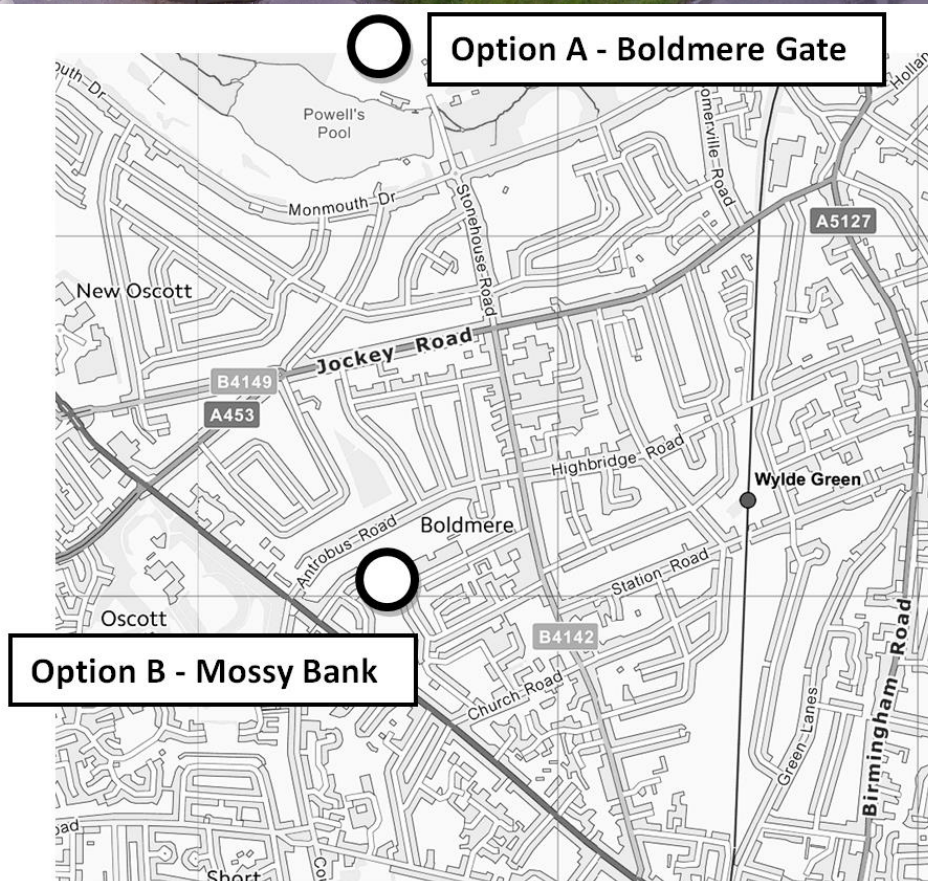




# Boldmere Play Area Location Consultation



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## Introduction

In March 2017 Royal Sutton Town Council commissioned the Landscape Practice Group (LPG), which is the landscape design arm of Birmingham City Council's Parks Service, to undertake a public consultation regarding two potential play area locations within the Boldmere area of Sutton Vesey, namely:

- A. Boldmere Gate, Sutton Park
- B. Mossy Bank on Warden Road

It is probable that once a location is recommended by the Town Council and approved by Birmingham City Council then thoughts would turn to design, cost options and construction. The current budget allocated to the project is £100,000.

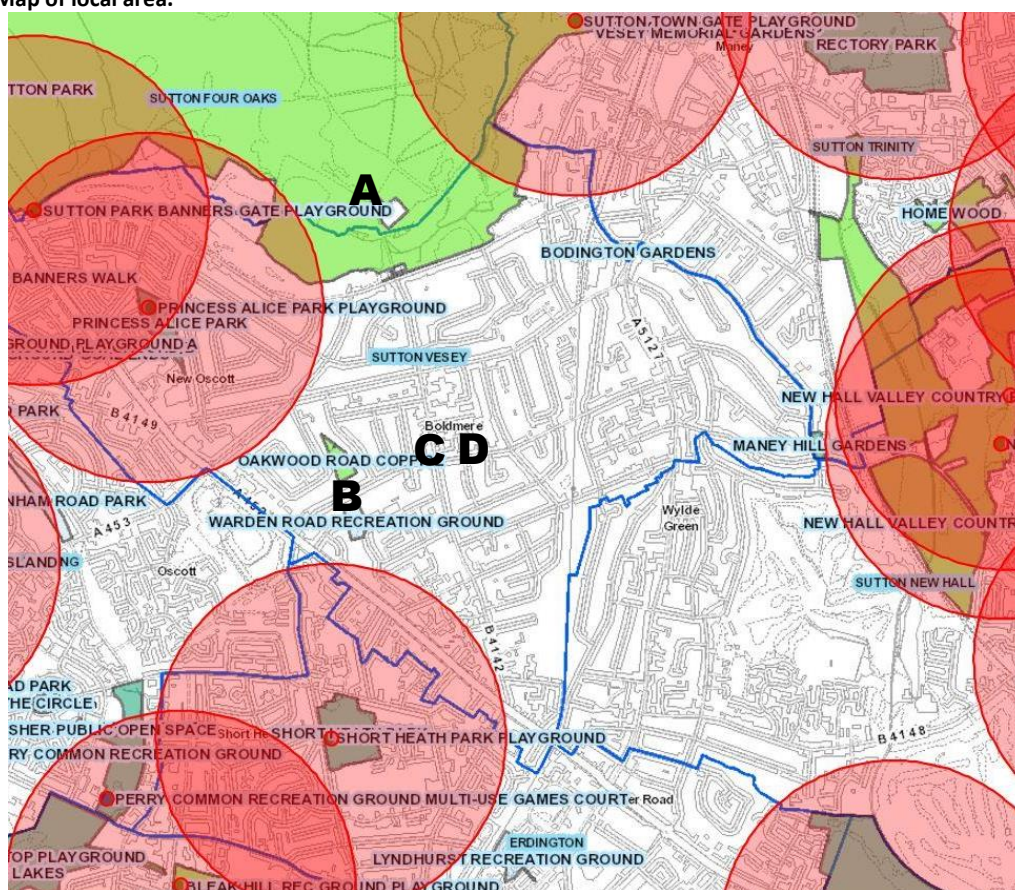


## Background

Boldmere in Sutton Vesey has very few public open spaces or parks, and it has even fewer play areas. The map below shows existing play areas with ½ mile/800m red circles around them representing their local catchment area (less than a 15 minute walk) and it is clear that Boldmere (and Wylde Green) have an under provision. Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council hopes to address this by creating a new play area in Boldmere. Four potential sites were put forward:

- A. Boldmere Gate / Sutton Park
- B. Mossy Bank / Warden Road Recreation Ground
- C. Boldmere High St.
- D. Fir Tree Grove, off the High St.

Map of local area.



Ward boundaries in blue. Existing play areas as small circles with their catchment areas. Four original play area locations lettered A to D.

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The two sites on and off the High St (C & D) were later deemed inappropriate for a play area, due to their proximity to housing and the vulnerability of their residents.

The shortlist of two remaining sites was then the subject of a study entitled “Sutton Vesey Ward – Assessments for New Play Area Provision”, which was presented to the Town’s Amenities Committee in December 2016. The report assessed various aspects of each site from accessibility, topography, current land use, known local issues, planning restrictions, site safety, potential risk for vandalism or anti-social behaviour and statutory designations.

It became obvious that each site would be suitable for a play area, but there were pros and cons for different members of the community. The Town Council then commissioned this consultation process to help guide their final decision.

## Consultation

The consultation consisted of:

1. A web page – as part of the Town Council's website.
2. 2525 questionnaires hand delivered to local residents
3. An information event, held on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March

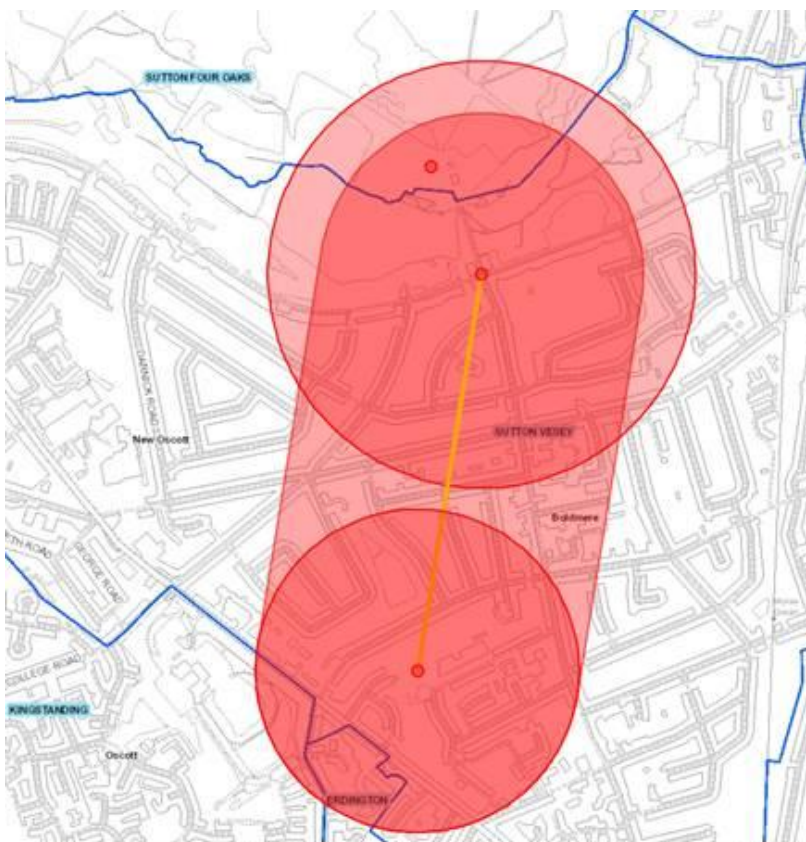
## 1. Website information on the Town Council Website.

This included a copy of the assessment report and contact details for comments and feedback. In all 13 people submitted comments via the email link.

## 2. Questionnaires

In order to ascertain a level of support for the two sites each household or business would have 1 vote via a returned questionnaire. The catchment area was shaped around the closest 1000 properties respectively. For Mossy Bank this was within a 450m radius, for Boldmere gate 595m (centred on the Monmouth Drive roundabout). Properties in-between these two circular areas were also included, whereas those in the neighbouring wards of Kingstanding or Erdington were not included or counted.

**Map showing the catchment area for questionnaires.**



The two red circles cover the nearest 1000 properties to each site, and the lozenge joining the two covers the properties in between. Note: addresses outside of Sutton Vesey Ward are not included. Blue lines indicate ward boundaries.

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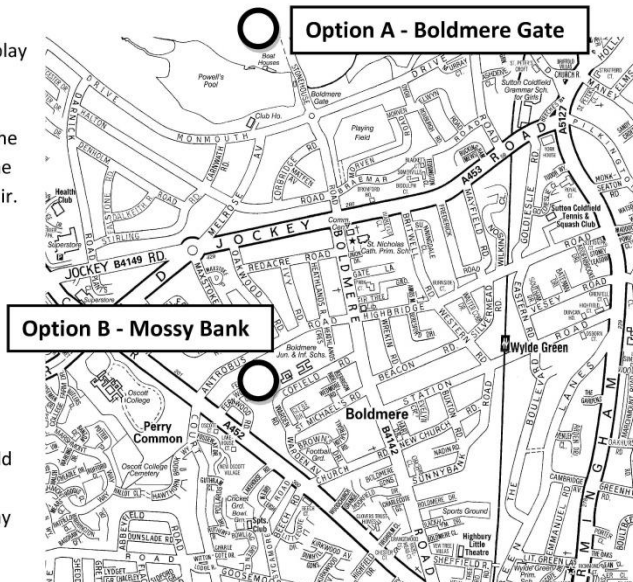
## Proposed New Play Area in Boldmere



Dear residents,

We are planning a new play area for Boldmere and we would appreciate your feedback on which of two shortlisted sites you would prefer.

At Boldmere Gate the play area would be located within Sutton Park past Powell's Pool, next to the 2<sup>nd</sup> car park, which is the site of the former funfair.



Mossy Bank is a small park adjacent to Boldmere Infant and Junior schools on Cofield Road. It can also be accessed via an alleyway on Antrobus Road.

Each site would be suitable for a play area but there are pros and cons for each and for different members of the community, which is why we are consulting locally.

An information event will be held at:

### **The Carpenter's Arms Community Centre**

(13A Boldmere Rd) on:

**Saturday 18th March 10am until 2pm**

The following questionnaire can be posted or emailed by Friday 24<sup>th</sup> March.  
Additional information is also available on the web at:

**[www.SuttonColdfieldTownCouncil.gov.uk](http://www.SuttonColdfieldTownCouncil.gov.uk)**

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It was difficult to set a catchment area without bias to either site as it was assumed that families with children would most likely vote for the play area location nearest them for convenience (however the actual results do not reflect this). Roughly speaking families inside the red zones could walk to the potential site whereas outside the red zones they are closer to other existing play facilities like Princess Alice Park, or Short Heath Park (though in east Boldmere the nearest current play area is at the far side of New Hall Valley). If a property was 1m outside the red catchment areas then it did not receive a questionnaire.

To avoid the risk of duplicate votes the distribution of questionnaires was strictly kept within the catchment area and not undertaken through schools, libraries or groups etc. Also each questionnaire was numbered.

## Proposed New Play Area in Boldmere

### Questionnaire:

1. Does your household currently include children aged 0 to 13?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  
2. Do you currently take children to play areas?
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Yes >>> do you/they like to visit any of these local play areas?  
(tick multiple boxes if you wish)
    - ☐ Princess Alice Park play area
    - ☐ Sutton Town Gate playground
    - ☐ Banners Gate play area
    - ☐ Short Heath Park play ground
    - ☐ Newhall Valley junior and toddler play grounds
    - ☐ Other .....
  
3. Which location would you prefer for the new play area?
  - ☐ Option A – Boldmere Gate
  - ☐ Option B – Mossy Bank
  - ☐ No preference
  
4. Which age group would you like to prioritise at your preferred play area location? (tick multiple boxes if you wish)
  - ☐ Toddlers
  - ☐ Juniors
  - ☐ Older children

Your postcode:	Any additional comments?

### Thank you

Please post your response in the attached envelope, or scan/photo and email to:

**LPG@birmingham.gov.uk**

Deadline for returns: **Friday 24th March**

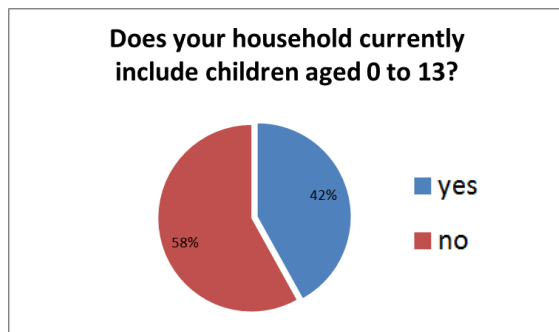
### Information event drop-in

An information event was held at The Carpenter's Arms Community Centre on Saturday 18th March, 10am until 2pm. Over 40 residents attended throughout the day including some children.

## Results

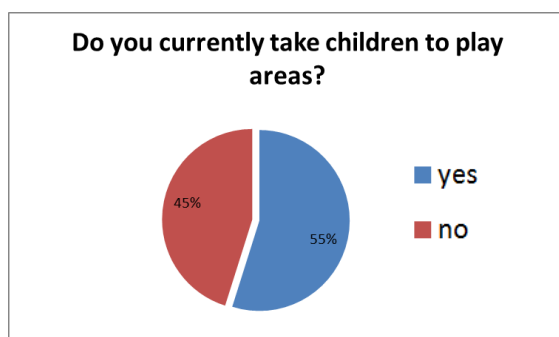
A total of 2,525 questionnaires were sent out between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of March with a return date of 24<sup>th</sup> March. In all 531 responses have been received, in the main by the freepost envelope, with a small number by email or by hand. Nine letters / emails were sent in by residents outside of the catchment area. This excellent level of response (21%) is high.

Q1



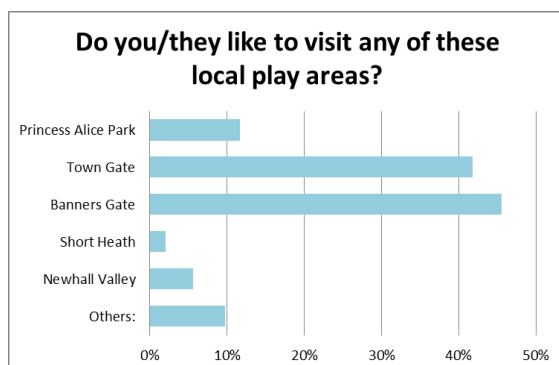
We asked this so that it would be possible to separate the voting of families with children (ages 0 to 13) from those without. It shows that 42% of respondents are in this group.

Q2/1



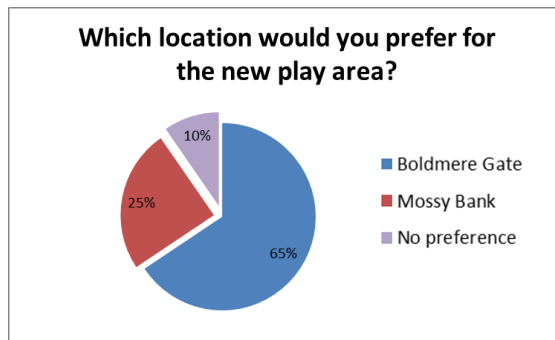
This question allowed for grandparents or carers to add their voice to a potential children's facility. It indicates that 13% of respondents are grandparents or carers of 0 to 13 year olds with a direct interest in play provision.

Q2/2



The two local Sutton Park play areas are by far the most popular and regularly used by residents in the catchment area. It is likely that all but the nearest residents drive to these sites, or else drive to Boldmere Gate and then walk due to the distances involved. 11% of respondents also said they visit Sandwell Valley, Walsall Arboretum, Tamworth Castle, Lichfield's Beacon Park and/or Cannon Hill Park, which are all destination parks in themselves. Little Aston play area, next to Little Aston Primary School, was also mentioned favourably.

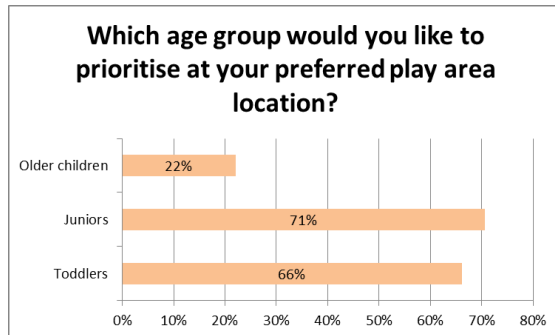
Q3



With 340 votes Boldmere Gate is the clear favourite. Mossy Bank received 128 votes and there were 50 with 'No preference' and 13 others, totalling 531 returns.

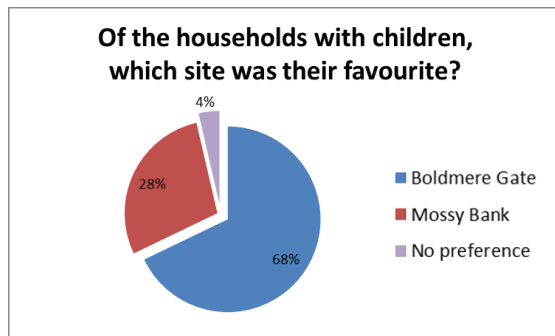
(Below there is a chart showing the vote for families with children aged 0 to 13.)

Q4



Prioritising toddlers and juniors was clearly preferred in the voting.

Families



There was a chance that households without children would vote differently to those with children (aged 0 to 13) but the results are very similar if not slightly in favour of Boldmere Gate.

Votes by location



This plan shows voting results according to generalised postcode areas. It is striking how uniformly spread the voting is. There are however noticeable clusters of votes for Boldmere Gate near Cofield Road, and for Mossy Bank near Monmouth Drive roundabout, which no doubt illustrates residents' anxiety about intensifying traffic or people near their homes.



## Feedback and comments

Highlights of the feedback received:

- Boldmere Gate
- Mossy Bank
- No preference

I have no young children but I think it is important that all age groups have a safe play area.

Local residents use Mossy Bank to walk their dogs. They wouldn't be able to do that if it was a playground.

Boldmere Gate too near Monmouth Drive and difficulties crossing at roundabout.

Fantastic news that new playground is coming to Boldmere!!

Good to have an area for older children instead of them hanging around streets with nowhere to go

Neither of the sites are ideal. A more local site (Boldmere High St) would be preferred.

Mossy Bank is a much underutilised resource. A play area at the Antrobus Road end would be great, but the whole area could be better developed for informal use and play for 7-13yr olds. Don't spoil it though, and ban dogs using it as a toilet.

I can foresee parking issues if Mossy Bank is used but it is more within walking distance for short legs and mum's with prams.

I strongly feel that a play area should not be near gardens. In the past garden fences has been burnt and gardens broken into. A play area would encourage children to come. At the moment Mossy Bank is a pleasant place where local children can meet and play

I know money is an issue but surely there is nothing to stop us starting with something small that we can develop as the years pass. We have an incredibly active and supportive community here in Boldmere, and this is something we feel very strongly about and we would be willing to muck in with developing and raising additional funds for. Please with this, toilets and cafe!!

It would be great to have a local facility for our grand-children.

Boldmere Gate has parking on the road + it's great to get children into the park + accessible for St Nics, New Oscott and Boldmere kids

Thank you for thinking of Boldmere families. We are desperate for child friendly areas.

The Mossy Bank site will encourage anti-social behaviour at an un-overlooked site, encourage prolonged parent parking on already congested residential streets, be exclusively aimed at parents of Boldmere School. Should invest in current Sutton Park play areas and not create a new one.

Being able to walk to the play area would be a big bonus. For Boldmere Gate most would drive.

Mossy Bank is unsuitable due to parking problems along Cofield Road and a large amount of dogs that use Mossy Bank as a toilet, totally unsuitable for a play area.

The local children need a local area to play and next to Boldmere School would be ideal and appropriate, no main road to cross.

This is a wonderful idea!

I don't think either location is close enough to the centre of Boldmere. People would probably drive to Boldmere Gate - bad idea.

If the play area is for Boldmere residents then it needs to be in Boldmere. Sutton Park is for a wider group.

We need different equipment to current sites (e.g. Banners Gate, Town Gate). Options for expansion as budget allows. Toilet facilities with children are essential as are parking facilities. Although we could walk to Boldmere Gate if we wanted to pop in after school we'd have to drop the car off first. We would probably drive to Mossy Bank so would just go to Sutton Park instead. Would like to see money spent on something different to local facilities.

# Recommendations

## Boldmere Gate

Boldmere Gate is clearly the preferred site for a new play area of the two, with 65% of the questionnaire vote compared with 25% for Mossy Bank, whilst 10% had no preference. It must be said that perhaps half of the support for Boldmere Gate was a negative vote, i.e. as a preferred alternative to Mossy Bank, with that site's apparent ASB and car parking problems.

Boldmere Gate is a natural choice for a play facility due to the existing infrastructure including car parking and an old toilet block and the lack of residencies that would be impacted upon. Boldmere Gate offers the possibility of becoming a destination play area. In fact there were many comments received about developing this site along the lines of premier play parks like Sandwell Valley/Dartmouth Park, Lichfield's Beacon Park or Walsall Arboretum. The current budget set aside for Boldmere's new play area is approximately £100k, but these premier sites cost many times more, upwards of £500k. Perhaps one mechanism for providing ambitious play facilities at Boldmere Gate could be to do several phases over a number of years.

**Aerial photo of the Boldmere Gate area.**



Proposed play area location shown in red.

Example large scale adventure play area location shown in green.

Imagery ©2017 Google, Map data ©2017 Google

If Boldmere Gate were chosen as the site for a new play area I would recommend that it be designed in such a way to allow for future phases of expansion, as the available site could accommodate a large facility. A long term masterplan could be drawn up to design for different age groups, long term phasing, assessing priorities, improving existing car parking and toilet facilities, capital funding opportunities, grants and of course income generating opportunities like a café or car park charging.



It must be remembered that a play area at Boldmere Gate would not simply serve Boldmere residents, it would inevitably draw in families from further afield. The number of families that it would draw in and the distance they would willing to travel from would be proportional to the scale of the play area development. If a local play area is required primarily to serve local families then the facility should perhaps be kept modest.

## Mossy Bank

**Aerial photo of Mossy Bank (outline in green). Proposed play area location shown in red.**



Imagery ©2017 Google, Map data ©2017 Google

Whilst there is definite core support for a play area at Mossy Bank based upon its proximity to housing, especially for families who would walk, and the instant customer base of pupils attending adjacent schools, the majority of local people in the vicinity of Mossy Bank in fact voted for Boldmere Gate due to one or more of three significant problems:

1. Parking problems on Cofield, Warden and Antrobus Roads, caused in the main by the drop offs and collections at Boldmere Infant & Junior Schools - Parking is often a problem around schools but from the sheer number of comments received it is evident that it is causing persistent weekday nuisance. A play area at Mossy Bank would likely attract a few extra cars on weekends, but more significantly would worsen the parking during the week by encouraging parents parking on local roads to stay that bit longer, while they visit the play area.
2. Anti-social behaviour and the fear thereof. Questionnaire comments about anti-social behaviour on Mossy Bank were almost as numerous as those regarding car parking. Mossy Bank is one of only a few public open spaces in the area and therefore will attract local

teenagers and young adults eager to enjoy themselves. In general residents have advised that this entails groups gathering in the evenings and early hours, with a party atmosphere, talking loudly, shouting, drinking, smoking and sometimes having a fire, presumably using dead wood from the copse of trees. Whilst this is all to be expected for a park it evidently causes noise, disturbance and anxiety for nearby residents. For this kind of late evening misuse Mossy Bank is close to housing and has poor surveillance.

3. Dog walkers. There were mixed comments regarding dogs at Mossy Bank. Some keen on walking their dogs there want to protect the current site from any changes that they feel threaten dog walking on site. They perhaps do not realise that a play area would take up only a small amount of the site and be fenced off from general grass areas. Other comments though were negative to dog walkers, accusing them of not clearing up and making the park too unsanitary for other uses; people said they would like to play there (football, picnics etc.) but cannot due to the amount of dog mess.

It is clear that whether Mossy Bank does or does not receive a new play area there are significant local issues that will not go away unless action is taken. It is also clear that Mossy Bank is a very important local park, albeit a pocket park, due to there being very few alternatives in Boldmere, and as such I feel it is an untapped, scarce, local resource. Efforts could be made to maximise its usefulness to the wider Boldmere community, however due to the level of local anxiety I would recommend that any 'improvements' are undertaken gradually and at a speed that the community are comfortable with. This would most commonly be done by forming a 'Friends of Mossy Bank' group, affiliated to Birmingham Open Spaces Forum, and with a spectrum of people on it (for instance, not just dog walkers). A Friends group could liaise with council officers and police, take forward projects and seek funding and steer the direction the site should head in.

To begin with I would suggest that the community reclaim the park for themselves rather than be a victim of late night anti-social behaviour and dog fouling. Late night activity could be controlled by fencing and gating off the site and managing the locking and unlocking of the gates to deter late night use. Litter bins, signage and discussions with dog walkers would help – perhaps even fencing off an area for dogs to exercise like is more common on the continent or even like the dog play area in Shirley Park, Solihull.

Car parking options should be investigated through the Constituency Engineer in partnership with the schools.

Mossy Bank would look superb with spring bulb planting, some seating, picnic tables and bins, a community notice board. Once this was implemented then the suggestion of a play area or simply some play pieces like boulders, logs, timber carvings and a set of swings would be more palatable and could grow and develop organically.



## Conclusion

The high level of response (21%) to the postal questionnaires is encouraging, and it is an indication of the strength of feeling and general support for a new local play area.

**Boldmere Gate** is the clear winner of the public vote and so it would be very difficult to justify choosing the Mossy Bank site. Boldmere Gate would benefit from a vision and masterplan before any play facilities are built there so as to not preclude future expansion possibilities.

**Mossy Bank** desperately needs a Friends Group to reclaim ownership of it from anti-social behaviour and dog mess. Boldmere in general needs Mossy Bank to develop into something much more useful for the wider community, but this should be undertaken gradually and at a speed that the local community are comfortable with.

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This report was prepared for:

**Royal Sutton Coldfield Town  
Council**



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