

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 07 November 2022

Portfolio:	Leisure and Community
Subject:	Play and Recreational Facilities Improvement Programme
Report of:	Director of Leisure and Community
Corporate Priorities:	Leisure Opportunities for Health and Fun

Purpose:

To agree a five-year improvement programme for the Council's existing play and recreational facilities in the Borough.

Executive summary:

The investment in play areas and recreational facilities over the last 10 years has been both valued by elected members and well received with residents. This has been supported by a responsive inspection and maintenance service that has ensured facilities are kept safe and operational.

To continue to provide and maintain a good standard of play and recreational provision, and to ensure these existing facilities remain safe, attractive and accessible to all children and young people across the Borough, a review of the current arrangements has been undertaken.

Recommendation/Recommended Option:

It is recommended that the Executive approves:

- (a) the five-year play and recreational improvement programme as detailed in the report; and
- (b) a budget allocation of up to £950,000 from the open spaces maintenance reserve.

Cost of proposals:

£950,000 funded from the open spaces maintenance reserve.

Appendices:

[A: Phasing of the most recent five-year play area improvement programme \(2018-2023\)](#)

B: Confidential risk assessment statement

Reference papers:

Report to the Executive for Decision – March 2018
Play Area Improvement Programme

Report to the Executive for Decision – October 2013
Safety Surfacing Improvement Programme

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Executive Briefing Paper

Date:	07 November 2022
Subject:	Play and Recreational Facilities Improvement Programme
Briefing by:	Director of Leisure and Community
Portfolio:	Leisure and Community

INTRODUCTION

1. In 2008 the Council had 43 play areas and 5 skate ramps located across the Borough that are provided for children and young people up to the age of 15.
2. In 2022, this number increased to 46 play areas with three large destination play areas being constructed at Holly Hill, Daedalus Common and Abbey Meadows.
3. Since 2015 the Council has used Section 106 (S106) contributions and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to fund new play areas and refurbish existing ones.
4. In 2014/15 a review of all 43 play areas was undertaken. The purpose of the review was to identify those play areas with the greatest need for improvement and prioritise those that required attention. No improvements to the skate facilities were undertaken as part of this programme.
5. This was the start of the play area improvement programme which has been in place since 2015, resulting in a marked improvement in the standard and quality of play area provision across the Borough.
6. Unfortunately, the original allocation of S106 contributions have now been used and all CIL funds are currently being directed to other corporate priority projects. Therefore, the Council needs to consider alternative sources of funding and identify the amount required to ensure that a safe and adequate standard of play provision can be maintained.

BACKGROUND

7. In March 2015, the Executive approved an initial three-year play area priority improvement programme, funded by Section 106 developer contributions collected by the Council for the provision of play and recreational facilities.
8. In previous years, play area improvements had consisted of complete

refurbishments, including new equipment, surfacing and ancillary items. Those play areas identified in the 2015 three-year priority programme were some of the oldest facilities in the Borough, with the greatest need for improvement. As a result of this programme, 12 play areas underwent improvement works at a cost of £725,000.

9. This programme of play area refurbishments used virtually all the S106 contributions available for the provision of play and recreational facilities. Therefore, to enable the Council to continue to maintain the standard of play area provision, in March 2018, the Executive approved a further five-year play area programme for the period 2018 – 2023 at a cost of £500,000, funded by CIL contributions.
10. The emphasis was on providing new, more challenging, and inclusive equipment to ensure that the Council's play areas provided a variety of equipment suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities. Existing equipment and floor graphics were also installed at sites to help give the entire play area the look and feel of a complete refurbishment.
11. The table marked Appendix A shows the phasing of the most recent five-year play area improvement programme. Residents and ward councillors were consulted on each of the proposed improvements.
12. In addition to the play area improvement programme, the Streetscene service coordinate a programme of safety surface replacement works as part of a ten-year improvement programme, approved by the Executive in October 2013, which also included reinstatement of dilapidated or broken items of play equipment.
13. The aim of the safety surface programme is to ensure that these issues are dealt with promptly rather than having to wait until the play area improvement works are undertaken. Leisure and Streetscene teams work together to ensure that these works are coordinated, and ongoing maintenance issues are considered.
14. The replacement of larger items of dilapidated or broken equipment was introduced following a review of the play area inspection and maintenance arrangements undertaken as part of the Streetscene Vanguard Intervention in 2018.
15. The Council now has 6 skatepark facilities. The most recent installation (2015) at Park Lane Recreation Ground is in good condition as are the small metal ramps at Locks Heath House Park (1999) and Locks Heath Shopping Centre (2006). There are two similar ramps at Wicor Recreation Ground (2004) and Stubbington Recreation Ground (2005) that will require major works within the next two years. This is largely due to deterioration in the metal structure and ramp surface. The small concrete ramp at Abshot Park (2015) is in a poor state of repair because of frequent vandalism.
16. All 46 play areas and 6 skate parks are inspected and maintained by the Council's Play Area Inspector. In addition to these facilities, they also regularly inspect and maintain the following outdoor recreational facilities and equipment:
 - 10 lifesaving rescue aids (defibrillators)
 - 2 emergency telephones on the foreshore
 - 19 mini football goals

- 15 Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA's) and basketball courts
 - 5 outdoor gym areas
 - 19 teen shelters"
17. The additional play area provision has largely been "destination play areas" which are larger than standard facilities with more items of equipment, resulting in more inspections and routine repairs. The Play Area Inspector is currently at capacity and there is now a need to establish extra capacity to inspect and maintain the existing play and recreational facilities owned by Fareham Borough Council.
 18. Earlier this year, the government launched its UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), as part of its Levelling Up agenda. It provides £2.6 billion of funding intended to reduce inequalities between communities. The funding covers the three-year period up to March 2025, and the Council has been allocated a total of £1m. It is proposed that a proportion will be allocated to the reconfiguration and improvement of Crossfell Walk Play Area.
 19. A separate allocation of section 106 contributions will be made available to implement a new children's play area on the open space on Laurel Grove, behind Fareham College. Once the land had been transferred into the Councils ownership, consultation with local residents will be carried out.

EXISTING BUDGETS

Safety Surfacing Programme (2013 to 2023)

20. The budget for replacing the play area safety surfacing is funded from S106 contributions. The current budget provision of £350,000 has funded an ongoing programme of replacement safety surfacing works resulting from vandalism and general wear and tear. This is particularly important from a health and safety perspective as damaged surfacing can lead to accidents such as trips and falls which often result in insurance claims.
21. The play area safety surfacing programme has historically had a capital budget of £350,000 with £17,000 available for the final year (2022) of the current programme. This will not be sufficient to address the repairs and replacement to safety surfacing as described above and leaves no funding remaining for future years

Play Area Repairs and Maintenance

22. Expenditure associated with repair and maintenance of play areas by Streetscene is met by Repair and Maintenance of grounds which has a budget of £101,440. This budget also funds repairs and maintenance of public spaces infrastructure including, paths, bollards, gates, fencing etc.
23. Any costs associated with maintenance of play and recreational facilities, including replacement of standard items of equipment that are beyond repair, is funded from this budget. The annual cost of repairs and maintenance varies depending on the scale of repairs and replacement required.
24. The programme of safety inspections and customer reports of damage and vandalism informs the requirement for the repair and maintenance of the Council's 46 play areas, which is funded from the revenue budget for public spaces. It is

important to note that because of robust maintenance and safety inspections the number of reported incidents and accidents remains very low.

25. The budget for repairs, maintenance and safety inspections for the current 46 play areas and 6 skate parks is being reviewed and any changes will be reflected in the forthcoming budget setting process for 2023/34.
26. There is a need to ensure that play areas are inspected and maintained to a safe standard as this reduces the risk of accidents and helps to mitigate against insurance claims resulting from associated injuries. To avoid these issues, the Council needs to determine the strategy for play area repairs and maintenance going forward. The following information considers two options:

5-year play area and safety surfacing improvement programme (2023-2028)

Safety Surfacing

27. The replacement of worn and damaged safety surfacing is essential. It is considered that a minimum annual budget of £50,000 is required to continue with ongoing maintenance and repairs to safety surfacing.

Skate Facilities

28. The skate ramps at Wicor Recreation Ground, Stubbington Recreation Ground and Abshot Road need major repairs or replacing. Given the problems experienced with frequent vandalism of the Abshot Road skate ramp, this facility could be closed and removed as there are two alternative skate ramps located nearby – Locks Heath House Park (0.7 miles) and behind Locks Heath Shopping Centre (1.1 miles)
29. It is estimated that the replacement of the skate ramps at Wicor and Stubbington Recreation Grounds would cost in the region of £100,000 each. The material used to construct the replacement skate facilities would be concrete and not metal. This is in line with the construction of the Park Lane skate park which has proven to be robust, long lasting and easier to maintain as well as being popular with skaters. This is considered a more cost-effective option to the interim repairs to the current metal skate ramps.

Play Area Improvement Programme

30. If the current budget of £100,000 per annum were to be continued for a further 5 years, this would allow the programme of play area improvements to continue.
31. However, it is anticipated that with the current sharp increase in costs of materials, labour and the price of new equipment, there would need to be a reduction in the number of play areas included each year in the improvement programme, from 4 to 3 within the proposed budget of £100,000 per annum.
32. If this is the preferred option, officers would carry out a review of play areas by March 2023 to help identify those that haven't had any recent investment and to help prioritise those that require attention over the next five years. This approach would enable up to 15 play areas to undergo improvement works over the next 5 years (2023 to 2028).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

33. The proposals set out will require additional funding of £150,000 per annum plus an additional one-off amount of £200,000 to upgrade the skate park facilities at Wicor and Stubbington Recreation Grounds.
34. The costs in the table below show the projected spend over 5 years.

Item	Cost per annum	5-Year Cost
Safety Surfacing Programme	£50,000	£250,000
Play Area Improvement Programme (3 per year)	£100,000	£500,000
Total	£150,000	£750,000
Skate Park Upgrade (one off amount)	£200,000	
Grand Total		£950,000

35. There are sufficient funds available in the open spaces maintenance reserve to fund the total cost of £950,000.

RISK ASSESSMENT

36. It is important to maintain the play areas and surfaces to ensure public safety. The risks of not continuing to maintain/upgrade play areas and safety surfacing are:-
- Limited opportunity to introduce new and inclusive play equipment to help ensure more of the Councils play areas are accessible
 - Items of broken or damaged equipment being taken out of use for lengthy periods of time. If the damage to equipment or surfacing was extensive and presented a risk to users, then entire play area may need to be closed
 - Loss of reputation for the Council and possible financial risks due to potential insurance claims and any resulting negative publicity
37. The implications on using the open spaces maintenance reserve to fund a 5-year play and recreational improvement programme can be found in the confidential risk assessment statement marked Appendix B.

CONCLUSION

38. The opportunity for children and young people to play creatively in good quality environments is essential to their development. Through play they acquire skills and abilities which cannot be learnt in any other way. It is therefore important for

the Council to continue to provide good quality play and recreational facilities and to ensure all children and young people in the Borough have access to this development opportunity.

39. The investment in play area and recreational facilities over the last 10 years has been both valued by elected members and well received with residents. This has been supported by a responsive inspection and maintenance service that has ensured facilities are kept safe and operational with robust defence against insurance claims.
40. With the increase in the number of play and recreational facilities that the Council now provides and the need to find new sources of funding to maintain current standards has required a review of the current arrangements.
41. The five-year play and recreational facilities improvement programme being proposed to help ensure the Council's existing play and recreational facilities continue to be accessible and well maintained, can be funded from the open space's maintenance reserve.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Emma Watts. Ext. 4440