
Report title : Bromsgrove District Play Audit and Investment Strategy

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor B. McEldowney
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Ruth Bamford
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Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	Communities which are safe, well maintained and green Living Independent, Active and Healthy Lives The Green Thread
Key Decision / Non-Key Decision.	Non-Key Decision
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet RESOLVE that:-

- 1) The approach to improve the accessibility of equipped children's play as presented in the Bromsgrove Play Assessment (Appendix1) is adopted**
- 2) That the approach to capital investment as presented in, The Bromsgrove Play Audit and Investment Strategy (Appendix 2) is accepted and that officers are requested to prepare bids for capital funding, as applicable, to be considered in due course and in the context of other funding bids**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Responding to the recommendations in the Leisure and Culture Strategy for Bromsgrove, a detailed Play Audit and Investment Strategy now been completed. This is presented as Appendix 1, The recommendations from Appendix 1 have been costed as part of the development of a Play audit and Investment Strategy and this is presented as Appendix 2.

- 2.4 An accessibility assessment of existing play found that currently 81.7% of households in the district have access to some form of equipped children's play within a walking time of up to 10 to 15 minutes.
- 2.5 Whilst this headline figure is positive, gaps in accessibility were noted in some wards, particularly the south-east of Lowes Hill Ward, the south of Norton Ward and the south of Rock Hill Ward within Bromsgrove Town. Of the 'larger settlements', there are gaps present in Lickey Hills ward and in Wythall East and Wythall West Wards. In addition, there are further gaps in the 'smaller settlements' where there are small villages or 'isolated' residential properties, namely Alvechurch South, Perryfields, Tardebigge and Belbroughton & Romsley Wards.
- 2.6 Play areas and associated provision needs to comply with British Standards (including Playground Equipment & Surfacing – BS EN 1176 & 1177). Play areas within the district are inspected regularly by the inhouse team providing up to date information about compliance and condition. This is supplemented by an annual external inspection of all play spaces by an accredited play inspector.
- 2.7 There are currently 85 play areas across the district. A total of 40 of these are owned and managed by Bromsgrove District Council, the other 45 are owned / managed by other organisations including parish councils, community associations, and private management companies. The Bromsgrove Play Audit which considers the accessibility of play provision takes into account the contribution of all 85 play spaces. The Bromsgrove Play Investment Strategy is focused on those 40 play spaces for which Bromsgrove District Council has responsibility. Council Officers provide advice and support to parish councils and community organisations about play area maintenance, suppliers and procurement. Planning gain through section 106 funding can be made available to these organisations where there is need for investment in play spaces related to new development.
- 2.8 Of the 40 play spaces owned and managed by Bromsgrove District Council, five require urgent investment (in the next 12 months), six have an expected lifespan of up to three years, a further five of up to 5 years, and 21 up to 10 years (assuming regular maintenance is carried out).
- 2.9 A further six play areas are in deteriorating condition and will need to be reviewed as they start to approach 'end of life' . Ward Members have been consulted about the future of play provision at Boleyn Road and the proposal to remove the equipment is supported. At Foxglove Way residents and Ward Members have been consulted over the future of the play spaces and there is consensus that play provision

should be retained at this site. Four options have been considered and the preferred option now needs to be agreed.

- 2.10 The Strategy recommends that the remaining four play spaces are reviewed and further feasibility work including local consultation with residents is carried out at these open spaces to identify the optimal solution for each space, based on the year of improvements are scheduled. Options to be considered could include informal and / or naturalistic play, equipped play and landscape and environmental improvements. An assessment has been carried out which shows that if these open spaces were to include only informal play provision there would be little impact on the overall accessibility of equipped play spaces within a 10 to 15 minute walking time. This approach to localised feasibility work is one that Members have requested through informal consultation on the strategy.
- 2.11 This process has already commenced
- 2.12 The play audit has laid a foundation for enhancing accessible, high-quality play provision across wards, with a strategic focus on inclusivity, safety, and sustainability. This audit considers national standards while prioritising effective resource allocation. Key aspects include:
- Improved Accessibility: Ensuring that all wards, where feasible, have high-access play spaces, enhancing community-wide reach.
- Quality-Driven Prioritisation: Assessing sites for play value, location suitability, maintenance feasibility, and vulnerability to vandalism or anti-social behaviour. Sites with lower play value or higher maintenance challenges are scheduled for review as part of the prioritisation framework.
- Flexible Solutions: Developing diverse options for sites needing upgrades or reconfiguration, aligning with strategic objectives to optimise play spaces in line with community needs and financial sustainability.
- 2.13 The Play Audit and Investment Strategy sets out an approach that will improve the accessibility of play provision so that 82.5% of households (baseline 81.7%) in the district have access to a play space within a walking time of up to 10 to 15 minutes.
- 2.14 The Play Audit and Investment Strategy proposes achieving this by:

- Agreeing the preferred option for Foxgrove Way (2024-25) since the play area is in poor condition and approaching 'end of life';
 - Urgent investment in Charford Recreation Ground (Neighbourhood) and Kinver Drive Play Area (Local) and Upland Grove Play Area (Local) (2025-26)
 - Urgent removal of one local play spaces (Boleyn Road) that is near 'end of life' (2025-26);
 - Upgrading 1 play space in Wythall East ward from Local to Neighbourhood level provision (2026/27) allowing 398 households to have improved access to play;
 - Urgent upgrade to one Neighbourhood play space (Swan's Length in 2026/27);
 - Upgrading 4 Neighbourhood play spaces and significant repairs and maintenance to one Local play space (2027/28);
 - Local consultation to explore the options for 4 existing play spaces that are expected to be 'end of life' (2028/29). Open spaces to be retained but consideration given to the options to for play provision and whether this is informal, natural or equipped play alongside landscape improvements;
 - Upgrading a further 3 Neighbourhood play spaces (2029/30);
 - Investing in a further 21 play spaces, that are currently in good condition but will need upgrading in the future (2030/31 onwards).
- 2.15 The play audit and Investment strategy includes a prioritised list of enhancements based on a set of principles that improves the overall accessibility of play spaces, followed by investment to address deteriorating condition and quality.
- 2.16 The investment proposals have been costed using recent cost data from play area improvements and ongoing repairs and maintenance in the district.
- 2.17 The table below summarises the estimated costs over a ten-year period. There may be scope to bring investment forward for those spaces that are proposed to receive investment in years 7 to 10, subject to finances being available.

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31 - 2034/35	Total
No. of play spaces	1	4	2	5	4	3	21	39
Cost	£15,000	£161,400	£150,666	£207,242	£60,000	£134,351	£1,135,000	£1,848,659
Inflation @ 3%	£0	£4,842	£9,176	£19,217	£7,531	£21,399	£260,907	£156,828
Total	£15,000	£166,242	£159,841	£226,459	£67,531	£155,749	£1,395,907	£2,005,487

2.18 In addition there could be further costs related to four small play areas where there will be local consultation about replacing equipment or possible repurposing to create a community garden/orchard or deliver other landscape improvements.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 There is inequality in the access to play provision across the district and this has now been assessed in detail through analysis using computer-based mapping (GIS).
- 3.2 Play areas and associated provision needs to comply with National Standards in order to satisfy risk management procedures and to comply with the requirements of the Council's insurers.
- 3.3 Outdoor equipped play provision typically has a lifespan of 10 to 20 years. Within the next five years, eighteen play spaces require partial or full replacement to achieve national standards.
- 3.4 There is significant pressure on existing revenue budgets for ongoing inspections and repairs and maintenance. The recent Play Audit has identified the opportunity to rationalise play provision, with the potential to reduce the overall Bromsgrove District Council play stock from 40 equipped play spaces to 34 (reduction of six) whilst improving accessibility levels. This would be subject to feasibility and local consultation to identify the preferred option for these open spaces.
- 3.5 Discussion with Parish Councils has confirmed that all will continue to provide their play spaces for the foreseeable future. Council Officers will continue to work with parish councils and provide advice about maintenance, procurement and external funding opportunities. It is recognised that Parish Councils may need to be able to bid for capital funds to sustain and enhance their existing play spaces.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Play Investment Strategy sets out costs for the proposed approaches over a ten-year period. This will be subject to review and to budget bids for council consideration.

The proposed capital programme, if no other funding were available and assuming a life of 20 years, would see additional revenue costs of Circa £1k in year one, rising at roughly £20k. In year 10 this would result in an ongoing £215k a year cost to finance the work. These costs are rounded as programmes and interest rates will change over time. A 5.50% interest rate is used for initial modelling.

	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30	30/31	31/32	32/33	33/34	34/35
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Investment	15	166	159	226	67	156	279	279	279	279	279
Interest @ 5.50%	1	10	19	31	35	43	59	74	89	105	120
MRP (20 yrs)	0	1	9	17	28	32	39	53	67	81	95
Total debt charges	1	11	28	48	63	75	98	127	157	186	215

These sites will require maintenance. This will be met within the existing maintenance budget. The 2024/5 MTFP set out estimated debt charges for the first 3 years of £10k, £20k and £50k.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Play provision is required to achieve national safety standards for the Council to meet its risk management and insurance liabilities.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS**Relevant Strategic Purpose**

- 6.1 The Council has recently adopted the Leisure and Culture Strategy for Bromsgrove. This strategy recognises the value of equipped children's play in providing spaces where children can play, be active and spend time outdoors. Play provision is also an important part of safe, well maintained and green neighbourhoods.
- 6.2 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, forming part of the Leisure and Culture Strategy recommended that the authority carry out an audit of the value, quality and accessibility of equipped children's play across the district.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.2 The play audit and Investment strategy seeks to address deficiencies in play provision across the district. Allowing all households, where reasonably practicable, to have access to good quality play spaces within walking times of up to 10 to 15 minutes. This supports the development of neighbourhoods where local facilities can be accessed on foot or through active travel.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.3 The play audit and Investment strategy proposes addressing deficiencies in the accessibility of play provision across the district, providing children and young people, and their families, with access to play provision within walking distance of home.
- 6.4 Investment and upgrading of play spaces will allow inclusive design principles to be followed and there would be consultation locally around the opportunities to improve the play provision at each site.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Ongoing investment is required to keep play spaces in a condition that meets national standards and reduces the frequency and scale of insurance claims.
- 7.2 Not investing in play spaces will mean that some play areas will be decommissioned once they reach the end of their working life or become uneconomic to repair. If this is not managed in a strategic manner this will adversely affect the equality of access to play provision across the district.
- 7.3 It should be noted that a significant number of the supply of play areas within the district are not under the direct control of the district council. This reliance on external bodies or organisations to manage certain parks presents a potential vulnerability, as changes in their management arrangements, priorities, or resources could impact the availability and quality of these spaces.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 - Bromsgrove Play Assessment (November 2024)
Appendix 2 – Bromsgrove Play Investment Strategy (December 2024)

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Councillor B. McEldowney	13.09.24
Lead Director / Head of Service	Ruth Bamford	13.09.24
Financial Services	Peter Carpenter.	24.10.24
Legal Services	Nicola Cummings Claire Felton	13.09.24

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet
2024

Date: 10th December

Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Commitment to working with Equalities moving forward including Equality Impact Assessments	13.09.24
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	Matthew Eccles	13.09.24