

**LLANTWIT FARDRE COMMUNITY COUNCIL
CYNGOR CYMUNED LLANILTUD FAERDREF**



LEISURE AND AMENITIES COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE CLERK

1. PLAY AREA SAFETY SURFACING ACROSS THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL AREA

- 1.1** As Members are aware the Community Council uses play bark in several of their play areas as a safety surface beneath play equipment. While it provides impact absorption and meets safety requirements it requires frequent replenishment due to displacement, weathering and natural decompression.
- 1.2** At present the Council spends approximately £5,000 per year on the supply and replacement of the play bark across play areas. This cost does not include staff time or labour associated with the installation and ongoing maintenance.
- 1.3** The following table shows the comparison between issues with existing play bark surfaces and a proposed alternative of rubber mulch surfacing:-

Play Bark Surfacing	Rubber Mulch Surfacing
High ongoing maintenance – bark is easily displaced by use and weather, requiring regular top-ups	Durability – rubber mulch has a longer lifespan with minimal material loss over time
Deterioration – bark naturally breaks down, reducing effectiveness and appearance, with weeds often appearing	Reduced long-term costs – higher initial installation costs may be offset by lower maintenance and replacement costs over several years
Accessibility – bark surfaces can be difficult for wheelchair users and those with mobility impairments	Improved accessibility – provides a firmer, more even surface suitable for inclusive play

Play Bark Surfacing

Cleanliness and safety – bark can become muddy, contaminated, and scattered

Rubber Mulch Surfacing

Cleaner appearance – less prone to mud, scattering, and organic decay; maintains impact absorption for fall protection

1.4 Officer have received an initial costing for replacing the surfacing at **Woodlands Upper** and **Ysgol Ty Coch** play areas.

Woodland Upper has been identified due to its location and the significant staff for annual bark replacement time it requires. Ysgol Ty Coch has also been considered due to the extensive bark coverage and its frequent use by the children attending the adjacent Special Education Needs provision.

1.5 The following quote have been received; -

- Woodlands Upper **£17,348.00 + VAT** which entails
 - x separate areas to be cleared of bark – approx. 152m² £2,200
 - new type of base laid @ 120mm with weed control -£2,700
 - new rubber mulch surface @50mm- £11,248
 - prelims- £600.00

- Ysgol Ty Coch play Area **£31,830.00 + VAT** which entails
 - Area approx. 312m² cleared of mulch (Left on site in woodland) £1,800
 - Type 1 laid @ 120mm with weed control £5,280
 - New rubber mulch surface laid @50mm - £23,600
 - Plant -£400
 - Prelims - £750

1.6 Financial considerations for Members to discuss is as follows: -

- The current annual spend on play bark is approximately **£5,000**
- Rubber mulch would require a higher upfront capital investment; however, the longevity may reduce or eliminate the need for annual resurfacing costs.
- When assessed over a five-to-ten-year period, rubber mulch may offer an overall cost saving along with staff working time.

1.7 Environmental consideration inline with the Council's Biodiversity Plan includes the fact that rubber mulch is typically manufactured from recycled tyres, contributing to the reuse of waste materials.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Members

1. Investigates the feasibility and full life-cycle costs of replacing play bark with rubber mulch in one or more play areas.
2. Considers a pilot installation to assess performance, maintenance requirements, and feedback.
3. Reviews long-term budget implications in comparison with the current annual £5,000 spend on bark surfacing.