

Environment, Health and Wellbeing Cabinet Advisory Committee Report

Play Areas

Introduction

Swale Borough Council owns and maintains 78 play areas across the borough consisting of a wide range of facilities, including traditionally equipped children play areas, bike zones, skate parks, multi-use games areas, basketball courts, trim trails, fitness zones, outdoor gym equipment all intended for the use of children and young people.

Responsibility for the management and maintenance is held by the council's Greenspace Team and in particular the Greenspace Service Manager, Greenspace Technical Officer and the two Greenspace Maintenance and Inspection Officers.

Inspection and Maintenance

Play areas by their very nature should provide a degree of risk and challenge to the users however this should come through development, design and investment and not equipment being in an unusable condition.

The council has a responsibility to maintain play areas to ensure that equipment is kept in a usable condition. To help achieve this the council has adopted a Play Area Repairs and Maintenance Procedure which outlines inspections regimes, contract visits and the prioritisation of repairs and maintenance in line with nationally recognised legislation and guidance.

Although there is no specific legislation for play areas the installation and subsequent maintenance of playgrounds is covered by British/European standards including:

- BS/EN1176 – Play Area Equipment
- BS/EN1177 – Play Area Surfacing
- BS/EN15321 – Multi Use Games Areas
- BS/EN14974 – Skate Parks
- BS/EN16639 – Outdoor Fitness Equipment

The council follows all the appropriate health & safety legislation including (but not limited to):

- Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Act 1999
- Occupiers Liability Act 1984
- Children Act 1989
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013
- Swale Borough Council Parks and Open Spaces Byelaws

The council's play areas are subject to regular inspections which are outlined below. These inspections follow the best practice set out in play area guidance BS/EN1176 and BS/EN1177 and are carried out by staff member/inspectors registered on the RPII inspectors list at the appropriate level.

- **Routine Inspections** – Each play area is visited weekly by either an Environmental Warden or a Greenspace Maintenance and Inspection Officer who undertakes a visual inspection of the site/equipment to ensure they are in a safe condition, free from any obvious vandalism and faults. Where a play area is subject to very high use or prone to vandalism/anti-social behaviour, the risk increases and thus the number of visits can increase up to three visits a week (Monday to Friday). All site visits are

recorded on the council's IT system with issues noted. Any faults requiring immediate action are passed to the relevant officer/contractor for the appropriate works to be carried out.

- **Operational Inspections** – On a quarterly basis each play area is visited by a Greenspace Maintenance and Inspection Officer who undertakes a detailed inspection of all area including all equipment, fences, gates and safer surfacing. All site visits are recorded on the council's IT system with issues noted. Any faults requiring immediate action are passed to the relevant officer/contractor for the appropriate works to be carried out.
- **Annual External Inspections** – An annual external inspection is undertaken on all play areas by the Council's insurer Zurich Municipal. The inspector undertakes a detailed inspection, including ensuring the area meets the appropriate safety standards and supplies an electronic report to the Greenspace Service Manager and the Greenspace Technical Officer. Any faults requiring immediate action or shortfalls around safety standards are passed to the relevant officer/contractor for the appropriate works to be carried out.

All repairs and maintenance are prioritised into three main categories:

- **High Priority** – this is when work required is of an urgent nature and would be actioned immediately. This priority includes (but not exclusive to):
 - Damage to equipment that could cause harm or injury
 - Damage to safer surfacing which could cause harm or injury
 - Obscene graffiti
 - Damage to fences or gates
 - Repairs to moving parts which if left could cause harm or injury
- **Medium Priority** – this is when work required, although significant, can be programmed in to meet budget and resource requirements. This includes (but not exclusive to):
 - Damage to equipment that will not cause harm or injury
 - Damage to safer surfacing which could not cause harm or injury
 - Repairs to moving parts that would not cause harm or injury
 - Replacement of wearing parts
 - Replacement of wearing safer surfacing
- **Low Priority** – this is when work required is minor and would be monitored/reviewed regularly until the priority is re-classified to either high or medium priority as item wears or breaks down. This includes (but not exclusive to):
 - Weathered/wearing equipment which does not directly affect its use or cause harm or injury
 - Weathered/wearing parts which does not directly affect its use or cause harm or injury

A decision was taken in 2018 as part of the new 'Open Spaces and Play Strategy' to no longer accept responsibility for play areas provided on new developments. Whilst the developers were required to pay maintenance contributions for up to 10 years, the continual increase in sites diluted the available budget for maintenance.

Refurbishment and Replacement

Even with a full inspection and maintenance programme, with play area equipment subject to high wear and tear and the effects of the weather, it is constantly subject to corrosion, rot and damage. As such there is a need to look ahead to larger/wider improvements.

Refurbishment or replacement projects have historically been undertaken when external grant funding or contributions from new housing developments have been achieved (the Open Spaces and Play Strategy would still allow one-off contributions to existing play areas but not acceptance of new sites).

In 2018/19, the Playground Improvement Fund was created to allocate £500,000 up until March 2022. A number of improvements were made early in that period, totalling a spend of £295,352. Following a gap in officer resource and the impact of the pandemic, as well as delivering against the remaining funds, the Coalition are committed to extending investment beyond March 2022.

RAG Rating

In 2020, a review of all play areas was undertaken with the aim to provide a RAG rating for each play area to help inform priorities when budgeting for the council's Play Area Development Programme. This review will now be completed annually to ensure it reflects the current position for each play area.

The criteria used to determine the RAG rating included:

- Age of Playground and/or Date of Last Refurbishment
- Play Area Type
- Play Area Availability (per Ward)
- Identified Defects (via Operational and Annual Inspections)
- Maintenance Costs
- Risk Assessment
- Service Requests, Complaints, Anti-Social Behaviour, Incident Reports
- Visual Inspection

The current RAG rating list of sites can be found at appendix 1.

In June 2021, £28,000 of Special Project Funding was secured to undertake the refurbishment of 12 play areas throughout Swale. The play areas were selected using information gained from the RAG Rating, ongoing maintenance costs and annual independent reports. The play areas are:

- King George V Playing Field Play Area, Sittingbourne
- Chilton Avenue Play Area, Sittingbourne
- Grove Park Play Area, Sittingbourne
- Rose Walk Play Area, Sittingbourne
- King George V Playing Field Play Area, Faversham
- Colonels Lane Play Area, Boughton Under Blean
- Lower Road Play Area, Faversham
- Sumpter Way Play Area, Faversham
- Vincent Gardens Play Area, Sheerness
- Second Avenue Play Area, Queenborough
- Chilham Close Play Area, Sheerness
- Anne Boleyn Close Play Area, Eastchurch

Work started in July 2021 (with a break until the beginning of September to allow for the school holiday) and is due for completion in October 2021.

The contractors and Greenspace Maintenance and Inspection Officers have worked closely, especially during the preparation period of the process, to identify wearing parts and to replace them prior to painting.

Revised Play Area Improvement Programme

Following a lack of development in 2020 and to date in 2021, due to staff vacancies and restrictions around the COVID pandemic, the play area improvement programme has been revised with 6 projects planned for the remainder of 2021/22 and 13 projects planned between 2022/23 and 2023/24. The later projects require initial preparation of works in order to inform the budgets required but as mentioned above, the Coalition are committed to allocating funds beyond the current commitment.

2021/2022				
Site	Area	Detail	Total Project Cost	SBC Capital
Millfield Road Play Area	Faversham	Complete replacement of play area	130,000	31,500
Johnson Road Play Area	Sittingbourne	Refurbishment of play area, replacement gates and installation of pathway	12,500	12,500
Manor Grove Play Area	Sittingbourne	Installation of 5x pieces of new play equipment Installation of 4x pieces of outdoor gym equipment or fitness station	45,000	45,000
Diligent Drive	Sittingbourne	Installation of new multi activity unit	13,500	0
Kemsley Recreation Ground	Sittingbourne	Installation of new multi activity unit and replacement gates	17,000	17,000
Grove Park	Sittingbourne	Installation of new fitness station	9,000	0
TOTAL			£227,000	£106,000

2022-2024		
Site	Area	Detail
Colonels Lane	Villages	Improvements to play area
Sumpter Way	Faversham	Replacement of play area
Festival Playing Field	Sheerness	Improvements to play area
Dickson's Field	Eastchurch	Improvements to play area
King George V Playing Field	Queenborough	Replacement of play area
King George V Playing Field	Faversham	New play area and car park
Anne Boleyn Close	Eastchurch	Replacement of Play Area
Chilton Avenue	Sittingbourne	Improvements to play area
King George V Playing Field	Sittingbourne	Improvements to play area

Lower Road	Faversham	Improvements to play area
Bysingwood Road	Faversham	Replace multi activity unit and fence
Great Easthall	Sittingbourne	New ballcourt
Iwade Healthy Living Centre	Sittingbourne	New outdoor gym

Conclusion and Questions for Committee

The report summarises the ongoing task of providing, maintaining and replacing play areas across the Borough.

1. Are we providing the right level of play for the Borough?
2. Do you agree with the method of RAG rating and proposed refurbishment?
3. Are there any sites missed off that Members feel should get attention?

Appendix 1 - RAG rating of SBC Playgrounds

Site	RAG Rating
Abbey Rise Play Area	Green
Agate Court Play Area	Yellow
Amethyst Drive Play Area	Yellow
Anne Boleyn Close Play Area	Yellow
Anslem Close Play Area	Yellow
Balas Drive Play Area	Green
Bartons Point Coastal Park Play Area	Green
Batteries Close Play Area	Yellow
Beachfields Park Play Area	Yellow
Brook Road Play Area	Red
Buckthorne Road Play Area	Yellow
Bysingwood Road Play Area	Yellow
Canal Bank Play Area	Yellow
Castle Site Play Area	Green
Eagles Close Fitness Zone	Green
Chilham Close Play Area	Yellow
Chilton Avenue Play Area	Yellow
Colonels Lane Play Area	Red
Colson Drive Play Area	Yellow
Dicksons Field Play Area	Yellow
Diligent Drive Play Area	Yellow
Eleanor Drive Play Area	Yellow
Eveas Drive Play Area	Yellow
Faversham Recreation Ground Play Area	Green
Festival Playing Field Play Area	Yellow
Finch Close Play Area	Yellow
Great Easthall Farm Play Area	Yellow
Grove Park Play Area	Yellow
Hazebrouck Road Play Area	Green
Hilton Close Play Area	Yellow
Homefield Drive Play Area	Yellow
Hugh Price Close Play Area	Yellow
Iwade Recreation Ground Play Area	Green
Johnson Road Recreation Ground Play Area	Yellow
Kemsley Recreation Ground Play Area	Yellow
King George V Playing Field Faversham Play Area	Yellow
King George V Playing Field Sittingbourne Play Area	Yellow
King George V Playing Field Queenborough Play Area	Yellow
Leysdown Coastal Park Play Area	Green
Lovell Road Play Area	Green
Lower Road Play Area	Yellow

Manor Grove Play Area	Yellow
Mansfield Drive Play Area	Green
Maylam Gardens Play Area	Green
Millfield Road Play Area	Yellow
Milton Creek Play Area	Yellow
Milton Recreation Ground Play Area	Yellow
Minster Leas Fitness Zone	Green
New Road Play Area	Yellow
New Village Hall Play Area	Yellow
Noreen Avenue Play Area	Yellow
Nunnery Grove Play Area	Green
Powerstation Road Play Area	Yellow
Premier Way Play Area	Yellow
Queensway Play Area	Yellow
Randle Way Play Area	Yellow
Recreation Way Play Area	Green
Rectory Playing Fields Play Area	Yellow
Reedland Crescent Play Area	Yellow
Rooks View Play Area	Yellow
Rose Walk Play Area	Yellow
Rushenden Hill Play Area	Yellow
Samuel Drive Play Area	Yellow
Second Avenue Play Area	Red
Sittingbourne Recreation Ground Play Area	Yellow
Stangate Drive Play Area	Green
Stanley Avenue Bike Zone	Green
Sumpter Way Play Area	Yellow
Faversham Swimming Pool Play Area	Green
The Glen Play Area	Green
The Spinney Play Area	Green
Thistle Hill Community Centre Play Area	Yellow
Thistle Hill Community Woodland Play Area	Green
Vincent Gardens Play Area	Yellow
West Faversham Community Centre Play Area	Yellow
Whiteway Road Play Area	Yellow
Windermere Play Area	Yellow
Woodpecker Drive Play Area	Green