

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Meeting with Gentoo Homes regarding play feature at Humbles Wood Friday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2018 in the Town Council office</b></p>
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**PRESENT**

Cllr Jennifer McGee, Cllr Eileen Burt, Sarah Eden, David Thomas (Gentoo Homes, Head of Commercial and Technical)

Apologies: Cllr Gerry Price, Cllr Glenn Simpson

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The meeting received copies of emails dating back to 2012 that tracked the decisions taken up to November 2017 when the play feature was agreed to be installed in its current location.

In summary, the Town Council had asked Gentoo to change the naturalistic scheme put forward in 2012 to a more robust play feature that incorporated swings and a slide. Following a number of years, several meetings and a change of personnel the play feature installed was agreed by the Town Council as its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2017. David Thomas was emailed on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2017 stating that the Town Council had agreed to take on the play area, following the transfer of the land, after a period of two years, for a one-off sum of £15,000.

Cllr Jennifer McGee advised that since the installation of the play feature the Town Council had received a complaint from a resident, who attended the council's public meeting in December, regarding the fact that the play feature was in a different place to where he had expected it to be when he bought the house, that it was too near his rear garden and that the swing feature overlooked his property and into his windows. Cllr Eileen Burt added that the resident in question described young people waving at him as they could see into his windows.

David Thomas responded that he had also received a very strong objection to the play feature from this resident but that he had also received positive communication from another. David Thomas described that the reason he had requested a site meeting with the Town Council was because they were the adopting authority and he wanted an agreement, this was sent by Sarah on 17<sup>th</sup> November following email communication between a number of Councillors and a site meeting with Cllr Glenn Simpson and a later visit by chair Cllr Gerry Price.

Cllr Jennifer McGee stated that she believed Cllr Simpson had mentioned the play feature being too close to houses but he was working so not able to attend the meeting that day. David Thomas agreed that the proximity to houses had been discussed but that it was with regard to the original location, where it was felt there was not enough space.

David Thomas confirmed that the reason the location was changed was due to ground levels and this being the flattest area for the swing to be installed, as well as spacing being desired between the 2 pieces of equipment. David Thomas assured that Infinite Play had no concern over the proximity to houses and he agreed as there was an area of grass, a pavement and a further area of grass before the rear fence line of properties.

David Thomas stated that he firmly believed that if the swings were removed there would be a backlash from other residents and there was nowhere else on the site they could be relocated to, due to the levels. David Thomas continued that the scheme was considered very successful and would be enjoyed by residents and that this was one complainant. Additionally, he confirmed that he had agreed a 3 years maintenance contract prior to the play area being transferred as it was more economical, so the Town Council was getting a better deal than previously agreed.

Cllr Jennifer McGee responded that only if the Town Council took on the play feature and that they had only agreed in principle. David Thomas indicated that his understanding was that the

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Town Council were taking on all the open space including the play equipment and as such maintenance had not been included in the cost to those purchasing homes on the estate, whereas at Cottier Grange a property services company would look after open space and the play equipment and this cost was passed on to residents.

Cllr Eileen Burt said she would be surprised if the Town Council had agreed to take on grass-cutting and shrubbery as this was not usual. Sarah Eden agreed and advised that although she was only involved recently, she did not anticipate the transfer would include all open space. David Thomas confirmed that the paths were being adopted by NCC.

It was discussed that the proposal had been brought to the Town Council 3 times due to the length timescale and the change in office but that there was never a legally binding agreement signed so the details were not clear. David Thomas agreed to go back through the records to find the details in the original offer as he was not involved at that time but he would be surprised if it did not include all of the open space. Cllr Jennifer McGee felt that discussions had included the open space and for this reason she had been reluctant. Sarah Eden repeated that discussions may or may not have included the open space at each juncture but there was definitely no legal documents relating to either a transfer or adoption of land or play equipment.

Sarah Eden questioned planning protocol and whether David Thomas thought a planning application or amendment would be required in view of the play feature changing in design and being installed in a different location. David Thomas did not believe this would be necessary under the circumstances. It was agreed to await a response from NCC Planning. *It has since been clarified that planning permission is required and a planning officer has advised both Gentoo Homes and the complainant.*

In summary, David Thomas asserted that he believed the swing was in the most appropriate location and that Gentoo Homes would not pay for it to be relocated or removed as Prudhoe Town Council had agreed its location with them.

Cllr Jennifer McGee summarised that that any further complaints received would be directed to Gentoo Homes as Prudhoe Town Council is not responsible for the site, it belongs to Gentoo Homes.

David Thomas responded that any complaints that came to him regarding the location of the swings, he would advise the complainant that Prudhoe Town Council had agreed the location.

Cllr Eileen Burt indicated that a response from planning was required.

As a possible compromise, Sarah Eden asked if the structure could be lowered by removing height from the bottom of the legs. Presently there is a toddler swing seat and a junior swing seat; toddler swings require less clearance and a lower structure may be considered less intrusive. David Thomas agreed that he could take this suggestion back to Infinite Play, Cllrs Eileen Burt and Jennifer McGee agreed that it could be a solution. *The complainant has not responded favourably to this suggestion.*

**ACTIONS**

- SJE to chase up Planning Department
- SJE to contact complainant about meeting and suggested compromise
- DT to contact Infinite Play about lowering structure
- DT to provide map of area 'agreed in principle' to be transferred