

This Report will be made public on 18 July 2023



Report Number **FPPG/23/02**

**To:** Folkestone Parks and Pleasure Grounds Charity – Board of Trustees  
**Date:** 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023  
**Chief Officer:** Samuel Aligbe, Chief Officer-Corporate Estate & Development  
**Director:** Andy Blaszkowicz, Director – Housing & Operations  
**SUBJECT:** EAST CLIFF CONSULTATION FINDINGS UPDATE

**SUMMARY:**

This report provides an update on, and summary of the findings of the East Cliff Consultation report prepared by Lake Market Research following a public consultation carried out by the council between 5 July and 31 August 2022. The report considers possible next steps and the implications to the existing assets within the site boundary.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. To receive and note report FPPG/23/02.
2. To note the summary findings of the recent consultation, and agree that no further work is progressed to deliver those proposals.
3. To note the ongoing maintenance costs and obligations on the Charity as set out in section 7 of the report.
4. To agree that officers continue to explore all available funding sources to support any future project and maintenance of the existing facilities.
5. To agree that any future improvement works will be subject to a further public consultation and a report to the Charity.

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 East Cliff is land owned by the Folkestone Parks and Pleasure Grounds Charity in East Folkestone and managed by the council on behalf of the charity.
- 1.2 It is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Site of Special Scientific Interest and the current facilities consist of:
  - Existing open space/cut grass (6.24 acres)
  - Pitch and putt course including the Martello Tower (8.68 acres)
  - Bowls club (two greens) and tennis courts (2.57 acres)
  - Children's play area (220 sqm)
  - Toilet block
- 1.3 The 2017 Shepway Play Area Review assessed the play provision throughout the district against national standards (FIT standards). East Cliff was earmarked as having a standard of -.0.21; the second lowest score in the district and all the facilities are dilapidated and require replacement and upgrading.
- 1.4 The Play Area Review also identified the area as having a shortage of play facilities for children and young people. The Play Area has been identified as a priority in the district's Play Area Strategy 2020.
- 1.5 The overarching vision for the area is to improve leisure facilities for residents and visitors while enhancing the heritage and archaeological setting. The areas consulted on to achieve this were:
  - Creating an upgraded destination play area with exciting and challenging play provision
  - Building a visitor centre so that information about the site's heritage and ecological importance can be shared more widely
  - Improving accessibility to the nearby Warren and beach
  - Creating a larger car park to manage parking pressures in the East Cliff area and to generate income for the charity and help with site maintenance.
- 1.6 Following discussions with local stakeholders, F&HDC launched a community consultation to gather the views of the local community in relation to the current use, general perceptions of the site and ideas for potential future use. The consultation ran from 5 July 2022 to 31 July 2022. F&HDC commissioned Lake Market Research to analyse and present the data and survey findings in a report received by officers in April 2023.

1.7 This report seeks to update the Charity Trustees on the findings of the consultation and provides recommendations on how the trustees should proceed and considers other implications.

1.8 A copy of the Consultation Report is attached as Appendix 1.

## **2. CONSULTATION PROCESS**

2.1 The consultation process was launched by FHDC on 5 July 2022 and ran until 31 August 2022.

2.2 The survey was available in online and print format and was open to all residents to participate.

2.3 Volunteers from residents' groups helped shape the survey and distributed printed copies in the Folkestone Harbour ward and printed copies were available at the East Cliff Sports Kiosk for collection and return.

2.4 Approximately 1200 surveys were completed.

## **3. CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY**

3.0 The survey was conducted using a multiple choice-based questionnaire that asked fourteen questions specifically about the perception and preferred uses of East Cliff play area itself and eight questions were related to the participant's personal circumstances and demographics.

3.1 Folkestone & Hythe District Council was responsible for the design, promotion and collection of the data while Lake Market Research was commissioned to conduct the independent analysis of the feedback.

3.2 Consultees were given a choice of which questions they wanted to respond to, the participation therefore being self-selecting.

3.3 Consultees included district, town and county councillors, schools (staff and pupils, resident associations, community groups, the bowls club, and the Canterbury Archaeological Trust.

## **4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION FINDINGS**

4.1 The vast majority responding to the consultation indicated they currently visit East Cliff (94%) and use the open space there (94%). Around a third indicated they use the play area (36%) and golf/putting facilities (32%) and a quarter (25%) indicated they use tennis facilities. 11% indicated they use public bowls pitches.

4.2 Facilities considered important to consultee households largely correlates with facilities currently used. The vast majority of those answering indicated the open space is important (89%) and 53% indicated the public toilets are important. The play area, golf / putting facilities, tennis facilities and bowls facilities rank third (46%), fourth (37%), fifth (36%) and sixth (21%) respectively.

- 4.3 Some barriers to the use of East Cliff were put forward by those answering. The most common are a perceived lack of play facilities (37%), parking (24%), the condition / location of public toilets (21%) and the poor condition / layout of the open space (20%). 11% referenced the conditions of the grounds and 10% referenced litter.
- 4.4 Consultees were asked to give a rating for the play areas in East Folkestone and East Cliff. It is important to note that the scales included in the online survey and print survey differed. As much, for the purpose of analysis, the scales have been matched accordingly to present overall ratings. Just over a quarter (28%) of those answering indicated they are satisfied with the play areas in East Folkestone (11% very satisfied and 16% fairly satisfied). 23% indicated they are dissatisfied with the play areas in East Folkestone (9% very dissatisfied and 14% fairly dissatisfied). A significant proportion (49%) indicated they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
- 4.5 The proportion satisfied is broadly similar in the context of East Cliff with just under a quarter (23%) of those answering indicated they are satisfied with the play area (10% very satisfied and 13% fairly satisfied). 33% indicated they are dissatisfied (9% very dissatisfied and 14% fairly dissatisfied); higher than observed for East Folkestone. Again, a significant proportion (44%) indicated they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
- 4.6 When asked to select the most appropriate size for the East Cliff play area, views are split between the options proposed in the survey:
- A local play area – 2-3 pieces of small equipment targeted at the younger age group – 28%;
  - Local equipped play area – 5 pieces of equipment, up to twice the size of the current play area with a cost to build approximately £75,000 – 27%;
  - Destination play area - 8 plus pieces of equipment, will contain some of the following: disability and sensory equipment, multi-use games area, sports activities, gym & fitness equipment. Cost to build approximately £250,000 plus cost of toilets/café etc. – 25%;
  - Neighbourhood play area - 8 pieces of equipment covering a wider age group, plus opportunity for more expansive play, such as wheeled activities i.e. multi use games area, may provide some accessible play equipment. Cost to build approximately £150,000 – 21%.
- 4.7 Consultees were asked to select which facilities they would use in the context of the charity needing to be able to afford improvements and secure the future of existing facilities and raise income. Of the facilities put forward, consultees indicated they were most likely to use a small café (71% of those answering) and a seasonal ice cream van (66%). 42% of those answering indicated they would use a café and visitor centre with educational offering, 37% indicated they would

use sports facilities and 22% indicated they would use hire facilities and/or pay and display parking.

- 4.8 Views on whether consultees would accept the total size of the sports area to be extended for sports/activity purposes are polarising with 47% indicating they would accept it and 53% indicating they would not accept it. Similarly, in the context of accepting the expansion of on-site car parking provision to prevent people from leaving their vehicles on local roads, 45% indicated they would accept it and 55% indicated they would not accept it.
- 4.9 Consultees were asked to rate the importance of improving paths and walkways to Folkestone harbour, the town centre and the Warren. It is important to note that the scales included in the online survey and print survey differed. As much, for the purpose of analysis, the scales have been matched accordingly to present overall ratings. Just under two thirds of those answering (62%) indicated they consider it important to improve paths and walkways to Folkestone harbour, the town centre and the Warren (42% rated it as very important). 11% indicated they do not consider it important. Just over a quarter (27%) indicated they consider it neither unimportant nor important.
- 4.10 Consultees were also asked to rate the importance of the heritage being acknowledged in future plans. It is important to note that the scales included in the online survey and print survey differed. As much, for the purpose of analysis, the scales have been matched accordingly to present overall ratings. Just over (54%) indicated they consider it important that the heritage is acknowledged in any future plans (38% rated it as very important). 21% indicated they do not consider it important. Just under a quarter (24%) indicated they consider it neither unimportant nor important.
- 4.11 The vast majority of those answering (95%) indicated they would accept a proportion of the open space being set aside to increase biodiversity and ecology on site through wildflower meadows and planting.
- 4.12 Finally, consultees were given the opportunity to provide suggestions for use of the Martello Tower in their own words. For the purpose of reporting, we have reviewed respondents' comments and have grouped common responses together into themes. A variety of suggestions were put forward but the most common are a café / restaurant / bar / coffee shop / offer of refreshments (36% of those answering), a museum / heritage centre / historical reference facilities (29%) and a visitor centre / tourist information centre (24%). 17% suggested a viewing point / platform / look out, 10% suggested an education centre / study and 9% suggested an art gallery / studio / exhibition centre.
- 4.12 Further comments about East Cliff.
- 4.13 Consultees were given the opportunity to provide any other comments about East Cliff in their own words. For the purpose of reporting, Lake reviewed respondents' comments and have grouped common responses together into themes. 60% of consultees provided a comment at this question.

- 4.14 A variety of comments were made but the most common are references to leave the area as it is / no development / keep area preserved (37%), keep / enjoy the green / open spaces (30%) and it is a beautiful / scenic area (25%).
- 4.15 15% commented that they felt limited improvements to the children's play area are needed (15%) and 12% commented that they felt no more car parking was needed. 11% commented that they would predominantly leave facilities as they are but with some minor development / improvement.
- 4.16 14% commented that the area is used frequently / important to the locals / community.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS OF CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Overall, it is apparent that opinion is mixed on how any improvements should be implemented at East Cliff.
- 5.2 The vast majority of those answering the questionnaire indicated the open space is important (89%) and 53% indicated the public toilets are important. The play area, golf / putting facilities, tennis facilities and bowls facilities rank third (46%), fourth (37%), fifth (36%) and sixth (21%) respectively.
- 5.3 The fact remains that the 2017 Shepway Play Area Review assessed the play provision throughout the district against National standards (FIT standards). East Cliff was earmarked as having a standard of -.0.21, the second lowest score in the district and all the facilities are dilapidated and require replacement and upgrading.
- 5.4 It should be noted that only a quarter of people that used East Cliff were satisfied with the play area and the play areas in East Folkestone more widely.
- 5.5 Whilst the results of the consultation are mixed and don't give a clear direction for any improvements, perhaps the comments added at the end of the consultation highlighted in paragraphs 4.12-4.16 provide a clearer steer. It is clear that many people would like East Cliff to remain as an unspoilt open space but they would accept improvements to the play area, toilets and other existing facilities pending further consultation.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARDS**

- 6.1 Following the public consultation it is recommended that any plans for the future of East Cliff should maintain the current character of the site.

- 6.2 There is a clear desire from some consultees to improve the play area and toilet facilities at East Cliff, and to improve access, paths and biodiversity.
- 6.3 The charity does not currently have sufficient income streams for improvements.
- 6.4 Officers should continue to work closely with planning colleagues to secure funding through developer contributions (S106) and CIL contributions to create sufficient budget to consider these improvement works in the future.
- 6.5 Any future works will be subject to available funding, further public consultation and a further report to the trustees.

## **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 As referred to in paragraph 1.2 there are a number of other facilities at East Cliff that require modernisation.
- 7.2 Whilst the grass tennis courts, bowling greens and golf course are in good condition the buildings that support these sport facilities are not. Substantial investment is required to bring these up to date.
- 7.3 There are high staffing costs associated with the maintenance and operation of the facilities including the grounds keepers, toilet cleaners and seasonal operatives who manage the facilities on a daily basis. The annual cost of the associated wages is £57,151 (comprising £17,783 2022/23 actual spend on temporary staff costs; and £39,368 permanent staffing cost forecast in 2023/24 budget).
- 7.4 Whilst the sports facilities are well used the income is relatively low at £22,609 per annum.
- 7.5 Other costs associated with the operation of East Cliff include, management, machinery, vehicles, fuel, and materials.
- 7.6 There is also the Martello Tower situated at East Cliff which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. This requires a substantial amount of money to refurbish the tower and keep in good condition.
- 7.7 It is clear that all of the facilities at East Cliff need to move to a more financially stable position to enable them to be sustainable for the charity for years to come.
- 7.8 Further work needs to be undertaken to understand the capital funding requirements for the facilities at East Cliff and how the council may be able to

move the operation of the facilities to a sounder financial position, making it sustainable for the future.

## **8. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS**

- 8.1 **Legal Officer's Comments (NM):** There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.
- 8.2 **Finance Officer's Comments (JS):** Whilst this report does not directly outline the financial implications of the recommendations at paragraph 7, it is clear from the body of this report that there may be a need for capital spend on the East Cliff site. Any such investment will need to be financed in a sustainable way. Should Trustees agree to the recommendations in this report, and once a clear strategic direction has been set, additional finance comments will need to be sought once relevant discussions have taken place with Planning (see paragraph 6.5) with regards to the use of s106/CIL funding and to determine the extent of additional funding required from the Charity's own reserves / financing.
- 8.3 **Diversity and Equality Implications:** There are no diversity nor equality implications arising directly from this report.
- 8.4 **Environmental Implications (OF):** There are no climate implications arising from this report however if the proportion of open space is taken forward it will need to be subject to climate implications assessment.

## **9. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Councilors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting.

Andy Blaszkowicz	Director Housing & Operations
Telephone:	01303 853 684
Email:	Andy.Blaszkowicz@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Samuel Aligbe	Chief Officer Corporate Estates and Development
Telephone:	01303 853 000
Email:	Samuel.Aligbe@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Lake Research Consultation Report