

23 January 2019

Policy, Projects and Resources Committee

Play Area Strategy

Report of: *Kim Anderson, Partnership, Leisure and Funding Manager*

Wards Affected: *All Brentwood Borough Wards*

This report is: *Public report*

1. Executive Summary

The Council's Leisure Strategy was agreed by Members at the Community Health and Housing Committee and Policy Projects and Resources Committee. One of the workstreams that sits under the Leisure Strategy is the play areas. The report before Members tonight is the Council's five-year Play Area Strategy which sets out the clear strategic vision for the future of the Council's play areas.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Members agree to the Play Area Strategy and associated guidelines within as attached in Appendix A of this report and;**
- 2.2 That the phased budget requirements are considered as part of the budget setting process for Medium-Term Financial Plan; and**
- 2.3 That subject to budget approval officers look at a compliant procurement exercise and that this process is brought back to the Community Health and Housing Committee.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1.** The Play Area Strategy is one of the six workstreams which sit under the Council's overarching Leisure Strategy 2018-2028 which was agreed by Members at the 11 September 2018 Community Health and Housing Committee, and also at the 18 September 2018 Policy Projects and Resources Committee. The vision for the Council is that strategically the Council needs to ensure that its leisure facilities will be of high quality, be sustainable in the future and that they broaden the impact on improving community health.
- 3.2.** The Borough of Brentwood has a total of 38 Play areas. 12 are managed directly by the Council's Parks and Open Spaces department, 15 are

managed by the Council's Housing Department and 11 are managed directly by the Parish Council's.

- 3.3.** 4Global undertook a Value for Money options analysis of the Council's Leisure facilities in 2016 which included the Council's Play Areas. This examined the current provision, associated budget to maintain and improve and future requirements.
- 3.4.** Sport England recognizes the importance that physical activity has on the health and wellbeing of children and young people, so the Council's play areas are a key component in delivering their objective.
- 3.5.** An on-line and face to face consultation took place over the summer 2018 to help inform the development of play area strategy. This asked a number of questions about type of equipment and how residents/visitors get to the play areas.
- 3.6.** Officers have also undertaken an audit of the play areas that are managed by the Council's Parks and Open Space department and the Council's Housing Department, which has also informed the Play Area Strategy. This also looked at the estimated walking time to access the play areas.
- 3.7.** The Council has recently opened Warley Play Area in July 2018 which is a Plan Inclusive Play Area (PiPA) accredited play area.
- 3.8.** The Play Area Strategy has also been informed by the Fields in Trust Policy Framework which sets out the desired requirement of play areas based on population figures and the PiPA guidance which helps local authorities, landscape architects, planners and families with disabled children to create inclusive outdoor play areas.
- 3.9.** The Neighbourhood Planning Policy Framework identifies sport and activity as a fundamental part of the planning and delivery of sustainable communities. The planning objectives also look at the protecting existing facilities, enhancing the quality, accessibility and management of existing facilities and providing new facilities to meet demand. Therefore, the Council also needs to ensure that the current provision is sufficient, but also that the future requirements are aligned to any new housing growth in the borough. The nature of play is also changing, so the Council also needs to ensure that it can be part of an inter-generational space. Play needs to be challenging and risky physically at a child's own level of development, but also needs to support sensory play.

- 3.10.** Play also needs to be safe, so the Council also need to ensure that it not only conforms to current British and European safety standards, but that they are regularly inspected, and any faults reported quickly and sufficient maintenance and management applied.

4. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1.** The Leisure Strategy is one of the key strategies as set out in the Vision for Brentwood 2016-19 document. To deliver a successful Leisure Strategy, Members and Officers need to have a complete picture of the cost of the current provision, how it measures in value for money terms, the future options available to them, together with any risk profiles associated with its leisure facilities.
- 4.2.** The 5year Play Area Strategy focusses on those play areas that are managed directly by the Council's Parks and Open Spaces department. The Housing sites remain the responsibility of Housing and these are not available for the general public to use.
- 4.3.** The on-line and face to face consultation had responses from 146 people of which 110 were residents. They were asked the following questions:
- a) What's your favourite play area in Brentwood?
 - b) Why is it your favourite play area?
 - c) How often do you visit your favourite play area?
 - d) How do you get there?
 - e) What are the age ranges of the children that use the play area?
 - f) What type of equipment do you prefer?
 - g) Which other play areas do you visit in Brentwood?
 - h) If you visit any other play areas in Brentwood, how often do you visit?
 - i) How do you get there?
 - j) Do you have any other comments?
- 4.4.** King George's Playing Fields came out as the favourite play area with Warley Playing Fields and Bishops Hall coming third. In response to the question of why it was a favourite park the highest response was the mix of equipment to suit a variety of ages, followed by play area with green open space and it's the nearest to where I live. Most people travel monthly, followed by weekly. Most travel by car closely followed by walking to get to the play area. The age range of children was 0-5, followed by 6-11 years of age. The type of equipment was evenly split between swings, slides and climbing. The top three of other play areas visited was King George's, Warley and Bishops Hall. Again, the frequency

of visit was the same with the majority being weekly and the people travelling by car.

- 4.5.** Other comments included the general variety of equipment, ancillary facilities, the need to provide more inclusive play for children and young people with special needs. A full summary of the responses to the consultation is attached in Appendix B.
- 4.6.** The Fields in Trust framework guidance sets out the proposed quantity of play that is required based on population figures and how close these need to be to population centres. It should be noted that if applying these benchmarks, that local features and obstacles to pedestrian and cycle movement should be taken into account. Play areas are classified as follows:
- a) Local Areas for Play (LAPs) and informal play; aimed at very young children –
 - b) Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs) and informal recreation; aimed at children who can go out to play independently; and
 - c) Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAPs) and informal recreation, and provision for children and young people.

These can be complemented by other facilities including Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) and skateboard parks. As part of an intergenerational space then outdoor gyms can also be included.

- 4.7.** It is recommended that the Council uses this framework to build on the current provision and also to inform the requirements for future provision.
- 4.8.** Plan Inclusive Play Area (PiPA) sets out the guidance for inclusive design to consider more than just access into a space as providing play activities that engage all is vital. The PiPA assessment tool not only helps the Council to design play areas but also to assess existing play areas. Their assessment tool helps the Council to understand a wide range of disabilities without being an expert, so that the public are offered the best inclusive provision. It is therefore recommended that the Council use the PiPA checklist to assess the current provision that will inform future improvements and ensure that all play areas will become community PiPA accredited.
- 4.9.** It is also recommended that the Council work with specialist organisations who support the children and young people with special needs such as SNAP (Special Needs and Parents) and BOSP (Brighter Opportunities through Supported Play) to assist in the design and improvement of the

Council's play areas. Relevant ward members will also be invited to assist in this process for play areas.

- 4.10. Once future growth has been identified then leisure facilities including play areas are factored into the development to support the needs of the local population. It is also recommended that either developer contribution (S106 monies) or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is sought to contribute towards play areas when required.
- 4.11. It is recommended that a robust regime is continued to ensure that equipment is installed, inspected and maintained in accordance with British and European standards; and if any equipment is non-compliant to those standards then it should be audited and approved on a risk assessment basis by a competent third party.
- 4.12. The priority play areas for strategic improvement have been identified as part of the inspection on the current provision, the age of equipment and when the play area was last refurbished. A five-year programme of capital improvement has been developed which is set out in the Play Strategy. It should be noted that this will need to be agreed as part of the annual budget setting process to inform the Council's Capital programme. If the Council has a managed capital improvement programme, then moving forward there should be a reduced demand on the Council's revenue budgets in regard to ongoing repairs and maintenance of the play areas. The Council's play areas do not generate any income as they are free to use, so future costs for any improvements need to come from Council budgets or from identified external funding or developer contribution.

5.0 Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 As part of the Council's due diligence in delivering a successful Leisure Strategy, Members and officers need to have a complete picture of the current associated costs, risk profiles of the Borough's Leisure facilities and identify opportunities for income generation.
- 5.2 Comments received from Sport England as part of the Local Development Plan consultation, stated that a Leisure Strategy is required that assesses Council owned sports and leisure facilities in order that the Council can continue to work with partners to ensure that appropriate provision is made for the residents of Brentwood. The strategy should not only consider how the Council can provide services, but also how other

partners can. The strategy should also use current sports facility evidence to identify strategic priorities to then inform what will be included in the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Following this feasibility work, the Council will then be able to determine which projects will be funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and those funded by planning obligations.

5. References to Council Priorities

The Play Area Strategy is a workstream of the overarching Leisure Strategy which sits in two main strands of the Vision for Brentwood 2016-19: Environment and Housing Management to develop a Leisure Strategy to provide strong and sustainable leisure facilities for residents and businesses; and Community and Health - to work with community and voluntary organisations to develop the priorities for community development. There are also strong links for the priorities of the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2014-2017, the Local Development Plan, Active Brentwood/Essex and the Council's Asset Management Strategy 2014/15.

6. Implications

Financial Implications

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- 6.1 Whilst the Council's play areas are discretionary, there is still a requirement to provide play from a community point of view. With a planned capital improvement programme, it is estimated that to deliver the Play Strategy it will cost a total of £2.2m phased over the 5 years. This projected cost is not currently funded within our Capital Programme. The budget requirement will be referred to Policy, Projects and Resources Committee and Ordinary Council as part of the budget setting process. The suggested costs (subject to approval) for the phased approach over the 5 years of the strategy are shown below.

2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
350k	500k	825k	350k	175k

- 6.2 The Council does not have the sufficient Capital Receipts in order to fund the proposed budget requirement. It is envisaged that the Council will need to externally borrow, However the effect of this borrowing will need

to be taken into wider consideration of the Council's Capital Program and its Treasury Management Strategy as part of the budget setting process.

- 6.3 It is recommended that officers also seek developer and external funding contributions to support the implementation of the strategy which could potentially reduce the projected costs.
- 6.4 Procurement options such as a sole supplier should also be examined to deliver greater Value for Money.

Legal Implications

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- 6.5 The recommendations set out within this report are within the Council's powers and duties. The Council has a discretionary power to provide play areas under s19 of the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976.

Effective consultation on the future of Brentwood's play areas has been carried from July to September 2018 out. There is no express duty to consult and the form and content of the consultation is therefore not prescribed. The outcome of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account as part of any lawful decision-making process.

The planning, installation and ongoing maintenance of the Council's play areas must comply with relevant health and safety legislation and government guidance, to safeguard users and minimise legal risk for the Council.

Any procurement exercise must be carried out in compliance with EU directives, UK procurement regulations and the Council's Constitution.

An Equality Impact Assessment should be carried out to secure compliance with the Council's statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate unlawful discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between different groups of users.

6.6 **Other Implications – Health and Safety**

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The Health and Safety implications are implicit in section 3.10 of this report and the References to Council Priorities. These identify the importance of safety in play, as well as enabling and encouraging children's health and wellbeing. It includes the Council's strategy to enable legal compliance with statutory responsibilities for using the

Council's play areas. The recommendations of the report also strongly advocate the budget approval to ensure timely investment and improvement in play areas and maintenance of them, to reduce the Council's risk exposure and liability from civil claims and criminal prosecution, from ageing play equipment.

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Play Area Strategy
Appendix B – Play Area Consultation
Appendix C – PiPA checklist

Background documents:

Fields in Trust-Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play - Beyond the six-acre standard

Plan Inclusive Play Area (PiPA)

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