

		Executive – 4 th February 2009	Agenda Item No.
Title		Repairs and Maintenance of Play Areas in the district	
For further information about this report please contact		Rose Winship 01926 456223 rose.winship@warwickdc.gov.uk	
Service Area		Cultural Services	
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Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006		No	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		Council (December 2008) – Petition from Cllr Gill	
Background Papers		Play Strategy – 26 th November 2008	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	Yes
Key Decision?	Yes
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	No

Officer/Councillor Approval

With regard to officer approval all reports *must* be approved by the report authors relevant director, Finance, Legal Services and the relevant Portfolio Holder(s).

Officer Approval	Date	Name
Relevant Director	20 th Jan 2009	Mary Hawkins
Chief Executive	20 th Jan 2009	Chris Elliot
CMT	20 th Jan 2009	
Section 151 Officer		Mary Hawkins
Legal	20 th Jan 2009	Peter Oliver
Finance	20 th Jan 2009	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	20 th Jan 2009	Cllr Chris White

Consultation Undertaken

Please insert details of any consultation undertaken with regard to this report.

Final Decision?	No
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Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)
The authority to allocate of funding to be drawn down from the County Council will be delegated to the Play Working Party.

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The report seeks to provide an up to date overview of the situation relating to the provision of play areas in the district and their role in relation to the WDC Play Strategy 2007 – 2012.
- 1.2 It provides a summary of the condition of play areas with particular reference to those in need of major repairs or replacement and also aims to address the specific issues raised by local residents in relation the Windmill Road play area and suggest how the situation may be addressed. Reference will be made in the report to resources which are currently available for play area maintenance, and highlight any alternative sources of funding which may provide opportunities in the future.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 An audit of the condition, value and levels of usage of the 47 play areas in the district is undertaken throughout the next 12 months and an action plan produced with recommendations for the future of play areas in light of the Warwick District Play Strategy, new design guidelines from Play England “Design for Play” and KIDS “Inclusion by Design” and the opportunities presented by internal and external funding. Resources to carry out this audit would be funded from the Leisure Improvement Budget 2008/09 and 2009/10 with officers working with ward councillors to complete the audit and public consultation exercises.
- 2.2 The Play Working Party is given delegated authority to agree the programme of works to play areas if the details of the Warwick district allocation from the £1million allocated to Warwickshire County Council to improve fixed play equipment are confirmed prior to the results of the audit being known.
- 2.3 A further report be brought to the Executive in due course with a fully costed action plan based on the outcomes of the audit of play areas.

3. **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 In 2007, the Council developed and adopted a five year Play Strategy which seeks to improve the public realm as a child and a “play friendly” environment. Widespread consultation with children and parents designed to inform the development of the Strategy, identified that many children found the traditional play areas to be boring and without adult supervision, often did not feel safe using them. Whilst fixed play areas will continue to have a role in supporting children’s play, the results of the survey, supported by guidance provide through the Department of Children, Schools and Families, encourage the Council to adopt a more holistic approach to its support of play area provision. Therefore it is essential that any future investment is undertaken in a fully considered and strategic manner that takes into account children and young peoples play needs.
- 3.2 The play areas in the district received a significant injection of funding in 2001 to 2003 when approximately £1 million was invested from the capital programme and s106 agreements to install new play areas throughout the district and bring all our play areas up to the new European Standards which was accepted good practice at the time. Natural wear and tear and, in some locations, significant vandalism have taken their toll on the equipment to the point were a programmed replacement schedule is required. The WDC Play Strategy however, identifies a shift away from the previous concept of fixed play areas being the most suitable for all locations,

and there is a movement towards “play spaces” rather than fixed play areas. Design guidelines have also been amended in the years since much of the play equipment was installed. Any future programmes must reflect these new guidelines and the objectives of the Play Strategy.

- 3.3 It has recently been announced that Warwickshire County Council have been allocated £1.1 million funding to improve fixed play areas in the County. It is currently unknown how these resources will be allocated and officers are currently working with colleagues across the county to clarify the situation. Any funding allocated to Warwick District will be used to address the issues highlighted in the audit.
- 3.4 Windmill Road Play area is a popular local play area for residents as outlined in the petition presented to Council in December 2008. Items of equipment have been removed over time from this play area due to vandalism and on the recommendation from an independent health and safety inspection (Appendix A). The condition of the safety surface has deteriorated to a point where it presents a trip hazard in parts and is no longer functioning as a safety surface in key areas. Initial estimates suggested that a sum of £25k would be required to reinstate the play area like for like. Given the number of play areas in the district requiring some injection of resources to repair/replace equipment, this is not considered achievable within existing resources.
- 3.5 Of the 47 play areas in the district, there are a further 4 which share similar issues with Windmill Road. Mason Avenue, which has suffered from ongoing vandalism; Shrublands/Fords Fields which has also been vandalised on a number of occasions and is subject to regular graffiti incidents and has been linked to drug dealing; Kennedy Square where the equipment is obsolete and does not meet current safety guidelines; and Calder Walk which has ongoing issues with vandalism. In addition there are other play areas in the district with minor repair issues but until the audit has been completed of all play areas a fully costed plan can not be produced.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTION CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Officers have visited Windmill Road play area and have worked up an alternative option which is achievable within a maximum budget of £13k which could be funded from the Leisure Improvement Budget for 2008/09 and 2009/10. However, there is concern that this would raise questions about other play areas in the district requiring improvements ie Mason Avenue, Kennedy Square, Calder Walk, Shrublands and others, and the resources are not available to take the same action in the 5 play areas including Windmill Road.
- 4.2 There is the possibility that the play areas listed above and others may be appropriate for the resources coming from the County; however, until details of this allocation are known it is not possible to confirm this option.

5. BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 Current budgets relevant to play areas are:

Play area maintenance budget 2008/09 - £37,000**

Leisure Improvement Budget (Play Areas) 2008/09 - £10,000

Resources remaining at 1/1/09 = £6,000 (maintenance budget) + £6,800 (improvements) = £12,800

However a total of £4,700 is earmarked from the maintenance budget for inspections and routine Glendale work leaving a total of **£8,100** to cover ad hoc repairs and any replacement required before the end of March 2009.

** £10k of this budget is ringfenced for repairs to “youth facilities” eg Campion Hills BMX track, skateparks

- 5.2 It has recently been announced that Warwickshire County Council have been allocated £1.1 million of DCSF “Playbuilder” funding to develop or improve 20-25 play areas across the County. It is currently unknown how these resources will be allocated and officers are scheduled to attend a meeting with the County Council in early February to discuss the application of the programme. If Warwick District were to be successful in receiving an allocation of this funding, guidance already available suggests that it must be used to provide play areas in areas of greatest identified need.

6. **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 6.1 The Play Strategy 2007 – 2012 was developed within the strategic framework of:
- Community Plan for Warwick District (draft)
 - Warwick District Council Corporate Strategy 2008 – 2011
 - Children and Young People’s Plan for the County of Warwickshire

Therefore any improvements to play areas need to be carried out within the context of the WDC Play Strategy.