

 Executive – 15th February 2012		Agenda Item No. <h1>12A</h1>
Title	Play Area Review	
For further information about this report please contact	David Anderson Greenspace Development Manager 09126 456214 david.anderson@warwickdc.gov.uk	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Executive – 24 th November 2010 No. 91	
Background Papers	Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report 12 th September 2011	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes Ref. 310
Equality & Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken	Yes/No (If No state why below)

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive		Andrew Jones
Head of Service		Ian Coker
CMT		
Section 151 Officer		Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer		
Finance		Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)		Councillor David Shilton
Consultation & Community Engagement		
Warwick District Council, Play Working Party - (ongoing) Interim report to Overview and Scrutiny - June 2010 Overview and Scrutiny – September 2011 Play Working Party and Ward Members meeting on 2 nd December to discuss removals.		
Final Decision?		Yes
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Many of the current play areas were installed during 2002/03 as part of the £1.1 million Play Area Improvement Programme, and therefore many will be reaching the end of their useable life in the next ten years. The estimated cost to replace the existing provision on a like for like basis is £1.82m. This figure could be reduced if the Council were to revise their approach to play provision. At this time there is a budgetary provision of £280k for capital replacement of play areas for the District.
- 1.2 The strategic approach taken by the Council's Play Working Party has been to develop a local play area standard for Warwick District Council, based on supporting evidence. This has then been applied to the Council's current provision of play areas, and has highlighted some duplication of play areas and also gaps in provision.
- 1.3 This report outlines proposals by the Council's Play Working Party for removals and enhancement of play areas and the cost implications for the next 10 years. It also updates Members on the Play Equipment Renewal Reserve and the opportunities for transferring play areas to other agencies and community groups.
- 1.4 Membership of the Play Working Party is Councillor David Shilton, Councillor Ann Blacklock, Councillor Judith Falp, Councillor Jane Knight, Councillor Tony Heath, Ian Coker, David Anderson, Simon Richardson, Pamela Trott (Police), Rene Warner and finally Councillor Susan Gallagher in a Safeguarding Childrens role.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Members approve the Play Working Party's Play Area Standard for the future provision of the Council's play areas.
 - **Access** - There is a play area within 480m of every home in Warwick district.
 - **Quality** - That play areas are designed to be as safe and inclusive as possible to access and use, and to be of high play value.
 - **Area** - That an area of at least 0.3 hectares per 1000 population is provided for play areas on new residential developments.
- 2.2 That Members approve the Play Working Party proposals for the reduction and enhancement of the Councils plays areas; see Play Area Development Plan Appendix 1. That Members agree to the principle of decommissioning or transferring the following play areas, based on information contained within section 7.4. This is subject to a sustainable future being determined for each unoccupied area following removal of play equipment, and for this to be done in consultation with the Portfolio Holder;
 - Saxon Meadows Leamington Milverton Ward – decommission.
 - Patterns Road Warwick North Ward and – decommission.
 - Red Lane Kenilworth Abbey Ward – decommission or transfer.
- 2.3 That Members approve that the Play Working Party review the provision of young people's outdoor facilities, including skate, BMX, Multi Use Game Areas, bringing a further report to Executive by October 2012.

3. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Following the Play Area report of November 2010, it was recommended that officers bring forward proposals for possible reduction and enhancement of the Council's play areas. It was also recommended that officers investigate establishing a Play Equipment Renewal Reserve for future play area provision with options on how this could be funded. Finally it was recommended that officers and the Play Working party consider opportunities for the transfer of play areas to other agencies and to bring all proposals and findings to a future meeting.
- 3.2 To determine future provision, the Play Working Party has developed a local 'Play Area Standard', as recommended by Planning Policy Guidance and Play England 'Planning for Play'. This standard has been applied to the Council's play areas and has been used to inform the number, type and location of play areas and the future cost implications. This standard has been applied to current provision but will also define play area opportunities as a result of new residential developments.
- 3.3 The standard addresses accessibility, quality and the minimum area requirements for play areas. Any approved local play standards should be a guide to the future provision of play areas. There may be the occasional circumstance where communities, in discussion with the Council, agree provision at variance with the standard. The Access Standard is relevant to urban areas only and needs to be treated more flexibly within the rural areas. For further information to this standard please refer to section 7.
- 3.4 Applying the above Play Area Standard has helped to determine the future number, type, location of play areas across the district. It has been used to inform the Play Area Development Plan for the next 10 years, see Appendix 1. This plan details those play areas that require removal and those that require further investment.
- 3.4.1 Rationalisation of the existing play area stock will involve closing and removing or transfer of three existing play areas where the following or some of the below criteria are met.
- Condition of existing equipment and/or safety surfacing
 - There is an overlap of provision with adjoining play areas
 - Existing use levels are low
 - Play value is poor
 - Poorly located

The following play areas have been provisionally earmarked for decommissioning or transfer, subject to the agreement of Executive, for the general reasons outlined above and more site specific reasons noted in section 7.

- Saxon Meadows, Leamington Milverton Ward
- Patterns Road, Warwick North Ward
- Red Lane, Kenilworth Abbey Ward

Ward Councillors were invited to a meeting on the 2nd December 2011 to discuss the proposals or at least respond in writing.

- 3.4.2 The Play Working Party have reviewed all remaining play areas and classified them based on the significance of the green space, their potential usage and the type of neighbouring play areas.

The Play Area Development Plan lists those remaining play areas requiring future investment, their new classification, the 10 year replacement cost to each and total capital requirements for all the Councils play areas.

- 3.4.3 The Play Working Party has proposed that further work is required to address gaps in play provision and that a future report is brought to the October 2012 Executive on any recommendations. Areas deprived of play include areas such as The Forbes Estate, Kenilworth East, Woodloes North etc. Please see map titled 'No WDC Play Area Provision'

Initial ideas to address deficiency included investigating opportunities through non WDC play area providers, e.g. schools, public houses, fast food retailer's and also opportunities through new residential developments.

- 3.5 The Play Area Development Plan, Appendix 1, identifies the funding requirements over the next 10 years, but does not specifically detail where the funding will come from. Section 5.4 identifies possible sources of funding but no in depth financial analysis has been made from these sources. It is therefore proposed that a funding model will be produced detailing what funding is presently available, what speculative funding may will be available through other sources, and any gaps in the funding requirements.
- 3.6 The focus of the Play Working Party over the last 3 years has been the Council's play areas, mainly influenced by the funding opportunities, but also Warwick District Play Strategy. The play area review and the proposed Play Area Development Plan have not included facilities such as skate, BMX, Multi Use Game Areas etc. It is now felt appropriate that a review of young people's outdoor facilities should be undertaken, to determine future provision and funding requirements.

4. **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 4.1 **Policy Framework** – This report does not bring forward any changes to the policy framework.
- 4.2 **Fit for the Future** – The Council's purpose is to improve the quality of life for everyone who lives in, works in or visits Warwick District. With our partners, we aspire to build sustainable, safer, stronger and healthier communities. Ensuring we have good play provision will contribute towards these aims.

5. **BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK**

- 5.1 Modern play areas have a considerably shorter shelf life than their earlier counterparts and on average last only 15 years before they need a complete refurbishment. Taking into account the fact that the majority of the current play equipment was installed during 2002-03 as part of the £1.1 million Play Area Improvement Programme, the majority will be reaching the end of their useable life during 2015-2020.
- 5.2 It has been estimated, based on recent refurbishments and play equipment costs, that the cost of refurbishing existing play areas in their present format is

£1,820,000 by 2020, see Appendix 1. (Please note this is a revision to the estimated costs set out in the November 2010 Executive Report). However under the new proposals as set out in Play Area Development Plan, it has been estimated that £1,670,000 is required by 2020, a reduced capital cost of £150,000.

- 5.3 Recent external funding through the previous government DSCF Playbuilder (£110,000), Big Lottery (£72,000) and s106 off site Developer contributions (£80,000) has been used to upgrade a limited number of play areas but even this external investment falls short of the projected funding required. These are good examples of how play areas can be refurbished from external funding and examples of how the Council may upgrade some play areas in the future. However this type of funding is certainly not guaranteed and is likely to be on an ad hoc basis in the future.
- 5.4 A Play Equipment Renewal Reserve that can be used to fund the replacement of play equipment has been established. This currently has £280,000 allocated to it. This reserve could be funded from a range of sources including s106, New Homes Bonus monies, external grants and the capital receipts from the disposal of greenspace, identified through the parks audit and the subsequent Greenspace Strategy.
- 5.5 Under the current grounds maintenance contract the removal of the three play areas would save £2621.94 in revenue costs.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S) CONSIDERED

- 6.1 A decision could be taken to do nothing differently and continue with the current approach and pattern of play provision. As explained this approach would not be cost effective and all 49 play areas would continue to be of low play value. This approach has been estimated to cost £1.82m.
- 6.2 Unless substantial sources of capital funding can be identified over the next 10 years, much of play equipment installed as part of the 2002-2003 £1.1 million playground initiative will be approaching the end of its life and will require removal on health and safety grounds. This will result in shortfalls in provision and many children and young people will not be able to access a sufficient range of play opportunities within their own local neighbourhood. This ad hoc approach would result in an unplanned and inequitable pattern of play provision across the district and the opportunities to maximise the benefit of any future play funding would not be realised.
- 6.3 Informal approaches have been made to two rural parishes on the two rural play areas owned by Warwick District Council to see if they would be interested in their transfer. In response, one Parish Council has made it clear that responsibility should still continue with Warwick District Council, while the other has not responded.
- 6.4 Anecdotal evidence from one local authority, which had transferred its play areas to local community groups, has suggested this has not proved successful, but further research is required on this type of transfer.
- 6.5 The West Midlands Parks Forum, which consists of 38 local authorities and green space professionals, have also been approached on this subject, but no

responses have been received. The lack of response indicates that the transfer of play areas is not widely practised amongst other Councils.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 Access Standard

'There is a play area within 480m of every home in Warwick district'.

- 7.1.1 This standard will address any deficiencies in play areas, but at the same time phase out small or poorly located play areas, and those in close proximity of each other, so long as there is satisfactory alternative play provision nearby. A 480m maximum walking distance standard equates approximately to a 10 minute walk. The proposed standard reflects the need to ensure equity in provision but also to ensure that the play areas provided are well maintained and fit for purpose. This distance standard aims to ensure that every child will be able to access an equipped play area within 480m or less of where they live. It is recognised that this standard is not always achievable, especially in those areas that are deficient in accessible green space, and within the rural areas of the district.
- 7.1.2 Planning Policy Guidance states that residents in rural areas cannot realistically expect to have the same level of access to the full range of different types of open spaces and sport and recreation facilities normally available in more densely populated urban areas. This means that residents of rural areas usually have to travel further than most urban residents to some forms of provision. This applies with play area provision.
- 7.1.3 However Planning Policy Guidance offers an alternative approach to the distance based provision standard, by using a settlement hierarchy concept, in which some forms of provisions, including play areas, should be concentrated in a number of 'key settlements' but intended to serve several settlements, including those smallest sporadic and dispersed settlements. This approach would require extensive consultation with local communities and has been outside the scope of this project.
- 7.1.4 As part of the review process, benchmarking has confirmed that no known Councils have separate play area provision standards for both urban and rural areas, where it is considered appropriate. For these reasons no attempt has been made to set a separate rural play area accessibility standard for the District. Therefore the 480m Access Standard detailed in this report, which is appropriate to the urban areas, will need to be treated more flexibly in a rural context. A map titled 'WDC and Town and Rural Play Areas within 480m buffer' shows the distribution of all the known play areas across the district.
- 7.1.5 In areas which are over-provided with play areas, where there are several play areas within the maximum walking distance, then the action should be to remove play areas that are poorly located or of poor play value, and to invest in improving the quality of the remaining play areas, without adversely affecting people's access to play areas. Decisions relating to individual play areas will refer to local circumstances and needs.

7.2 Quality Standard

'That play areas are designed to be as safe and inclusive as possible to access and use, and to be of high play value'.

7.2.1 To achieve this quality there is a need to apply the following five principles to the location and design of play areas:

- play areas should be located where there is good natural surveillance from the street and neighbouring houses
- play areas should be located on accessible green space where feasible and include elements of natural and free play
- a buffer zone should be provided around play areas
- all play areas should be designed to be inclusive for children and young people with disabilities
- play areas should be designed using the 10 principles for designing successful play spaces as set out by Play England in their guidance manual 'Design for Play'. This has already been adopted by the Council.

Adopting these principles in the design of new play areas will support the creation of high quality, inclusive play spaces.

7.2.2 The enhancement of play areas is already being addressed through better design of play areas. The recent Playbuilder programme provided the opportunity to adopt a more progressive approach to play area design within the District. The Council has moved away from the old fashioned KFC (Kit/Fence/Carpet) type play areas, with many being poor quality and under used, to new play areas that now follow national design guidance.

7.3 **Area Standard.**

'To ensure an area for equipped play provision of at least 0.3 hectares per 1000 population'

7.3.1 This area requirement has already been adopted by the Council as part of the Open Space Supplementary Planning Document. In addition for new play areas on new developments, play areas should also be located within, or adjacent to, accessible green space, and that a minimum size of 400m² for play areas catering to children up to 14 years.

7.3.2 The purpose of this standard is to ensure that as Warwick district grows, so new play areas are provided, but appropriate to the size of the development. The play standard is based on existing provision (0.02 hectares/1000) but is set at a slightly higher level to reflect the need to develop more provision for young people up to 18.

7.3.3 New play areas should be located within or adjacent to accessible green space, both to reduce the impact of the play space on neighbouring properties and to provide opportunities for children to combine free and static play.

7.3.4 Warwick District plans to retain and enhance a network of 'Destination Play Zones' with a minimum size of 1,000m². Destination Play Zones will cater for young people up to 18 and should look to include at least one of the following: a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), skate park, BMX track or other sports facility as well as play equipment. Destination Play Zones are currently Newbold Comyn, Leamington, Victoria Park, Leamington, St. Nicholas Park, Warwick and Abbey Fields, Kenilworth.

7.4 The following play areas have been provisionally earmarked for decommissioning or transfer, subject to the agreement of the Executive, for general reasons outlined previously and more site specific reasons noted below.

7.4.1 Saxon Meadows, Leamington

- Play value is low
- location is isolated with poor surveillance
- infrastructure is poor
- Relatively low usage
- There are poor sightlines from nearby houses
- within catchment of a neighbouring play area
- The river is a known hazard and parents will know to take this into consideration when allowing their children to use the play area.
- within catchment of Avonside South play area which is well used and serves children

Closure recommended by March 2013.

Alternative options will be investigated into the future use of this area.

7.4.2 Pattens Road, Warwick

- Play value is low
- location is isolated with poor surveillance (high hedges and fences)
- infrastructure is poor
- Relatively low usage
- within catchment of upgraded neighbouring Millbank play area which is well used and serves children

Closure recommended by March 2013.

Alternative options will be investigated into the future use of this area, but this may include allotment provision if there is demand in this area.

7.4.3 Red Lane, Kenilworth

- There are a limited number of houses within a reasonable walking distance.
- Play value is average
- infrastructure is poor
- Relatively low usage

Closure of the play area or transfer to the emerging Burton Green Parish Council recommended by March 2013.

WDC should look to support the planning of new play area central to the Burton Green settlement. One way this could be done is to transfer the play equipment to a suitable site, and to consider that the Parish Council takes on the future management, maintenance and inspection of this new play area. It understood that no suitable land is available at present.

If no land can be found to accommodate the play equipment, then the transfer of the existing play area to the emerging Burton Green Parish Council is another option. The Parish Council could take on the future management, maintenance and inspection of the play area and its full liability. Warwick District Council,

through its Ward Councillors, has already started negotiations with the emerging Burton Green Parish Council on these proposals.

- 7.5 As for the remaining play areas these have been reclassified from the old National Playing Fields Association standards of NEAPs, LEAPs and LAPs to a new classification, as detailed in the previous Executive report.
- 7.5.1 The estimated capital replacement cost for each of these type of play areas are;
 - Destination Play Zones (Equipped) - £100,000
 - Community Play Zones (Equipped) - £40,000
 - Local Play Zones (Equipped) - £15,000
 - Natural Play Zones (non-equipped) - £5,000
- 7.5.2 These costs are based on average costs for each type of play area. For example the Community Play Zone is estimated at £40,000, but some sites may cost £50,000, while others may only cost £30,000 and will be appropriate to each site.

Appendix 1 – Play Area Development Plan

The following table identifies by locality all of the existing 49 play areas owned and managed Warwick District Council. The table provides by individual play area;

- their current classification
- their recommended new classification
- their anticipated 10 year replacement cost under current classification
- their anticipated 10 year replacement cost under the new classification

Play Area	Locality	Current classification	Current 10 year capital replacement cost	Recommended New Classification	Recommended 10 year capital replacement cost
Hatton Park	Rural	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Sabin Drive	Rural	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Abbey Fields	Kenilworth	NEAP	100000	Destination Play Zone	100000
Bates Memorial	Kenilworth	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Castle Farm	Kenilworth	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Farmer Ward	Kenilworth	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Glendale Avenue	Kenilworth	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Red Lane	Kenilworth	LEAP	30000	Proposed Removal or transfer	0
St John's Playing Fields	Kenilworth	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000

Avonside	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Calder Walk	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Campion Hills	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Natural Play Zone	5000
Cox's Orchard	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Natural Play Zone	5000
Cubbington Waterworks	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Eagle Recreation Gr.	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Elizabeth Road	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Fallow Hill	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Guys Cliffe	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Kennedy Square	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Mason Avenue	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Midland Oak	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Mill Gardens	Leamington	NEAP	100000	Destination Play Zone	100000
Newbold Arms	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Newbold Recreation	Leamington	NEAP	100000	Destination Play Zone	100000

Paul Putz	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Redlands Recreation Gr.	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Roxburgh Croft	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Natural play zone	5000
Rushmore Street	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Saxon Meadows	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Proposed Removal	0
Shrublands	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Stamford Gardens	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
The Dell Play	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
The Holt	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Victoria Park	Leamington	NEAP	100000	Destination Play Zone	100000
Villiers Street	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Windmill Road	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Wych Elm Drive	Leamington	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
Canalside	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Mander Grove	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000

Millbank Play	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Pattens Road	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Proposed Removal	0
Priory Pools	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Saltisford Common	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Local Play Zone	15000
St Nicholas Park	Warwick	NEAP	100000	Destination Play Zone	100000
Twycross Walk	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Warwick Gates East	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Warwick Gates West	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
The Marish	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000
Hickmans Close	Warwick	LEAP	30000	Community Play Zone	40000

Existing Cost £1,820,000

New Cost

£1,670,000

Cost reduction

£150,000

Notes

The current classification of play areas, i.e. NEAPS, LEAPS and LAPS have been categorised under the old National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) standard. Even though each site is not currently fully compliant, it gives a good indication to the play areas significance and the cost of refurbishment.

Under the recommended new classification, the 10 year capital replacement costs have been based on average costs for each type of play area. For example the new Community Play Zone is estimated at £40,000 but some sites may actually cost £50,000, while others may only cost £30,000 and will be appropriate to each site.

Of the 46 remaining play areas there are

- 5 x Destination Play Zone
- 23 x community Play zones
- 15 x Local Play Zones
- 3 x Natural Play Zones