

Hartham Common Play Area, Hartham Lane, Hertford SG14 1QR  
Response in support of Planning Application Ref: 3/19/2313/FUL

1. The Hartham Common Play Area is within the Bengeo Neighbourhood Area Plan (BNAP) boundary. Consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft (Regulation 14) closed on the 15 September 2019 and a Regulation 16 Draft is being prepared for submission to East Herts District Council (EHDC). A Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report was submitted to EHDC on the 8 November 2019.

### **Community Facilities**

2. The Hartham Common younger and older children's play areas are included in Appendix F: Community Facilities of the BNAP Pre-Submission Draft. Criterion II of BNAP Policy HBC2: Enhanced Community Facilities states:

*Proposals to improve or enhance community facilities will be supported when they improve the range, quality, suitability and accessibility of facilities for residents and when the benefits of development outweigh any disadvantages.*

3. Particularly welcome in this planning application are:
  - The broad range of play equipment, much of it constructed with natural materials
  - Wheelchair access to the sand and mud play unit (A11) and Barrell Roundabout (A19)
  - Water play, utilising potable mains water (A17 and A18)
  - Sunshades over the Mushroom Pump (A13) and Dinosaur Fossil (A15) areas
  - The inclusion of swings, slides and see-saws, some of them designed for use by children of varying ages
  - A large area for sand play (it's good to note that the existing sand will be washed and re-used)
  - Sensory equipment, producing a range of sounds
  - The installation of fixed Table Tennis (a facility for all)
  - The adventurous play opportunities offered by the Double Black Forest Climbing Tower (A21)
  - The opportunities offered for children to play and learn through natural environments
  - An increase in the number of benches and picnic tables, positioned to overlook play equipment
4. In the BNAP response to the play area consultation, the potential for vandalism of equipment was flagged. BNAP have since been advised that EHDC do not generally have surveillance equipment in children's play areas unless there's a specific reason why it's considered necessary, and that discussions have taken place with the Police Crime Prevention Design Adviser.

## Nature Conservation

5. Criteria I & III of BNAP Policy HBN4: Nature Conservation state:

*All development should conserve and enhance biodiversity and seek to deliver net biodiversity gains.*

*Proposals to create new natural areas and wildlife habitats, or to expand or enhance existing provision, will be supported.*

6. It's noted that the planting schedule in Drawing Number 3033-PP-006 contains an extensive volume and range of herbaceous perennials, ferns, grasses and shrubs, as well as 14 trees and hundreds of native Hornbeam hedging whips. It's reasonable to anticipate that this increase in planting, together with the proposed wildflower area in the space left by the demolition of the former toilet block, would have a positive impact on biodiversity and wildlife habitats.

## Landscaping

7. Criterion I of BNAP Policy HBH3: Landscape Design states:

*Landscaping schemes should enhance the character of the development and reflect and complement the surrounding landscape, particularly when close or adjacent to the Green Belt.*

8. The overall impression represented in Drawing Number 3033-GA-004 and in the planting plans (as well as in the materials used in the play equipment) is that this scheme would complement its surrounding landscape and Green Belt setting.

## Road Safety

9. The BNAP response to the play area consultation recommended that the exit gate nearest the road be removed. It's unclear whether the proposal is for all existing gates to be retained. If feasible (and unless disability access is restricted) exit points from the play area may be safer away from the road. If the Leisure Centre planning application is approved, large vehicles would be passing the play area during construction, adding to road safety risks for very young children.

## Neighbourhood Plan Objectives and Policies

10. Objective D in the draft Bengeo Neighbourhood Area Plan is '*Retain, protect and enhance community facilities*'. This welcome proposed refurbishment of the Hartham Common Play Area is consistent with that objective and with the draft Neighbourhood Plan's policies.

Chair, Bengeo Neighbourhood Area Plan