

# Firth Park playground community consultation

*by Friends of Firth Park and local Councillor Abtisam Mohamed*

## **Background**

Firth Park is in the north east area of Sheffield, situated in the Brightside and Hillsborough constituency. The ward has a population of 22,000 with a 33% BAME population. It is an area of high socio-economic challenges: income rates in the area are low, academic achievement and the health status of the population are amongst the lowest in Sheffield, whilst child poverty levels are the highest.

The area has low level of physical activity in the city, with only 15% participating in at least 30 minutes of exercise on at least 3 days per week, compared with 20% for the city population as a whole. Given the above it is not surprising that the ward has higher levels of adult obesity than the city as a whole (26.3% compared with Sheffield 22.6%). Not surprisingly, poor health status is associated with high levels of deprivation; 28% of people in the ward area claim benefits, compared with a city-wide average of 17%.

In relation to health profiles, there is clear national and local evidence which states that individual BAME communities have a range of specific health and well-being needs. There is also clear evidence that many of these communities experience relatively poor health and well-being. BAME populations are the highest users of primary care services, yet they are less likely to gain access to appropriate health services and treatment and they report the worst health outcomes. Green spaces and parks are essential means of addressing health inequalities.

***Firth Park is an area rich in green spaces which are well loved but badly in need of updated facilities.***

## **Firth Park, Sheffield's oldest public park**

Firth Park is a 36 acre park founded in 1875. In 2000 the Friends Of Firth Park group was formed to help regenerate the park, a regeneration which included the opening of a new First Start Centre in 2005 incorporating a toddler group, drop in nursery and a cafe. The park also has a multi-use games area with facilities for football, hockey, basketball and cricket. There is a children's playground, a picnic area, and bowling green.

## The Playground

The playground is situated near the shops and is heavily used due to its close proximity to a number of local housing estates. It draws on diverse demographics surrounding the park.

*The equipment in the playground has not been replaced since 2005, is nearing the end of its working life and struggles to meet the needs and demands of the local community.*

## Consultation

Initial feedback received came directly from families requesting more information on how and when their park would be updated. Individuals contacted local councillors stating that the playground was looking tired and did not have enough for children compared to more affluent parts of the city.

This was discussed with the parks management team and Friends of Firth Park who agreed to undertake a community consultation to begin a process of updating the playground and wider play offer.

The consultation included presence at two festivals in the park, both the winter and summer festivals, engaging with over a hundred families. A further two hundred families were also consulted directly in the playground.

A boosted Facebook post sharing ideas and requesting feedback was seen by 5868 people with 1085 either leaving comments, sharing the post or reacting to the post/comments – you can find the post by scrolling down to 5<sup>th</sup> January 2023 on <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofFirthPark/>

Questions were open-ended relating to what changes families would like to see.

Copies of catalogues of play equipment from all the major providers were passed around local families with post it notes for them to flag desired items.

***Findings show that there is a strong desire and need for a larger, more modern play area incorporating a diversity of play space for different age groups and abilities.***

## **Feedback included:**

Bigger playground with more space – 142  
More modern equipment - 129  
Different age appropriate equipment e.g. larger slide and climbing frame – 174  
A bike/skate area – 102  
More swings – 163  
More accessible equipment for disabled children - 93  
More wooden/environmentally friendly features - 86  
Adventure trails – 122  
Water features – 112  
Sand features – 96 (also quite a few people worried about this for rats, litter, etc)  
Better lighting for winter days – 131  
More and better seating/tables for families and picnics - 96  
Separate play for younger and older children – 122  
Better pest control – 43

Some selected responses from parents and children include:

*We have to drive to Graves or Millhouses for better playgrounds for our children*

*Why does our area get neglected? We want the best for our area too*

*Our children want to play but the equipment is old and there isn't as much for toddlers  
The climbing frame is too small*

*The park gets really busy but there isn't enough and everyone just spends there time queuing*

*We need bigger areas and bigger slides. We want more water features like Millhouses*

*We love using the park but we think we deserve a better playground. Why do our areas get forgotten*

*I would like to see the playground extended and something for older children.*

*At the moment the playground is too small. Other parks are bigger and nicer than ours*

*When its hot there are too many children in such a small area and the equipment gets too hot*

*I would like more swings. Me and my friends have to queue for them*

*Please put some lights in the basketball court we want to hoop!*

*I'd like somewhere I can bring my bike and skateboard but needs to be near to my family*

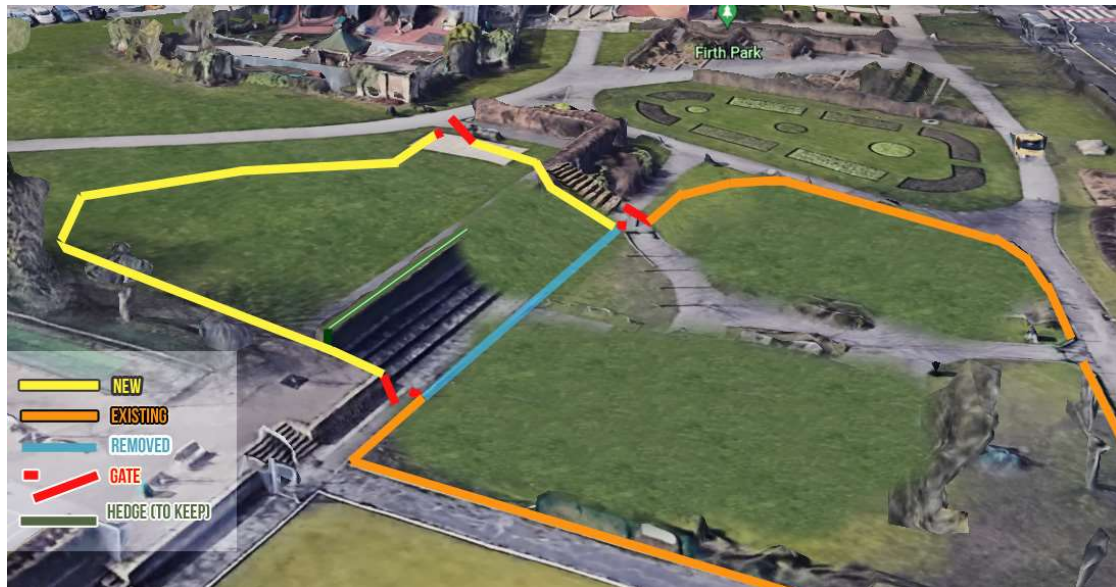
*Definitely need's to be made bigger and more up-to-date equipment. Also needs to be lit better so people feel safer*

*It needs to be bigger. We love coming here and like that its busy but its too small and children don't have enough to play on.*

## Proposal and action plan

### Size

Doubling the size of the playground is badly needed and uncontroversial. There is an open, flat, under-used patch adjacent to the playground which used to be a bowling green. Some hedge can be removed and the stepped concrete seating area would need to be landscaped. It would likely be prudent to leave some of this in as people enjoy sitting on the steps in groups whilst their kids play.



### Skate, scooters and bikes

There is another area of the park called the Ripples which is a little way down the road next to the Clock Tower. One proposal is to focus on increasing the amount of playground equipment as phase one and the convert the Ripples to a skate and bike park as part of a second phase.



## **Sand and water**

Many people have expressed a desire for sand and water features such as those found in Millhouses and Meadowhall. This author has observed how much of the year water features are out of action at both the above sites, how long it takes to fix them when they break and wonders if this is the best use of space and budget. The Parks team are also less keen on having a water feature.

In terms of sand, it is a polarising proposal. There is no doubt that we have a rat problem in the park, and people are also concerned about glass. The playgrounds is very close to the picnic area, in addition to the number of people who dump bread in the park to 'feed the birds'. The nursery school close by has had to remove its sand pit due to rats nesting in it. If a sand area is going to be created, this needs to be accompanied with a serious pest control drive. Nearly as many people feel sand is a bad idea as a good idea.

It is my opinion that this could work if situated as far from the picnic area as possible at the south side of the playground. I have observed playgrounds where the sand pit is inside an additional small brightly coloured fence with no seating provision for youth/adults near it, to provide a clear boundary for dogs and youths, making it clear that it is a space for small children with early years focused accoutrements. I am keen to explore this still, having seen the utter delight and concentration in brings in kids... especially with those who are not so drawn to loud and exciting play equipment, perhaps with neurodiversity and/or additional needs.

## **Swings, swings, swings**

People want more swings. This is the biggest item for most people as they have to queue for them at busy times which is most days. Having a variety of sizes and shapes seems prudent.

## **Trim trail, natural play features, etc**

A trim trail (kids obstacle course made from multiple bits of small equipment) and some rocks and tree trunks are uncontroversial and desired. The current playground has small bushes and trees which people like and should be kept with further plants required for new area.

## **Floor play art**

Designs painted on to the floor of the paths with numbers and letters plus other designs for floor games has come up a number of times, can be found at other sites nearby and is a low cost and desirable outcome.



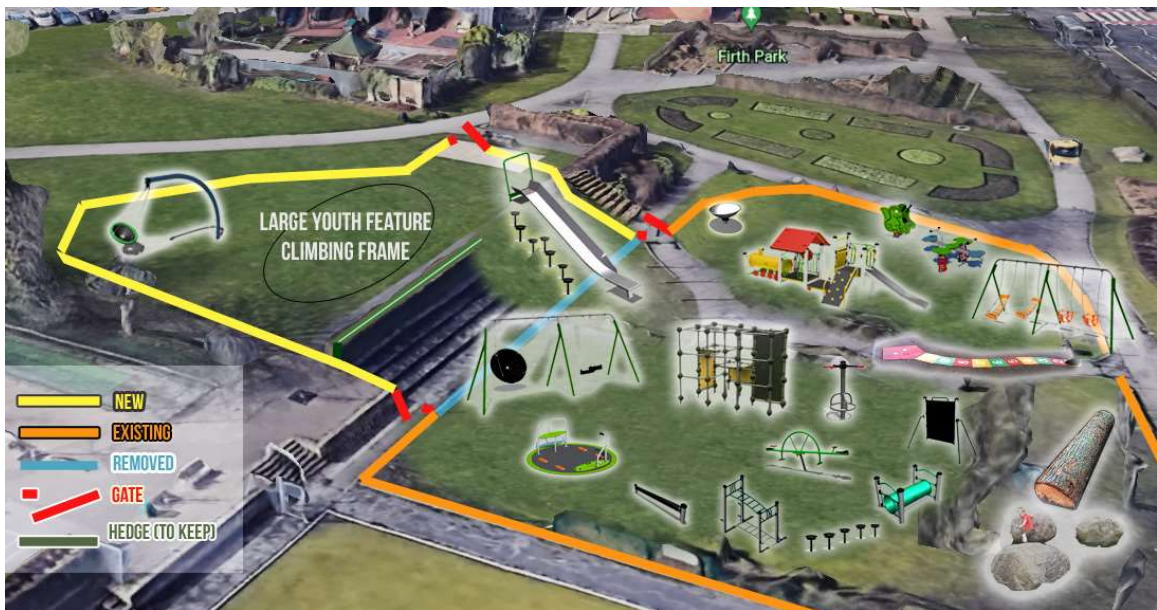
## Lighting

Many people have fed back that they would like to be able to bring their kids to the playground at times of the year when the days are shorter and it gets dark early. A lot of youth would also like to be able to make use of the basketball pitch during the winter. Lighting installed and set to turn off at an agreed time is an important feature of this brief and will allow much better use of the spaces throughout the year.

## Seating and picnic tables

A lot of families like to be able to sit inside the fenced area and eat whilst their kids make use of the space. There is currently space and provision for this which should be kept and potentially expanded in the new space.

Below is an idea of how the space could look. Please note that picnic benches, seat and sand area are not included in this mock up but are part of the community brief.



## Action plan

Friends of Firth Park to work with the council CDS team and local Councillors in raising £200-250k via grants and CIL money for actioning the above.

All our local councillors are happy to support the £11k CDS start up fee coming out of the LAC CIL funds as proposed.