

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Paul Crossley, Cabinet Member for Communities	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	On or after 14th March 2020 (for single Member decision)	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3199
TITLE:	Parks Play Area Review	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Please list all the appendices here, clearly indicating any which are exempt and the reasons for exemption		

1 THE ISSUE

The Council's Parks' team manages 60 children's play areas across the district. All play areas need to be inspected at least weekly and require ongoing capital investment to replace play equipment as it reaches its end of life. The Council's Green Spaces Strategy identifies access standards for play areas with the aim of ensuring that there is a children's play area within 580m of all residents. In 2018, the Parks Service reduced the number of play inspectors. The Service was also mindful of the emerging pressures on the council's capital, programme and the costs for replacing all end of life play equipment. Within this financial context, the Parks Team conducted an assessment of the play value of all 60 of B&NES owned play areas (2019). Residents were consulted on proposals to re-purpose ten of these spaces – protecting their status as open spaces- but presenting options for alternative, and less costly play and leisure facilities.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member for Communities is asked to support the recommendations made in the report (Section 3)

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 The Parks Team currently manages 60 B&NES play areas across the district. The combined value of this asset (in terms of play equipment, fencing and safety surfaces) is estimated to be around £4 million. The life expectancy of play equipment is forecast to be around 10 -15 years, so the estimated annual equipment replacement budget is likely to be approx. £260-£400k/year.
- 3.2 In order to be able to continue to deliver services within a sustainable budget, the Parks service undertook a review of its formal play areas to understand levels of use and identify any duplication in provision. The review also sought to understand which of its spaces offered the best play value, using a methodology based on guidance issued by Play England (and practiced by other local authorities such as Edinburgh City Council).
- 3.3 The review assign a score to each of the B&NES and Curo play areas and scores were based on the quality and range of facilities at each site: the play equipment itself and other features such as seating, access and toilets. The assessment also sought to safeguard play areas in areas of high deprivation. This was done by using national Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Income Deprivation Affecting Children indices (IDACI) to assign a deprivation score for each location. These scores were then ranked against national scores to create a percentage value which is shown in the table on page 2.
- 3.4 The team also conducted a mapping exercise to understand what - if any - duplication of provision there is throughout the district. Finally, the study identified village sites and those next to schools and active travel routes (such as cycle routes) and locations with other nearby play facilities (such as a playing field).
- 3.5 The Parks team identified nine sites which scored poorly in the review, largely because of their close proximity to other play areas and where the site does not score highly in the indices of multiple deprivation. Scoring play areas against each of these criteria ensures that we can be confident that areas most in need are protected.
- 3.6 Proposals were drawn up to remove the existing equipment at each of the nine sites and provide alternative facilities, which it was hoped, would diversify the leisure offer in the areas. Options for 're-purposing' play areas - such as the provision of natural play features, picnic tables and benches and new meadows and tree planting, were presented to the public at a series of short consultation events in September 2019.
- 3.7 There was a mixed attendance at the feedback events. At some sites there was a strong turn out from residents objecting to proposals to remove the formal play equipment and at others attendance was very low. Feedback on the proposed options was recorded at the events and gathered from subsequent emails from the public.
- 3.8 At Burnt House Road, there was very strong feedback from residents that the nearby play area at Ridge Green Close is poorly used and comparatively unpopular and would be better suited to re-purposing; and the Parks Team subsequently undertook a similar consultation event at Ridge Green Close. There was a very low attendance at the event and those that did attend were unanimous in support of the proposal to retain existing provision at nearby Burnt House Road and re-purpose the space at Ridge Green Close.

3.9 A further, eleventh site at Burchill Close, Clutton has also seen a removal of its play facilities. The safety of the climbing unit was found to be unsatisfactory by an independent report and the decision was made to remove it in September 2019. Bath and North East Somerset Council is currently working with Clutton Parish Council which is seeking to adopt the land from B&NES and there are no plans to replace the equipment in the interim.

3.10 The loss of some conventional play facilities will also provide capacity for the Parks Team to focus more efforts on diversifying and improving the Council's play (and recreation) offer for older ages. Growing levels of teenager and adult obesity and declining mental health suggests that more needs to be done to reduce sedentary lifestyles - particularly in areas of high indices of deprivation. Recently, the Somer Valley Obesity Trailblazer identified girls aged approx. 11 to be of highest need of intervention; and there is currently very little fitness related facilities that is freely available for this demographic.

3.11 Targeted investment in parks and greenspaces will encourage a change in behaviour and help a broad range of people to be more active in parks. This view serves to cross age barriers and further enhance community cohesion and its benefits. In feedback from other consultations, emails to the department and ad hoc conversations with residents and friends groups, residents are telling us more and more that they want more natural play, more outdoor gyms and more informal sports areas (goalposts and basketball hoops).statutory

Based on the outcomes of the play review and feedback from consultation events it is recommended that the Cabinet Member approve proposals to:

- Proceed to community asset transfer the play area at Collier's Way, Haydon from Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES) to Radstock Town Council.
- Proceed to community asset transfer the play area at Manor Copse, Writhlington from B&NES to Radstock Town Council and allocate £18,575.55 from developer's contributions associated with development 13/01709/OUT (Parcel 1934 Knobsbury Lane, Writhlington) to match fund investment in the site.
- At Hillside Crescent, Midsomer Norton, to further explore the option to create a community garden or mixed growing and play space. This will involve allocating £26,835 from developer's contributions associated with developments (09/04488/FUL; 10/04015/FUL and 14/03867/FUL) as potential match funding to invest in the site. The Council will proceed to explore its preference to community asset transfer the play area from B&NES to Midsomer Norton Town Trust which is receptive to this option and preparing its own proposal for the future of the site. If this option falls away B&NES will continue to consult on its own proposal - to create a mixed use community garden and growing space- as defined in the initial site consultation.
- At Calton Road, Widcombe Bath, re-purpose the space to provide a new natural play area. Feedback from consultation sessions that natural play features and greater community involvement would be popular at the site and the Council is working with the Widcombe Residents Association to apply for additional funds to develop a new natural play area. If grant applications are

successful, all work will be completed by September 2020. Residents will be consulted on the final design for the space which is anticipated to include the removal of the existing equipment and its replacement with new natural play features.

- Make no changes to the existing play facilities at Chalfield play area, Keynsham at present. The Council has taken into consideration public concerns about the proposal to re-purpose play provision at the site and will seek to work with other stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for resourcing play area provision in Keynsham.
- Make no changes to the existing play facilities at Loxton Drive, given the limited scope to develop alternative facilities at the site.
- At Parry Close in Bath, re-purpose the space by removing the existing play equipment before the end of March 2020, re-planting the area with trees and installing a bench in the space. Notices will be installed on site which will outline the plans and provide opportunities for public feedback. There was very limited feedback from the public about the proposals to re-purpose the space.
- At St Saviours Road Play Area Bath, follow feedback from the consultation session and further develop plans to improve the wider landscape throughout the open space to include new pathways, trees and benches and to re-purpose the play offer. Trees will be planted in the open space in 2020 and the council will share plans for a re-designed landscape at public consultation events in 2020. These plans will include the removal of the current play equipment and there will be scope for public input into options for new seating and natural play opportunities. There will be no changes to the current play facilities until the updated landscape plan has been shared publically and completed.
- At Burnt House Rd, Bath: retain the existing play equipment and make the necessary repairs to facilities and safety surfacing, following strong feedback from the public that the space is well used and important to the local community.
- At Ridge Green Close in Bath: re-purpose the space to provide better facilities for older children and a different play offer from that at nearby Burnt House Road. Feedback at a public consultation session in September indicated that the space is poorly used and there is a stronger need for play provision for older children. The Council will run a consultation about the range of options for improving the Sulis Meadows Open Space in 2020 and these will inform plans for the re-purposing of the space. There will be further public consultation before any changes are made to the site.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The Council has no statutory duty to provide play areas but does have a legal responsibility to ensure that the public spaces that it provides are safe to use.

4.2 The Council's adopted Green Spaces Strategy requires the provision of a play area within 580m of all residents but does not specify that play provision needs to be through the provision of conventional, manufactured, play equipment.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

5.1 The actions recommended in this report lie within the council's budget constraints and will not generate any additional resource requirements or implications.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

7 CLIMATE CHANGE

7.1 The Council sought to offer alternative forms of play provision, which carry a lower carbon footprint, at the ten locations wherever possible. Wherever possible, the consultation team explored the scope for natural play opportunities and enhancement of the natural landscape as part of the re-purposing proposals. It is hoped that increasing children's access to the natural landscape (and natural play opportunities within it) will help improve ecological literacy; and families' willingness to take action to address the climate and ecological emergencies.

7.2 The re-purposing proposals offer scope for minor reductions in the Council's carbon footprint through the need for less frequent play inspections. This in turn would mean a reduction in vehicle journeys to and from play areas.

7.3 There has been no assessment of the carbon footprint of conventional play equipment. The construction of play equipment is relatively energy intensive, but metal equipment can be long lived is recycled at end of life.

8 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 Option 1 – Retain existing play facilities and support volunteer groups to take on a greater responsibility for the maintenance of facilities; working with the community to fundraise for replacement equipment. This option was suggested by members of the public at a number of feedback sessions but, as explained, it is unworkable as the Council needs to maintain a rigorous inspection schedule staff for manufactured play equipment, with inspections undertaken by qualified staff. Without regular, recorded inspections by qualified staff, there is a risk to the Council's insurance liability.

8.2 Option 2 – Maintain the existing number of play areas and restore pre 2019 numbers of inspection staff. This would require the diversion of funds from another area of the Council's budget or from a reduction in the park's service elsewhere. This is arguably inequitable when the reduction in the number of formal play areas outlined in the play review would still safeguard the provision of a play area within 580m of every resident in B&NES.

8.3 Option 3 – Out-source the inspection and maintenance of play areas to a third party. The Council's play inspection services were bench-marked against other

local authorities in 2018 and found to be very cost effective. In-house provision ensures more flexible operations and allows ad hoc and planned repairs to be made by the team - which is more cost effective than paying for the work to be done by an external contractor.

9 CONSULTATION

9.1 This decision has been reviewed by the S151 officer, the monitoring officer and The Director for Environmental Services.

Contact person	Paul Pearce
Background papers	None
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	

