

CABINET

Review of Districtwide Playground Provision

20th April 2010

Report of Head of Environmental Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To report back to Cabinet on the recent review of districtwide playground provision as per Council's recent resolution.				
Key Decision	X	Non-Key Decision	Referral from Cabinet Member	
Date Included in Forward Plan		March 2010		
This report is public				

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the policy of playground provision outlined in the report (option 2) is used as the basis for consultation with ward councillors, parish councils and the general public.
- (2) That the results of the consultation exercise are reported back to the Cabinet Member with special responsibility prior to final adoption and implementation.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Council (3 February 2010) resolved the following-

That it be noted that there are no special expenses to declare in respect of play area provision for the 2010/11 budget, but that Council requests Cabinet to review its existing policy for such provision, agreed by Cabinet in September 2006. Specifically it is requested that the review should:

- consider the development of a more robust and strategic policy for play area provision throughout the district, including those owned and managed by others;
- seek to reduce the total number of play areas supported by the City Council, to ensure their future sustainability at an acceptable condition;
- consider providing direct financial support for any play areas provided by others, where these fit with strategic policy.

- 1.2 The outcome of the policy review will then feed back into the completion of the report on parish services and funding, to be undertaken by the relevant Task Group.
- 1.3 The current policy for play area provision is focussed only on play areas owned and maintained by the City Council. Play areas are prioritised through being given a score according to –

i) Proximity to other free playgrounds for similar age groups (25%)

ii) Surrounding demographics (25%)

iii) Strategic location (20%)

iv) Location in relation to sustainable transport (15%)

(v) Indices of deprivation (15%)

Many of the higher scoring play areas have benefitted from capital funded improvement works. Many of the lower scoring play areas are in very poor condition due to lack of investment.

- 1.4 The City Council is currently responsible for maintaining playgrounds at 79 sites (excluding Williamson Park).
- 1.5 Legislation requires that playgrounds are maintained in a safe condition and are accessible. Failing to meet minimum standards (eg safety surfacing) means that the Council risks removal of cover by its insurers in the event of compensation claims and the like. All playgrounds and equipment are inspected for safety on a regular basis by a competent person. In addition all playgrounds have a regular maintenance regime.
- 1.6 Having a large quantity of play areas that in some cases lack any stimulating play equipment but still need to be regularly visited for inspection and maintenance is a waste of resource. It would be far better to focus on providing a better quality network of play areas that can be maintained from within existing resources to a standard that will encourage children to make use of them.
- 1.7 Besides City Council owned playgrounds there are 14 playgrounds provided by Parish Councils and one provided by a residents association. The Parish Council owned playgrounds are generally well used and in good condition. In order to meet legislative requirements the majority of Parish Councils sub contract inspections of their play areas to the City Council.
- 1.8 Whilst there is not a statutory responsibility to provide playgrounds, they do clearly contribute to a number of City Council and LSP priorities especially around the theme of safe and healthy communities and clean and green places.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 A comprehensive review of all play areas owned by District and Parish Councils has now been undertaken. In carrying out this review we have taken account of the following existing policies and studies–
- PPG17- Work already undertaken on PPG17 has assisted the Council with the development of a clear vision for Open Space, Sport and Recreation priorities

and establish direction for the attainment and allocation of resources based on expressed local needs. The study makes numerous recommendations for the longer term development of playgrounds which where currently practical have been incorporated into this report.

- District Play Strategy

Within this policy framework we have also considered the following-

- Current condition and priority of play area
- Size of play area
- Usage of the play area
- Location of the play area- in terms of surrounding demographics, proximity to other play areas and how easily and safely the play area can be accessed
- Type, numbers and condition of play equipment
- Type and condition of safety surfacing
- Number of litter bins
- Number of benches
- Whether by law signs are present
- Where there are gaps in provision

The location of all play areas has been mapped on the Council's GIS system. Details and photographs of each play area have been compiled. A basic summary is shown in Appendix A.

2.2 The review has been undertaken within the parameters of the current revenue and capital budgets available. The intention of the review is not to make savings but to ensure that children on the district can make use of quality playgrounds that are fit for purpose, stimulating and well located.

2.3 In outline terms the strategy adopted for the review is as follows-

- **Areas of the District that because of their location are likely to be well visited by children.** Eg parks and promenade. These should have well equipped play areas suitable for a wide range of ages. These play areas are likely to be used by local children who are prepared to travel further to use a better equipped play area as well as visitors.
- **Areas of the District that have concentrations of population** including urban and rural areas. These should have play areas that are fit for purpose. In some cases there are other adjacent play areas. In this situation consideration should be given to focussing resources on having one fit for purpose play area as opposed to possibly several that aren't fit for purpose. Some of these play areas may just be provided for specific age ranges.

2.4 The review makes recommendations as to the following-

- Locations for new play areas
- Play areas which need to be improved / relocated
- Development of a partnership approach to provision with Parish Councils
- Play areas which are no longer fit for purpose, adjacent to other better play areas, and could reasonably be removed.
- Use of the 2010/11, 2011/12 capital funding allocation
- Working in partnership with community groups

- New developments
 - Use of external funding to make improvements
- 2.5 **Locations for new play areas-** PPG 17 identifies locations where there are clear gaps in provision. It is proposed that in 2010/11 £50,000 of allocated capital funding is used to build at least two new play areas to help the identified gaps.
- 2.6 **Play areas which need to be improved / merged /relocated-**
- Green St, Lancaster-currently has one swing and no safety surfacing. Would be better improved to a natural toddler play area.
 - Dorrington Road, Lancaster - the play area is in a good location but needs improvement. Closing the nearby Arcon House play area would allow us to improve this play area.
 - Essington Avenue, Morecambe- this play area is well located but in poor condition. It would benefit from improvement.
 - Cowshards, Mainways, Lancaster- the play area would benefit from relocation and improvement.
 - Hala Abbeystead / Hala Hill- one play area is poorly located and regularly floods, the other has no stimulating play equipment. There is a clear need for a play area and there are some suitable locations nearby

The cost of the above of estimated at £43,000 which would be funded by the one off revenue allocation for 2010/11 of £40,000 and existing revenue budgets.

- 2.7 **Development of a partnership approach to provision with Parish Councils -** The 14 Parish Council owned play areas and the one community owned play area are all in good locations, generally well used and equipped. The decision to fund and provide the play areas has been taken by the Parish Councils themselves. Safety inspections of the play areas are required and the service is generally contracted to the City Council at a cost to the Parish Council. It is proposed that the 14 Parish Council owned and 1 community owned are considered part of the District's strategic stock of play areas. They will still remain the asset of their owner, however, the City Council will at no charge to the Parish Council / community group provide regular safety inspections of the play areas and undertake minor repairs. The exact details to be agreed in consultation with each Parish. The cost of this to the City Council is estimated at £8,000 per annum and this will be funded from within the existing playground budget. It is proposed that this scheme would commence April 2011.
- 2.8 **Play areas which are no longer fit for purpose, adjacent to other better play areas, and could reasonably be removed**

There are a number of play areas in the District that are not at an acceptable standard and which are currently in a state of decay and in some cases are actually unsafe. The review has identified these play areas and also the nearest and better equipped alternatives. This is shown in the table below-

All distances are 'as the crow flies.'				
Playarea to Close	Nearest Alternative	Distance (m)	Second Alternative	Distance (m)
Abbeystead Drive	Proposed new playarea near Hala Square	320	All playareas on Hala are due to close	
Ambleside Road	Thirlmere Road	370		
Arcon House	Dorrington Road (to be improved)	370	Greaves Park	610
Barnacre Close	Proposed new playarea near Hala Square	570	All playareas on Hala are due to close	
Carwood Gardens	Beech Avenue	170		
Church Brow	Bolton-le-Sands Village	1000	but next to village primary school	
Crag Bank Field	Johnson Close	360	Redruth Drive	590
Forest Park	Willow Lane Playing Field	120	Cedar Road (to be improved)	540
Furness Street	Atherton Road	190	Cedar Road (to be improved)	300
Gregson Road	Scotch Quarry	350	Williamson's Park	500
Hala Hill	Proposed new playarea near Hala Square	130	All playareas on Hala are due to close	
Highgrove Close	Essington Avenue (to be improved)	320	Kilnbank	290
Low Moor	Williamson's Park	240	Scotch Quarry	560
Manor Road	Slyne Recreation Ground	250		
Montrose Crescent	Proposed new playarea in Heysham Village	370	Douglas Park	330
Parliament Street	West End Gardens x 3	260	Regent Park	430
Skerton Cowshard	Relocation to new site in Skerton Cowshard area	290		
St Austell	Redruth Drive	170	Johnson Close	440
The Roods	Warton Village (to be improved)	930		

The one off cost of removing these play areas and reinstating the area that remains is estimated at £10,000. The play equipment will be reused in other play areas. This will be funded from within the 2010/11 playground budget.

2.9 Use of the 2010/11, 2011/12 capital funding allocation- the capital programme allocates £60,000 to playgrounds improvements in 2010/11 and 2011/12. It is proposed that these capital allocations are used to fund the proposals outlined in 2.4 and 2.5 and the remainder is spent on improving the City Council owned playground network.

2.10 Working in partnership with community groups- several of the City Council's play areas have been improved through working in partnership with community groups. These groups can sometimes access funding that would be unavailable to the Council. Improving play areas in this way ensures that the community is fully involved and generates ownership. It is recommended that where possible the Council engages with interested community groups when providing new play areas or improving existing ones.

- 2.11 **New developments-** Many of the better play areas in the District have been handed over to the Council following new developments. In some cases it makes sense to have a play area located within the new development. In some cases it is better for the money the developer budgets for a play area to be spent on upgrading a nearby facility. When new developments are planned it is recommended that officers from Environmental Services have input into determining what is best.
- 2.12 **Use of external funding to make improvements-** in many cases officers have identified opportunities to improve play provision via external funding. External funding opportunities for improvements to Greaves Park and Ryelands Play provision are currently being sought. Where the bidding for funding is consistent with the outlined policy for playground provision and where officers agree that the use of external funding will not create ongoing revenue liabilities it is recommended that the bidding for (and acceptance of) the funding is delegated to Head of Environmental Services who already has delegated responsibility for management of open space.

3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 At this stage the relevant officers within the Community Engagement service have been consulted in preparing this report. It is proposed that if agreed by Cabinet the recommendations outlined in this report are used as a basis for consultation with Parish Councils, Ward Councillors, the general public and especially children. The feedback from the consultation exercise will be reported to the Cabinet Member with special responsibility. Any significant changes to the recommendations outlined as a result of consultation may result in other changes to the recommendations.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

4.1

Option	Pros	Cons
1- Adopt the policy for playground provision outlined- without consultation	<p>Provides for a comprehensive, well located, well equipped, sustainable playground network.</p> <p>Encourages partnership working with Parish Councils and allows Parish Councils to divert funds that would otherwise be spent on playground inspections and minor maintenance elsewhere.</p> <p>Focuses on quality rather than quantity but ensures there are play areas within easy reach of most children.</p> <p>Identifies gaps in existing provision and makes recommendations as to how</p>	<p>Doesn't allow for consultation with relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>Reduction in number of play areas</p>

	<p>best to fill these.</p> <p>Allows officers to plan with certainty.</p>	
<p>2- Adopt the policy for playground provision outlined – for consultation</p>	<p>Allows for consultation with relevant stakeholders which will influence implementation.</p> <p>Provides for a comprehensive, well located, well equipped, sustainable playground network.</p> <p>Encourages partnership working with Parish Councils and allows Parish Councils to divert funds that would otherwise be spent on playground inspections and minor maintenance elsewhere.</p> <p>Focuses on quality rather than quantity but ensures there are play areas within easy reach of most children.</p> <p>Identifies gaps in existing provision and makes recommendations as to how best to fill these.</p> <p>Allows officers to plan with certainty.</p>	<p>Reduction in number of play areas</p>
<p>3- Adopt / consult on a policy other than that set out in the report</p>		<p>The recommendations set out in the report have been prepared based on Officers knowledge of the condition of current play ground stock, recommendations of insurers, PPG17 and the recommendations of the Parish Task Group.</p>

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

5.1 The officer preferred option is option 2

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 The report makes recommendations to meet the resolutions of Council.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

Whilst there is not a statutory responsibility to provide playgrounds. They do clearly contribute to a number of City Council and LSP priorities especially around the theme of safe and healthy communities and clean and green places.

PPG17- This study informs the preparation of Local Development Framework Documents, the Council's approach to Sustainability Appraisal, the assessment of planning applications and the negotiation of S106 Agreements. The study provides a key evidence base document to the Submitted Core Strategy informs the future Land Allocations and Development Policies, Development Plan Documents and Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document. The study assists the Council with the development of a clear vision for Open Space, Sport and Recreation priorities and establish direction for the attainment and allocation of resources based on expressed local needs. The study makes numerous recommendations for the longer term development of playgrounds which where currently practical have been incorporated into this report.

District Play Strategy- 2007- the main objectives of this are-

- To raise awareness of the importance of play to children's and young people's wellbeing and development by promoting its value to families, council departments, other organisations and the wider community.
- To recognise that children play in a variety of public spaces, as well as dedicated provision.
- To provide a network of high-quality, inclusive and sustainable play opportunities throughout district, which meet the needs of both children and young people.
- To ensure that play areas are attractive, individually and securely designed spaces, where children and young people have access to, and are able to create, a wide range of challenging experiences, and are able to take acceptable levels of risk.
- To actively seek to focus new provision on areas and groups with the poorest access to good play opportunities.
- To ensure children are consulted and involved with the development of new provision.
- To maximise the potential to support the development of new and existing play opportunities through partnership working and sources of external funding.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

The review has been undertaken in accord with the need to ensure that play facilities are accessible, safe, sustainable and fit for their purpose.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The 2010/2011 revenue budget for playground improvements is £73,300 which includes a £40,000 one-off growth item for 2010/2011 only.

Options 1 and 2 in this report can be summarised as follows:

	£
Improve/Merge/Relocate (para 2.6)	43,000
Remove & Re-Instate Selected Areas (para 2.8)	<u>10,000</u>
	<u>53,000</u>

The remaining revenue budget (£20,300) will be spent on usual playground improvements eg. repairs identified from inspections, vandalism etc.

With respect to play areas owned by Parish Councils and Community Groups the cost of providing free annual inspections from 1st April 2011 is estimated at £8,000 and this will also be met from within the remaining playground improvement budget with effect from that date.

The following table illustrates the playground improvement budget for the financial years 2010/11 and 2011/12:

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Revised Playground Improvement Budget	£73,300	£33,300	£33,300
Estimated Expenditure under Options 1 & 2	£(53,300)	-	-
Parish Councils and Community Groups	-	£(8,000)	£(8,000)
Routine Repairs and Maintenance	£(20,000)	£(25,300)	£(25,300)
Total Estimated Expenditure	£(73,300)	£(33,300)	£(33,300)

In addition to the playground improvement budget, there are other areas of spend with the Playgrounds budget mainly in relation to grounds maintenance, materials (general) and equipment and tools. The proposals in this report are not expected to impact on these budgets.

The Capital Programme, as approved by Council on 3rd March 2010, includes capital funding of £60,000 in both 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 (subject to levels of capital receipts and an approved project implementation document). It is proposed that this is used to provide two new play areas at an estimated cost of £50,000 with the remainder to be spent on improving the City Council owned playground network. It is anticipated that £50,000 works in 2010/11 will be carried out over a 6 month period October 2010 to March 2011.

Should Cabinet decide to go for option 3, or decide to amend options 1 or 2, then the financial implication will have to be revised and reconsidered within the context of the current capital and revenue budgets as outlined within this report.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The report identifies various budget headings associated with playground provision, both revenue and capital, and the s151 Officer has requested further work to be done in reviewing these, to be clearer about the nature of costs being incurred. This can be done alongside the proposed consultation.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Legal have been consulted and have no further comments to make.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NONE

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Ref:

Districtwide Playgrounds

City Council Playgrounds	Parish Council Playgrounds	Community Playgrounds
Happy Mount Park	Nether Kellett Green	Wingate-Saul Infant Play Area
Ryelands	Bolton-Le-Sands Village	Wingate-Saul Junior Play Area
Ryelands Park	Silverdale Infant Play Area	
Promenade East	Silverdale Junior Play Area	
Combermere - Peel Avenue	Warton Village	
The Cliffs	Hest Bank Rec Basketball Court	
Blades Street	Hest Bank Rec Play Area	
Glasson Dock	Hornby Bridge Infant Play Area	
Palatine Rec	Hornby Bridge Junior Play Area	
King Georges Field	Ireby (next to Fell View)	
Yealand Redmayne	Wray	
Benson Avenue	Middleton Village	
Parkfield/Greaves Park	Caton Fell View	
Regent Park	Overton	
Derby Road	Dolphinholme	
West End Gardens 3 (Under 5's)	Cockerham	
West End Gardens (Play Area 2)	Halton Schoolhouse Lane	
West End Gardens (Play Area 1)	Halton St Wilfrids Park	
Kingsway	Halton Low Road	
Kilnbank		
Borwick Court		
Douglas Park		
Hill Road		
Carnforth - Kellet Road		
Carnforth - Dunkirk Avenue		
Crag Bank - Johnson Close		
Poulton Hall		
Willow Lane Field		
Galgate - Crofters Fold		
Galgate - Wharfedale		
Priorsgate - Canterbury Close		
Scotch Quarry		
Hala Hill		
Lancaster Road		
Promenade Central		
Winchester Avenue		
Hala - Abbeystead Drive		
Newton		
Cowshards		
Broadway Park		
Marsh - Sycamore Grove		
Plover Drive		
Warton - The Roods		
Parliament Street		
Galgate - Beech Avenue		
Dorrington Road		
Altham Meadow		
Langridge Way		
Bolton-le-Sands - Church Brow		
Ridge - Ambleside Road		
Parsons Close		
Grosvenor Park		
Fairfield Park		
Braddon Close		
Cedar Road		
Essington Avenue		
Hasgill Place		

Arcon House
Green Street
Wilton Close
Crag Bank Field
Hamilton Drive
The Cedars
Barnacre Close
Crag Bank - St Austell Place
Highgrove Close
Furness Street
Slyne - Manor Road
Gregson Road
The Willows
Forest Park
Galgate - Carrwood Gardens
Montrose Crescent
Low Moor
Crag Bank - Redruth Drive
Priorsgate - Durham Avenue
Alexandra Road Basketball Court.
Combermere - Sycamore Gardens
Ridge - Thirlmere Road
Viscount Drive
Woodrush
Standen Park - Infant Playarea
Standen Park - Junior Playarea
Williamsons Park