or is it too early yet?*

It is probably too early for the official figures from the Community Safety partnership (CSP). Conversations with the local CSOs and some of the residents indicate that they feel that there has been a benefit. 50 young people are already going to a club for 2 hours (plus travel), is going to have a

positive impact. This is an age group that would have been using the facility, (and having conversations with some that have used it) they have used it for the purpose that it was provided for, not necessarily with the individuals that are there after 10 pm when some of the ASB reports have been made. The youth club does look really positive and has generated a sense of achievement in the area. Youth Support had tried on 3 previous occasions to kick start a youth club and keep the momentum. This has been a long process with lots of agencies to ensure that this stands the best chance for long term survival and therefore that will act in effect on the longer term ASB pattern.

Q One of the strongest powers is peer pressure, do you see any of that coming from the youths that attend the club or is the topic not discussed?

The peer pressure is in keeping with their age and where they are with their development. In respect of ASB this has not been seen within the youth club, but has been experienced whilst working with South Bromsgrove High School. From meeting individuals that live in Alvechurch there is a small number that will be affected by peer pressure from the groups they hang out with and the activities they engage in. Some of that is also, to concur with the police evidence, around drinking alcohol, which is a complex issue, because it is parents that buy them the drink It is very difficult to conclude that this is peer pressure, when its their family that might be condoning a behaviour that then falls into the group. If the MUGA was not there the problem would be somewhere else.

Q From your rapport with the young people, what are their thoughts on the MUGA?

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. It is mentioned within their discussion groups.

Q If it was removed do you think the youths would be upset?

Yes because they would be looking for somewhere else to go and play. I was part of the consultation process as one of the partners and appreciate the difficulty in where you situate something like this, especially with a PFI funded school, so the activities that happen within that arena tend to finish at 6.00 p.m. so this MUGA is a good meeting place and it carries on, especially in the lighter nights when they can stay out until about 9 pm and they predominantly use it for the activities it was created for, i.e. football, basketball.

Q What age group are you currently working with?

The eldest member is just under 14 years old. This age group has been targeted, as they were aware they would only be there until September and to target an age range from 11 to 19 years over one night would have been too wide an age range. Very impressed with having 50 of the younger age range

attend, so when the youth club kicks off properly it will be an asset to Alvechurch, because they have not even started to attract the older youth age range yet.

Q How long has the youth club been running?

Since June 2010. We were working with the individuals setting this up beforehand, taking them through the process of applying for funding and how to set it up. Currently I have workers there delivering a service and will change the delivery slightly over the summer, taking on board that the young people are around all day. So trips have been organised and the staff team will establish that the young people have had a full taste of the activities that they can do in a youth club. This will establish the group ready to run from September by themselves with their newly appointed staff.

Q Are you a good medium to be able to communicate to the young people the residents feelings and would you be able to put these across to them?

There are cases where this has been done. We are currently delivering from upstairs at the social club and one of the considerations from the people who allowed use of the room was that they did not want the young people charging up and down the stairs, so behavioural contracts were negotiated with the young people before they started. A lot of work was also done with the youth workers on how the young people responsibly leave the building and walk through the village. This is done each week.

Q What are your thoughts on what would happen if the MUGA was removed, do you think ASB would increase?

In my view, if more housing is being built, it may not affect the figures, as more families and the youth populous will increase and ASB statistics will also naturally tend to increase anyway. ASB would probably move but still be within the village somewhere, but just somewhere else. You may have a spike of higher figures where young people feel as if they have lost something, hopefully gaining the youth club would help prevent that.

Q How often do you think the club will be open in September and for how long?

We cannot answer this specifically as it will be up to the group running it at that point, but they have advertised for a worker to be delivering 3 sessions a week, most will be in the region of 2-2½ hours. If it was the older age range it may be between 7 or 7.30 pm and 10 pm. The plan with the team that are setting it up is that they want it to be a “drop in” centre, so it will be open for young people to meet with a responsible adult and maybe access other agencies and services and therefore pick up young people in crisis or need, or undertake preventative work on such things. That’s where education of ASB will make more impact. This will also be dependant on the funding that they secure. The current summer delivery includes an overnight stay.

6. Questions to Lead Petitioners

Sarah Morgan – Petition 1 Organiser

Q What do you consider the impact would be on young people in Alvechurch if the MUGA was removed?

It would be good for local residents who are subject to ASB. We have already heard about the youth club, so removal of the MUGA would not be of detriment, Alvechurch has a lot to offer the teenagers and will go from strength to strength. Removing the MUGA will give back quality of life to the residents that have been suffering for the last 2½ years.

Q Do you have any views on the alternative options to deal with ASB around the MUGA if it was kept in situ?

No I do not have any alternative options if left in situ, but do have grave concerns in dealing with an ASB if it is left there and these concerns are based on cost and sustainability to all partners involved. The partners involved, (Council, police, Youth Services) in this financial climate are all subject to cost cutting exercises. Should it be left, we need to be asking questions about where the budgets in place to carry out any of the recommendations will come from, can we afford fencing? Can we afford lighting? Is it sustainable? Is the man power of the police sustainable?

Alex Cooke – Petition 2 Organiser

Q What do you consider the impact would be on young people in Alvechurch if the MUGA was removed?

A key distinction is that it is not the children that are using the MUGA that are causing the ASB. The MUGA is used for social play. The predominate use is of the sports area, football pitch, basketball court and a big advantage is that it is all weather. In winter it is the only facility where children can go to play any sport. The removal of the MUGA would remove the opportunity for children to get out and get exercise and play in the wet weather.

Q Do you have any views on the alternative options to deal with ASB around the MUGA if it was kept in situ?

I am surprised that the professionals in the room have not explored the options and opportunities more. We have heard a lot about the ASB and past, but not what we have not done or tried. I understand that BDC has an ASB Reduction Strategy, so I would be keen to understand whether we have followed that as a district. That suggests that there is an escalating set of measures that can be taken by varying partners, but predominantly the police in terms of ASB Orders, which have not been mentioned tonight and that measures get progressively more serious in terms of what you are trying to do to remedy ASB. I am not convinced in any way that all has been done that could be done to reduce the ASB. As a petitioner I represent a group of

people who accept that there is ASB and do not want it. We feel sorry for the residents, but do not believe that removal of the MUGA will reduce the ASB in the village. Tonight's debate has been about how to reduce ASB, not a debate about whether or not we should remove some very useful play equipment.

Emily Wightman – Petitioner 3 Organiser

Q What do you consider the impact would be on young people in Alvechurch if the MUGA was removed?

If it was removed teenagers would find another place to meet up and that younger people who use the MUGA normally and properly will not have the opportunity to do that and not have the opportunity to play anywhere else in the village.

Q Do you have any views on the alternative options to deal with ASB around the MUGA if it was kept situ?

Not really.