

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 7 October 2013

Portfolio: Streetscene
Subject: **Play Area Safety Surface Replacement Programme**
Report of: Director of Street Scene
Strategy/Policy: Leisure Strategy

Corporate Objective: A safe and healthy place to live and work

Purpose:

To put forward proposals for a programme of works to replace safety surfacing in the Borough Council's play areas.

Executive summary:

The Council maintains 45 play areas located throughout the Borough, mainly on leisure and housing land. Access to all of these unsupervised play areas is free and unrestricted.

As part of a management review of these facilities, Officers from the Streetscene Department recently assessed the maintenance of the Council's play areas and it was noted that although the actual play equipment should last between 20 and 25 years, the safety surface beneath the equipment (rubber crumb) has a lifespan of just 10 - 15 years. This creates a gap between the estimated replacement date of a play area and the need to replace or renovate the safety surface.

In spring 2013 a survey was completed to assess the current condition of the safety surfaces. The survey revealed that some of the play area surfacing was reaching the end of its useful life although the play equipment was still providing a good play environment for children.

The main issue arising from a worn safety surface is the increasing risk of a child slipping on the smooth surface and colliding with the equipment causing injury.

In order to reduce this risk it will be necessary to implement a safety surface replacement programme.

Recommendations:

That the Executive agrees:

- (a) a budget of £350,000, funded from the open spaces maintenance reserve, be approved for a 10 year replacement programme for the Council's play area

safety surfaces; and

- (b) that officers conduct a tender exercise or identify a suitable framework agreement to enable procurement of the necessary works.

Reason:

To ensure play facilities remain safe, attractive and accessible to all children and young adults throughout the Borough.

Cost of proposals:

£350,000 funded from the open space maintenance reserve.

Appendices: **A: Play area safety surface condition survey**

Background papers: **None**

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Executive Briefing Paper

Date: 7 October 2013

Subject: Play Area Safety Surface Replacement Programme

Briefing by: Director of Street Scene

Portfolio: Streetscene

INTRODUCTION

1. The opportunity to play creatively in high-quality environments is essential to the development of children. Through their play they acquire skills and abilities which can be learnt in no other way. It is therefore important for the Council to continue to provide these facilities within easy walking distance of local residents to ensure all the children in the Borough have access to this development opportunity.
2. To achieve the above provision the Council maintains 45 play areas located throughout the Borough, mainly on leisure and housing land. Access to all of these unsupervised play areas is free and unrestricted.
3. As part of the Streetscene Service, the Council's Grounds Maintenance Team is responsible for inspecting and maintaining the play facilities.
4. A play inspector/fitter, trained to Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) standard, is employed to inspect and undertake minor repairs to all of the play areas. Inspections take place on a frequency between 1 and 4 times per week depending on usage.
5. The Council has a duty under the Health & Safety at Work Act (1974) to ensure the health & safety of users, so far as reasonably practicable and also the Occupier's Liability Act (1957 - revised 1984) that requires that people can expect to be reasonably safe when using the Council's playgrounds.
6. All play areas have a variety of fixed equipment suitable for children aged two to five years (toddler) and children aged six to twelve years old (junior). Some sites have equipment suitable for older children up to fourteen years old. Skate parks cater for a wider age range of children and adults.

PLAY AREA REVIEW

7. Officers from the Streetscene Department recently reviewed the maintenance of the Council's play areas as part of the ongoing management of these facilities

and it was noted that although play equipment should last between 20 and 25 years, the most commonly used safety surfaces in play area construction beneath the equipment (rubber crumb) has a lifespan of just 10 - 15 years. This creates a gap between the estimated replacement date of a play area and the need to replace or renovate the safety surface.

8. Rubber crumb safety surface is designed to absorb the impact of a child's fall from the equipment it surrounds. The depth of surface is dependent on the critical fall height (CFH) from the equipment. Over time this type of surface will become smooth through wear and this can then introduce a slip hazard to a play area and could also reduce the ability to absorb impact.
9. The Council's play areas range in age from the oldest, installed in 1992, to the most recent installation in 2013. There is no programme in place to renovate or replace the play area safety surfaces other than the repair patching of damaged areas as required. However, there is a play area replacement programme to replace facilities that have reached the end of their expected service. The programme is funded through Section 106 gains and is therefore limited as to the locality funds can be allocated to. The budget is also a reducing one as new developments have slowed down in recent years and the change in legislation introducing the Community Infrastructure Levy has meant direct funding from new developments to this budget has ceased.
10. As a result of the gap highlighted in the maintenance review, a condition survey of all the Council's play area safety surfaces was undertaken in spring 2013 (Appendix 1): The survey revealed that some of the play area surfacing was reaching the end of its useful life although the play equipment was still providing a good play environment for children.
11. To ensure the play facilities remain available to all areas of the community it will be necessary to replace worn surfaces before they become a hazard to users.

OPTIONS

12. Officers have considered a number of options to resolve this matter, and these are set out below:-

Option 1

13. Close the play areas when surfaces become too worn for continual safe use. Closing facilities would generate negative publicity and in the short term some areas of the Borough may be disadvantaged more than others depending on the availability of alternative sites nearby.
14. In the longer term, this option would lead to a number of children being without free outdoor play facilities close to where they live.

Option 2

15. Complete the replacement of the rubber crumb surface at an estimated cost of £53.50 per sq m for black 0.6m CFH rising to £81.50 for black 2.0m CFH. The estimated lifespan is approximately 10 - 15 years depending on site usage

Option 3

16. Application of a top coat of black rubber crumb to the existing surface at an estimated cost of £32 per sq m. The estimated lifespan is approximately 5-7 years depending on usage. The shorter lifespan of the product could potentially require two applications to cover the estimated remaining lifespan of a play area.

Option 4

17. Overlay the existing safety surface with a sand filled artificial turf at a cost of approximately £35 per sq m. Additional benefits of this type of surface are its durability, making it harder to vandalise than traditional rubber crumb surfacing. A variety of single colours can be used at no extra cost. The estimated lifespan of this product is 8-10 years.

PROPOSAL

18. The preferred option is Option 4, sand filled artificial turf. The product has been widely used as a play surface on park and school sites nationwide. Local Authority users include Glasgow City Council, Manchester City Council, Dorset County Council and Oldham Metropolitan Council. The product was trialled successfully at Fareham's Park Lane site in June 2013.

RISK ASSESSMENT

19. The main issue arising from a worn safety surface is the increasing risk of a child slipping on the smooth surface and colliding with the equipment causing injury. As well as the distress caused to the child and family, this could lead to a loss of reputation for the Council, and presents a possible financial risk due to potential insurance claims and a risk of negative publicity.
20. In order to reduce the risk to the Council and play area users it will be necessary to either close some sites on a rolling programme or identify funding to create a safety surface replacement programme.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

21. The total cost to replace the surfaces on a 10 year rolling programme is estimated to be £350,000. This can be funded from the open space maintenance reserve.
22. In line with the Council's contract procedure rules the value of the works would require a competitive tender process or the joining of an existing framework agreement.
23. The most appropriate form of tender will need to be discussed in detail with the procurement team as a number of options exist including the use of frameworks and the length of the contract. Due to the value of the contract it is currently subject to EU procurement procedures although the thresholds are due to be reviewed for 2014 and this may influence the tender process.

CONCLUSION

24. Access to free play is an important contribution to a child's health and

development. Fareham Borough Council supports this development by providing facilities that include open spaces and equipped play areas. It is important that children and their parents feel welcome and safe in this environment and are able to access them easily and close to where they live. In order to facilitate this aim it will be necessary to invest into these sites to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose by introducing a rolling safety surface replacement programme.

Reference Papers: None

Appendix A.

Location	Date of Installation	Safety Surface Size (m sq)	Estimated lifespan of surface
King George V multi play	1992	200	1 - 2 years
Birchen Road	1994	110	3 – 4 years
Drake Close	1994	95	1 - 2 years
Sarisbury Green	1994	110	1 - 2 years
Clydesdale (swings, senior multi play & trim trail)	1994	150	
Portchester Park (swings, multi play & seesaw)	1994	290	3 – 4 years
Howerts Close	1994	80	1 - 2 years
Park Lane	1995	170	1 - 2 years
Stubbington Rec.	1995	180	1 - 2 years
Dore Avenue (swings, multi play & trim trail)	1996	215	4 - 5 years
Abshot Road	1998	240	3 – 4 years
Harbour View (swings, roundabout & senior multi play)	1998	130	4 - 5 years
Fareham Park	1998	195	3 – 4 years
Locks Heath House Park (swings & trim trail)	1999	165	1 - 2 years
Swanwick Lane	1999	115	4 - 5 years
Blackbrook Park (swings, junior multi play & trim trail)	1999	275	5 years +
Sweethills (swings, multi play & space net)	1999	210	4 - 5 years
Funtley Rec.	2000	300	4 - 5 years
Castle Street	2000	300	1 - 2 years
Course Park Crescent	2000	130	3 – 4 years
Eastern Parade	2000	250	1 - 2 years
Priory Park	2001	115	1 - 2 years
Segensworth	2001	280	1 - 2 years
Barry's Meadow	2001	300	1 - 2 years
King George V	2002	85	3 – 4 years
Newtown	2002	185	5 years +
Warsash Rec.	2003	160	1 - 2 years
Seafeld Park	2003	135	5 years +
Metcalf Avenue	2003	175	3 – 4 years
Bath Lane	2003	215	3 – 4 years
Longacres	2004	275	1 - 2 years
Sweethills (roundabout & seesaw)	2004	55	4 - 5 years
Badgers Copse	2005	350	4 - 5 years
Portchester Park (rotator, roundabout & space net)	2005	160	4 - 5 years
Salterns Park	2006	110	4 - 5 years
Harbour View (multi play, play panel, roundabout, stepping	2007	160	5 years +

stones)			
Crossfield Walk seesaw	2007	30	5 years +
Clydesdale (junior multi play & seesaw)	2008	120	4 - 5 years
Burridge	2009	130	5 years +
Fielding Road (swings, junior multi play, roundabout & springle)	2009	370	5 years +
Bellfield	2010	255	5 years +
Kenwood Road	2010	110	5 years +
Kites Croft	2010	65	5 years +
Bath Lane roundabout	2010	10	4 - 5 years
St Michael's Road	2011	300	5 years +
Blackbrook Park (basket swing, space net, springle & stepping stones)	2011	150	5 years +
Dore Avenue (basket swing, space net, senior multi play & stepping stones)	2011	110	5 years +
Fielding Road (basket swing, senior multi play & springle)	2011	145	5 years +
Locks Heath House Park (junior multi play & seesaw)	2011	75	4 - 5 years
Crossfell Walk	2012	175	5 years +
Hollybrook Gardens	2012	155	5 years +
West Street	2012	115	5 years +
Laurel Gardens	2013	80	5 years +