

Community Hub – Why not Mill Lane Recreation ground?

Firstly, the Parish Council would like to make it clear that it is fully supportive of a community hub in principle. The proposal before it at its meeting on 14th December raised, however, some quite major problems.

Firstly, the building proposed is very large – 33.4m x 19.9m (110 x 65.2 ft). This, on the site suggested in Mill Lane would have occupied about 45% of the remaining open frontage between the pavilion and 17 Mill Lane and resulted in the loss of the children's play area. This underwent a major refurbishment by the Parish Council about 18 months ago costing around £60,000. Most of the cost of installing play equipment lies in providing safety surfacing and erecting it. Moving or replacing this almost new equipment is estimated at around £45,000, a cost which would fall to the Parish Council.

Sawston has 4.81 ha (11.9 acres) less sports grounds and 1.06 ha (2.62 acres) less play area than is the recommended standard for a village of its size. Suggestions that replacement land could be made available as part of a deal with Cambridge City FC to build a stadium at the rear of Deal Manor Business Park have been effectively ruled out by the planners, at least for the foreseeable future and it is therefore important that what land we have is retained.

Mill Lane recreation ground is not only in a conservation area, but is designated a 'protected village amenity area' (PVAA) in the Local Plan. This designation is the highest level of protection which can be given to an open space within a built up area and it was given because it was considered that this area forms an important asset in providing not only a sports ground, but a place where people can sit, walk dogs, play and generally enjoy an open space close to the centre of the village. Whilst the community hub would not have totally prevented these activities, a building of this size would have given a much more urban feel to Mill Lane and by creating a large concealed area, to its rear, increased the level of antisocial behaviour and vandalism after dark.

The Parish Council is still actively engaged in trying to find an alternative site and asking whether a building this large is really necessary for it to fulfil the functions proposed in the clear and thoughtful report presented to the meeting by the Rev Bruce Waldron.

Eugene Murray
Chairman Sawston Parish Council