

## **An Open Letter To Leeds City Council, Gledhow Primary School And The Local Community.**

In May 2015, we learned that Gledhow Field would be closed to the community and, as a result, The Friends of Gledhow Field was formed, petitions and surveys were conducted, negotiations with the school and Leeds City Council (LCC) started and, on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, notice was served on the school and council that an application for Village Green status would be made. Despite our continued efforts to reach a compromise, almost a year on, we are no further forward. In fact, as the field has been closed to the public and the school, we are all in a worse position. Children have not even been able to use Gledhow Field temporarily while construction work takes place. We urge all relevant parties to work together to reach an acceptable compromise as soon as possible.

We did not take the decision to apply for Village Green status lightly or without consideration for the school. We have always tried to identify a solution that will suit all parties and, in our commitment to satisfy ourselves that the children of Gledhow Primary School will not be disadvantaged, we asked LCC about their plans should the application be successful and they confirmed the following:

*'In order to provide the Governing Body with assurance that the school will be provided with sufficient external play for a 3FE primary school, the Council has agreed to install a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) at Gledhow Primary School in line with Sport England requirements for a Primary School if the current Village Green Application is successful. The location, type and size of MUGA have not yet been determined, as this will be subject to consultation with the Local Planning Authority and Sport England.'*

In summary, LCC will of course ensure that the children of Gledhow Primary School will not suffer if the Village Green Application is successful. The above commitment to install a MUGA, (using an all weather playing surface), may even be considered to be a better solution for the children. Rather than simply having more land, which will only ever be usable when the weather allows it, the school would benefit from upgraded facilities that can be used throughout the year.

**Sport England summarises the advantages of artificial pitches, (generally used for MUGA's), over natural grass:**

- Greater durability
- More efficient use of space
- Increased usage (Possibly 10 times as much use)
- Flexibility
- Less maintenance required
- Better overall value for money

**Specifically for the pupils of Gledhow Primary School, as well as the wider community, a MUGA could offer the following:**

- Both the existing school field and Gledhow Field are often too wet and muddy to use safely and comfortably for long periods of the school year. A MUGA would offer year-round availability.
- Due to greater durability and more efficient use of space, Sport England regards an artificial pitch to be double the size of a grass pitch when considering ideal playing field sizes for schools. Consequently, as confirmed in the council's statement, the school would have sufficient space for the children without the loss of a community green space.
- The MUGA would be a long-term asset for the school, it would provide a broad range of sports options throughout the year for school pupils and it would be possible to offer quality facilities to community groups outside of school hours.
- The MUGA would allow Gledhow Field to be fully reopened. This would benefit the local community as a whole, including the pupils of Gledhow Primary School, many of whom live near to the field. They will lose out too if the field remains closed as they will not be able to play on it outside of school hours, weekends and during the holidays.

If the Village Green application, and any subsequent appeal, is unsuccessful the school will have around double the amount of land it currently has but the children will still have nowhere to play when it is wet and muddy, they will have lower quality facilities and there will be fewer opportunities to offer year-round amenities to the community. For large parts of the year the benefit will be minimal and the wider community will have lost a green space which is an important and much valued asset.

We believe that the following options should be given urgent consideration:

- That Leeds City Council and the school formally agree now to replace the existing school pitches with a MUGA and to reopen the field permanently. The Friends of Gledhow Field would withdraw the Village Green application, this could be the quickest way to resolve the matter.
- Council representatives, the school and the parents action group support the Village Green application as a successful outcome would ensure the children at Gledhow Primary School would gain from the advantages of a MUGA and the community, which the school serves, would not lose a valuable asset.
- LCC has an obligation to provide a broad range of services to the people of Leeds. Public Health, the Environment, Parks and Green Spaces, Culture and Community are all affected by the outcome of this decision in addition to Children's Services and therefore a fair division of resources is required. A compromise could simply be that the land is divided giving some to the community and some to the school. Alternatively, it could be an agreement to share the land, a scheme which has been used elsewhere in Leeds. There are many options to consider. If the preference remains for grassed areas rather than the MUGA, again, the VGA would be withdrawn if a legally binding commitment to an agreeable compromise is found.

Village Green applications can take years to complete, particularly if an appeal is lodged which is currently likely whatever the outcome of the initial decision. We remain willing to withdraw the application if a reasonable and legally binding solution is found. Through dialogue and negotiation, we believe we can reach a faster, better conclusion which would bring some or all of the field back into community use and allow the school to develop their outdoor space plans without the cloud of uncertainty hanging over them.

We, the Friends of Gledhow Field, have always wanted a compromise. We can be contacted via email [info@friendsofgledhowfield.org](mailto:info@friendsofgledhowfield.org), we are currently waiting for a response from the council to our latest attempts to pursue a dialogue and hope that a solution can be found that suits all as quickly as possible.

**The Friends of Gledhow Field**