

# Swing gets council nod

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THE Koondrook community will get their all-abilities park and a wheelchair swing they have fund-raised for after Gannawarra Shire councillors voted unanimously to amend a staff plan to install a different piece of equipment.

The council last Wednesday night voted in favour of a \$590,000 tender for the creation of the park being awarded to local builders, but reduced the contribution to come from Koondrook community funds for the over-budget project and specified that it include a Liberty Swing.

The Liberty Swing, which accommodates a wheelchair, was the original inspiration for fundraising efforts in the Koondrook community which led to the creation of the all-abilities park.

The community raised \$22,500 for the swing over several years, \$15,000 of which was donated by Kerang's Bus Stop Recycle Shop.

However, the swing was left out of the final playground plan after council staff were persuaded by expert advice that "inclusiveness" - being able to share play equipment with others - was of primary importance for kids with disabilities.

Staff had opted instead for an item called a Sway Fun, which can accommodate wheelchairs and small groups of people.

While the decision had been discussed with councillors there had apparently not been effective consultation with the Koondrook community about it and it was not referred to it in the council report.

Speaking on the issue at the meeting, Cr Kelvin Burt said that Deputy Mayor Garner Smith had "started the conversation" with



Gannawarra Shire councillors and council infrastructure manager Geoff Rollinson met members of the Koondrook community last Monday to hear their views about the Liberty Swing and the all-abilities park project.

Picture: JENNY DENTON

other councillors about community discontent over the decision.

Mayor Charlie Gillingham had then organised a meeting with the Koondrook community and Murray Ward councillor Ross Stanton "did all the research" to compare the two pieces of equipment and "came up with an answer".

"Everyone's pretty well changed their mind I think on how we were going to vote," Cr Burt said.

"So I reckon it's well done by all staff members and (everyone) — the outcome of this should be good."

Cr Stanton described the choice between the two products as difficult but said the Sway Fun, while said to be more inclusive, had drawbacks, including the fact it was produced in America and seemed not to be covered by warranty.

The Liberty Swing was produced in Australia and had a five-year warranty, he said.

Cr Stanton also said the Sway Fun had an apparent age limit of 12 years and didn't offer the same degree of movement as the Liberty Swing.

Ultimately, it seemed it was the feelings of the Koondrook community that were the deciding factor. "To be honest, the community

have put a lot of time and effort into raising the funds," Cr Stanton said.

"That's what their heart was set on, that's what they expressed to us, so I think in this case, given the difference between the two, that we should follow their wishes."

Crs Link and Smith also spoke enthusiastically about the processes that had led to the councillors' decision.

"I found it a very educational process about learning the best way to operate a council for the benefit of the community," Cr Smith said, expressing appreciation to council staff for their input, which he described as "correct".

"I must admit, if it was up to me, I'd still probably go for the Sway Fun, but you know what, it's not up to me," he said.

"I would just like to say that this has been a great example of the community, the shire staff and councillors all coming together, having an input and coming up with the best outcome for the community."

Koondrook Development Association president Bryan Goble said a sign advising the project had commenced went up at the Main Street park site on Thursday.

Mr Goble said he thought it was very positive that the councillors had taken the initiative to listen to a range of views on the issue.

"It certainly set some good grounding for community consultation," he said.

Mr Goble said a sum of \$25,000 — reduced from the initial figure of \$35,000 — from the former Koondrook Hall Committee which would help cover a budget overrun for the park would be transferred to the council by the end of last week.



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