

This Report will be made public on 3 December 2019

Report Number **C/19/48**

To: Cabinet
Date: 11 December 2019
Status: Key Decision
Responsible Officer: Andy Blaszkwicz – Assistant Director,
Environment & Corporate Assets
Cabinet Member: Cllr John Collier, Cabinet Member for Property
Management & Grounds Maintenance

SUBJECT: PLAY AREA STRATEGY 2020-2030

SUMMARY: The Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 details how high quality play areas will be provided and maintained throughout the District over the next ten years. The Strategy outlines how Folkestone & Hythe District Council will work with Town and Parish Councils, Community Groups and other stakeholders to provide a network of Priority and Strategic Play Areas across the district that provide high quality play space, are well maintained, have good access and are financially sustainable.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Current play area provision across the district is unsustainable. The Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 outlines how the Council will work with partners to provide a sustainable network of Priority and Strategic Play Areas across the District. Cabinet are asked to consider and approve the principles of the draft strategy which sets out clear direction of how these important community facilities will be managed, maintained and enhanced over the next ten years.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/19/48.
2. To approve the principles of the draft Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 and associated action plan.
3. To agree to proceed to formal consultation.
4. To report back to Cabinet following formal consultation with a view to approving the Strategy from 1st April 2020.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document follows on from the report Planning for Play in Shepway 2007-2012 which was developed by Folkestone & Hythe District Council (F&HDC) and the Shepway Play Partnership (a range of organisations and agencies involved in the Play sector) in response to a commitment from central Government to raise the national profile of Play. Since the 2007 Strategy was adopted by F&HDC there have been many improvements to play provision in the district as well as changes to the available resources to manage and maintain features. It is therefore now timely to review and update the Strategy which will guide the management and maintenance of play spaces in Folkestone & Hythe District.
- 1.2 The Shepway Play Area Review (2017) assesses the current provision of play spaces across the district. The findings of the review have provided a foundation for this Play Area Strategy. This report therefore outlines the aspirations for play provision in Folkestone & Hythe District, in the context of what is achievable and realistic.
- 1.3 Following the completion of the Play Area Review the following key aspects are considered within the Strategy:
 - Ensure play provision meets the recreational needs of the community for the period 2020 – 2030 and is linked to the Council's priorities, in particular improving health and wellbeing for not just children and young people, but adults and older people.
 - Develop a prioritised network of strategic and non-strategic sites to ensure all residents are able to access a good quality and good value play space.
 - Develop a robust mechanism for consulting towns, parishes and communities about the provision of play in their local areas.
 - Establish a framework to guide the future ownership and sustainable management of play provision in the Folkestone & Hythe District.
 - Utilise the assessment of the volume of play provision for all age groups across the district within the Play Area Review to identify those areas of under and over provision.
 - Consider the financial position of providing play areas with currently available resources and the future implications of this.
 - Consider and utilise the standards of provision to take forward alongside setting key objectives.
 - Raise the overall quality and value of a network of identified priority and strategic play area facilities within the district.
 - Develop a mechanism for securing developer contributions towards the provision and maintenance of a strategic play network e.g. Section 106 planning obligations and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charges.

2. CORPORATE PLAN

- 2.1 F&HDC's Corporate Plan outlines the vision and priorities for the Council through its Strategic Objectives. The Corporate Plan 2017-2020 – Investing for the next generation – delivering more of what matters, outlines priorities based around supporting local economic growth, developing housing provision, fostering localism, maintaining an attractive district and providing local people with value for money. The six strategic objectives include: more homes; more jobs; appearance matters; health matters; achieving stability and delivering excellence.
- 2.2 The objectives contribute to securing the shared commitment to providing good quality play provision particularly in reference to appearance matters, health matters and delivering excellence.
- 2.3 Work is currently underway to develop a new Corporate Plan for the period 2020-2030. Early indications are that there will be support for accessible, quality open spaces and play provision as well as collaborative working with Town & Parish Councils.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 There are 85 play areas in the Folkestone & Hythe District. Of these 48 are owned by FHDC corporately or through the HRA. The other play areas are in the ownership of a multitude of other organisations including Town and Parish Council's and Housing Associations. FHDC have further agreements in place to manage and maintain some of these play areas on behalf of the other organisations.
- 3.2 With the exception of the play areas at the Coastal Park and the Royal Military Canal (Seabrook) the Council has a maintenance budget of £15k. With aging play areas this is clearly not a sustainable position.
- 3.3 The maintenance of the play areas managed by F&HDC is carried out by the FHDC Maintenance Officers.
- 3.4 Each play area is inspected on a weekly basis by RoSPA trained personnel, this is known as the visual inspection. These inspections assess the safety of the equipment and form the basis of maintenance schedules.
- 3.5 Every play area is inspected on a quarterly basis by a RoSPA trained personnel, this is known as the operational inspection. These inspections are more meticulous inspecting bearings and other hidden elements, records are provided using a risk based approach.
- 3.6 In order to satisfy our insurance requirements an annual independent inspection takes place looking at all Folkestone & Hythe District's play areas by Zurich Insurance Inspectors. From these inspections Crimson Reports are generated which then inform the work plan in terms of ongoing maintenance and renewal of equipment.
- 3.7 In general, most repairs can be undertaken quickly and cost effectively however, where an item is irreparable or past its useful life, it will be removed without replacement due to budget constraints.

4. The Play Area Strategy 2020-2030

4.1 The Strategy is set out in three parts; the vision which sets out FHDC's aim for the future of play provision within the District; the objectives of the Strategy which set out how we will implement the vision and an action plan which sets out how we will achieve the objectives.

4.2 Vision:

Play experiences are fundamental to the health and development of children and young people. Folkestone & Hythe District Council will therefore seek to ensure all residents are able to access a high quality and high value play area. We will work with town and parish councils, together with other providers, to create play spaces which offer challenging and exciting environments for children and young people of all ages and abilities.

4.3 The Shepway Play Area Review (2017) provides an assessment of play areas in the district in terms of quantity, accessibility, location, value and quality.

4.4 National guidance suggests that play strategies should be based on locally derived standards. These standards are determined through analysis of existing provision of play spaces, consideration of local and national standards for play and an understanding of local need. The proposed standards for Folkestone & Hythe District are set out in the Shepway Play Area Review (2017) and Section 4 of the Strategy.

4.5 F&HDC acknowledges that, due to ongoing financial constraints facing local authorities, achieving these standards in Folkestone & Hythe District will be a challenge. It is therefore proposed that any investment will be prioritised on the management and enhancement of play areas where there is considered greatest need i.e. play spaces located in areas with the largest concentration of children and young people. Based on this assessment 9 play areas have been identified as being priorities for F&HDC known as Priority Play Areas (PPAs). The Strategy identifies another 5 PPA's within the district in other ownership. F&HDC will work with town and parish councils to identify priority play spaces in their areas.

4.6 In addition F&HDC will work in partnership with parish and town organisations, together with housing trusts and other community groups, to deliver a network of Strategically Important Play Areas (SIPAs). The network of SIPAs has been identified with the aim of ensuring the majority of the district's residents live within a 15 minute walk of a high quality and high value play area. FHDC will look to transfer these sites to the Town and Parish Councils who are best placed to provide these facilities for their local residents.

4.7 Those play areas not considered to be part of this network will be known as Non-Strategic Play Areas (NSPA) and will be offered to F&HDC's partners as part of an asset transfer. If after one year no interested parties come forward, play equipment will be removed from these play areas and the

ground returned to open space. (Appendix 2 of the Strategy outlines those sites which form part of the PPA, SIPA and NSPA network with locations shown within Appendix 3 of the Strategy.)

4.8 Objectives

The Shepway Play Area Review (2017) identified a need to take a strategic approach to future play area provision in the district. The following objectives and supporting action plan (see Section 7 of the Strategy) have been informed by the findings of the Play Area Review, which involved desk based analysis, stakeholder consultation and an audit of play areas. Each play area in the district was assessed to record:

- Location: Safety and security, accessibility (including disabled access) and extent of use.
- Quantity: Amount of play areas by classification.
- Quality: Care and maintenance of equipment and facilities.
- Value: Provision of equipment offering a variety of challenging play and movement incorporating natural features and offering value to a range of age groups and abilities.
- Accessibility: FiT guidance provides a benchmark for accessibility catchments.

4.9 The Strategy includes 6 objectives that are set out to deliver the vision; how each objective is achieved is set out in detail in the Strategy and subsequent action plan.

- **Objective 1:** Improve the location, quality, value and accessibility of play provision for all children and young people.
- **Objective 2:** Effectively utilise planning policy to benefit play provision.
- **Objective 3:** Raise awareness of play opportunities and the importance of play.
- **Objective 4:** Maximise funding opportunities for the maintenance and enhancement of play areas.
- **Objective 5:** Communicate and engage with key partners and stakeholders.
- **Objective 6:** Ensure appropriate and regular communication and review.

4.10 **Action Plan;** this sets out the programme of actions which will be carried out to meet the vision for play in Folkestone & Hythe District. It lists each management objective, how each will be achieved and who is responsible for achieving them. Where appropriate a priority level is indicated and further considerations highlighted. The programme will be reviewed annually and targets monitored to ensure actions have been achieved.

5. Funding & Financial Implication

- 5.1** F&HDC's Engineering & Buildings Service is under pressure from increasing budget demands. In response, the Service is considering options to support day-to-day maintenance operations and one-off improvement projects. However there is a range of external funding schemes that could be used to support the maintenance and enhancement of play areas in Folkestone & Hythe District. The main two external funding streams are Section 106 commuted sums and Community Infrastructure Levy.
- 5.2** F&HDC receives funding for open space improvements through the collection of 'Section 106 planning obligations and contributions'. Section 106 planning obligations or 'commuted sums' are legal agreements negotiated by the local planning authority with the developer (or landowner) of a proposed development. In relation to the provision of play areas, commuted sums must be spent on improvements at existing sites at or close to the development that gave rise to the funding. Commuted sums in the form of Section 106 are critical to the enhancement and development of play areas across Folkestone & Hythe District. Contributions secured through Section 106 can be used as match funding to support the delivery of larger projects.
- 5.3** Improvement projects for parks and play areas may also be funded through the collection of CIL. CIL charges are based on simple formulae that relate to the size and character of the associated development. The proceeds from the levy can be spent on local and sub-regional infrastructure, including parks and play areas. F&HDC's Regulation "123" list defines the type of infrastructure and projects that will be funded through CIL in the district. The funding can be directed to parish and town council's to deliver projects within their jurisdiction.
- 5.4** A number of other funding streams are explored within the strategy.
- 5.5** The Strategy states that we will work with Town and Parish Council's, Community groups and other stakeholders to create a network of Priority and Strategic play sites across the District. FHDC will be looking to transfer ownership of Strategically Important Play Areas (SIPA's) and Non-Strategic Play Areas (NSPA's) to the Towns and Parishes and community groups whilst retaining ownership of the Priority Play Area network. S106 monies that are designated to any transferring site (if available) would transfer with the play area. A Dowry may also be payable on completion of the transfer which would be negotiated on the basis of 5 years maintenance.
- 5.6** Savings; implementing the new Strategy is not about making savings. As stated earlier in the report budgets for play area maintenance are very small and there are currently no budgets set aside for capital investment. The Strategy is about working with partners to create a network of Priority and Strategic play sites across the District that are sustainable into the future.
- 5.7** Efficiencies; will be realised that will lead to improved service levels in other play areas as the current resources will be spread across fewer sites. Having fewer play areas under the direct control / ownership of FHDC also reduces the future maintenance liability.

5.8 A capital growth proposal will be considered in the new year as part of the budget setting cycle for the medium term capital programme 2020/21 to 2024/25.

6.0 Review and Governance

6.1 This Strategy and action plan will be monitored through F&HDC’s Performance Management Framework and reviewed at least annually. This will include an assessment of progress against targets and whether these need to be modified in the light of changing circumstances. Changes to relevant legislation, funding, linked strategies and planning will be noted and the Strategy modified as appropriate.

6.2 Regular updates against the Action Plan will be reviewed at the Asset Management Board.

7.0 Consultation

7.1 Several of the Town and Parish Councils, external partners, stakeholders and community groups have already been informally consulted about the Strategy. Over the last few years Hawkinge Town Council have taken management responsibility for numerous play areas and open spaces and the Council is currently in negotiations with Folkestone Town Council, Sandgate Parish Council and New Romney Town Council over the transfer of 11 further play areas.

7.2 Following Cabinet approval of the draft Strategy formal consultation will be undertaken with Town and Parish Council’s, community groups, partners and stakeholders. This will be relayed to the Cabinet Member for Property Management and Grounds Maintenance and the Strategy updated as necessary before being presented to Cabinet for final approval.

7.3 It is envisaged that the Strategy will be implemented from 1st April 2020.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
Play Area Strategy not adopted	High	Low	Detailed and thorough consultation with all stakeholders to ensure strategy is adopted
Town and Parish Councils not willing to adopt play areas	High	Medium	Detailed and thorough consultation with all stakeholders to ensure strategy is adopted and dowry’s sufficient to cover maintenance costs

Insufficient funding to maintain Priority and SIPA networks	High	Medium	Work internally with planning to ensure S106 and CIL payments are directed to the right projects. Work with external partners and community groups to explore all funding opportunities
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10. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

10.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NE)

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

10.2 Finance Officer's Comments (LW)

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, the report outlines the financial pressure faced in maintaining the council's existing play area provision and identifies possible options to address this. The financial implications of any proposed action for local play area provision will need to be included as part of the report back to Cabinet, following the consultation exercise, seeking approval of the proposed strategy.

10.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (AB)

The Strategy sets out a clear vision to develop a network of Priority and Strategically Important Play Areas so all residents have access to high quality, high value play areas. All new and refurbished play areas will undergo an equalities impact assessment during the design process to ensure that they meet the needs of all of our residents.

10.4 Communications Implications (KA)

This will need to be handled with care and a communications plan will be developed to mitigate the communications implications arising from this strategy.

11. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting

Andy Blaszkowicz, Assistant Director – Environment & Corporate Assets

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft Play Area Strategy 2020-2030

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