

This Report will be made public on 16 June 2020

Report Number **C/20/04**

To: Cabinet
Date: June 24th 2020
Status: Key Decision
Responsible Officer: Andy Blaszkwicz – Director, Housing & Operations
Cabinet Member: Cllr John Collier, Cabinet Member for Property Management & Grounds Maintenance

SUBJECT: PLAY AREA STRATEGY 2020-2030 –
CONSULTATION RESPONSES & OUTCOME

SUMMARY: Report No. **C/19/48** considered the draft Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 as presented to Cabinet on 11/12/2019. The report detailed how high quality play areas will be provided and maintained throughout the District over the next ten years. Cabinet resolved:

1. That report C/20/04 be received and noted.
2. That the suggestion of sites to be sold in respect of non-strategic play areas be removed.
3. That the principles of the draft Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 and associated action plan be approved.
4. To proceed to formal consultation.
5. That a report be brought back to Cabinet following formal consultation with a view to approving the Strategy from 1st April 2020.

These resolutions have been actioned with the formal consultation beginning 20/12/2019 and concluding on 31/01/2020. This report summarises the consultation responses and minor amendments to the strategy.

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 the responses to the formal consultation, the minor amendments to the draft strategy and approve 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/20/04.**
- 2. To note the consultation responses to the draft Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 and associated action plan**
- 3. To note the minor amendments to the draft Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 and associated action plan**
- 4. To approve the draft Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 and associated action plan and provide delegated authority to the Director, Housing & Operations to implement the draft Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 from 1st July 2020**
- 5. To note and approve the proposed amount of up to £250k for Dowry payments to Town and Parish Councils for the transfer of SIPA and NSPA designated play areas to be met from the General Fund Vehicles, Equipment and Technology Reserve**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 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 over the next 10 years.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 With the exception of the play areas at the Coastal Park and the Royal Military Canal (Seabrook) the Council has a maintenance budget of £20k. With aging play areas this is clearly not a sustainable position.

3. THE PLAY AREA STRATEGY 2020-2030

- 3.1 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. The full draft strategy is included as **Appendix 2** of this report.

3.2 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.

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

- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 FHDC acknowledges that, due to ongoing financial constraints facing local authorities, achieving these standards in the 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 FHDC known as Priority Play Areas (PPAs). The Strategy identifies another 5 PPA's within the district in other ownership. FHDC will work with town and parish councils to identify priority play spaces in their areas.
- 3.6 In addition FHDC will work in partnership with Town and Parish Councils, 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.
- 3.7 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 FHDC's partners **and stakeholders** 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.

3.8 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

- 3.9 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

3.10 **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.

4. CONSULTATION

4.1 The consultation commenced 20/12/2019 and concluded 31/01/2020.

4.2 The consultation documents were published on the FHDC website with all affected organisations, stakeholders and partners notified by email.

4.3 Consultees included; KCC, all Town and Parish Councils, RDH Charitable Trust, all known community groups with an interest in play provision, NHS and other stakeholders.

4.4 A summary of the consultation responses and recommended actions is set out below with the full consultation results detailed in Appendix 1 of this report.

4.5 In total **83 responses** were received by the Council which are summarised below.

4.6 1 to purchase land.
Responses from 4 Town or Parish (Burmarsch/Hythe/Hawkinge/St Mary's in the Marsh)
1 from the Labour Party
1 from KCC Member
2 Charitable Sector

4.7 Responses stating individual parks;

Pine Way – 5 responses
Densole Way – 1
Oakham Drive - 11
Brabner Park - 1
Campbell Road - 1
Atkinson Road - 8
Country's field - 1
Wraightsfield - 1
George Gurr - 5

Oakland's - 6
Heron Forstal - 1
Mackenzie Drive - 3
Peregrine Close - 1
Reachfields - 1
Southern Way - 1
Jefferstone Lane -1
Meads Way – 1
Oak Drive – 1

In addition to this there were many responses for Hawkinge on the whole, with the vast majority received after factually incorrect signs were posted by an unknown person or persons.

4.8 Themes and recommended actions

- Ownership corrections (2 of these which will be amended within the strategy)
- Play provision – The type and amount of equipment found within parks was commented on, responses pointed towards different parks offering different ages of equipment, which was seen both as a positive and negative item. No action is needed with regards to the strategy.
- Closure – The vast majority of responses (49) came after signs which contained false information were put up at all parks by an unknown person or persons. FHDC does not want to close any parks, and is working with Towns and Parishes to avoid this. No action is needed with regards to the strategy. It should be noted that none of these responses referred directly to the Play Area Strategy.
- Designation – Comments came in regarding re-designating parks as some felt the importance of their local park was not recognised. However the parks have all been put through the same process to be designated appropriately. See strategy for methodology and reasoning.
- Funding - A number of consultees were seeking information regarding how funding could be sought in the long term. Parish and Town Councils are able to work with the charitable sector to secure funding and will also receive their share of CIL funding. It should be noted that both Towns and Parish councils can apply for further CIL funding when available. No action is needed with regards to the strategy.
- Accessibility – a comment was received highlighting a lack of accessible equipment, and this is noted within the strategy and action plan. Before any major updates all parks will receive a fully accessibility audit as per the action plan. No action is needed with regards to the strategy.
- Budget – A number of comments referred to the budget the Town and Parish Councils would need to manage the parks should they transfer. FHDC will provide Dowry's based on a 5 year maintenance contribution payable upon transfer. Detail has been added to the strategy page 29, Objective 4, No.7.

No budget provision exists in the General Fund for the Dowry payments and it is estimated the total cost could be up to £250k. It is proposed to meet the cost from the Council's Vehicles, Equipment and Technology Reserve.

- Developer Management of play areas – A comment was received regarding previous parks where management companies and developers had dissolved and therefore leaving parks unmanaged and neglected. This will be picked up with strict planning policy. No action is needed with regards to the strategy.
- Consultation Duration – a number of comments were made with reference to the consultation period including the Christmas and New Year period. All written with the same wording. The consultation timeframe was carefully considered and appropriate. No action is needed with regards to the strategy.

5. ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 Throughout the consultation period discussions have continued to take place with Town and Parish Councils regarding the transfer of Play Areas. Officers feel that the conversations have been really positive.
- 5.2 The transfer of 8 play areas has been agreed with Folkestone Town Council.
- 5.3 The transfer of 1 play area has been agreed with Sandgate Parish Council.
- 5.4 The transfer of 1 play area has been agreed in principal with New Romney Town Council.
- 5.5 The transfer of 5 play areas is ongoing with Lydd Town Council.
- 5.6 Discussions are taking place with other Town and Parish Council's over the transfer of other play areas across the district.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

| Perceived risk | Seriousness | Likelihood | Preventative action |
|--|-------------|------------|--|
| Play Area Strategy not adopted | High | Low | Detailed and thorough ongoing consultation with all stakeholders to ensure strategy is adopted |
| Town and Parish Councils not willing to adopt play areas | High | Low | Detailed and thorough ongoing 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 | Low | 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 |
|---|------|-----|---|

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Officers have concluded that the consultation responses and the discussions that have been taking place during the consultation period have generally been positive and supportive of the strategy. No responses have been received that would require any material changes being made to the strategy.
- 6.2 The majority of responses that were received were in response to signs which contained false information that were put up at all parks by an unknown person or persons or relating to single play areas and the fear of them closing. Officers have been working hard with Town and Parish Councils over the potential transfer of the SIPA and NSPA sites which will alleviate these fears.
- 6.3 Following the consultation period, the responses received and the ongoing discussions with Town and Parish Councils, Officers recommend that the Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 is approved and should be implemented on 1st April 2020.

7. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

7.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NE)

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. However, legal will be involved in relation to any transfers or leases of the play parks to third parties.

7.2 Finance Officer's Comments (LW)

The financial implication of providing the proposed Dowry payments is outlined in the report. Adequate provision is available within the General Fund Vehicles, Equipment and Technology Reserve to meet the cost of up to £250k. There are no other financial implications arising directly from this report.

7.3 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.

7.4 Communications Implications (KA)

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

8. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Play Area Strategy 2020-2030 full consultation results

Appendix 2: Draft Play Area Strategy 2020-2030