Appendix 2

An Evaluation of Meriden Adventure Playground: Focus on impact upon Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, Social Isolation and obtaining Information & Advice.

Report Written for:

The Public Health Department,
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

By:

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Abstract

The current evaluation aimed to explore the impact of Meriden Adventure Playground in North Solihull on children’s physical activity levels, eating habits, social interaction and the sense of the Playground as being a natural “community hub”. A predominantly qualitative approach was taken throughout the evaluation utilising focus groups, interviews and questionnaires to collect data from sixty-four children, parents and three staff who use the Playground. Data from Fit Bit activity trackers was also gathered to measure calorie intake, steps, sleeping patterns and distance walked. An analytical, but descriptive form of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was performed on the qualitative data gathered. Common themes were identified within the data. The main themes reported were: 1) freedom to initiate various types of play; 2) social interaction for parents and children; 3) the Playground as a source of information and signposting for community services such as food banks, weight management; 4) increased physical activity; and 5) suggested Playground improvements. Data from the activity trackers showed that the Playground initiated increased levels of physical activity, including walking further and higher calorie expenditure. These findings suggest the Playground serves multiple positive functions which improve health and wellbeing for the community- primarily, increased physical activity for children, freedom of play and largely positive and useful social interactions, information, advice and support for both parents and children.
Introduction

Solihull and Public Health

Current key priority areas for Solihull Council include building stronger communities and improving the health and wellbeing of the population. Public Health’s specific priorities include, reducing social isolation and giving every child the best start in life, which includes good mental and physical health. An overarching NHS and council priority is to manage demand by supporting and encouraging citizens to self-care and communities to provide support for their members.

Obesity Rates in Solihull

Obesity is an increasing epidemic within the UK (Public Health England, 2014). Within Solihull 64.6% of adults are either overweight or obese. Children residing in the regeneration areas of the borough (predominantly North Solihull), have a much higher likelihood of being either overweight or obese. The NCMP data from 2014 shows the highest prevalence of excess weight in Solihull of year 6 pupils is in Kingshurst and Fordbridge, with 37.7%, followed by Smiths Wood 37.4% and Chelmsley Wood 36.8%. The lowest prevalence of excess weight is found in Knowle 19.7%, St Alphege 22.6% and Meriden 24.3%, which are all situated in the south of the borough.

Obesity is an ongoing cycle which can often begin during childhood, and is often due to the individual having reduced physical activity (PA) levels, increased intake of junk foods, both of which can lead to weight gain (Dixon, et al., 2007). Childhood obesity has a link with an increased risk of premature death and disability in adulthood (Dietz, 1998; Must, et al., 1992). Adult obesity can cause many health conditions including asthma (Egan, et al., 2013), obstructive sleep apnoea (Narang & Matthews, 2012), musculoskeletal pain (Paulis, et al., 2013), Type two diabetes (Thee, et al., 2013), and cardiovascular diseases (Cote, et al., 2013), cancer (Cancer Research UK, 2016) and mental health issues (Luppino, et al., 2010).

The cause of obesity can be due to poor lifestyle choices and behaviours, physical inactivity and where calorie intake exceeds calorie output (Egan, et al., 2013). Typically, excess weight results from not consuming healthy foods, high intake of junk high sugar and fat foods, and by sedentary lifestyles (Dixon, et al., 2007). The Adventure Playground is an environment that offers a potentially multi-pronged approach to reduce childhood obesity by increasing children’s PA levels, offering an environment for exploration and play; which in turn improves mental health and the opportunity to try healthy foods.

Childhood Physical Activity Levels

Physical activity (PA) can be defined as any bodily movement which is produced by the skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure (World Health Organisation, 2015). The recommendations for PA for children varies due to the child’s age. For children under five, it is recommended that they should be encouraged to engage in physical activity of all levels, including light PA, and energetic PA (NHS, 2016). It is also recommended that
children under five should avoid being sedentary for long periods of time (Department of Health, 2011). For children five to eighteen it is recommended that they should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA each day. They should engage in these activities to strengthen muscles and bones during an important time of development (Department of Health, 2011).

A recent Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ) (2014), demonstrated that the number of children eating five portions of fruit and vegetables and meeting guidelines on physical activity are declining rapidly. PA levels further decline as children move into adolescence, this is particularly true of girls (year 10 girls report the lowest levels of exercise of any group). 12.6% of 15 year olds within Solihull manage to do at least one hour of PA per day, which is below the national average. The percentage of 15 year olds who are sedentary for over 7 hours per day is 73% within Solihull, which is above the national average (Public Health England, 2016). In the diagram below, taken from data from the HRBQ (2014), children within North Solihull are the least active across the borough.

Health Eating and Campaigns

The prevalence of physical inactivity and obesity together among the population rose sharply in the early 2000s, this was also further accelerated due to the rise of fast convenient food premises (Public Health England, 2014). Healthy eating is defined as eating a balanced nutritious diet which is important for health (NHS, 2016). It has been suggested by Public Health England (2016) to use the Eatwell Guide to get the best out of food to enhance health. The guide uses a diagram of a plate which shows the different food groups and the portion sizes that should be consumed per day. This should be a tool used by everyone so that they are eating the correct foods and gaining the benefits to enhance health and improve mood. However, trying to eat healthy is becoming a challenge faced by many due to the rise of fast food premises making this food more convenient.

Currently in the three regeneration wards in Solihull there are 13 fast food premises offering unhealthy food options. Solihull is unusual in that fast food outlet concentration does not correlate well with excess weight figures.

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<tr>
<th>Top 3 High Obesity Wards (Public Health England, 2016)</th>
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<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Kingshurst and Fordbridge</td>
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<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Smith’s Wood</td>
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However, it should be noted that what is counted as a fast food outlet does not include outlets such as Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonalds and Greggs, which are currently for example, categorised as restaurants.

Below is a visual of the number of people who think about their health when considering what to eat. As it can be seen, people living in the North of the Borough, do not tend to think about their health when considering what to eat, compared to the South of the Borough.

Many current interventions designed to tackle obesity, physical inactivity and healthy eating are funded by the government’s Public Health Grant for each local authority and charitable organisations. Change 4 Life, probably the most well-known DOH campaign targeting children and families has been running in the UK since 2009. The behaviours the campaign aims to target include aiming to increase physical activity levels, reduce portions sizes, reduce sugar and fat intake.

The concept is underpinned by theories such as transtheoretical model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984) and theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and uses mechanisms such as diary keeping and goal setting to aid behaviour change. However, this type of intervention is broad and relies heavily on information giving and adhering to advice on how to change behaviour which requires the recipient to utilise Reflective Motivation (Reflective processes, involving evaluations and plans) when in fact most people, particularly from our target communities, respond better to interventions targeting Automatic Motivation.
(Automatic processes involving emotions and impulses) (Mitchie, et al, 2014). Campaigns such as Change 4 Life therefore may be unlikely to have the impact required for some communities/individuals/target groups.

**Community Hubs & Information and Advice**

Solihull is committed to providing good information and advice to its residents and communities to encourage self-care and reduce stress on acute and community services. Solihull has commissioned several Health and Wellbeing Community hubs recently, but it is recognised that there are several natural community hubs which unofficially serve a very similar function within the community but are not directly commissioned or recognised to do so. Moreover, those natural community Hubs are likely to attract and reach those members of the community who may not wish to visit a statutory formal community hub. The Playground has been recognised of one such ‘unofficial’ community hub.

**Social Isolation on Health and Wellbeing**

Social isolation is defined as a self-imposed state of complete/near-complete lack of contact between one and their society. It differs, but is linked to loneliness, which reflects on a temporary lack of contact with other individuals. Social isolation can affect any one of any age and symptoms may differ dependant on everyone (NHS, 2015; Shankar, et al., 2011). Various mechanisms have been proposed where social isolation and loneliness (which are closely linked) influence health, which include biological and behavioural factors (Shankar, et al., 2011).

Loneliness is one of the most significant public health issues in the 21st Century and in terms of impact upon mortality, is the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes per day (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). It has also been suggested that loneliness and social isolation are risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke (Valtorta, et al., 2015). There is also a strong link between social isolation, poor health and obesity (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2003), therefore it is important to stop the vicious circle of social isolation and obesity before causing further problems to health in the future. Meriden Adventure Playground has been recognised as a central meeting point for groups of parents who come together and talk whilst their children play. This is likely to have a very positive impact upon reducing social isolation and therefore the mental health and wellbeing of parents.

**Meriden Adventure Playground**

Meriden Adventure Playground is a playground situated in the heart of Meriden Park, in North Solihull, which allows children and parents to come along and be part of a natural community hub and is an area for children to play and build within the playground. Meriden Adventure Playground Association, also known as MAPA are the company who run the playground on a day to day basis. MAPA is a community group set up with local parents and interested professionals, who support the work at the Playground. At present, MAPA is an unincorporated association, in the process of applying to become a charitable organisation. Meriden Adventure Playground is jointly funded by Solihull MBC Neighborhood Services and grant funding who provide together sixty hours per week of
staff hours through direct management of one full-time and two part-time play workers at the playground.

Over the past year, the Adventure Playground has offered an after school and play scheme service to families within the local area. During term time, the Playground is open to the public for 20 hours per week, and during school holidays is open 35 hours per week. Limited participant information is recorded but it can be ascertained that, as of October 2016, there are approximately 1000 registered users at the Playground with an average of 50-120 users a day in the winter, and 172 users per day in the summer. The playground is hugely popular with attendance reported on one day during the summer of 2015 as 400 children. Children took part in various activities including playing on the equipment, doing arts and crafts, tending to the fire and cooking foods on the fire.

Aims and objectives of the playground

There are nine key aims and objectives of the playground as defined by MAPA which are:

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<th>Number</th>
<th>Aim</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Run a regularly available space, where children can claim their right to play freely, without external pressure, undue adult direction or fear for their own safety.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Run a service from that site where children are free to come and go as they choose, and all hidden barriers to play are actively addressed.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Support children to develop their belief in their capacity to affect change in the world, encouraging independent thought, resilience, and a sense of shared responsibility for what happens around them.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Sustain an environment which is emotionally and socially nurturing, providing children access to a consistent group of caring adults who are on the children’s side whenever possible.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Sustain an environment and offer opportunities which are physically nurturing, stimulating, and challenging, giving children a better chance of developing healthy, active habits for life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Give children access to experiences, activities and people that they might not otherwise come across, enriching, deepening and expanding their experience.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Provide a helpful and supportive resource for community members.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Provide an informal means of support for parents, carers and other family members to help address a range of parenting issues.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Foster a general understanding – in adults particularly - of the nature and value of play.</td>
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All these aims are put into practice at the playground regularly and is underpinned by the Playwork Principles (PP Scrutiny Group, 2005).

Proposed evaluation

The current report aims to evaluate the effects of the Playground on several key areas:

- Children’s physical activity levels using the facility vs when not using it.
- Children’s eating patterns whilst at the facility vs when not using it.
- Effects of the Playground on social isolation for children and parents.
- The Playground being a “community hub” for the local area.
- Playground’s influence on children’s play.

The method of evaluation included using focus groups and interviews with parents, children and staff who use the Playground. Parents who were all randomly selected at the playground, also completed a questionnaire, regarding physical activity levels for themselves and their children; the benefits of the playground; and ways to make the playground more successful. Randomly selected children (randomly selected by Playground Manager), used Fit Bit activity trackers to measure calorie expenditure; physical activity levels; and sleep patterns for one week. This helped enable the research team to gain a sample snap shot of children’s lives over a period and see whether the Playground is having any effect on physical activity levels. Taken collectively, the evaluation of the Playground can then determine what effects the Playground is having physical activity levels, healthy eating, play and social isolation.

Proposed analysis

The primary reason for using qualitative methods is for its exploratory approach, which is suitable for the discussion regarding Meriden Adventure Playground. Secondly, there is currently insufficient appropriate historical information collected from the Playground to inform the research in any meaningful way. This method was therefore used to gain an in-depth understanding of underlying reasons, thoughts and feelings around a specific topic (Coolican, 2009), which is ideal for the current evaluation.

Qualitative research is engrained in constructivism and interpretivism, which suggests reality is dependent on an individual’s subjective perception (Slevitch, 2011). This method provides insight into the issue to then develop hypotheses for potential quantitative or further qualitative research. By using predominantly qualitative approach over quantitative, it will add depth to the answers given by participants, in regards to themes, feelings, thoughts and reasons, rather than just statistics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The specific method used was interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA has an epistemological underpinning of contextualism and critical realism which is appropriate to this study as the method will aid putting into context what the participants are saying (Larkin, et al., 2006).

Methodology

Participants: A total of sixty-four people participated (38 children, 26 parents, 3 staff) in the evaluation. Children were all in either primary or secondary level education, with an age range of three to fifteen years old. Parents were either in employment or currently unemployed, with an average age of thirty-seven. They also ranged in their parental status and physical activity levels/history. Data was taken at several time points throughout the summer holidays of 2016 (mid-July – Early September) during which the focus groups and interviews took place.
Procedure: The method for data collection was obtained through focus groups, interviews, Fit Bit activity trackers and questionnaires. The moderator was a young white female PhD student herself also a lifelong resident within the local area. Before taking part in the evaluation, participants were given a participation sheet (see Appendix 1) which explained what the study entailed. Once having read this form, participants had to give consent. Consent was obtained for participants under the age of 18, and parents were also present (see Appendix 2). Once consent was gained, the data collection began.

Focus group prompts: There were approximately twenty prompts used regularly throughout the focus group. Once every participant had an input on each question, the moderator then used the next prompt with the group. The prompts allowed everyone to have their say on each topic without being guided too much in giving certain answers. Everyone could give their own opinion on the topics.

Part one: Childrens’ focus groups and interviews
The first part of the evaluation consisted of focus groups and interviews with children who regularly use the Playground. Participants were approached to partake in focus groups through contact with staff at the Playground. Thirty-eight children with signed consent from parents/guardians, participated in focus groups (which were prompted) or participated in one-to-one interviews. Prompts in the focus groups included asking the children about their thoughts on the playground, types of play they use, hobbies, advice and services offered by staff and healthy eating. The same questions were used in the interviews (see appendix 3).

Part two: parents’ focus groups and interviews
The second part of the evaluation involved organised focus groups and one-to-one interviews with the parents who use the Playground regularly themselves. They were approached to take part by the staff contact at the Playground. After gaining consent, parents were asked questions which prompted responses about their children’s physical activity levels, eating patterns, social interaction at the playground and benefits they receive from the Playground as a parent, including signposting to various services, and the function of the Playground within the local area as a “community hub” (see appendix 4).

Part three: Staff focus group
The third part of the evaluation involved a focus group with staff at the Playground, which prompted them about their thoughts of the playground on how it affects children’s play, physical activity levels of the children, social interactions and the services they signpost individuals to (see appendix 5).

Part four: Questionnaires for parents
The next section involved a quantitative and qualitative view of the Playground, gained through the Playground questionnaire completed by parents who participated in the focus groups. Participants either completed the questionnaire before taking part in a focus group, or were approached by the researcher at the playground to complete the questionnaires. Twenty-six parents had given signed consent to participate in the study. Questions include demographic questions such as age, employment status and how many children they have. Questions then included why the parents visit the Playground; how
regularly their children play at the Playground and what improvements they believe could be made to the facility.

**Part five: Fit Bit activity trackers**

The final part to the evaluation involved two children being selected to use *Fit Bit* activity trackers over the course of one week. Data which was recorded included their calorie intake/output, steps taken each day, physical activity levels throughout each day, and sleep quality and patterns. Children and parents were debriefed before giving signed consent to participate. Once gaining consent, children were given a *Fit Bit* to wear for one whole week. They did not have access to the data on the activity trackers so they could not see what effect they were making.

**Method of analysis:** Once the focus groups, interviews and questionnaires were completed, the transcript was then coded for common themes and interpretations through the method of IPA. IPA has been suggested to be a better method to review qualitative data in more depth, compared to thematic analysis (Reid, et al., 2005). It has also been suggested to be a method which goes through a process of interpreting and examining data in greater depths than thematic analysis (Larkin, et al., 2006). IPA involves the close reading of a transcript several times so it can be fully understood (Smith, et al., 1999). Common themes and extracts related to research questions were coded to summarise quotes. Once completing the descriptive section of coding, analytical coding was then performed. Common themes were found and analysed for further interpretation. This method reviewed the data in greater depths around the participant’s past experiences, thoughts and feelings (Smith, et al., 2009).

**Analysis**

After coding the data from the focus groups, interviews and questionnaires, various themes and descriptions were found and discussed. The following themes were commonly sourced throughout the transcripts, therefore creating various main themes throughout all transcripts. Data from *Fit Bits* can be seen below in a table.

**Part one: children focus groups and interviews**

**Social interaction**

The first common theme found throughout the focus groups and interviews with children, is the ability to interact with other children at the Playground, which leads to making new friends. The words commonly used by children are “making friends”, which shows a strong element of social interaction with other children at the Playground, which is leading to friendships.

“I now have lots of friends that I play with at the playground”.

“Even the staff are my friends, I tell them lots of things”.

“I think of the staff as friends, because they always protect me when I’m at the park”.

When talking about their social interaction, there is a lot of positivity in the children’s voices and body language, which suggests they welcome the interaction. There
was no discussion of children not being able to socialise or any sense of bullying between children, which shows the Playground is a great tool to allow children to develop positivity. It is also an effective use of the “play menu” which incorporates types of play, environment and emotional factors to ensure that most of the known play behaviours are on offer.

**Creative play**

Another popular theme found throughout the transcripts is linked to the idea of the children being creative with their play. Common phrases such as “we get to build things” and “make stuff” were used by the children, which suggests that they can be creative using anything within the Playground to make new play creations.

“We get the create stuff with paint and wood, it’s fun”.
“We get to play on anything we want and the staff help us”.
“At home, I can’t play like I do at the playground, that’s why I love coming here”.

The Adventure Playground allows the children to use their imagination in creating things that they cannot create at home. The children talk about how they are allowed to use hammers and nails and create fires at the Playground. The element of danger may also attract some children to the Playground as they can use tools that they cannot use at home to create structures.

“We get to play on high swings and jump of the structures onto mats which is scary and fun”.
“I play with hammers and nails and create things like chairs and bridges”.
“Sometimes I build things with my friends here at the playground and it looks good when we have finished”.
“At home I can’t play with hammers that’s why I like coming here”.

With this, there seemed to be a sense of achievement from the children when they were talking about objects they have built. However, one child was describing how he felt when another child “came over and broke the chair I made for the wood”, and he was very negative in his expressions suggesting that he was proud of what he had made, and was upset when another child broke it down to build something else. It seems that children build on a sense of achievement from their creations and do not want others to infringe or damage what they have created, as it has a knock-on effect on their emotions.

**Environment of opportunity**

This theme was found throughout the transcripts and relates to the wide range of activities children have at the Playground. Many of the children talk about how they have freedom to do what they want at the Playground, whatever their age is.

“Sometimes I make things, sometimes I paint, sometimes I play on the stuff over there. I can do whatever I want”.
“There’s play things for older children and things for little children, so everyone can play here”.

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There are a wide range of activities which include sand pits and toys for the younger children and a mixture of frameworks which allow the older children to climb on and build up on. There are also set sessions at the Playground throughout the school holidays which focus on arts and crafts and learning new skills which also seem to be of big interest of the children. From speaking to a wide age range of children, the Playground caters for a wide range of ages which suit age groups.

“I like the sandpit the bestest, and then I can paint too. But I can’t go the big swing yet as I am too little”.

When speaking to a four-year-old girl, her favourite activities seem to be the sandpit and painting. Whereas, for a fifteen-year-old boy, being more adventurous and using an element of danger, their favourite activities tend to be around climbing high structures and jumping off them onto crash mats. From speaking to many children, there seems to be activities to suit every individual, which shows that the Playground can accommodate any child and their preferences.

Part two: parents’ focus groups and interviews

Freedom to initiate different types of play

A major theme throughout focus groups and interviews with parents is that their children have the freedom to play in whichever way they want to.

“I just think that it’s a good place to go when, like you say, you’ve got no money and stuff, and basically you can just let them go and just let them do what they’ve got to do”.

“As you say it’s safe, there’s controlled play, they can run around, do what they want”.

The Playground allows children to initiate many types of play including being “adventurous” and “creative” per the parents. The Playground also allows children to play with equipment which they may not be allowed to use at home, but due to the safe secure environment they are in, it is allowed.

“More adventurous for them, very adventurous”.

“No, they’re more active, there’s not a lot of stuff around here for them to do. This is a good place for them, because you can leave them alone, let them do what they’ve got to do, go play, and they explore to be honest and they keep playing”.

Many parents seem to show positivity to the freedom that their children have around the equipment they can use as some suggest that their children “burn off energy which helps them sleep on the night”. This also can relate to the data found from the Fit Bit activity trackers which can be seen below. However, there are some parents who showed negativity to the level of freedom the children have. One parent suggested that “there needs to be more staff around as the children are using dangerous equipment”. He was referring to the hammer and nails children have access to at the Playground and that the
children are not monitored all the time as there are many children at the Playground and only two to four staff on duty at a time.

Another parent calls the Playground a “danger park” when referring to the Playground to their children. When mentioning “danger park” to her children, the children tend to get excited about going to the playground to use equipment they cannot use at home.

“It’s what we call it actually, we call it the ‘danger park’ actually because of what you can do here compared to at home”.

The same parent also suggested that due to be able to use this kind of equipment, “it allows the children to let off steam and any anger”. She went on to further say that once visiting the Playground, she sees that her children are more well behaved as they have been given allocated time to play at the Playground in an environment where they are allowed to use their tools and do what they want.

Parents talk about how they do not have the space at home to play and be physically active, therefore they try to take their children to the Playground on regular basis so their children can be active and “play like children should”. Parents within the focus groups have acknowledged that the Playground does make their children more physically active, and without the Playground, their children would be at home doing other activities which are not as physically demanding, which could lead to lower energy expenditure.

Social interaction

i) Children Social interaction with other children was a theme which was common in the children’s focus groups. Parents have suggested that their children are being exposed to more social interaction than children that do not visit the facility.

“It is just a nicer environment where the kids can just meet new friends and socialise whilst playing”.

“When we visit other parks, I notice that my children do not mix with other children, but when we visit the playground, my children mix with lots of other children and help each other build new creations. I think it is good that they can interact as much as they do here, as they are meeting new people and sharing creative ideas with each other”.

From this, it can be suggested that the Playground does have a more social interactive element compared to the usual parks also in the local area, this may be due to the values of the park and supervision, which is not present at other local parks.

ii) Parents Some parents suggested that the Adventure Playground is a “community hub” not just for the children, but for the parents too.
“As a single mom, I do not have the chance to interact much with other people as I have to look after the children, but when I am at the playground, the children are free to go off and play whilst I can chat to other moms at the playground”. “Well we all sit down by the desk normally and just, yeah, I have met a few friends there”.

This could imply that the Playground isn’t just for children, but for parents to also have a place where they can meet other moms in similar situations and make friends too. Suggesting that the Playground serves the function of a “community hub” and an opportunity to meet and interact with other parents adds so much strength to the playground and its position in the community. Parents who are unemployed seem to gain greater benefit from the social interaction than those employed. There is so much positivity revolving around the Playground and how it allows people to get together for a conversation. Parents have said that if the Playground was ever too close, it would be a great loss to the community and those who use it.

The social interaction doesn’t just come from the children and parents, but also the staff. Many parents along with their children, have called the staff members their friends, as they have got to build a relationship with staff where they can talk to them about anything. Some parents have used the staff as a connection to obtain information and advice to services such as food banks, advice on benefits, domestic abuse, weight loss services, housing advice, homelessness and support for carers. However, there are some parents who do not know that the staff can refer people to specific services. To improve this link, more advertisement around the Playground could be used so that parents and children know that the staff are there to help beyond the remits of the Playground.

**Food options**

Food options available at the Playground was a further theme that transpired from the focus groups. The transcripts revolve around the food options at the playground and locally. One food option is the food that is freshly prepared and cooked on an open fire at the playground. There are mixed reviews from parents about this food on the fire.

“There is a lot of fast food around here, but the park does provide healthy food like soup and other healthy food options”.

“I’ve been there when they’ve done rice Krispy cakes, and they’ve done jacket potatoes on the fire, cooked new foods for the kids to try, its good”.

Most parents suggest that the food cooked on the fire is good for the children, as they get to try new foods and learn how to cook. The food options are mainly healthy choices, so there are some children who do not try the foods at all as they believe they won’t like them. Some parents immediately put a guard up saying that “my children don’t like vegetables” but when questioning them to see if their children have tried these vegetables before, they mostly say no. From these comments, it could be suggested that the parents do not encourage their children to try new foods, whereas if they did try them, they may find that the new flavours are suitable for them and would then start to eat healthier options.
Part of the rationale for fire cooking was the observation that children who got free school meals, did not have the access to these free meals during weekends and holidays and exhibited behavioural issues. Raising blood sugar levels allowed them to play, and stopped them from stopping other children from playing.

However, there are other food options available. There is a café onsite which tends to offer unhealthy alternatives which children tend to go for. From speaking to parents who do not use the café, they suggested that the café only serves burgers, chips, hot dogs, crisps and fizzy drinks; all food which can increase obesity risks (Public Health England, 2014). Whereas, when speaking to parents who do use the café, they serve other options such as sandwiches. There are mixed views on the café, but a common answer regarding the café is that it needs expanding so that more foods can be offered at the café if there was more staff working in there.

**Importance of Security**

Whereas many children had more positive things to say about the Playground, a major theme throughout the focus groups and interviews with parents seems to revolve around the security of the playground.

“Well I’m sick of it getting burnt down, more security is needed down here to stop the place being damaged so regularly”.

“More security needed is the main issue”.

“They need to get more policing down here, so that the presence is there to stop trouble”.

Many parents talked about issues around security at the Playground. The facility has been vandalised several times which includes equipment getting damaged. Parents talk about how distraught their children have been when turning up at the playground and seeing their creations and toys are damaged and cannot be used. From words that were used by parents such as “horrific” and “terrible”, the damage caused creates a sense of negativity around the Playground which could be avoided. The parents’ solution to these issues seems to revolve around security such as CCTV, higher fencing and more police presence.

However, there is another element to security that has been mentioned by parents, and even children during their focus groups. Parents believe that when their children are at the Playground, they are in a secure environment where their children are free to play. The Playground during the day has been described as “secure” by many parents.

**Parental Suggested Improvements**

A common theme which did show some negativity on the Playground, is all the improvements which have been suggested to make the Playground a better environment. These improvements suggested by the parents include more security, more suitable opening hours which includes Sundays, more staffing, better toilet facilities and a better café and menu. Many parents suggested security alone was a major issue, but there are other improvements needed at the Playground.
The opening hours do vary dependant on it being term time or school holidays, but are designed to suit the needs of children, rather than working parents. It is a form of informal childcare for parents. During the summer holidays the Playground is open every weekday and closes at the weekend. For parents that work in the week, they find the hours to be very limited and believe it should be open the weekend also. During term time, the Playground is open some evenings and Saturdays. Many parents believed that the Playground should be open on Sundays. This all relates back to staffing and having staff available to accommodate these extra hours.

“We would be more frequent visitors to the playground if they extended their opening hours”.  
“It should be open Sundays as we as parents may not have work and can go to the playground with our children if it was open”.

As suggested by parents more staff are needed at the Playground to allow the Playground to open for longer and more days. Some parents also mentioned that during the summer holidays, a lot of children visit the Playground and sometimes there is not enough staff.

“Sometimes there are too many children at the playground and the staff do not get chance to have a lunch break, so we try to help them out”.

These parents help voluntary at the Playground when it is busy so that the staff are not under too much pressure. Possibly having some sort of apprenticeships for older children who have left the Playground to get into work was also recommended by a few parents. Many parents also suggested that the toilets need refurbishing.

“The sewage system is terrible. Some days in the summer you can smell the toilets bad and the pipes leak making the grass outside the playground wet and unable to play on”.  

There is a lot of negativity revolving around the issue of the toilets which needs addressing to make the Playground a better, safer environment.

The final improvement which has been previously mention is the café area. Improvements which were recommended were making it bigger, offering healthier alternatives, and having sheltered seating areas.

“Healthier food needs to be serviced, not burgers, chips, crisps and chocolate”.  
“Better seating area that is under cover for people using the café”.  
“Regular café hours are needed, but I know the café staff are sometimes unreliable, so better staffing is also needed to improve the service the café gives”. (Staff at the café are volunteers, and have been working unpaid for a couple of years).

When talking about the improvements that could be made, many parents then went on to talk about all the positive elements of the Playground and how they out way the negative aspects.
Part three: staff focus group

Sense of achievement

A common theme throughout the focus group with staff revolved around a sense of achievement for both staff, children and parents who use the Playground. When speaking to staff, they were using positive phrases to describe the playground and its position in the community. When explaining the facilities that they have built for the children, there was a sense of pride and achievement for the staff.

“It’s a fantastic place for children to be children and it’s a fantastic place for the community as it is a community hub”.

“It is a fantastic place to work and work with the children”.

“From my perspective... of the sites I’ve come into contact with I think that Meriden does the job in a way that very, very few sites do”.

“I absolutely love the playground, I love my job, I love the community, I love the team I work with, for me it’s a bit of pride, it’s a bit of yes I’ve done it, yes we’ve done it as a team”.

A sense of achievement was discussed revolving around the creations that the children build. The staff were extremely aware of what children at the playground are doing, and allow them to build and create new things within the Playground, which initiates a sense of achievement for the children who build it.

“The photographs we’ve had, we should put them in a book actually”.

“You’re going around and clearing up and there’s like a little pile of painted stones”.

“Or there’s an ice cream left in a cup - it hasn’t been touched, it’s with the spoon still in it... they’ve thought oh let’s go and play and they’ve forgotten about it”.

The staff talked about how involved some parents are with the activities at the Playground. The Playground allows parents to socially interact with the staff and in turn, some parents donate old toys and equipment for the children to use. Parents are involved with the Playground and seem to show a sense of achievement towards staff also.

Types of play initiated

A big focus of the Playground is to allow children to initiate various types of play. The staff focus their energy on allowing the children to play in a risk/benefit assessed environment, free from unacceptable hazards. Play is developmental for children, and the staff try to link play with improving mental health and resilience to aid development.

“That’s where we come into the link between play and mental health and resilience, because in playing out children develop strategies and develop their ability to predict outcomes and as I say it’s in safe frames. That’s where play becomes auto-therapeutic”.

Staff suggest that play automatically becomes therapeutic, which has been supported with research (McMahon, 2003). Play becomes a child’s way of linking the world
they are growing up in to fiction. It allows child to relax within a context they are familiar with. One staff member discusses how play allows children to be interested in something and learn lessons during play:

“One of the things about the play drive is that people are attracted in their play to the thing which they need at that moment and if a person has had an enriched play experience then their play drive will be lessened and they’ll move on”.

The staff talk heavily about play and how it is a focus of the Playground to aid the child’s development in life. Play allows the child to gain specific information that they can store for future reference for unencountered situations, this is known as combinatorial flexibility (Hughes, 2011). The Playground is a place where children can do whatever they want to, without being told that it is not allowed. Staff try to cater for all children and for most activities they want to carry out. There are 16 types of play and children tend to go through different types when initiating different activities.

“There’s a significant amount of gross motor, motivation, roll play, there’s a significant amount of creative and mastery, both with the elemental stuff, earth, air, fire and water, and the construction the building and all that sort of stuff”. “There’s risk as well because there are children who have never been on a swing, so they’re taking a risk”. “Because children are able to access the materials and tools to create there, then that automatically leads onto socio dramatic and the various emotional stuff that comes with that”. “And the thing about painted stones, why are those stones there arranged that pile like that and all painted, what does it mean, what was going on there, and yes we’ll never know, and yes it’s none of our business”.

Play is so creative and can mean certain things to the individuals involved, but may mean nothing to others who look in on that play. The Playground and staff try to cater for all types of play which are possible for children, so that they are being exposed play in the best way. The staff are all highly knowledgeable on the types of play and how to expose children to them in the best way, with the offering of safe/low risk benefits.

**Social interaction**

The Playground allows children to interact with other children. Staff find that another important aspect of the Playground is the social interaction users get whilst there. This is important for children’s development and can also reduce social anxiety and awkwardness.

However, it is not just for the children, it is a “hub” for parents to meet with other parents. The staff talk about a few case studies of parents who do not have the opportunity to speak with other parents, unless they come to the Playground. The playground allows parents to ask staff for advice and help with many issues. Staff mentioned that many issues which are discussed include “housing issues, domestic abuse, referrals to health services, food bank vouchers, caring”. Without the staff, these parents may not know where to turn
to when they need advice, therefore the social interaction at the Playground is positive as it enables staff to help parents in need.

One staff member discussed about how one parent was struggling to get support for her child within education, which was having a strain on the parent’s mental capacity.

“She felt that because she lived in this community she wasn’t being heard and why do some parents get diagnoses for conditions which she felt weren’t as challenging as her child’s condition and yet she couldn’t get a diagnosis and she felt that her child wasn’t getting support”

“We talked around what other support there may be, how to get second assessments, support from the National Autism Society, what links they might have or knowledge they might have of groups around here which could support her, and all stuff around that”.

As well as getting social interaction with the staff, parents are getting advice on health and support for their children, which does not seem to be easily accessible in the local community. This may also improve their mental health due to the support staff give to individuals who feel isolated within the community.

“There are a number of issues in the community which couple to the issues in the approach of service provision to the community which mean that there are some quite extreme difficulties. We’ve found I think the playground approach can address some of those, but at the same time we as a staff team and the infrastructure of the facility itself suffers”.

“A big issue is food poverty. Their benefits being cut, they haven’t got enough money to feed their kids, they haven’t got any bed linen, they haven’t got the support from the appropriate people and childcare, clothing issues, just ... you can’t say on a particular day what families are going to walk through the gates. Every day is a completely different day”.

There are several issues that individuals face within the local community. In the quote, above, the staff member suggests that people can walk into the park with any issues, and the staff will try to help them. The staff seem to bridge the gap between parents within the community and services that could lead to help and advice regarding these issues. As well as getting advice, parents can offload to the staff rather than keeping it all in.

**Community hub**

Throughout the whole of the evaluation, a strong theme is the sense of a community hub within the Playground environment. When first mentioning the playground as a “community hub”, the first response from a staff member was:

“It’s already a community hub. It can’t be any more than it is already”.

“Most people interact with you, and can have regular conversations with them”.

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“And I know we keep going on about the community but without the community there wouldn’t be a playground, it wouldn’t be what it is today, and it wouldn’t be what it is today without the team that we’ve got, and the support that we’ve had”.

The Playground, for everyone involved is a community hub; parents, children and staff. Everyone is involved with making the Playground a safe and friendly place, especially the staff. The staff do so much for the Playground, offering advice to parents, support for children and helping each other out with duties around the playground.

There was a discussion on how it could be improved further and responses from the staff included a proper building being built on site, hygienic toilets that are efficient, better sewage systems and office space where staff can work without regular interruption.

“The playground could be more”.

There seems to be so much enthusiasm in the staff’s voices, but when discussing the issues around expansion, there is so much negativity. The staff want to make the Playground the best it can be, and so far, have done this, but now seem to plateau due to limitations to improve the playground.

Part four: questionnaires for parents

In the table below, is the demographic information found for the parents who completed the questionnaire. As it can be seen, the parents who visit the Playground are predominantly female, unemployed, white British individuals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 1. Demographic information from parents</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean average age of parents</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean average age their children visiting the playground</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex of parents visiting the playground</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employment status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The following common themes were found from the questionnaires answered by parents.

**Common improvements which could be made at the playground**

Like the answers given in the focus groups and interviews, a major finding through the questionnaire was the urgency from parents to have improvements made at the Playground. The following improvements were all suggested by parents: more security, including CCTV and higher fencing; better café facilities; better toilet facilities; more arts and craft activities; activities to suit every age group; sheltered areas; better discipline for the older children who cause trouble at the Playground; no smoking sign more visible at the
Playground premises; better signage to display opening times and that the Playground is on the main road. The frequency of these improvements can be seen in the figure 1 below.

![Figure 1. Frequency of improvements suggested by parents](image)

Parents had many good comments to say about the Playground such as the supportive staff; their facilities for the children; interaction for parents; creative thinking of staff for new activities and food options cooked on the fire. The frequency of these comments can be seen below in figure 2.

![Figure 2. Frequency of good comments suggested by parents](image)

However, there seems to be a strong need to review ways of improving the Playground to make it an even better place for everyone using it. This may also bring people to the Playground who have never been there before.
**Freedom of play**

Various questions ask what are the benefits of the Playground and what makes it good and a common answer is around their children’s freedom to play and do what they want. This also links to answers given in the focus groups and interviews. Many of the parent’s welcome this type of play where their children can go and use equipment that they would not usually play with. It allows the children to be adventurous and learn new skills without being in danger of harm.

For some parents who live in high rise housing, their children do not have the opportunity to have dedicated time to play outdoors and must play within their house. The Playground gives the children the opportunity to play outside, getting fresh air, interacting with other children and reduce social isolation.

**Part five: Fit Bit activity tracker**

The tables below show the quantitative data gathered from the Fit Bit activity trackers which were worn by two children who regularly used the Playground. In table 2, data from the Fit Bits on the days when the children visited the Playground can be observed. Whereas data in table 3, is on days they did not visit the Playground. During these days’ children either played at home, other parks or otherwise engaged with family occasions which didn't involve much, if any physical activity.

There are variances in the data, which could suggest that the Playground does enhance physical activity levels as steps taken each day are more than doubled when at the Playground. Kilometres walked on days when visiting the Playground also double, suggesting that the children are more active whilst at the Playground covering more ground. Calorie expenditure sees nearly a 50% increase when at the Playground, suggesting that the physical activity has benefit on children’s metabolism. Fit Bit activity trackers track the time someone spends being active in one bout. The trackers recorded the children being active for over one hour at least. Whereas when they were not at the Playground, time spent active dramatically reduces by nearly 50%.

The trackers also recorded longer periods of time spent sleeping when the children had been to the Playground. This may be due to the energy expenditure the children had them days and the energy they have used whilst playing, suggesting they needed longer to recover from the activity. This benefit was suggested by parents in the focus groups. Parents believed that their children showed greater benefits in sleep patterns when after visiting the Playground due to using up their energy whilst playing. Parents suggested that children would sleep solid for longer periods of time than nights after not visiting the Playground and being less active.
Table 2. Days when visiting Playground

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Average number of steps per day</th>
<th>Average number of kilometres walked each day</th>
<th>Average number of calories burnt each day</th>
<th>Longest time spent active</th>
<th>Longest time spent sleeping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12,074 steps</td>
<td>9.13km</td>
<td>2263cal</td>
<td>76 minutes</td>
<td>14 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10,275 steps</td>
<td>7.64km</td>
<td>2189cal</td>
<td>63 minutes</td>
<td>12 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Days when not visiting the Playground

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Average number of steps per day</th>
<th>Average number of kilometres walked each day</th>
<th>Average number of calories burnt each day</th>
<th>Longest time spent active</th>
<th>Longest time spent sleeping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4583 steps</td>
<td>3.32km</td>
<td>1362cal</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3865 steps</td>
<td>2.79km</td>
<td>1421cal</td>
<td>33 minutes</td>
<td>9 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The main aims of the evaluation were to review children’s PA levels when using the facility, children’s eating patterns at the facility, effects of the Playground on social isolation for both children and parents, the Playground as a “community hub” and influence on play. From the data collected, the Playground has a positive impact on children’s development physiologically (increase PA levels, reduce obesity) and psychologically (reduce social isolation, initiation of play). The Playground also shows to have a positive impact on parent’s psychologically, reducing their social isolation and initiating social engagement with other parents and staff.

The Playground is an important and multifunctional asset to the community for several reasons. Firstly, the Playground is a central hub in the community for parents and children. Many parents in their own words described the Playground as a hub, not only for their children but for themselves too. Parents are gaining benefits such as social interaction (reduced social isolation) and as a source for information and advice from the Playground. Parents are exposed to advice from staff on signposting to various services which include housing, benefits, food bank vouchers, support for carers, domestic abuse and weight loss. This suggests an important function for the Playground as a community hub for parents (and children) for socialising and obtaining information and advice. The Hub is likely to service significant function in enhancing /maintain the health and wellbeing of parents.

Social interaction is also a key function for the children accessing the Playground. Furthermore, the interviews revealed other important positive impact positively for the children’s health and development. The children’s report gaining a sense of pride when creating new things at the Playground; can speak openly to staff about issues they may have; and, be physically active even if they are not intending to be. The Playground seems to be a central hub in Chelmsley Wood and all those who visit, parents and children, show a
sense of pride and passion when they talk about the Playground. Many parents have discussed how they give back to the playground by volunteering and donating old toys for children to play with in the future.

Social interaction is a major reason why people visit the Playground. Parents believe that the social interaction is welcomed by their children as they get to play, and also the parents get to interact with other parents, which was highly welcomed by those who do not get the chance to interact with many people on a day-to-day basis. Without the Playground, some parents have said they would be lost without the provisions it offers.

The Playground offers fresh healthy foods cooked on the fire. When speaking to the children who eat at the playground, they believe that they are becoming healthier and are exploring new foods because they are involved with the cooking process. When given the opportunity to help prepare and cook the food, and when it is ready to eat, they seem to show a sense of pride in what they have just cooked. Without this option being available, most children would resort to the unhealthy options from the café.

One parent who was interviewed described the Playground as the “danger park”. People seem to be valuing that there are activities which can be accessed at the Playground which aren’t available elsewhere, and the term of ‘danger park’ shows a level of risk management in the family, because they still like it and still come. This type of play does involve a low risk/benefit approach which is approved by Play England (Ball, et al., 2012) and endorsed by the HSE.

The quantitative data collected from the activity trackers showed great positivity of the benefits of the Playground on children’s activity levels, steps taken, calorie expenditure and sleeping habits. A significant finding from this research, and a key question at the outset was around increased physical activity. This doubling in physical activity and increased calorific intake on days when children use the park is likely over the medium/long term, to significantly reduce the risk of children maintaining a healthy weight. Most children tend to be at the Playground for more than one hour each visit, with most visiting at least twice a week. The children’s primary outcome may not to be physically active, but this is a by-product of their play and experience. Their physical activity is noted by parents as they see changes in children’s behaviour once returning home. In addition, parents have suggested that their children sleep better after their time at the park and behave better. The data from the Fit Bit activity trackers also show benefit on sleep.

However, the main limitation to the Fit bit data collected is that only two participants had taken part. There were issues with getting children to wear the bands for long periods of time without the bands being irritating to the children or without falling off. The aim was to get a minimum of six children to wear the bands. However, the results were very positive and with further research into monitoring children’s physical activity behaviours and related habits, may gather more evidence into the benefits of the adventure playgrounds.

A major strength to this qualitative evaluation is that there were fifty-eight participants where good quality data was extracted. There were views from parents, staff
and children who all use the playground. However, a limitation was the quantity of quantitative data collected from the Fit Bit activity trackers. More quantitative data could have been collected through questionnaires on social interaction which may have supported the findings further.

Overall, the evaluation has shown that Meriden Adventure Playground is an extremely popular multifunctional community hub within North Solihull which seems to meet all its own aims and objectives as stated by MAPA. Furthermore, data from this evaluation reveals that it is likely to meet several other public health wellbeing and council objectives, particularly those pertaining to targeted increase in physical activity, healthy eating (to some extent) and reduced weight gain, reducing social isolation, obtaining information, advice and signposting about health and social care, strengthening community cohesiveness, giving a sense of civic pride. The Playground has the potential to meet still more, however, issues such as likely impact on anti-social behaviour, and more detailed analysis of play were outside of the scope of this evaluation.

Recommendations

Key Recommendations:

1) Meriden Childrens Playground appears to represent a valued and trusted unofficial, Community Hub where parents and children from target geographical and demographic communities seek information and advice and are able to interact socially. It offers the basis and potential for further development as a Community Hub given the appropriate circumstances.

2) Recognition by statutory agencies that Meriden Childrens Playground is highly likely to be meeting a number of key Council and NHS Objectives which it is not currently recognised or commissioned to do. In particular – the value the playground has in terms of reducing childhood obesity, increasing physical activity, reducing anti-social behaviour, improvements in mental wellbeing, and serving the function of a community hub and point for I&A for target communities. We would recommend further exploration / research by statutory agencies to recognise the cross cutting benefits the playground offers in terms of currently meeting Council & NHS objectives and priorities.

Specific Recommendation for MAPA / Meriden Playground / Staff: -

1) Playground staff and parent champions would benefit from receiving MECC+ training and kept up to date about local services / pathways and potential opportunities for families.

2) Work with Public Health colleagues and similar local providers e.g. Community Hub, You+ Shop in providing resources to staff (information leaflets / flyers) with consideration to providing practical items to support health and wellbeing such as portion control plates / vitamins etc.(storage permitting).
3) Work with Public Health colleagues to look at opportunities for stocking healthier options within the café for children and expanding the opportunities for children and families to try new healthy foods in novel ways.

4) Create healthy cooking sessions for parents to attend whilst their children are playing at the playground. For example, using slow cookers, which are cheap and easy to use, parents’ can learn new cooking skills using affordable healthy foods.

5) Risk/benefit assessments, set out by the HSE are carried out regularly, but also make sure vigorous regular risk assessments are conducted to explore possible mitigation of risks.

6) Expansion of the café and maintenance on sewage system.

7) Security system requires considerable improvement.

8) Consider opening the playground on Sundays.

9) Increase staffing on days known likely to be busy e.g. Saturdays during the summer.

10) Collect information on postcode, who children’s GP is and School attended to help with future bids.

Opportunities:

1) With better facilities – the main example being the expansion of the café area and better security - the Playground could service a much wider function in terms of addressing health / wellbeing issues. In particular reducing social isolation and improving community cohesion within the area, whilst maintaining the feel of being owned by the community with the ‘hands-off’ approach to being aligned too closely with statutory bodies (e.g. SMBC / NHS).

2) 65% of parents who were interviewed were at the time of interview, unemployed. The playground presents opportunities to develop volunteering, skills development and apprenticeships within the local community.

3) The model the Adventure Playground has adopted seems to be wholly positive with multiple benefits which address many council priorities. The model could be adapted and use elsewhere within the borough. Staff from the playground could also work within the community as a satellite provider, to promote the Playground and its benefits on health.
References


**Appendix**

**Appendix 1: Participation Sheet**

**Evaluation of Meriden Park Childrens Play Area**

The Local Public Health Department and Meriden Park Children’s Play Area Team wish to jointly run an evaluation of Meriden Children’s Play Area. As parents, in small groups, we would really like to hear your views, and ask you a few questions, such as, what you think about the play area, how you think things could be improved and what ideas you might have for future development. Taking part in this will mean coming along to a small group meeting with a few other parents. The meeting will last no longer than 2 hours.

For your help in taking part in this valuable meeting, we will give you a £10.00 Love to Shop voucher straight after completing the group chat.

If you are interested in giving your views on Meriden Park Children’s Play Area, then please attend the following group chat on:

Date: _____________________________
Time: _____________________________

The group discussion will be held at: You+, Coppice Way, Chelmsley Wood, B37 5TX (next to the bus stops at Chelmsley Wood).
Your views on the play area would be greatly appreciated. If you cannot or do not want to attend the group sessions, then you can email us with any views / suggestions at nikita.price@solihull.gov.uk.

If you have any further questions regarding the evaluation, please contact Simon or Ellen at the playground.
Thank you for your time.

Appendix 2: Consent form

Consent form

You or your child/ren are taking part in an evaluation of the playground. Your responses to the questions will be used to evaluate Meriden Children’s Play Area. All recordings and information given will be kept anonymous within the evaluation and your personal information will only be viewed by the research team and not passed onto anyone else. All identifiable information will be stored securely, and then destroyed once the evaluation is complete.

For a child to take part, their parent/guardian must sign this consent form, not the child.

If you as a parent/guardian are accompanying your child/ren at the discussion, please allow this time for your child/ren to talk about the playground and how they feel about the playground. There is a separate discussion for parents.

Name of Researcher: Nikita Price

Please tick the following boxes and sign to give your consent for yourself or your child/ren to take part in the group discussions.

1. I confirm that I understand the above information on participating in the group session. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have answers.

2. I understand that I am providing consent for the use of my answers on the questionnaire and in the group session to be used for the evaluation of Meriden Children’s play area.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

4. I agree to take part in the discussion / for my child/ren to take part in the group discussion.
Appendix 3: Children’s Focus Group Script

Script for focus group with children

Hello, my name is Nikita and I am here today to lead the chat on Meriden Park. I am working with the public health team in Solihull, to evaluate Meriden Park. I will begin with telling you that this chat will be recorded and transcribed (explain what this means), so if everyone could begin with saying their first name. All recordings and information given will be kept anonymous (which means) within the evaluation (means). Also if anyone hasn’t completed the questionnaire which you were given, could you please do this now. Parents, if you could allow your children to speak about the park. We are running separate groups to get parents views. I can give you more details about that if you would like after this discussion. If at any time you would like to leave the discussion, then please just let me know.

1) What do you think overall about the playground? What are the benefits of the playground overall? What needs improving?

How often do you visit the playground each week?

Do you think the playground is a place where you feel safe and comfortable around others?

These next few questions are about who you have contact with at the playground.

2) Do you speak to other children at the playground? And have you made new friends from being at the playground?

Do you often talk with staff (like Simon, Sharon, Sharon and Ellen: show pictures) at the playground?

Do you ever ask for help or advice from staff members? If so, what?

Have the staff ever helped you with a problem?

3) Do you think that many other children in your area know about the playground?
So now I would like to know more about what you can eat at the playground.

What do you think about the cooked food on offer at the playground?

The next few questions are about keeping fit and healthy and playing.

4) What sort of exercise do you like doing? Do you think that the play area makes you more active?

If you weren’t at the playground, what do you think you would be doing instead?

Where else do you play?

If you are not at the playground, what else do you do?

Do you have much time to play? What do you play?

5) Looking at the 16 types of play, which one do you think you use the most? (use the 16 types of play cards, allow children to read them all or explain them to them)

From looking at the cards, which type of play looks interesting?

6) What do you think could be improved at the playground and why?

What improvements could be made in your local area to improve access to fun activities?

What fun activities would you like to see at the playground?

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Meriden Park?

Any other comments?

Thank you for taking the time to give your views on Meriden park. All your comments and suggestions will be used in the evaluation.
Appendix 4: Parent’s Focus Group Script

Script for focus group with parents: regular users

Hello, my name is Nikita and I am working on behalf of the local public health department. I am here today to lead the discussion on Meriden Park Children’s Play area. I will begin with telling you that this session will be recorded and transcribed (may need to explain what this means). Just to remind you, we have a set of questions we will ask you and we would like you to respond as fully and honestly as you can. Your responses to questions will be used to evaluate Meriden Childrens Play area. All recordings and information given will be kept anonymous within the evaluation and your personal information will only be viewed by the research team and not passed on to anyone else. It will also be stored securely. So if everyone could begin with saying you name. Also if anyone hasn’t completed the questionnaire which you were given when you entered the room, could you please do this now (demographic questionnaire). If at any time you could like to leave the discussion then please just let me know and we will stop recording the discussion. Manage expectation about time required to participate: 2 hours required to participate.

1) What do you think overall about the playground?

2) How regularly do you yourself visit the playground? Are there any times of the year that you come more often than other times? Why is this? What would encourage you to spend longer at the playground?

I will now ask you questions about the benefits of the playground and the interaction you have whilst there.

What are the benefits for yourself at the playground? {prompt with examples if necessary} What function does the playground have for you?

Do you speak to other parents at the playground?

Do you think the playground is a place where you as parents can engage with others?
Do you interact with staff at the playground?

3) Do you think that people in your local community know about the playground and the services they offer?

4) Some of you have mentioned that you sometimes get advice on various services and issues when you visit the park, such as healthy lifestyles, housing, debt advice. Does anyone want to add to this? So you get advice from other parents? The staff?

Do you ever go elsewhere (or would you) to get advice on any of the above issues? If so, where? Who would you ask?

The next few questions are about you and your children’s physical activity levels, play and eating.

5) What are your thoughts on accessing healthy food options locally?

Do you think the playground has an influence on how physically active your child/ren are? If so, how much and in what way?

When are your children most physically active?

Are you physically active? {define}

Has the playground encouraged you to become more physically active?

How many times a week do your child/ren visit the playground?

Where else do your children go to play?

What hobbies do your child/ren have?

What activities do your child/ren do to keep physically fit and healthy?

6) What do you think could be improved at the playground and why?

What improvements could be made in your community to
   i) make people feel more connected or more neighbourly with other people,
   ii) make people feel happier and satisfied with their community
   iii) Get people to be more active and eat a healthier diet?

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Meriden Park children’s play area?

Any other comments?

Thank you for taking the time to give your views on Meriden park. All your comments and suggestions will be used in the evaluation.
Appendix 5: Staff Focus Group Prompts

Script for focus group with staff

Hello, my name is Nikita and I am working on behalf of the local public health department. I am here today to lead the discussion on Meriden Park Childrens’ Play area. I will begin with telling you that this session will be recorded and transcribed [explain what this means]. Just to remind you, I have a set of questions I will ask you and would like you to respond as fully and honestly as you can. Your responses to questions will be used to evaluate Meriden Childrens Play area. All recordings and information given will be kept anonymous within the evaluation and your personal information will only be viewed by the research team and not passed on to anyone else and will be stored securely. So if everyone could begin with us going around the room and saying their name. Also if anyone hasn’t completed the questionnaire which you were given when you entered the room, could you please do this now. If at any time you could like to leave the discussion, then please just let me know.

1. What do you think overall about the playground?

2. Do you interact with parents and what do you tend to discuss with them? Please expand...................

Do you ever find yourself giving information and advice to parents about any of the following?: -

- Debt advice
- Quitting Smoking and / or e cigarettes
- Weight loss
- Food vouchers
- Support if you are a carer
- Healthy eating
- Housing
- Domestic abuse or relationship problems
- Childcare
- Advice about parenting
- Homelessness
- Drug & Alcohol problems
- Other related
Benefits
The Bosworth Community Centre
Community Advice Hub in Chelmsley Wood Library
Three Trees Community Centre
You+ Shop
Other

What services are you signposting people to the most do you think?

What are your links like with services? (e.g. lifestyle services such as health trainers, the community hub at CW library, housing)

How could these links be improved?

Do you find yourself giving information and advice to children? If so, about what?

The next few questions are about the benefits of the playground for users.

3. What do you think are the main benefits to the children who attend the playground? (e.g. physical activity, mental and emotional wellbeing, nutrition)

Why do you think some children don’t attend? What would encourage them to attend?

4. What do you think are the main benefits to the parents/guardians who attend the playground?

5. Do you see the playground having the potential to expand further and become a natural ‘hub’ of the community and if so, what would need to be done to help achieve or develop this?

6. What are the benefits for yourself at the playground?

The next few questions are about play at the playground.

7. What types of play do you think the children use the most at the playground?

What activities are done with supervision at the playground?

What activities are done without supervision at the playground?

What types of play do you think should be used more at the playground?

Do you think that children in your local community know about the playground and the activities they offer? How do you market it?

8. What are your thoughts on the eating options at the playground?

9. What improvements could be made in your local area to improve access to fun activities? What fun activities would you like to see at the playground?
Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Meriden Park?

Any other comments?

Thank you for taking the time to give your views on Meriden park. All your comments and suggestions will be used in the evaluation.