

**Subject:** Playground and Open Space Audit - Update

**Report to:** Executive Leadership Team – 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021  
Environment Committee – 25<sup>th</sup> November 2021

**Report by:** Head of Property & Asset Management



## RECOMMENDATIONS

**That Committee: Note the update report with a view to considering options on receipt of the full audit in January 2022.**

### 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 As a Borough the Council has a significant number of Playgrounds. Some years ago, it was identified that an audit of facilities was required to fully understand provision and consider future options.
- 1.2 Early in 2021 it was agreed that the resource for this work would be passed to the Property and Asset Team. A part-time post was identified to undertake the audit and the post was filled in May 2021. The audit was to focus on Playgrounds only however as the work began it was clear that an audit of open space would also be beneficial and was added to the scope of the role.
- 1.3 Since the commencement of the audit a significant amount of information and data has been collated and this is now being finalised in readiness for the full report in January 2021. This report aims to update the Committee in relation to the information gathered, facilities available within each area and options to be put forward.

### 2. PLAYGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Fields in Trust introduced in the early 1980's a range of terms to provide detailed technical guidance for authorities on what exact provision should be made for children's play. The terms were then widely adopted by both Planners and Play Practitioners, and today are universally used when it comes to planning for play.
- 2.2 Play areas therefore fall into several categories and for the purposes of the audit the data has been collected in relation to these categories. To explain further the definition of the categories are as follows:

<b>LAP</b>	Local Area for Play	A small area of open space specifically designated and primarily laid out for very young children to play close to
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		where they live i.e. within one minute's walking time. LAPs are designed to allow for ease of informal observation and supervision and primarily function to encourage informal play and social interaction for toddlers. The LAP requires no play equipment as such, relying more on demonstrative features indicating that play is positively encouraged.
<b>LEAP</b>	Locally Equipped Area for Play	<p>An area of open space specifically designed and laid out with features including equipment for children who are beginning to play independently. The number and nature of equipment and structures is a matter for local decision, though provision for a minimum number of six play experiences is recommended.</p> <p>Play features including equipment are an integral part of the LEAP and the attractiveness of such spaces, though it is also important that the space can be used for physical activity and games. LEAPs can also include landscaped areas of play; containing little formal equipment but imaginatively designed and contoured, using as far as is possible natural materials such as logs or boulders which create an attractive setting for play.</p>
<b>NEAP</b>	Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play	This is an area of open space specifically designated, laid out and equipped mainly for older children but potentially with play opportunities for younger children as well. It can provide play equipment and a hard surface area for ball games or wheeled activities such as roller skating or cycling. It may provide other facilities such as a ramp for skateboarding, a rebound wall, and a shelter for meeting and socialising. NEAPs can often be combined with LEAP provision.
<b>MUGA</b>	Multi Use Games Area	Sports MUGAs are usually a steel anti vandal outdoor fenced area with built in goal post units for various types of sports games, such as <a href="#">football</a> , <a href="#">basketball</a> or <a href="#">tennis</a> .

2.3 Within the Borough there are a total of 98 play areas which are divided as follows:

Category	Definition	Total
<b>LAP</b>	Local Area for Play	15
<b>LEAP</b>	Locally Equipped Area for Play	46
<b>NEAP</b>	Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play	21
<b>MUGA</b>	Multi use games areas	2
<b>OTHER</b>	Not categorised or not on Play Inspection Company Database i.e. splash park, putting green, basketball court.	14
<b>TOTAL SITES</b>		<b>98</b>

2.4 Although there are a total of 98 play areas not all within the Borough are owned by the council although all play areas are currently inspected by GYBC staff as part of a risk rated approach on a monthly, quarterly, and annual basis. Annually an external consultant inspection is undertaken to complete the inspection audit No reimbursement of costs is received from Parishes for this service.

2.5 The breakdown of ownership is as follows:



2.6 From the audit inspection to date the following overview points have been noted:

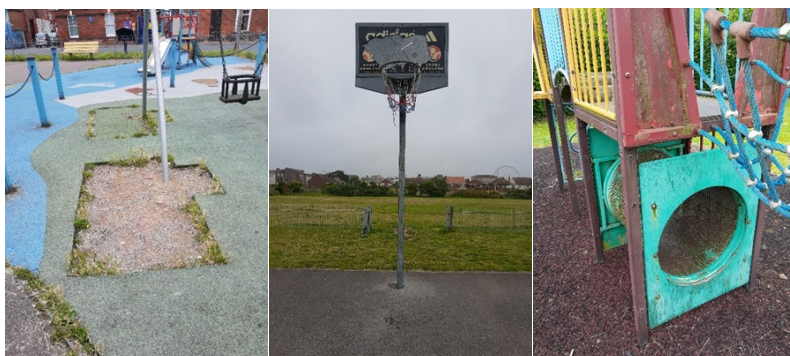
#### **Positives**

- There are good amounts of play provision around Borough.
- Many sites have fenced areas with dog grids or gates.

#### **Areas for Improvement**

- In general, play areas are beginning to look tired and equipment is becoming dated so lacks visual appeal.
- Surfaces are deteriorating in play areas and MUGA sites including issues with weeds, loose material.
- Lack of disabled access paths and entry routes into areas and overall lack of inclusive play equipment.
- Review of seating and bin provision would be beneficial.

Example of findings representative of a number of locations:



- 2.7 Many of the LAP and LEAP sites have been installed with the benefit of S106 funding and it is predominantly these sites which are in most need of consideration as part of the full audit.

### 3. OPEN SPACE INFORMATION

- 3.1 Open space information has been gathered based on previous and updated mapping data, database information and through site visits. The following calculations can be drawn from the types of open space sites included in the 2021 audit. These figures include GYBC, Parish and Highways owned sites identified from present and previous data sources.

Type of Space	Definition	Total
Informal Amenity Greenspace	Informal recreation spaces, communal green spaces in and around housing and village greens.	155
Parks and Gardens	Formal green spaces including urban parks, country parks, forest parks and formal gardens.	33

- 3.2 The information being gathered should be viewed as a base level listing within the site categories. The quality of these open spaces is defined through a scoring system for planning references and measured in relation to quality and quantity:

- **Quality :-** The needs, expectations and experiences of users, and the design, management and maintenance of facilities.
- **Quantity :-** A measure of the amount of open space provision which is necessary to meet the needs of the local (and in some cases the regional) catchment.

- 3.3 In undertaking the audit the following findings have been identified:

- Not all spaces have disabled access.
- Not every space has visual appeal, bins, benches.
- Space specific maintenance varies – grass, tree and shrubs, bins and litter picking.
- Safety of Spaces varies – some secluded spaces, dark areas. Overall lack of lighting and CCTV.
- Some areas have been adopted by In Bloom Groups, Volunteer Groups, Local Residents and Individuals.

## 4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 As can be seen from the above snapshot of information the volume of data is considerable. To enable the Committee to fully consider the impacts of location, type of facility, amount of equipment and age range the information for both play areas and open spaces is being collected and collated by Parish for the rural areas and Ward for the urban areas. This information has already been circulated to Ward members for those areas to ensure the information is as complete as possible. The data will be presented in as comprehensive a format as possible to enable next steps to be considered and agreed.

### Playgrounds:

- 4.2 The audit aims to raise considerations around the following areas:

- refurbishment of sites
- overall numbers of sites
- redesign of facilities
- reuse of areas.

In some cases, a light touch refurbishment may be all that is needed to bring new life to a facility. An example of this is the work undertaken at St. Georges Park although the safety surfacing was expensive and delayed by undertaking a repaint and refurbishment of equipment as the same time the facility feels like new without any change of equipment.



- 4.3 Other options will consider how different types of play could be considered to reduce long-term management costs but provide interesting and new types of play space for areas. Some examples are below:



<p><b>Natural Play Areas</b></p>  <p>Local Example – Trafalgar Grange</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willow/timber/ boulder structures.</li> <li>• Bark/ Grass/ Sand surfaces.</li> <li>• Nature areas - Bug Hotels, Wildflower areas.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Inclusive Play</b></p>  <p>Local example – Beaconsfield</p>	<p><b>Natural Inclusive Play</b></p> 
<p><b>Outdoor Gyms - movable</b></p>  <p>Urban outdoor gym areas</p>	<p><b>Outdoor Gyms - static equipment</b></p> 
<p><b>Urban Drainage Play Parks</b></p>  <p>Example : West Gorton Community Park - Manchester</p>	<p><b>Activity Trails</b></p> 
<p><b>Integrated Play Areas</b></p>  <p>Natural</p>	<p><b>Integrated Climbing Wall</b></p>  <p>Urban – Stratford Olympic Park Landscape</p>

4.4 Traditionally the Borough has installed mechanical play but as can be seen from the above options there are a range of natural play provisions which may benefit consideration for the future.

4.5 Funding will be one of the more challenging areas for any development of these facilities but there are a few channels which could be explored to deliver improvements including but not

limited to: further S106 developments, Lottery bids, match funding from parishes, community funds and Housing Associations, donations, advertising, sponsorship as well as council funding.

### Open Space:

- 4.6 For Open Space the options to be considered are similar
- overall amount of space
  - possible changes of use
  - sale of land or redevelopment.
- 4.7 It is important to ensure that space is protected from development where necessary and that space is accessible by all including the installation of assets such as dropped kerb entry points, level paths, raised borders and sensory spaces. Many of the spaces would benefit from improvements in relation to design, lighting, and CCTV.
- 4.8 Consideration of the environment and rewilding areas would also be beneficial leaving spaces to nature with additional tree planting and wildflower areas. The introduction of clear recreational spaces and pocket parks could also assist with the improved use of the open space provision.
- 4.9 Ongoing maintenance must be considered as part of any options together with drainage, drought, or flood tolerant spaces.
- 4.10 As with play space funding will continue to be challenging however a number of options can be considered including support from volunteer and community groups, Parish Council support and alternative use of some space. Some examples from other locations are shown below.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The full report will be available to the Committee in January 2022, but the information provided is to identify some of the opportunities and challenges with the overall volume of play and open space in the borough together with the current condition.
- 5.2 The full report will include a high-level detail in relation to each Ward (Urban) and Parish (Rural) including the number of play spaces and type, numbers and types of play equipment and overall condition, area of open space and location, type of space. Maps with play and open space marked will be provided as part of each pack to enable Members to better consider overall provision and location.
- 5.3 In order to ensure the information is as complete as possible each Ward/Parish area will be provided to Ward Councillors ahead of the January meeting for review and update ahead of the full January report.
- 5.4 Information will be provided in relation to current costs, capital funding and S106 funding.
- 5.5 Inspections and repairs and maintenance have continued on all Playgrounds throughout this audit with annual inspections now due in February 2022.
- 5.6 Information from the complete audit will be input to the Concerto Asset Management System.
- 5.7 Members are asked to note the information within the report as a preview to the detailed audit information to be presented in January 2022.

Area for consideration	Comment
Monitoring Officer Consultation	Noted
Section 151 Officer Consultation	Noted
Existing Council Policies	See background papers
Financial Implications - within existing budgets	Monthly, quarterly, and annual inspections.
Legal Implications (including human rights)	Considered
Risk Implications	No
Equality Issues/EQIA assessment	Yes
Details contained in strategy	Yes
Crime & Disorder	Yes
Every Child Matters	Yes