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Introduction

Section 11 of the Children and families (Wales) measure (2010) places a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children. The Welsh Government commenced the first part of the duty in November 2012 and local authorities submitted their play sufficiency assessments by March 2013 together with action plans setting out how they intended to improve and/or protect opportunities for play in their area. Local Authorities were then expected to work towards securing sufficient play opportunities by implementing their Play Sufficiency Assessment action plans.

In 2016, Wrexham's 2nd Play Sufficiency Assessment identified that year 5 (9/10 year old) children living within the Marchwiell and Cross Lanes electoral area felt dissatisfied with their opportunities for play. Although the survey only represented a small sample, when Sesswick Community Council members became aware of the results they invited Wrexham Council's Play Development Team to further investigate the issue and a proposal for conducting a localised Play Sufficiency Assessment was accepted. In doing so Sesswick Community Council have taken a pioneering approach. As yet no other Community Council in Wrexham County Borough has commissioned this kind of investigation and it confirms the Community Council's commitment to its youngest members' quality of life and wellbeing.

This report is concerned with the whole of the Sesswick Community Council area, however it has a particular focus on the Cross Lanes neighbourhood, as this is where the majority of people live. In recognition of the Community Council's very limited financial resources, the budget for the project was based on 10 days of work, however in practice the time and resources taken to conduct the research, process the amount of evidence generated and produce the report have far exceeded this. Work on the Sesswick Play Sufficiency Assessment began in August 2016 and it is hoped that this resulting report will enable the Community Council to develop a response to supporting children's play based on real evidence and the opinions of local people.

What is sufficiency?

What is considered sufficient for some people may differ to others in terms of opportunities for play and a range of subjective and objective issues may have a bearing (including personal and collective concerns which are specific to a local community). The issues which challenge people's subjective experience of sufficiency can range across a number of themes or 'assets' that work together, influencing people's subjective experience of having sufficient opportunity for play.

Where children express dissatisfaction, they identify issues that contribute to sufficiency which concurs with the presence of those features in communities where children express satisfaction. This suggests that the introduction of these features is proven to work and carries minimum 'risk'.

Methodology

Aims

To actively involve community stakeholders (including children, teenagers and their parents) in analysing current conditions for playing within the Sesswick community.

Objectives

- Identify examples of play sufficiency and the conditions which support them.
- Identify examples of insufficiency and the reasons for this.
- Highlight factors to maintain/protect and priorities to address.

Theoretical Framework

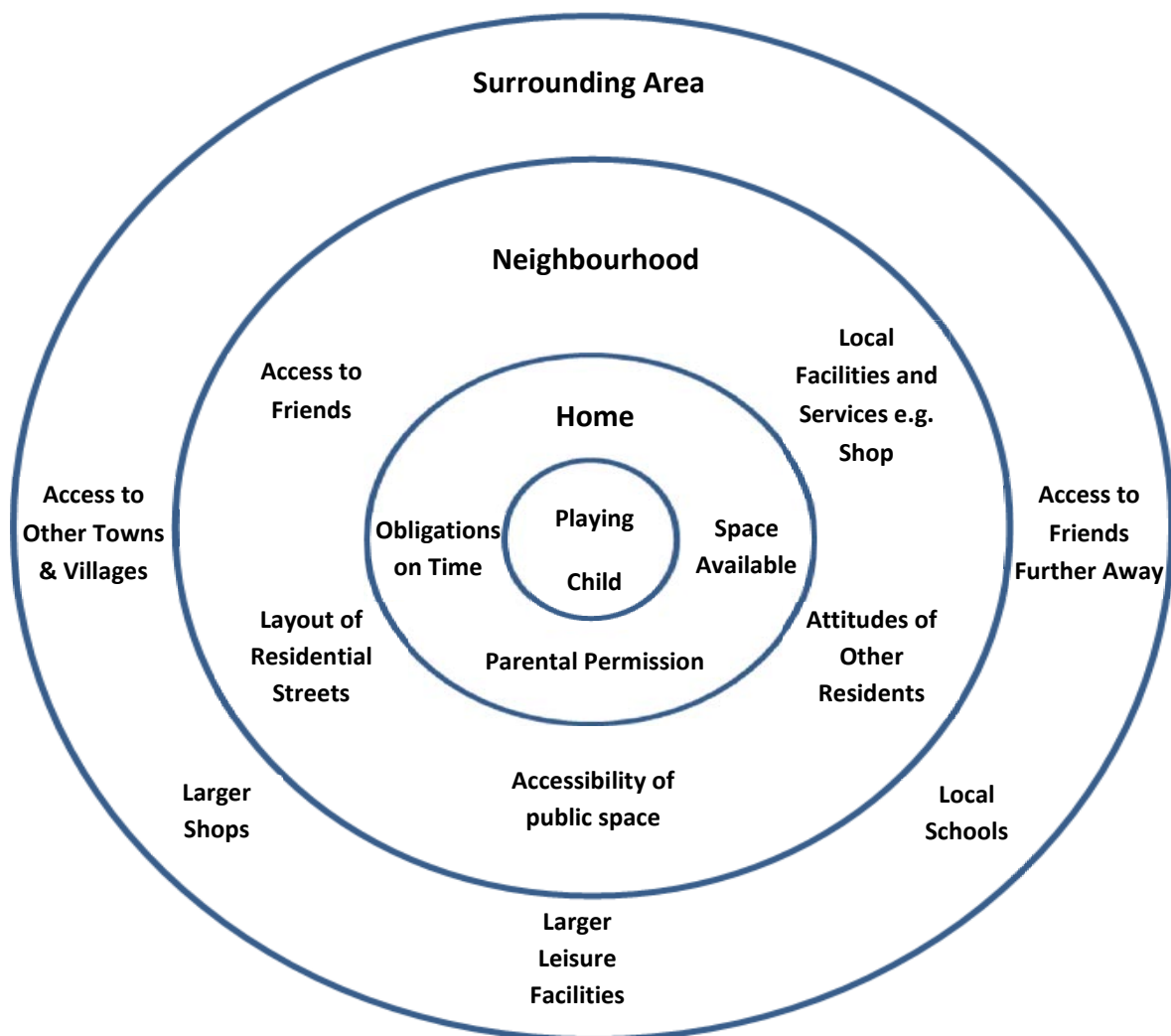
In line with Wrexham Council's Play Sufficiency Assessments, this report will use some technical terms in referring to the complex issues associated with the assessment of sufficiency of opportunities for play. For instance the term 'affordance' will be used and this refers to a feature or characteristic of an environment which may present an opportunity for play to occur.

This report also uses a framework originally developed for use in Wrexham's first Play Sufficiency Assessment (2013), which is an adaption of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach (1979) and Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell's Manchester Circles (2008) model. This framework allows for the consideration of affordances for play presented by the children's home/family environments, and how these affect and are affected by the affordances in the local neighbourhood, and how all of this is affected by the wider context within which the community exists.

Each level of the framework is investigated to explore the physical and social factors that coalesce to affect children's day to day play experiences and uses four lines of enquiry identified from research and theory developed since UNICEF's report on children's well-being in developed countries (2007):

- Time – how often and how much time children spend playing
- Space – that exists within children's locality and the 'quality' of that space
- Access – children's mobility, the permission they are granted and the physical accessibility of space.
- Attitudes – of children, parents and other community members.

Fig 1 - Ecological Systems model combined with the Manchester Circles and applied to potential time, space, access and attitudes afforded by the human and geographical systems of Sesswick:



It is important to recognise that children's ability to make real use of any *potential* affordances for play within their local community will be influenced / affected by some or all of the factors above and more besides. This means that when attempting to provide for children's play adults must pay attention to the conditions under which children are playing and recognise that children's opportunities for play are dependant on more than just the provision of space. To help with this the report uses the concepts of 'constrained', 'promoted' and 'free' fields of action (Kyttä, 2003) to consider how the environment affects children's freely chosen and self-directed behaviour (i.e. their play).

Research Methods

Internal Desktop Audit

Individuals within the local authority responsible for asset management, the maintenance and development of public open spaces, planning applications and obligations, transport management and housing were contacted to help identify the ownership of different spaces within the local community and share any information about current or future initiatives within the local area which may impact on children's ability to access time and space for playing.

Detailed Community Audit

A detailed 'on the ground' audit of the local community was completed aimed at establishing the potential and actualised affordances for play. This included two play development workers walking the majority of routes through and around the community, taking photographs of the spaces available, looking for evidence of children playing and talking to local residents if the opportunity occurred; all in attempt to identify features that support or constrain children's access to space for playing. This research focussed on the Cross Lanes housing estate as there is a higher population here, although car journeys were made in each direction in order to understand a little about the spread of residences and the roads and pathways approaching the main 'village'.

Research with Children in Schools

To avoid presumptions being made, it was important that children were directly engaged in exploring their current experiences of playing and socialising within their local community. To support this workshops were facilitated with children from Sesswick in two local primary schools and one secondary school, this included:

- Ysgol Deiniol CP in Marchwiel
- Ysgol St. Dunawd in Bangor on Dee
- Maelor School, Penley

The workshops focussed on children and young people living within Sesswick Community Council's area and explored their current experiences of playing and socialising within their community. Children were given maps of the area and firstly asked to identify where they live, where they play, where they don't or can't play and the reasons why. Their comments and play stories were noted. Children were then given the opportunity to think about what might improve their play experiences.

Community Play Event in Cross Lanes

This one off community play event aimed to gather further evidence for the play sufficiency assessment whilst also promoting the work of Sesswick Community Council. Children who were previously involved in the research in schools were invited to the event giving them the opportunity to show the play development workers where they play and any features within their neighbourhood that support or constrain their opportunities for playing. The event also provided an opportunity for the play development workers to talk directly with parents and other local residents about the children's opportunities for playing and any concerns they may have associated with this.

Final Report and Recommendations

This report intends to summarise the findings of the localised assessment and will be presented at a Community Council meeting to enable further discussion of issues identified and recommendations for any future plans.

Stakeholder Engagement and Research Challenges.

In total 26 children and young people from three schools participated in the research, unfortunately one other local primary school were not able to be involved within the limited timescales of the assessment. However a further 14 adults provided comments via the community play event which was also attended by 14 playing children.

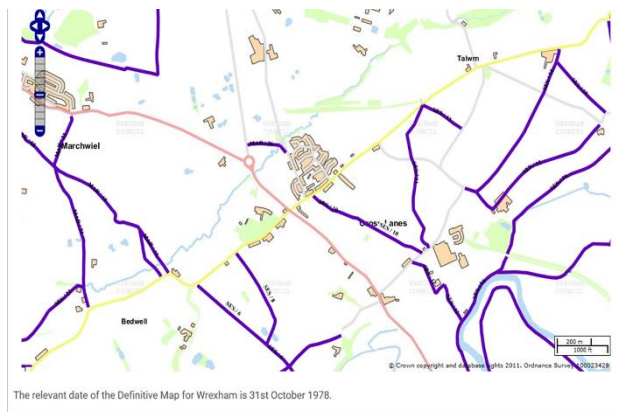
One of the core principles of this Play Sufficiency Assessment was to support children's informed participation, ensuring that their opinions were given equal weight to those of adults. It has to be noted that adult stakeholder participation appeared limited and some of those who did get involved participate suggested that not enough people knew about the community event. Ideally each home would have received a leaflet but the budget for this research was limited so publicity was disseminated through Sesswick Community Council and displayed on the community notice boards as well as at the local shop.

The internal desk top audit took place during June and July 2016, followed by two community audits in August (taking on board the views of children playing out during their summer holidays). The three school workshops took place during September and October and the community play event was held prior to the October half term holiday, 2016.

Key Findings

Desktop Research – Mapping

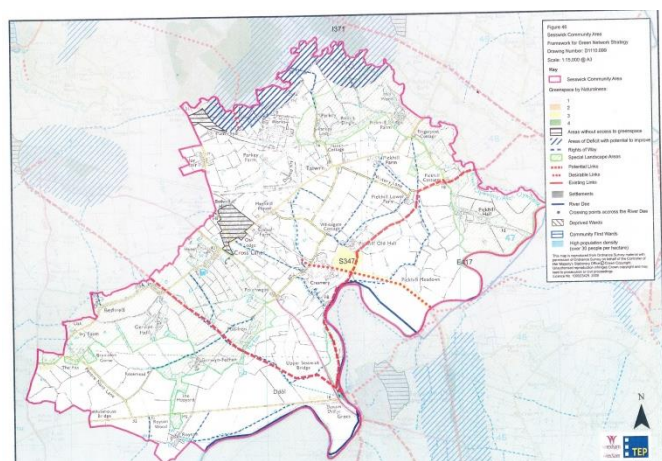
A-roads, B-roads and C-roads almost surround Cross Lanes main settlement area. There are a number of children and young people who live along these roads in all directions. Children living in the area attend three different primary schools and one secondary school in other nearby villages.



This 1978 map of public footpaths clearly shows a lack of or 'broken' footpaths connecting Cross Lanes with Marchwiel and many of the lanes connecting existing public footpaths have no pavements.

The 2008 Wrexham Green Network Strategy (Phase 2) illustrates that ‘existing, desirable and potential links’ have been considered previously.

This series of maps also shows Cross Lanes' potential connections to Marchwiel and Bangor is-y-coed.



These maps highlight the distances between homes in the Sesswick area and draw attention to Cross Lanes' fractured connections with surrounding settlements, which are mainly reached by busy roads.

Desktop Research – Planning

There is currently a planning application pending at a site off Bedwall Road in Cross Lanes, however the final decision was unknown at time of compiling this report.

Another planning application was also submitted to Wrexham Council in October 2016 requesting to turn the former Cross Lanes Hotel into a children's activity centre. Significant changes were made to the design access statement to address Wrexham

Council concerns. Changes to the operation of the centre may also free up opportunities for local groups. Negotiations were still in progress at the time of compiling this report.



An inquiry was also made to the Parks, Countryside and Rights of Way manager whose reply referred to a request for a play area in Cross Lanes a few years previously and advised of the space requirements and the fundraising needed.

Community Audit

The Home Environment

Main settlement consists of varied property designs in cul-de sac situations.

There is a pleasant 'open' feel to front gardens and garden boundaries are defined by varied planting.

Most gardens are really well maintained with established plants/hedges.

There is varied foliage, colour and form.

There are no pavements within each cul-de-sac, although pavements lead into each.





Vehicles are generally parked within their owner's properties.

Properties have front and rear gardens.

Cul-de-sac roads offer gentle curves and gentle slopes.

There is minimum street furniture and no road markings.

The Neighbourhood Environment

There are several green spaces within the main estate, mostly within 'ear-shot' of homes.

There are mature trees and varied hedging - ideal for hiding, dens and some climbing.

Vehicles are well catered for but drivers have to expect people of all ages within the cul-de-sacs.

Cul-de-sacs and green spaces are linked by pavements.



Green spaces are fairly generous — good for group games and some ball games etc.

People of all ages have the potential for positive community interaction. These could be valuable spaces for community events, which afford greater community cohesion.



Whilst Cross Lanes is surrounded by countryside, all roads approaching and entering the settlement are busy.

There are pavements on one side of the road that lead from the traffic lights (with crossing points) to just prior to the last residence.

The pavement also stops along Bedwall road.

To the East of the village there is a farm gate, which indicates where the old Railway line ran.

There are no benches or bus shelters (which would afford multigenerational use).

There is a gate into fields opposite the Co-op which appears to be a public footpath.

Evidence of Children Playing

The public space in Cross Lanes estate is very well cared for. The grass is closely cut and there are some mature specimen trees. There are mature dense hedges of various kinds. There was no evidence of any dens within these.

On the days visited there were not many signs or 'play marks' evident. This could be due to the maintenance of the spaces. There was evidence of sweet wrappers and pop bottles as well as a conker shell but no conker tree, suggesting it had been brought in from elsewhere. Children had also chalked their names onto the only wall on the estate.

All of these items were found around the wall, which suggests it could be a place to meet and hang out. A small group of children came across to speak to the play development workers during the audit. They were collecting rubbish and were disturbed by the alcohol cans left lying around. A parent also commented that these were sometimes left by adults as well as young people.



Research with Children in Schools

The younger children from Sesswick who attend Ysgol Deiniol and Ysgol St. Dunawd said...

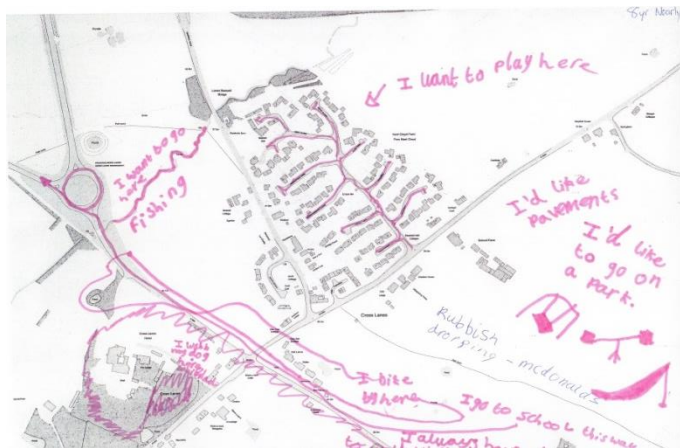
There is one street they are not allowed to play in and one they avoid.

They use trees as goal posts —
"please can we have goals?"

There is a 'dent' in a big tree so "you can climb it and hide — we call it the talking tree and pretend to be a cat"

There is a hole in the hedge and dandelions in the summer.

Dog walkers sometimes don't clear the mess up.



"We sit and balance on the wall."

"There is a 'spider' tree with fuzzy branches — my friend goes there when she's upset."

'The Crescent' — the children are mostly older.

Children play catch, tag, hide and seek, football and 'two a touch'.

There is a driver who drives too fast.

They know where to find conkers.

People get bored.

"There isn't enough 'equipment'"

"I'd like pavements"

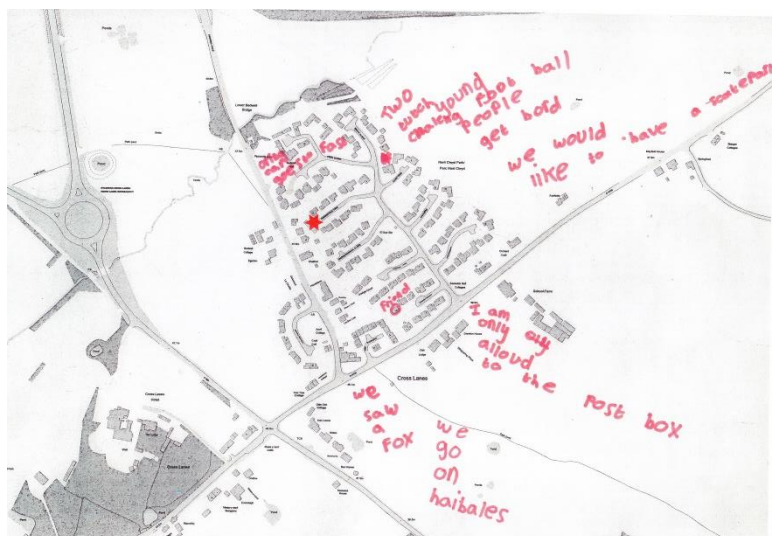
"I always have to walk with adults"

They are limited in how far they can walk or ride their bikes.

They have to be taken to the shops or friends' houses.

"I am only allowed to the post box."

"I have no friends where I live. No one in class lives by me."



The older children from Sesswick who attend Penley School also said...

Older children / young people play on the hay bales.

They go to the river.

They would love to have goal posts. They suggested putting some goals on the fields.

“The shop is good as a bus stop ‘cos you can go in if it’s cold”.

“Please can we have a bus stop/bus shelter?”

“We are all together on the bus to school—it takes about 20 minutes.”



“I ride my bike to Bangor-on-Dee... it’s good but it is a bit dangerous. Make it safer to travel around Cross Lanes”.

“The people here are really nice and there’s not many mean people.”

“It’s all friendly in Cross Lanes—we all get on.”

Community Play Event



While children played, adults shared their views and experiences and discussed their concerns with playworkers.

A mother with two children introduced herself to another parent. She felt it was good to get everyone out together. She mentioned the cars being fast. She thanked playworkers and said her children had enjoyed playing out.

Two dads agreed that the traffic is a concern, both felt cars can come a bit quick on the main road and drivers can come out of cul-de-sacs without looking. One made it clear he wouldn't want to see speed bumps though. One felt his children managed to get out to play, but that his teenager preferred computer games. The other dad had a very young child and said that the issue of children being able to play out will be a bigger concern for him in a couple of years.

A father of an older teen joined the group. He said there had been problems with the old bench but that had also involved people in cars (possibly coming into the area from elsewhere). When asked what had been attracting the cars there, he didn't seem to know. He said the PCSO's had been involved at the time. His garden fence gets hit by footballs which he does find annoying as it can be loud. He wondered if play equipment could be placed by the old hotel site but a woman said that it is a private business and that it would be used by groups during the week and people would have to pay to go there at weekends.

A couple of people reported that the same couple of cars repeatedly drive too fast on the estate. Two parents independently said they felt there is an accident waiting to happen.

A playworker asked if any community events are held. A dad said that individual streets might do something but generally people from one street don't know people from another.

A mum said "sometimes outsiders come and play" and explained that by outsiders she meant children from the other local streets.

One resident was extremely angry about the football games causing repeated damage to the fence at the rear of his property. A playworker accompanied him to look at the issue. He said when he was a boy they played football in the area where children say they play on the hay bales (opposite the shop). He maintained that elderly residents had been intimidated by youths and were frightened.

Another mother spoke of how the children used to play football by the electric box but had been moved on by some of the neighbours. She admitted that they can be loud, but said that they were only being children and questioned where else they could go. She said some of the attitudes of adults towards children have been hostile and that children have been shouted at. She felt that the children did try to stop the balls crashing into fences or going over the top of them.

The parents of a teen girl spoke of her staying in most days and being interested in 'other things' but they said there isn't anything for her age group anyway. Mum went away for a while and Dad stayed and talked about his memories of how he used to ride his bike along the old railway line. The Mum returned later with this note:

For the teenagers there is little to do in Cross lanes. Maybe the council could look at using local community centres to hold age specific activities and lay on transport to take them there. It's better that they have the independence to start venturing safely off the estate. Any permanent structure would be a bad idea as they then tend to gather in "gangs" and this can be intimidating

for some residents. In the past we've had issues with groups of teenagers collecting and drinking and smoking and being a general nuisance.

Summarising the Results

The key points made by all participants during the research have been summarised and grouped into themes of time, access to space and attitudes or permission. They have then been colour coded to illustrate the factors that support children's **FREE** actions, those that **REGULATE** children's actions or **'PROMOTE'** particular types of behaviour, and those that **CONSTRAIN** children's actions and activities.

Time for play

Young people can socialise on their school bus.

Children tend to play out more in longer holidays and most references are around the summer holidays.

The majority of children and young people attend four different schools in neighbouring villages and are unable to play on the way to and from school.

Time for play is reduced by time spent in childcare and on homework. Parent's work commitments have a real impact and there is a tendency for children and young people to be driven to structured activities.

Access to spaces for play

Younger children play in safe cul-de-sacs, and then move to the communal spaces, which have limited affordances. They make the best of it and are generally positive about their community.

Children living along the lanes in all directions described playing in natural environments and interacting with nature.

Parents seem committed to driving their children to spaces and places to play.

There was some hope for access to facilities at the new Cross Lanes Hotel development.

Children's ability to access different spaces is age dependant.

Significant numbers of children spoke of visiting a friend's house to play in their garden but 'not outside'.

Adults from individual streets tend not to mix with adults from other streets—adults need leisure/play too!

There is no community intergenerational space, where community events can take place.

The focus is on tidy, well-kept areas and children need environments which they can experiment with, explore and manipulate. There is very little left in terms of material which they can adapt.

Busy roads and a lack of pavements beyond the main estate restrict children's movements, access to friends and their ability to range. Young residents of Cross Lanes are effectively cut off from each other.

Riding a bicycle any distance is dangerous due to busy roads.

It was noticeable that school children at the same school didn't know their neighbours from home.

Some children spoke about solitary play and were alienated because they couldn't share in the talk with others (effectively cut off from access to social play within the community) due to a lack of safe routes.

Attitudes and Permission for Play

Young people report being happy in a friendly place

Whilst adults are concerned about some drivers, no-one said they kept their children in because of it.

Some adults are concerned about young people - mostly that there is nothing for them to do which limits the necessary development of independence.

Children talked about wanting to play on a fixed equipment playground, but not wanting one by their house.

Children are very aware that football is an issue. They have moved where they play and have pleaded for goals.

There are on-going tensions about football being played and causing damage but no evidence of it being stopped now the game has moved location.

Younger children are concerned about older young people.

There is also some hostility towards young people from a group of residents due to their previous experiences of Anti-social Behaviour.

All adults were adamant that they didn't want a fixed equipment playground.

Discussion

Sesswick Community Council has commissioned this research to investigate further the factors influencing children's general dissatisfaction around their opportunities to play within their neighbourhood (highlighted by Wrexham Council's 2nd Play Sufficiency Assessment, 2016).

The desktop audit highlights Cross Lane's presence within the surrounding landscape and its relationship to nearby major roads (which are directly linked to major employers, towns and facilities). These views of Cross Lanes also reveal that whilst the village is set within beautiful countryside and enjoys excellent vehicular links; pedestrians of all ages, but especially the young, are at a disadvantage. The majority of children who took part in the consultations were restricted firstly by age in how far they could range (remaining within their cul-de-sac to begin with) before progressing to the 'communal' areas within the main road of the estate. The second and biggest factor restricting movement from approximately 10 years old plus is the speed and density of traffic on the roads beyond the estate and the fact that there are no alternative 'safe' routes or connecting pathways. This has resulted in children and young people living in any direction beyond the main housing estate being effectively cut off from each other, unable to range independently, develop their navigation and risk-management skills or social networks. As children and young people attend four different schools in satellite villages, they do not benefit from spending time with each other walking to and from school, playing on route, therefore any improvements to enable them access to time and space together increases in importance.

The desktop audit also draws attention to the possibility of further housing developments off Bedwall Road. Children's maps indicate that they play on this site. These proposals appear to be substantial in nature and, whilst the outcome of this particular application is not known, there are likely to be others in the future. This report recommends that where possible future housing developments should contribute to providing safe, pedestrian friendly connecting routes in and between the existing settlements.

It has been clear throughout this process that the Cross Lanes Hotel is a facility which is missed by the community. Children related to the proposals for its new use with excitement, although what form of access will be available for the community remains to be seen. Furthermore any access to the new venture will not negate the need to improve play opportunities within the wider Sesswick area.

The environmental audit draws attention to a home setting environment that affords an ideal space for younger children, just venturing out. Planting defines boundaries yet offers investigation and potentially affords social interaction for all ages and the cul-de-sacs offer great affordances for children to begin their transition from home to community play. These spaces are typically limited in traffic flow and cars tend to be driven slowly. The cul-de-sac design and

beautiful gardens are ideal for younger children and affords connection with immediate neighbours, sensory elements and playable forms. Pavements in turn connect the cul-de-sacs to the main street, which affords older children the potential to widen social networks and develop self-managing skills.

The audit then moved from individual streets and on to Briar Close to consider the affordances of the open 'communal' spaces, which punctuate its length. These appear to be very well maintained areas which offer potential for play but have little affordance in terms of supporting children's desire to manipulate their play environment. Whilst there are many well-established and varied hedges, mature specimen trees and gentle slopes, there appears to be no physical environmental features to indicate a sense of 'place' or encourage people to meet up. The consultation also highlighted the sometimes 'contested' nature of these spaces. They are the only easily accessible spaces available to children living on the estate and so they are inevitably (and rightly) used for playing. One of the factors that makes these spaces good for playing is their close proximity to homes, which creates a sense of security for those using them. However this can also create tensions especially when playing gets noisier or if people are concerned about their property being damaged. This appears to be a particular problem when it comes to children playing football. The children are not trying to cause problems, in fact they are very aware of avoiding them, but there are very few alternatives for them. One option may be to investigate types of natural screening.

Homes beyond the main settlement area are limited in their connecting pathways and some dwellings have no pavements, limiting safe passage and social interaction. Children living here have very different play experiences to those living in the cul-de-sacs. Some give detailed descriptions of the countryside adjacent to them and their interactions with nature. Others seemed excluded from schoolmate's conversations about play and were clearly not acquainted with those living in the same place.

As children grow more independent and begin to explore their communities, they take their 'cues' from the physical and human environments around them. Whilst play may be considered as a child's 'business', it will always be promoted or constrained by the time, space and permission provided by the adult community around them. If the 'business' of childhood is supported, children feel valued and they value the people and places around them and develop attachments to them. Cross Lanes children told us they have names for the places (The Field, The Hill) and some of the features (The Talking Tree etc.) where they play. A connection to place and a connection to community - place attachment provides the conditions for a sense of ownership in young people and with ownership comes recognition of responsibilities, but this relationship again needs to be supported by time, space and permission to *be* children from community elders.

Whilst Cross Lanes' youngest community members enjoy playing in the home/street environments, which support their initial independent play (from around five to eight years),

the problems begin to arise for children beyond this age. There are spaces that potentially support children's play, particularly for those aged approximately eight to 12 years, although these are limited in their affordance for playing and could be improved at relatively little cost. As previously discussed the consultation results also highlight the contested use of these spaces by young people and the consequential negative experiences of some adult residents. Possible solutions to this problem need to be explored further but could be addressed in part by interventions aimed at improving community relations.

The situation becomes more polarised for young people, those aged 12 years and over. Their need to range further and independently is not supported by safe routes so young people's activities and socialisation is reliant on parents ability to transport them (or the bus journey to school). Alternatively they have no option but to hang out in their neighbourhood (or just stay indoors). This in itself may cause problems because adults tend to have less tolerance for the playful behaviour of bigger children (the contested nature of space issue again). Young people who have grown up with sense of detachment from their community may also be less inclined to show respect towards it (although this did not appear to be the case for the young people engaged in this research). Both of these issues could be contributing factors to the concerns raised by some adults about young people's behaviour around 'the wall' and the bench that was previously located near the shops (both of which appeared to have caused serious problems in the past but were also linked to people turning up in cars).

This research indicates that there is a need to promote ways of connecting children and families who live on the main housing estates, as well as those living in more isolated homes in every direction. At the moment it seems that car journeys are made to connect individual families so children can play together but there are also strong indications that the adults within the main estate have a tendency not to mix beyond their own street. The environmental audit supports this by identifying that there is no intergenerational community meeting place and no obvious space where community events can take place.

Recommendations and Suggestions

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this play sufficiency assessment and are intended to be used as guidance for informing a strategic and evidence based response to supporting children's play in the community of Sesswick:

- 1. Where possible future housing developments should contribute to the development of safe, pedestrian friendly, connecting routes in and between the existing settlements.**
- 2. Introduce low cost modifications to the existing 'communal spaces' in Cross Lanes to improve their affordances for play and extend children's experiences of playing.**
- 3. Facilitate at least one community event within the Cross Lanes area aimed at bringing people together and building social cohesion.**
- 4. Consider the possibility of developing a community space *with* young people in the Cross Lanes area.**
- 5. Explore options for improving young people's access to neighbouring villages, particularly where youth provision / activities are made available.**

The recommendations above require agreed commitment, an amount of dedicated time and possibly some financial resources. However, there are many possible interventions that could help to address some if not all of these priorities, including those that cost very little but rely on the goodwill of a neighbourhood. To finish here are a few ideas...

No Cost:

- Leave an area of grass to grow longer in the summer and pile up leaves in Autumn.
- Leave some soft branch pruning's to promote den building and agree to monitor and leave the dens up for a while.
- Collect old blankets / sheets for dens or dressing up and leave them out for children.
- Encourage people to find an excuse for walking to the local shop regularly (and saying hello to anyone they meet along the way).

Low cost:

- Leave some chalks out for children to discover.
- Have a community picnic or 'tea on the lawn'.
- Celebrate National Play Day (1st Wednesday of August).
- Consider some low-key landscape features to create an intergenerational place which welcomes everyone. This could include planting as a screen to reduce noise for residents

More Cost:

- Consider commissioning some staffed play sessions for the longer holidays.
- Investigate sources of funding and local resources which may support young people accessing provision (e.g. Co-op Community Fund).

CYNGOR CYMUNED SESSWICK SESSWICK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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20th August 2017

Dear Sirs,

**Town and Country Planning Act 1990: Section 78 Appeal
Land west of Bedwell Road, Cross Lanes, Wrexham
Outline application for residential development (24 dwellings) including means of access
to the site
Welsh Government/ Planning Inspectorate Reference: H6955/A/17/3179242
Wrexham County Borough Council Planning Reference: P 2016 0273**

This council, in whose community the proposal is located, remains strongly opposed to the above application.

Please see attached the original communication sent to the local planning authority detailing the reasons for objecting.

If there is a lack of a five- year supply of housing land in the county borough as the applicant contests in the appeal documentation, this does not give developers carte blanche to build anywhere regardless. Careful consideration still needs to be given to the location's environs to ensure development can be readily accommodated. Sites such as this one in the small tier- 4 village of Cross Lanes should not be used for meeting housing need when there are far more appropriate opportunities available elsewhere within the district. Cross Lanes being near to the Industrial Estate is completely irrelevant as the village simply cannot support an estate of this scale. The proposal is outside the settlement limit, on greenfield land and is in a hamlet with no facilities bar one shop

The appellant states from a recent appeal decision that “the pressing need for new housing outweighs the countryside protection policies”. He continues that where local authorities have an out of date UDP and not yet adopted a LDP, then it cannot be demonstrated if the county council has a 5-year housing land supply. Therefore, it has to be assumed that there is a zero- housing supply figure and “the need to increase land supply should be given considerable weight when dealing with planning applications”.

This council vehemently disagrees that the above policies legitimises development in Cross Lanes. It is clear from local news that the county council has significant plans for new housing around Wrexham, without the need to use sites such as on Bedwell road. Wrexham County Borough Council did propose a LDP, but this was vetoed by the Welsh Government. It would be perverse for Cardiff Bay to push through planning here for the reason that no LDP is in force, when it was Cardiff Bay itself who rejected Wrexham’s democratically- approved LDP in the first place. This document had gone through full public consultation and concluded there was no need to use this site for development. That decision is well- researched, logical and should be respected. Two planning decisions in this village have been overturned by the Planning Inspectorate in recent years. A third such instance would further undermine the role of elected representatives in the planning process and question whose interests are being served in these appeals if permission can be repeatedly imposed on a population without consent.

The applicant states the proposed site is near to the Industrial Estate. We disagree that the new southern access link road has “continuous pedestrian footways”. Rather, there is a small gap from the highway, used by cyclists and walkers, but not separated from vehicles. This road is high- speed and dangerous for those on foot, especially in winter. Furthermore, much of Bedwell Road has no pavement or street lighting. This is a narrow rural lane with hedges on both sides of the highway and less- than- ideal visibility. To place a new housing development in such a position would be grossly irresponsible for public safety.

One can hardly claim that Cross Lanes is “well served by a sustainable public transport provision”. The 146 service between Wrexham and Whitchurch does not call at the nearby Industrial Estate at all. There are four services a day, and this limited number may be further reduced. The last bus leaves Wrexham at 4.45pm, so cannot be used by workers in the town centre contracted to standard 9am- 5pm office hours. Residents at the site would be reliant on cars, which is not a sustainable option. Furthermore, the nature of the plot entrance cannot safely accommodate the potential for 53 cars to be entering and exiting every day

Given the site’s proximity to a brook, community councillors continue to have reservations over the issue of drainage and flooding, and wish to see these matters resolved first in a transparent manner. It is not reassuring that the Inspector will not have the opportunity to engage with the statutory consultees in this field. We do not support the applicant’s suggestion that permission be granted and a suitably worded condition be devised afterwards

In spite of pressure to reduce the density of the proposal, the applicant intends to pursue the application for 24 dwellings. The initial plans highlighted a conspicuous absence of garages, suggesting a prevalence of on- road parking. This would cause issues in such concentration, and would prohibit the easy access of emergency services vehicles if required.

The applicant has offered an area of public land, which may include an equipped play area. Although to be welcomed at initial face value, this fails to address the significant under- provision of open spaces in Cross Lanes. This was well documented by the 2017 county council document “Sesswick Play Scheme Assessment” (copy attached). There is a statutory obligation on authorities to secure sufficient play opportunities for children. Even with the aforementioned offer, this deficit would in fact be further exacerbated by this development and its associated increase in population.

In July, planning permission was granted to build an 80,000+ chicken broiler rearing facility, in very close proximity to this estate. Common sense would suggest that any marketability that the proposal did have would have been eliminated when that complex was allowed, Therefore, the viability of using this land for residential purpose no longer holds.

Yours faithfully,

Ian Griffiths
Clerk

Cc: Sharon Williams, Planning Office, Wrexham County Borough Council, Guildhall, Wrexham
LL11 1AY (by email)

From: Ian Griffiths [REDACTED]

Sent: 24 April 2016 20:48

To: Philip Forster

Subject: RE: P/2016/0273

Dear Mr Forster,

Sesswick Community Council opposes the above application. It contravenes many policies within the unitary development plan and would place a strain on this small rural community.

- 1 The infrastructure around Cross Lanes is poor and could not support a development of this size
 - a the only facility in the village is one shop. Parking on the roads there already causes congestion
 - b there are no surplus places in neighbouring schools to accommodate the children who would live in this development. Extra traffic movements would be generated transporting pupils further afield.
 - c public transport is very limited and bus times do not correlate to train services in Wrexham. Car ownership at the site would be essential.
 - d Bedwell road is a narrow country lane. It could not handle the additional traffic flows from the planned volume of cars.
 - e the village already has less than the statutory amount of open space amenity. The plans make no provision for children's play areas, so the deficit would be exacerbated.
- 2 the development would encroach into greenfield areas outside the settlement limit.
- 3 This area is predominantly heavy clay. Discharge of surface water via infiltration to nearby Bedwell Brook could lead to flooding affecting other areas and properties downstream. It is debatable whether a holding tank would be adequate to alleviate the speed of run-off from the development. There are also serious concerns that the brook may be polluted from the use of harmful substances at the development (eg weed killer, car washing), and precautions would need to be put in place to monitor this.
- 4 Fifteen of the proposed garages do not have garages (essential for security in the countryside) and the front gardens are small. Three and four bedroom houses will potentially have 3-4 cars per households (more than what the application puts forward). This implies the possibility of street parking if drives cannot provide sufficient room for off- road parking. This has been an issue in areas where there are larger drives and front gardens.
- 5 The plans seem to refer to out- of- date environmental records and should be reviewed. It is questionable for there to be no great-crested newts recorded at the site since 2011 and no bat activity since 1994. Furthermore, an otter has very recently been seen just 100 metres from the plot.
- 6 There are concerns over the electricity provision to the development. The nearby Nant Clwyd Park Estate experienced problems for many years until improved supply was put in place.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Griffiths

Clerk