

**Transcript
Hartham Common Play Area
Presentation**

November 10th 2021

Malcolm Ramsay

Rob Allwood and Judy Bayless, as I was saying is in the Hertford Playground Alliance. So we have, you know, different perspectives on a complicated project here, which has been very successful. But I don't want to say too much more, because it's, it's time for Rob to sort of do his presentation. And for the rest of us to listen, and watch.

Rob Allwood

Okay, I'll crack from here, then really? I'm going to do a bit and then Jody's gonna do a bit about the playground Alliance. And so yeah, so I project managed to I'm Rubberwood. I know it's a Charlotte on my screen. But I didn't switch accounts from my wife's account. So ignore that. I am Rob. I was the project manager for the play area. And so actually, as a result of this, I ended up actually getting a new job within East Herts as a project manager doing other high profile projects. So it was it certainly for me was a successful project. And for the community, it was it's been a heavily used play area since we finally got to open it. So I will move on. Why is it not moving on? There we go. It technical difficulties.

So Project Overview really. I don't know if anyone saw the original play area that was there. But yeah, I don't think come. Yeah, I'm gonna be honest, it was an unimaginative play area. Quite drab, quite past its past its best. Not really in keeping with what we what we as the Council and even what the Playground Alliance probably viewed that aren't uncommon is a destination park, we certainly viewed as the play area certainly just does not match it or did not just say, match the ambitions of the park. So we really wanted to do something with it and actually turn hearts and into a destination park from being perceived as being.

So initially, we were granted about a quarter of a million pounds worth of budget to actually to afford this. And as time went on we managed to snap up a few sort of £10,000s of pounds from other sort of pots within the Council. And then we did a bit of Crowdfunding, which we'll get onto, I don't want to sort of game sort of go too hard too soon with that, but, but maybe by the point in which we were ready to actually really start the project, we had about £400,000 pounds worth of funding to actually do this project and do a damn good service to the park into the play area.

The concept behind the play area the old play area, it just felt like this is the park play area. It was plumped there, we wanted a play area that felt like it was part of the park. It always was there. Even though it's only been there for less than a year. It's always it's always been there. And it reflects the trees at the back of the Warren of heart common. It reflects some of the sort of leisure and recreation activities that go on in the park. It reflects what's coming with hearts and leisure centre, and how that's going to look at some of the materials that are going to be used on that. So we want it to really just kind of feel like when you walk in or when you're driving past things because you come in. And that's the first thing you see. And the first impression is the best impression. And it's the best of what hearts and common and even Hertford, it has to offer. The crowdfunding aspect of it that came in sort of quite late in the day. It was a big was a big part of the project. And I think in

hindsight should have been a bigger part of the project. But we were kind of constrained by the fact that we'd started the work late 2018. And we had a programme we were working towards. And they've been a bit of research in the background with crowdfunding and how East hearts could use it. And we got to a point where we've been engaging with the Hertford playground Alliance.

And we've done this bit of research with crowdfunding, it just kind of felt like there was an opportunity there that well, what can we do with this and how can we better utilise that the great feedback and work that we're doing with the playground Alliance? So we sort of thought well, let's try and make it work and fit it into the programme. And probably the big learning point if any of you are intending To get involved with crowdfunding, the big learning point that we took away was, if you're going to do crowdfunding, make that the core of the project and then work backwards, and then work forwards from that. Whereas what we did was, this is the programme, and then we'll fit crowdfunding in here. Yeah, it was a successful campaign, the crowdfunding, but I think in hindsight, probably would have been more successful had we'd realise that from the start and then worked from that. But I mean, 20,000 pounds of crowdfunding is that that's not a small amount of money, that that was a sizable amount. And a lot of that work was done by the playground design. So thank you, Jody, and everyone else.

Obstacles that we had to overcome, actually, most of the obstacles we had to overcome was actually building the play area. Actually, the build up from the start of the engagement with the playground Alliance all the way through concept designs and public engagement. You know that that was actually quite easy. In hindsight, the real obstacles were locked down Brexit, and also supply factories burning down. So we've we've locked down, we would do to actually put the first spade in the ground middle of April. But obviously, end of March 1, lockdown came in. And most of the equipment we were buying was coming from the likes of Belgium and Germany.

And if everyone remembers, they went into the hardest lockdown. So immediately thinking, we should probably hold back a bit. So that that kind of pushed back to start date as of October time there, Brexit came in, we were hoping to have all the equipment over from the continent before Christmas. That didn't materialise. And some of the some of the equipment came in after Christmas, which, of course, that would be Brexit time, but tracting Kelleigh. So we lost a bit of time on that there supply delays that the Resin bound gravel, the producer of the resin, their factory burned down at the beginning of the year. So we lost time on that. And so yeah, the pre build was the easy part. The actual building was the real difficult part.

But I'll move on to timeline, just give you an idea. And you can you can see from the dates there, this was a long project. So I think work was starting earlier in 2018. But I was brought on board to start project managing towards the end of 2018. And by then the playground alliances, were engaging with us a lot more. And actually a lot of feedback we were getting was actually really sort of matching what it is that we were thinking. So we kind of saw an opportunity there as well, rather than with other play areas where we go go to the public and go what, here's what we're thinking, what do you think, and then we'll just get crack on with it. We thought, let's actually get them involved. They're really interested. They're quite well organised. They've got good networks, let's get them involved and actually have the group looking at some of our documentation, which we never do.

Normally, when we do tenders for anything, it's usually quite closely guarded, cuz a lot of it's quite commercially sensitive information. But this is this is more of a public thing, as

opposed to unless your contract or grounds maintenance or waste contract with commercial sensitivity. And this year, we actually for we've got an opportunity here, it's nothing really sensitive, this, let them have a look at it, let them give us some feedback. We weren't really sure what we would get back. But actually, the feedback we got on the landscape architect tender package was really quite informative. And we actually took their, their feedback and put pretty much all of it into the tender package. And yeah, so I look back at that. And actually, we got a good, very good landscape architects out of it. And actually, a lot of that probably comes from the feedback we've got from them. That was really informative. I guess we move on to landscape architect.

So we appointed Groundwork East who are local, I think they're based sort of Hatfield's and Obinze? area. We appointed them in May 2019. And when we saw when we saw that tender package, their concept design immediately when we looked at it, that's all winner. That's the landscape architect, but there's a whole lot of work we have to do to actually go through their paperwork and make sure everything actually stacks up behind the scenes. But yeah, that everything from the concept design, to the paperwork to the price, everything was perfect. And it was under no doubt that Groundwork East were the right landscape architect actually looking at what we've got in the end. You know, I think that that's proven. So they worked with us, all the way from doing the concept design from May, all the way through to public engagement all the way through to planning and actually all the way through to the end of the project.

But we did a public engagement date and we've got some pictures in this bit later on. We did that on the 31st of July I think or maybe early August 31st 31st. July anyway. And with that it was a full day event. We did it at the play area. We had activities for kids, just sort of, I guess, spark their imagination, get them interested, you know, while they're sort of creating Little bits out of twigs, leaves and whatnot, you know, asking them questions about what is it you want what you want to see, you know, we'd note that down. And also, while they're doing that, you know, the parents will be getting asked questions about what they like, what they don't like what they'd like to see. I think we had probably, I think over 100 people were engaged on the day when there was a lot of people swarming. I mean, I've completely lost track. I'm fairly sure the number I heard was over 100, which was fantastic. We used that day as well to launch the crowdfunding campaign.

So public engagement, the consultation, we did an online consultation that launched from the public engagement that went on two weeks, and then there was the crowdfunding campaign that went from the engagement date all the way through to mid September. And say, we generated about £28,000 pounds, which was a fantastic sum of money. Yeah, I think everyone Yeah, between us at the council, even I think the playground lunch, we were all very nervous, or even going to get £28 pounds, let alone £28,000 pounds, but it was brilliant. So from that, once we got all of the data from everyone from the consultation, the engagement, we've got the crowdfunding money, we've secured some grant funding for tarmac, we had asked for £400,000 or so pounds. We then worked with the architects to take us through to planning so that was early January 2020. Then we appointed the installation specialist, which was D Honour and Sons (Landscape Ltd Stansted). They were very good, very good with the public, and very good in sort of communicating as well with with the Playground Alliance. I think that yeah, the relationship there was really good, that seeing themselves were just a real pleasure to work with, and quite amenable, especially if we want to do some last minute changes to the design, they're quite amenable. So 13th of April would have been the date that would have originally started but of course COVID decided to happen. And it was about August that we saw Belgium and Germany were coming at the worst of their lockdown. The companies we were buying

equipment from they'd survived the lockdown. So we felt confident that, you know, between the crowdfunding money, the grant money, public taxpayer money, you know, that we protected the project, we protected that money correctly. Those businesses were ready for us to start buying equipment from so we did, and in the first spade hit the ground fifth of October last year.

We were hoping to finish the project was about March time but between well between lockdowns, Brexit, and the supplier, there factory burning down that actually went back to the 19th of May was practical completion. Unfortunately, I couldn't be there. I was on holiday. So I had to let everyone else sort of step forward. But I mean, I was quite happy to slay one just enjoy the day and enjoy the glory of it. We did have to about two weeks later closed down for a week just to finish a few little bits from supplier that had they actually burned down that they'd finally got all this stuff together and sent it over. So we finished that. So the player was completely done by about beginning of June. Okay, now move on. We go.

So just couple of pictures. This came from Jodi actually, these are pictures of the original play area, which I think when you look at that you can see drab, boring, unimaginative, and probably, um, sounding probably quite harsh. And I think even absent, the council will admit it is all of those words, it does not reflect what heart is what Hertford is. You can also see the picture in the bottom left is a brick heartless the old public toilets, which means derelict really, for years, and we've been wanting an excuse to knock it down and get rid of it for so long. And this was a this was our opportunity. And we've replaced it now with a little wildflower meadows, but I'm getting ahead of myself here. I'll move on to the next one. So this is the concept design that Groundwork East came up with. So hopefully, you can see that you can kind of see why immediately we looked at it and for that's our winner. You know, we just got to hope that their paperwork and all this sort of financial elements all stack up, which they did. And actually looking at it in hindsight, the design actually is not a million miles away from what we actually got. In the end.

You can see sort of the bottom left, there's a little sort of purpley bit of chasing butterflies, that was supposed to be the wildflower meadow. Not quite as big as what they're showing there, but it's still quite sizable. We've got the yellow bit in the middle, which is that the huge sandpit, probably the biggest sandpit that we've got in the district, and it's just a little bit sort of like the path was I think the path that shown it is actually identical to the path that was actually laid. So you know that the great thing is, that was a concept design, and it's actually almost identical to what we've got, which is very rare that you get a concept design that looks like the final product.

Oh, move on. Okay, so we got the public engagement date, first of July. So you can see, the kids are sort of involved in all kinds of activities. smiley Chaplin middle looks like a sort of crown of leaves. So while they were doing that, you can see the sort of top right is a picture there with, I think Vicki's somewhere in there as well, actually, you know, we're we're just talking to the parents and just getting their thoughts and feedback, but also at the same time, and see the chap in the Middle East holding when they sort of charity boxes we used for it was. So because we use it as our launch for the crowdfunding, we've got some of the kids that were running around with those charity boxes, we've playground lions did really running around with charity boxes, getting people to sort of throw in this sort of loose change and tracking or whatnot. And then that money was then used as the first lot of money that went into the crowdfunding campaign. So that that was a really nice little thing, especially to get it all started.

And it's all continuing the theme of public engagement. And that which I think is kind of the theme, from start to finish, really where we engaged with the playground Alliance, we had the public engagement day. And then what was supposed to be just before we started, the actual project was a hedge planting date. So I don't know how well people know the player, but the southern edge of the player is got a hoops, metal fencing, which is still there. And we wanted to keep that because there's a road there. So we ideally want to try and stop kids from from running out into the road. But it's quite an ugly things, but it's a very useful fence. So we what we did, or what the landscape architect proposed was, well, let's plant some horn beams along there. And then they'll grow and eventually sort of envelop the fence. So you don't eventually see the metal fence, you just see the hedges. So we thought, well, let's incorporate as part of this sort of public engagement thing all throughout. And we have a day where people come along, and we can see that everyone brought a spade along, everyone popped in a bit of hedge in a whip, obviously, you know, we were quite worried about are these going to take these sort of quite pathetic looking whips really, but they've actually established quite well and I think give it another year. And they will, they will envelop that fence. And it will really look like us all hedged fence as opposed to a, an ugly hoops, metal fence, but give it time, it was really well attended day actually more well attended. And I think we were expecting it was quite, I remember being a cold day person and then have a huge area. I was definitely freezing. That was a great day.

Okay, and then sort of fast forwarding from that. So we're skipping through lockdown. And finally, speed hits the ground in October. I mean, if you're looking at the pictures, it set them up chronologically. So if you start top left and go to top right, then bottom left to bottom, right, that's chronological order of some of the pictures. October was all about basically just ripping out the old, knocking down the old public toilet ripping out the old play equipment. And then sort of November through till February was landscaping, it was installing the new equipment, it was forming the new sandpit. And then from March through to May, it was basically getting that getting the grass down, getting the sand, getting the plants in and just getting it ready and presentable for first group of people who are going to use it.

Then the next one, I've said, this is the finished product. Actually, that's a little bit of a lie. Actually, these pictures aren't really the finished product. Then if you see that sort of winding path, he's showing a black turtleneck, the actual finished product is a sort of Sandy Resin bound type gravel. So what we did, because we still had a bit of a delay with that, we decided to soft launch on the 19th of May. So these pictures are literally from just before that before everyone piled onto the grass and whatnot. And then, about two weeks later, we closed it in the Resin bound gravel, but they've actually these are the pictures from from just before practical completion. And you can see it's complete transformation from fight flight. Go back. You can see the mud pile that was and then complete transformation to what what is. Okay, what I'll do, I'll hand over to Jody and do a bit Jody, just let me know when you want to skip onto the next slide.

Jodi Bayliss

Sure. Thank you, Bob. Thanks for having me, as well. So we started in 2018. And I was at the playground with my one and four year old at the time, I think they were and the terrain most smallest was just learning to walk and the terrain was horrific and she kept falling and stumbling. And that got me thinking lots of grandparents use the part of the play area. You know, thinking about how they would get around on the terrain that was completely unworkable. Nevermind for a wheelchair or buggy and then looking around at the equipment, you know, my older son at that time was already a bit bored and I thought he's

still so small how couldn't be bored in our towns biggest play area. So we I started up a conversation in the where and mom were in Hertford mom's Facebook group, which is as quite a lot of members and just said that cuz anyone approached the council or done anything about renovate, renovating the play area, does anyone know if it's in the pipeline, etc. So nobody really knew. So I thought, Okay, I'm just going to take this on and see what happens. So we started our own Facebook group, which now has 1200 members, which are mainly parents and grandparents carers formed that Facebook group asked sort of people what their thoughts were on the current playground, I'm in some of the responses we received were not so nice, as you can imagine.

So from there, we took some photos of the playground, packaged everything into this massive email and then blasted all of the local councillors. And that's essentially how it started. And then from there, we had a response from, I think it was counselling Deering at first. And of course, Peter raffles was very involved from the start, always trying to help us get the project underway and get our get our foot in the door, basically. And then, you know, they invited us to collaborate, which was amazing. Took on the crowdfunding project together. And then we used a local mom volunteer to sort of make us logo, which is fantastic. And it all came together from there. When it gets to the next slide, Bb, and then just a bit about the crowdfunding. The count the Alliance, we had never used a crowdfunding platform. So this was all sort of new to us as well. We sort of worked it out as we went along. And I think as Rob mentioned, we probably did it a bit backwards, but it's a learning curve for everybody. So we worked with Groundwork East, East Arts Council to put together this website. Vicki did a lot of the text which was amazing Becky from the Council in Comms and then we created this little YouTube video I don't know if you wanted to, if you can play that link Rob.

Rob Allwood
Let's see if it works

Jodi Bayliss
Maybe not what is it working Can you see it? I can't Okay, there we go.

Rob Allwood
Okay. Well do Yeah.

Jodi Bayliss
case when the volume or you have to turn the volume up or not.

So there is music and vocals. I don't know why can't really hear them. But anyway, we created this using our own children. Sorry, children, as sort of a plea to put on the crowdfunding site to show exactly what we were doing. And to just help generate donations. And I think it did help because it shows sort of the state of the play area. It was a suggestion from Crowdfunder. And it was, yeah, I kid. So that was circulated all through social media and on the Crowdfunder site itself. And so from there, as Rob said, we raised £28,505 pounds in 42 days, we were under a serious time constraint, which is why the campaign couldn't last longer. Again, that was crowdfunders advice to keep the campaign short. We were hopeful to have received donations from some of the larger corporations in Hertford, I'm not going to name names. But that didn't happen.

So the majority of the donations actually did come from local residents and residents of the surrounding area. And there were small numbers that fortunately added up. So it was fantastic. And I think it really made the town and the community feel involved in the project

itself. And then also, as Rob had talked about, the community consultation day, I think was key there was they had massive groundwork, he's had massive questionnaires that were parents were able to complete them on site, or children could actually do it themselves. Just sort of stating what they wanted in their towns play area. And the themes that kept coming up were climbing apparatus, and challenging equipment for the older children. As I said, My son was born at age five. And then water play was a big thing, everyone wanted a splash park, which, you know, it's not the right space for a massive splash park. But the amazing thing is that groundwork, you can actually see in one of those photos, groundwork incorporated these amazing water pumps, which is more than we could have hoped for.

So Groundwork East, the landscape designer, Landscape Architect really took on board, everything we had asked for and put together this amazing plan. So I just I can't thank them enough for the work that that they put into the project. I just think they were outstanding. And then another example, I think, Rob of how the council and the Alliance work together was, was in regards to fencing. That was a big issue for parents, as parents, everybody wanted fencing surrounding the entire play area. I mean, you've got grandparents running after little ones escaping into the larger common. So we were so keen on fencing and not saying the council didn't want fencing, but I think there was a bit of a disconnect on that. That point. But the end result was that we compromised and came together and had these amazing wooden fence posts put in, I think that satisfied both of our criteria and and still keep the play area in. in high regard, it looks like it should be flowing into the comments. So I think that was key. And just a great example. I think of how we work together to get over some hurdles. And I think yeah, it's just a some of the community feedback we've received has been outstanding. Every time I go to the playground, people are still talking about it. Even the ladies at Sainsbury's, who I who I know quite well talk about it every time I'm in there, and it's just it really felt like a project that people were involved in. And I think that meant so much to everyone. Thank you.

Rob Allwood

Yeah. And that brings us kind of to the end of I guess what we were what we're talking about the picture here is that sort of Thank you sign that that we put together with the last of these, the budget that we had, we had £5,000 or so pounds before. So it'd be nice if we put something up as a sort of a thank you acknowledging the businesses that put up a lot of money towards the Crowdfunder as well as also specific people and families who put contributed quite a lot themselves as significant sums to it. So the little green bubbles, you probably can't quite see in the picture, but there are people's names or family names. And then on the right hand side you can see the businesses which if you make them out the Sainsbury's Volker Fitzpatrick mother fit can't quite make out the other three. I think one of them's a school

Jodi Bayliss

Duncombe Schools one and Tree Tops Nursery, I think,

Rob Allwood

I couldn't remember if it was if it was a more busy baseball. There we go better memory than me. What came along after that was also tarmac. So Tarmac gave us about £50,000 pounds of grant funding, and they've got a plaque as well, which sits directly underneath that. So they've got a little thank you as well. And so yeah, that brings us to the end of our presentation. I suppose if anyone's got any questions and anything they want to ask stop sharing. See one hand up from Peter Ruffles?

Peter Ruffles

Shall I ask my question? Well, haven't got a question. Really, I want to just make an underlying statement of delight. I always have to say, the very beginning in many, many conversations with people how the council had a plan, because that's the bit that is lost. And Robert pointed out what that plan was. So it wasn't a massive takeover, until the energies really began to arrive a little later down from Jodi's Alliance. But the real credit, although the council had a plan is to Jody and the playground Alliance, which has just made such a wonderful thing that Halford can boast about. And we're always short at things to boast about, especially in local government. And this has been absolutely wonderful. Since it happened. My own good fortune is that it's in my ward, the ward I share with Ben Crystal and Sally Newton Benjo ward. So I had dialogues within the council. That's the counsellors role and was able to reassure quite a lot of people who saw this phenomenon of Jody, coming in from the side and playing a flanker where we at risk and what was going to happen.

I also happen to be the council's representative for a long time on groundwork trust, and Groundwork East. And so I had the links there. So it was a pleasure for me to do that part from talking to people and generally linking things together. I didn't do anything apart from planting some whips on that very cold day and then watering them afterwards. We did have to do that God didn't we without that tends to get the horn beams underway. But it's been really, really thrilling in my time as a counsellor to have unadulterated praise for something that's happened because there haven't been criticisms have been expressions of concern about the elements like the fencing that Jodie mentioned. that needed to be sorted.

But it's it's just been wonderful and exemplary. And Rob has been doing his job and doing it as well as he does. Remember Rob has to look after 200 square miles of East Herts, not just Halford even, and so full credit to that council. But thank you God once again for all of those energies and drives. And I really want us to be looking at some other much smaller playing areas to do a similar sort of thing on a on a much lesser scale. And I can think within Halford within Benjo Ward, where there are one or two examples that could benefit from a bit of crowdfunding income in, in cooperation with the council. So just wanted to put a members word of delight from the council side of things. Thank you.

Jodi Bayliss

Thank you. Thank you. Peter. said you were you were you were there from the start in supporting us and you just being really positive about the project and when you're sort of not involved in government and really have no idea what you're doing. That's amazingly helpful. So thank you

Malcolm Ramsay

I can see the millennials got a hand raise. No, they do want to say something or ask a question.

Milena

Thanks, Malcolm. Yes, I suppose first as well to echo Peters. Thanks because it's it's an amazing congratulations, as well as thanks for having pulled off such a beautiful result at all, cutting nevermind against the backdrop of steady, international tragedy that was going on alongside it. So I hope that in a sense as well, the involvement in this project and seeing it continue and come to fruition despite what was going on around you might have been a sort of sustaining thing both everybody who was involved in it. I know certainly, sort of from the outside seeing it progress, despite what was going on was kind of a nice thread

of hope, but I was curious And particularly when you were talking about the feedback from the playground Alliance, which changed the thinking of the council before it went out to tender, what kinds of things those were. More generally, I was curious about what role research or evidence from other places other kinds of play areas might have played in your thoughts about what kind of play area you wanted? And what would work in that location? And finally, what kind of lessons do you would you how come the other way around without having done this now, what kind of lessons would you share with anyone else now thinking about play areas apart from avoiding going back to a 1980s? Here's some tarmac here, some definitely items that your children can fall off kind of approach. So yeah, I was just about Congratulations, again, it's a wonderful space.

Rob Allwood

Okay. Okay, I'll try and cover all those points remind me if I've forgotten, sort of some of those points. In terms of the feedback that we were going back to what the late 2018, the main thing that stood out to me was the feedback we got was was mostly around the wording. The wording that we use, when we were writing original landscape, Arctic tender package was very cool sort of local authority wording. And when when we handed it over to the playground lights, actually a lot, the word that came back was quite, it was quite emotive wording, which you know, is not normal kind of thing, we would stick in a tender package, it be quite formal, and it'd be very sort of view, sort of correct and proper ways of writing production kind of took that took that emotive wording for whatever it's just plug it in. Because this is actually quite an emotive subject, you know, heart and common.

And I think that's come through what Jody has said, that was the main thing that stood out to me is actually just that little bit of emotive wording to it, you actually kind of capture an end, it must click worked, it must have worked, because Groundworks came up with a fantastic concept design. And I'm coming, I'd like to think this, looked at that wording looked at some of the passion behind that wording, and when we know exactly what you want. And when there is there is the concept design. So that was the main thing that stood out. In terms of lessons learned. I think going forward, it's kind of opened, the division of parks teams, eyes are seeing the vision box teams, so they're a separate thing. I've sort of since moved on to major projects team now and I'm dealing with other sort of large projects so that they are their thing, and I've moved on.

I think they're thinking now with play areas is very much more trying to engage local residents in the public a lot more. Whereas I think you can sort of suggest that it is yeah, that the old school 1980s or 1990s is a piece of equipment has been a tarmac, you know, off you go. You know, I think between I mean Trinity player and Bishop Stortford is another recent one. There's parsonage Lane also in Bishop's Stortford. Those are ones that came about around about the same time as heart and, and the same sort of principles that we applied with heart and have, but it's actually actively engaged in actually be a bit more open and not so closed off, and be a bit more transparent. And actually listen to what people are saying, and actually, not just listen to it, but actually act on it. That's probably the main thing. We've walked away. You walked away with, and I'm hoping that, that that team will then continue that and actually deliver more play areas like like a heart. But yeah, obviously on a

Milena

Can I just follow up on that my can briefly so that's, that was my question one and three, and at least said to try and remind you if there was not the other part of it. That's really interesting, both of the language which I suppose it not just so much passion and languages, but sometimes when people write directly, but it's the direction that that

passion gives, because it's very, it's very often the case that local authority language can be quite formulaic terms. And it's it's it's not just the enthusiasm, it's actually informative, not not not just the fact that it isn't easy. And I completely take the point about saying what it is that people want, but there might be my the middle part of my question was what evidence base or research might you have relied on or thought about in order to inform and, for example, evaluate out of all of the things that people said they wanted? Which ones might actually work together or work in that location? Because I'm slightly cautious about the idea that, Oh, well, we'll just consult and we'll ask what they want, and then we'll give them what they want. They'll be fantastic. So we'll actually, there's quite a lot of knowledge about what works in both for individual types of communities or ages of children, but also to do with the integration between elements of the community like Jody said, one of the things that first made her notice quite how bad this was, was quite how uneven the payment might be for the grandparents taking their kids to The Park. And that's it. That's one of the things and there's there, there must be quite a lot of stuff, which I'm sure you're aware of and are just taking for granted.

But I think it's worth articulating that tells you about what kinds of solutions work for generational connections, for example, or integration with wildflowers. Because if you go out and ask people, What do you want, they'll say, I want to splash park. And actually, that might not be the best thing for all kinds of reasons, not least, because it's very exclusive of a large swathe of people ages, not necessarily environmentally friendly. So well, the consultation is is all good, there has to be in the the passion and enthusiasm, knowledge has to be there. I think the counsellors role does also have to be the evidence based aspect of it. So it's not just contributing to the vision, but also to keeping an eye on the implementation and the likelihood of success of it.

So I think you're under playing your own role in the importance of the development of this approach, particularly if it's going to get used in other areas, which could be great. But again, you don't want so well, it's crowdfunded. It's whatever they want, they crowdfunded that they can have that. And then you just end up with a very piecemeal, no oversight, no vision, no coherence, no consistency to approach and different players across the across the region, which isn't presumably what you're looking for that I'm just thinking out loud. Here. It's really interesting. I'm just trying to pull up strands together. In terms

Rob Allwood

in terms of inspiration, we thought took inspiration from a number of areas, but the same time, not sure we had the inspiration, and we had the sort of passionate language to try and drive it. We at the same time didn't want to constrain groundwork too much, or, obviously, it wasn't just grammar that there was another 10 boxy ground, but one it I mean, I think what we were interested in is something that that I guess, as I said, we've always been there, and it doesn't look like it's just kind of arrived out of nowhere, it's always been there. And what it had to sort of reflect what's around and why we were kind of sort of trying to sort of draw initial our initial inspiration from is that anyone's been to Knebworth house and seen the play area there is a sort of, sort of sort of fortification, but they kind of use the landscaping sort of crate as well, as was sort of wooden walls and fencing. And that's quite an exciting player.

But I think what started to really take our attention was something like Go Ape, and not necessarily all that the higher wires that you can go on, but just the idea of using nature to create something that you can climb on and play with and interact with. And that's what really sort of, I think, captured our imagination. And hopefully, you know, the God in the playground lights kind of so and I think they did, and I think they have and that's that's

that's I think that's what really captured our imagination. I think that kind of shows in what was delivered in the end, because a lot of it is sort of Robin, you would type structures that clearly look like they've come from a tree. It's not just some fabricated material that appears like a tree is an actual tree looks like it's been formed from that. And some of it looks like it's actually grown from the ground and been purposed in that way. And that's what we've tried to go with, even with the choice of fencing, is obviously the southern border is the hoop top fencing, but that will hopefully eventually overgrown by the Hornbeam?

And Jody sort of mentioned earlier, initially, the northern barrier was going to just be soft fencing was not inventing a soft border. So we would have used, you know, shrubs and whatnot to create a border, but actually, after a lot of discussion with the playground Alliance and their concern around dogs getting into the play area, you know, sort of reflecting on it reflected on it. And initially we went down, it's quite typical for them. To be honest, quite typical Council approach was never been issues with dogs in the past. So you know, do we need a fence? But actually, we sort of stopped them for Well, no, actually, these parents that you have a genuine concern, even though we've never had an issue of a dog getting in the player, doesn't mean that issue might never happen in the future.

So we kind of changed our thinking, No, that's actually listened to that and figure out a way that we can try and address that, but also stay true to what it is we want to choose the whole idea of go away utilising nature utilising the idea of trees. And this is where the chestnut posts, if you've been there, this chestnut posts around sort of northern and western and even eastern edge actually. So we try to sort of get them in such a way that they look natural, and they look like they may have grown up out of the ground. So that that was where our initial inspiration came from.

Jodi Bayliss

Actually, I'd seen the fencing and a playground in America, sort of six months prior to the project breaking ground believe it was and I just thought it's natural. It's low. I think it's something the I was hoping the council would agree to And it was surrounding a beautiful wooden playground in South Carolina. So I took some photos of it brought it back to the council to groundwork East. And yeah, that's what that's sort of the concept that they ended up using, which was amazing.

Rob Allwood

Look, looks it does look great. And we're even thinking about using it elsewhere. If it's right.

Malcolm Ramsay

I can see a hand raise John Bevan.

John Bevan

Congratulations, everybody on creating something as good as, as we've been hearing about. What I'm interested in is, I understand what Hertford playground Alliance did from 2018 onwards, I wonder God, whether that alliance existed before 2018, and how it grew up.

Jodi Bayliss

And so no, it didn't, it really grew from my frustration with the playground. And just started from there sort of snowballed into a lot of parents joining this Facebook group and voicing their own concerns. So really, I was just a voice for the parents of Hertford, who had the

same frustration and felt like, you know, we all spend a lot of time at the play area, it should really be a place that we can enjoy and love and be proud of, and it wasn't. So it started from there. And then just grateful that the East Herts Council welcomed us and welcomed our ideas and really made the project quite inclusive. Thank you.

Malcolm Ramsay

Can I ask you a question? This is really following up from what Milena was talking about. You know, anyone setting up a playground now to think about climate change and things like the need to provide some shade that might not have been on anyone's wish list. But some shade has been organised for that playground, for instance. And I imagine there are other things that I'm not actually aware of that would also have been planned in by drawing on other places, you know, real specific things that look to the future. But you either do like to comment.

Rob Allwood

The shade, that wasn't in the original concept, it wasn't something we originally planned or even really considered. I mean, my memories a bit hazy about where it came from. But if I remember right, yeah, I think Jody yourselves mentioned something about having some kind of shade.

Jodi Bayliss

Yes. So that sort of came from parents. That was the old playground had a play area had very little shade, and the equipment would get very, very hot, almost become unusable. And especially over the sandpit was a big thing, because that's where sort of a lot of the smaller children and babies would play. So a lot of parents expressed on our Facebook group, desire for shade, and then groundwork in East Herts, East Herts came up with the shade Sunshade idea over the sandpit which just looks amazing,

Rob Allwood

I think, yeah, it was, we sort of had a bit of a head scratcher as to how do we, how do we build something like that in and maintain the theme of the wood trees? How on earth do you do that? And groundwork I mean, grandpa were brilliant. They they went away, disappeared, as they do for a bit and then came back on when we've seen something somewhere else, took some pictures, showed it to us and immediately went, yep, that that's brilliant. Let's show that to the playground Alliance. We think they love that we showed we showed it to him. And they were Yeah, that's perfect.

Jodi Bayliss

They planted some additional trees, don't they? Which should mature probably quite slowly, but that will eventually provide additional shade. So it was it was quite a big thing for us as parents.

Malcolm Ramsay

Thank you. That's definitely interesting. There's anybody else who wants to ask a question next.

If not, there was one other question that I was also wanting or one other thing I was wanting to raise alongside this play area, that there is the fantastic skatepark. I sort of imagined the two must kind of reinforce each other. You know, if one is going well help the other to go well and things like that. And people, certainly some families, some kids will go to one bit and some might go to the other bit, how does that actually work in practice?

Rob Allwood

During might have probably more, I guess, practical experience of having been there and seen it. But from a council perspective, we tend to find that that is or certainly has been the case recently, you'll get families go along with children of multiple ages, which I think Jody said, Yes, she's got kids of different ages. So we've got an older kids play area, which is just sort of a little bit further along from the skatepark. We've got the skate park and then next to that is the new play area. So yeah, we as a council, we've noticed that families with a couple of kids will find that what yeah, one kid will be might be on the skatepark, another can be on the older kids player. Yeah, another kid will be in the younger kids play area. So we do find that that interactions case, I think probably Jody's better place to really kind of give a hands on.

Jodi Bayliss

Yeah, I mean, I think prior to this play area renovation, the skate park had perhaps I'm sorry, Rob, but a bit of an antisocial vibe, I'll be honest. And then since the player has finished the whole area, it does seem a bit more cohesive and more family friendly. So I think it's affected the area overall, including the skateboard park in a positive way.

Malcolm Ramsay

I think that's very interesting to hear, because even my really casual impression was exactly the same. But there must have been some mutual benefit here.

Rob Allwood

Yeah, I mean, heart, some has had some antisocial behaviour over the years. Part of my previous role was working with the ledger operator at the Leisure Centre, which I still do in my new role, but I'm slightly more detached. But I mean, I don't know how true this is. But I have heard that there is a bit of a less of an issue of antisocial behaviour, I mean, clearly are still going. But it does seem to be a bit less of an issue. Hopefully, that's because the new player is that people take pride in it, and you've got more families going there, which hopefully puts that kind of behaviour off.

Malcolm Ramsay

Well, if nobody else has any more questions, it just remains for me to say thank you so much for a fascinating presentation from the different perspectives that we've had tonight. And that's been really valuable to learn about the play area and how it's worked, or how everyone learned things and how everyone has benefited and gained at the end. So thank you so much. And we are all very grateful. While I have everybody's attention. I should also mention that our next talk is on Wednesday, the first of December, when Chris Skidmore, we talking about the Friends Meeting House in the middle of Hertford, following it 300 and 50th anniversary. So I'm sure Terry will be sending out notifications. But it's it's nice to be able to just to mention our next talk as well. And thank you very much to everyone who came along. And I think we'll all have enjoyed this evening and then things and it's all been great. So just thank you so much.

ENDS