

Report subject	BCP Council Plan for Play
Meeting date	10 December 2024
Status	Public report
Executive summary	<p>The BCP Council Plan for Play brings forward a strategy that sets out how our play infrastructure should be managed, designed and improved.</p> <p>This strategy directly aligns and supports many of the Council's key ambitions. This report highlights the detail contained in the strategy, most notably how our stock of play facilities – play equipment, cycle and BMX facilities – is in severe decline and in need of significant investment.</p> <p>The Plan for Play includes an Improvement Plan for a phased approach to investing in the equipment that is crucial to our young people and their physical and mental well-being. This investment will make an immediate impact that ensures play areas stay open and create a pathway to work with communities, local business and funders to support our play needs.</p> <p>Adopting the Plan for Play creates a vision and priorities for future provision across BCP and can be applied as funds become available or decisions are made.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>(a) The strategy is formally adopted, comprised of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Plan for Play b. Design guide c. Improvement Plan d. Evidence base and appendices <p>(b) The Consultation plan for phase one of the Improvement Plan is approved to ensure it is developed with our communities and partners.</p> <p>It is Recommended that Cabinet recommends to Council:</p> <p>(c) The allocation of £548,047 of capital funds from various planning obligations and reserves to the Improvement Plan.</p>

	<p>(d) The allocation of £3,390,609 from Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy to the Improvement Plan.</p> <p>(e) Both (c) and (d) are subject to receiving the subsequent endorsement of the Director of Finance based on the availability of the necessary cash.</p>
Reason for recommendations	<p>Supports the Corporate Strategy in improving our environment and play spaces, making a difference for people and communities.</p> <p>Supports the aims and principles of the Green Infrastructure Strategy.</p> <p>Provides an opportunity to invest in new play spaces, modernise our provision and enable future generations to have access to exciting, challenging and contemporary play equipment, fit for future generations.</p> <p>Supports service improvement in managing our ageing play stock, supports pressures on revenue budgets. The Plan for Play and suite of strategic documents will provide a sound base for any future investment and funding bids, internally or externally with community partners and funders.</p> <p>The strategy is required to be able to prioritise improvements and any financial investment, ensuring those areas that need improved spaces the most have first consideration, moving away from an ad hoc, scatter-gun approach to repairs and funding.</p> <p>Supports Public Health commitments as set out in Dorset's physical activity strategy, 'A Movement for Movement' and a range of health and well-being drivers seeking to reduce inpatient admissions related to physical and mental health conditions that can be mitigated by time in green space and being more active.</p> <p>Works to create accessible and inclusive spaces supported by the Equalities Impact assessment.</p> <p>Supports Planning Policy and the forthcoming Local plan.</p>
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. The Plan for Play (Appendix 1) has been developed as a key council strategy that on multiple levels supports the councils' ambitions including:
 - Our communities have pride in our streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces
 - Our green spaces flourish and support the wellbeing of both people and nature
 - High quality of life for all, where people can be active, healthy and independent
 - Local communities shape the services that matter to them
2. The Plan for Play creates an opportunity to invest in all our play spaces, the first such significant investment across Bournemouth and Poole since 2010. Making a difference to all those who use our play and wheeled spaces, this strategy can transform our green spaces to provide high quality, accessible, inclusive and exciting play spaces.
3. The over-arching priorities for the Plan for Play set a strategic intent and key decision making for the future provision of facilities, their spatial context, scale and purpose.
4. A Design Guide (Appendix 2) creates key guidance for successful play spaces, including consideration of key groups and how they access and use play, such as people with disabilities and making space for girls; along with design standards and practical advice to ensure robustness of design.
5. Play areas, BMX tracks, skate parks, spaces to play in nature or on street corners are all fundamental building blocks of all our lives and should be of prime importance in the future place shaping across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.
6. BCP Council's play stock is largely inherited from the preceding Councils and is in major decline, with many items reaching end of life soon. There is a challenge to set out the future needs for anyone wanting to play in BCP both in terms of maintaining current provision and ensuring that it is in the right place and serving the future needs for play.
7. It is acknowledged that there are current limitations on Council finances and the ability to deliver all aspirations in the strategy may be restricted. However, the Plan for Play creates a vision and priorities for what future provision should look like across BCP and can be applied as funds become available or decisions are made. The Improvement Plan sets out a costed replacement schedule which if not fully funded will slow the replacement of individual equipment and potentially lead to full site closures.
8. Revenue budgets for play are limited to £151,000 pa and fund annual independent inspections, software and regular safety inspections. Without investment there is a real risk of wholesale removal of equipment and consequent loss of sites. This has an immediate impact on the health and well-being of our young people, but also on the wider quality of green spaces, feelings of safety and levels of anti-social behaviour.
9. "Children have a right to play. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) creates a specific right for all children to have rest and

leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities...". This report and the Plan for Play responds to the need to provide play as a fundamental building block of healthy growth, socialisation and life.

10. The scope of the Plan for Play is the BCP Council owned or managed 153 play spaces including play areas, natural play, play trails, multi-use games areas (MUGA's) and rebound walls; 18 Wheeled activity spaces including skate parks, BMX tracks and Cyclogyms. The total number of play spaces in scope of this report and the Plan for Play is 171. The term Play should be read as encompassing all these facilities and uses and the Plan for Play references the whole strategy, Design guide and Improvement plan

Plan for Play development

11. The Plan for Play has taken two years to draw together. A robust evidence base has been gathered that includes:
 - annual independent inspections
 - regular BCP staff inspections
 - every site audited for quality, access and wider provision
 - mapping and spatial review
 - public consultation
 - key demographics and data
12. The assessment, scoring and ranking of sites in the evidence base (Appendix 8) has been brought forward to form a holistic picture and assessment of needs. This is a strategic view of what we have and what future provision should look like.
13. The Plan for Play is an exciting opportunity to make significant investment in much needed and high-profile public facilities. These are highly valued by the community and in many locations our visitors, they make a tangible difference to local pride in place, people's health and well-being and fundamentally children's growth and development.

Plan for Play priorities

14. The Plan for Play identifies 5 key priorities, with deliverable actions within them that guide the Improvement Plan, sets out how the design guide can be used, and crucially includes how to fund play and enable the community to have a role.
15. An important thread is to have better-quality facilities, but to reduce the overall number where small and poor-quality facilities can be offset by larger play areas still within local community areas.
16. The Plan for Play high-level priorities are:
 - Priority 1. Create high quality and sustainable play provision
 - Priority 2. Future strategic vision
 - Priority 3. Embed the Design Guide
 - Priority 4. Actively seek short- and long-term funding
 - Priority 5. Enable communities

Design guide

17. A Design guide accompanies the Plan for Play and sets a rationale for high quality landscape design being used to ensure all factors are considered in any play provision:
 - ensuring they last a long time and provide value for money
 - are well used and loved
 - provide a range of stimulation, challenge and enjoyment
 - created to be accessible and inclusive
18. The Design guide also supports Planning Policy by setting standards, play typologies and levels of provisions for developers and meeting future housing needs and increasing pressures on existing green space and play areas.

Improvement Plan

19. The Plan for Play creates an opportunity to structure investment in our play spaces where it is needed most and will have the greatest impact. The Improvement plan (Appendix 3) has used the evidence base to structure a phased approach to delivery.
20. Immediate defect repairs are targeted to ensure current provision is immediately improved and rectified, ensuring spaces stay open, accessible and safe.
21. Refurbishments are prioritised to the areas of greatest need, based on:
 - areas of deprivation
 - walk times to spaces
 - equipment condition and life span
 - health and safety assessment
22. **The Plan for Play and Improvement Plan advocate for the following scale of work to bring BCP play spaces back into good condition.**
 - 2 new play spaces
 - 90 sites receive repairs to defective equipment
 - 44 sites refurbished
 - 20 sites completely replaced in the same location
 - At the end of all phases of the Improvement Plan BCP Council will own and manage 141 play spaces of an improved quality that are modern and more accessible.
 - **Total cost of all works** (currently unfunded) **£10.8m.**
23. **Phase 1 will include:**
 - Making immediate defect repairs across 120 play spaces
 - 1 new play area
 - 7 replacement play areas

- 10 refurbished play areas
 - 14 sites to seek community led ownership or consolidate and change usage once nearby sites have been improved (see Appendix 5).
 - **Phase 1 cost of £3.97m**
24. Defect repairs are targeted in Phase 1 for immediate repair to slow the rate of decline and get as many pieces of equipment back in use, as quickly as possible through replacing consumable parts such as swing seats and bearings. There are 8,802 individual defect reports and the Improvement plan tackles these with 50 sites in Phase 1 seeing prioritised work, alongside 18 sites refurbished/replaced and 22 repurposed.
 25. Some sites need to change and be altered to reduce the overall number of play sites, unless alternative community led ownership solutions can be found. Most of these spaces have very poor-quality play equipment, or individual items that offer very little play value (Appendix 5). Investing in other, nearby spaces, will greatly enhance the overall offer and maintain standard walk times to the nearest play space.
 26. The removal of individual, small pieces of equipment is made to reduce the number of play sites, visits by inspectors and pressure on the revenue budget and is a confirmed decision. The larger play areas being considered for consolidation or repurposing decisions will be dependent on public consultation and further Council decision-making.
 27. A detailed consultation programme will be brought forward for the phased delivery of improvements. This will set out where and when localities can have an input in to the improvement plan and play a part in creating new high-quality play spaces. See Appendix 4. This also details area clusters for consultation, levels of consultation detail for different site and the approach to ensure the process is inclusive and accessible.

Options Appraisal

28. The Plan for Play has been written as a significant proportion of our play stock is in decline, with many play areas seeing individual items removed as they become unsafe, or whole play areas being closed. The Plan seeks to address this decline as well as create great play areas in the future.
29. If Phase 1 is not funded the total cost of defect repairs alone will remain at £200,000 with an annual revenue budget of £131,000 available. Equipment continues to decline, anti-social behaviour and vandalism takes place that adds further burdens on the revenue funding.
30. Our 171 play spaces have 1,175 individual pieces of play equipment (excluding fences, gates, benches etc). The option of maintaining what we have and not investing in play spaces will accelerate further this decline and loss of individual items and more whole-site closures. Anticipated rate of decline, based on equipment life expectancy, would be:
 - 2026 – 13 play area closures
 - 2028 – 87 play area closures
 - 2033 - 69 play area closures

31. The available options to rectify this decline are therefore dependant on the level of investment. These are explored more fully in the options analysis in Appendix 6. This report has identified use of the available Cil funds to deliver an impactful Phase 1 that will make significant difference to play provision.
32. Future options on sites to be repurposed are limited. Any sites that remain open add to the revenue burden of limited funding to maintain all our spaces. They also add to the future capital need for investment. Creating higher quality play spaces is a core priority of the strategy, with reduced numbers a consequence that supports meeting financial pressures.
33. Proposals from the local community, stakeholders or businesses will be considered for options on future management and maintenance to avoid repurposing. However, any sites that are outsourced need to have a robust future plan for maintenance and investment to ensure they remain in good condition and do not come back to the council in a poor state in the future.

Summary of financial implications

34. The revenue budget for the maintenance and operational management of play areas is £151,000 pa. This funds specialist inspection software and annual independent health and safety inspections.
35. The Council spending controls owing to financial pressures currently restrict use of this budget as a non-statutory service. This means that repairs and defects cannot be addressed leading to items being fenced off or removed to protect public safety. If the spending controls were lifted it would allow the repair and replacement of equipment and prevent further decline.
36. A small team of play inspectors, and resource pulled from other roles, means there are approximately 6 full-time equivalent roles funded from Neighbourhood services revenue budgets who undertake inspections and repairs.

Capital funding for the Plan for Play

37. Strategic CIL in September 2024 has funding to be allocated of £3.411m. It is to be recognised that this fund is significantly over-subscribed with Planning Services, who receive and manage the fund, currently developing a prioritisation programme for future allocation. Any allocation of strategic CIL to the Plan for Play will have an impact on other services and infrastructure improvements across BCP.
38. Funding the Plan for Play calls on Strategic CIL but can also make use of existing funds held in various Council funds, mainly from individual planning obligations (Developer Contributions). Table 1 shows the available funds to be allocated, Table 2 the CIL request.
39. Beyond CIL, the Plan for Play identifies a range of additional funding streams that are available. Some funds are already allocated to projects and can be absorbed in to the Improvement Plan. Others are held in reserves or are available to be drawn down for use.

Table 1. Funds available to be allocated to Phase 1 of the Improvement plan.

Fund	Detail	£
Reserves	Fund identified for "Playground Equipment / Improvements"	£22,000

	Income at Kings Park for green space improvements	£150,000
Hamworthy Park Beach hut reserve	Ring-fenced income only for use in Hamworthy Park.	£50,000
Legacy s106 / Developer contributions	Alexandra Park Hamworthy Park	£43,047 £50,000
Baiter skate park	Neighbourhood CIL funds	£100,000
Christchurch legacy play area fund	Funds unspent from allocation for land transfers to be used for Christchurch and play sites nearest Christchurch	£100,000
S106 agreements for green space and play improvements	Specific housing developments that have brought forward planning contributions, as yet unallocated: land at Helyar road, land at Moorside road.	£33,000
Total		£548,047

Table 2. Strategic CIL funding for Phase 1, from 2025.

Total costs to deliver Phase 1 Includes resourcing and all types of works.	£3,967,863
Less capital funding Table 1	-£548,047
Strategic CIL Funding request Phase 1	= £3,419,816

40. Later phases of the Improvement Plan will likely need to return to seek additional strategic CIL. In addition, Phase 1 will develop and seek additional contributions from other sources and planning obligations as they are received.
41. The funds listed below are therefore not yet confirmed and are aspirational, dependent on funding bids, partnership working and draw down of funds.

Table 3. Funds to be sourced and brought forward for future phases

Fund	Detail
Strategic CIL	As above
Neighbourhood CIL	These funds are currently under review and have previously supported play area improvements.
BCP Governance	Consideration of more Parishes being created across BCP, and potentially funding future play investment.

review	
Community funds	<p>Working with known partners and stakeholders to develop funding plans. Known interest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Townsend Community centre • Westbourne traders • Queens Park Forum • Seafield Gardens • Poole Community Trust, Turlin Moor Skate • Broadstone Neighbourhood Forum • Bourne Big Local / Friends of Bourne
External Funding bids	<p>Developed in partnership with stakeholders these could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landfill tax credits • National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of larger, site-wide applications. • The Talbot Village Trust
Disposal of open space	<p>In the consolidation and repurposing of a small number of spaces, it may be possible to dispose of the open space. Through housing development capital receipts could be secured that can be reinvested in other nearby sites for play improvements.</p>
S106 agreements for green space and play improvements	<p>Specific housing developments that will bring forward planning contributions, as yet to commence development: land between Wilkinson and Cheshire Drive; and potentially other sites. £66,000 received.</p>
Corporate businesses	<p>Play areas play an important role on our green spaces and are often linked to dwell time in communities, especially when play areas are near to high streets or local centres.</p> <p>Local businesses, or larger corporates, could choose to support their local communities by investing in capital costs, or regular support for maintenance. Sponsorship and on-site recognition to be considered and developed proportionately.</p>
Philanthropy and donations	<p>Donations, legacies and Crowdfunding through community support could be used to support play investment costs</p>

42. This level of investment and programming of immediate works in a first phase will require procurement and legal support to ensure equipment, surfacing and the construction work can be delivered.

43. The Improvement Plan for delivery shall comply with all relevant procurement requirements, including the Council's Financial Regulations and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Procurement Act 2023 (where applicable) for any works (or other arrangements) that are to be carried out by third parties under contract.
44. The procurement approach for the programme of improvement has been considered and is likely to use a framework approach with specific lots for play and wheeled. This will cover all elements of the process to construct new play spaces, from design, engagement, supply and works.
45. Further detail will be developed to consider:
 - Lotting to award multiple sites to individual suppliers, ensuring neighbouring sites have variety of equipment and experience from different suppliers.
 - Some spaces will warrant bespoke design and higher levels of landscape architect input alongside community engagement to ensure they work well in their setting. These will take longer to develop, with more detailed specifications and criteria.
 - Wheeled spaces are likely to take longer to develop as they will require more specialist input, stakeholder involvement and greater site considerations.
 - Working with stakeholders is an effective way to develop high quality and well-respected play spaces.
46. Should a decision be taken to not approve funds for reinvestment, a level of funding for closing and removing unsafe equipment assets and reinstating back to natural green space will be required. The Improvement plan has identified a typical estimated cost of £20,000 per decommission of any sites.

Summary of legal implications

47. There is no statutory obligation to provide play. However, there is a duty of care to users and a legal obligation to ensure any public realm infrastructure is safe for residents to use. Play equipment should be compliant with BS EN 1176 play equipment and EN 1177 safety surfacing.
48. Play England are seeking changes to provide play sufficiency legislation, this would create a requirement of Local Authorities to provide play spaces in relation to the amount of local population.
49. The Education Act 1996, section 507A, provides that the Local Authority "must...include adequate facilities for recreation and social and physical training". This includes that they may "establish, maintain and manage...playing fields, play centres, playgrounds" etc.
50. BCP play areas are independently inspected annually and detailed reports are used to assess lifespan and current safety. If equipment is deemed to be a risk to users, it will be removed or fenced off.
51. Insurance claims are received where users have had accidents because of defective equipment or surfacing. Insurance records show that between 1/4/2019 and 3/7/2024 BCP council received and dealt with 12 claims which referred to injuries in playgrounds or on play equipment:

- 9 claims are closed, with total payment of £4,466 made.
 - 3 claims remain open.
52. If equipment and play areas are allowed to significantly decline, then the rate of insurance claims and need for payments will likely increase.
53. Support of the procurement framework arrangement, as detailed above, and the relevant contracts and terms and conditions documentation will be required from BCP Commercial legal teams.

Summary of human resources implications

54. Programme resourcing will create new posts as well as use existing resource in the Strategic Green space team to deliver the works, including a Programme Manager, Community engagement officer, Landscape Architect and a Project support officer. These posts will be supplemented by the existing teams working on greenspaces, from the operational side and from other services, such as Communities and Leisure.
55. Enhanced training for the current play inspectors and across these roles on contract management, tendering and on the implementation of pay standards will also be brought forward as part of the programme delivery
56. Enabling community partners and stakeholders to also benefit from such training will be valuable as we seek to enable these groups to have a greater role in managing play spaces.

Summary of sustainability impact

57. An impact report has been completed and is supported across all colleagues reviewing the proposals. The reports summary states:
58. Supported as the strategy plans to improve the quality and nature value of greenspaces through improvement of play provision; help children and young people engage with the natural environment through outdoor play; incorporate biodiversity gain and designing for nature into play improvements; address environmental justice by ensuring play sites in deprived areas improved and their multiple benefits to local people and the environment fully acknowledged and highlighting sustainability as a key issue in design.
59. Maintaining the walkability to suitable play spaces is important in considering the sustainability of play spaces.

Summary of public health implications

60. Public health Dorset have been engaged throughout the Plan for Play writing and have supported with positive comments on the importance for the well-being of those playing and all those accessing green spaces.
61. Key highlights from the strategy:
- Providing high quality, safe and inclusive play spaces for children and young people of all ages has a key part to play in improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people in BCP and preventing ill health for future generations. It will support and enable delivery of strategic goals across Dorset's health and care system which cannot be delivered through the action of healthcare providers alone.

- Disadvantaged groups appear to gain a larger health benefit and have reduced socio economic-related inequalities in health when living in greener communities.
- Access to green spaces that enable contact with nature and regular play supports a range of positive mental and physical health outcomes.

Summary of equality implications

62. An EIA conversation/screening document has been completed and has been approved by the EIA panel. This document is considered to be 'live' as the project moves in to delivery so the EIA will be updated accordingly, especially with regards to consulting on the improvement plan, its decisions and impacts on people. The summary comments are as follows.
63. Providing play areas is seen as a fundamental requirement of a quality public park. Therefore, improving and increasing the usage of these is a positive intervention. High quality design and inclusivity will also elevate this work to ensure positive public reaction and uptake.
64. DOTs disability is an independent charity who have been consulted in the formation of the Plan for Play and will be used to support future consultation planning.

Summary of risk assessment

65. There is a significant risk, if the recommendations are not taken forward and play areas are not invested in, of serious decline in play equipment and an impact on people's ability to access space for play.
66. The impact of this decline would mean the failure of play spaces to meet people's needs, reduction in exercise and access of green spaces for those who need it the most. Access to green space for those who live in the most deprived areas is lower than in more affluent areas. Access to play spaces is reflected similarly and any investment is to be prioritised towards these areas.
67. Without significant budget there will be an increasing risk liability to public health and safety from poor quality sites and insufficient revenue budget to fund equipment removal and reinstatement back to public open space, without play equipment on it.
68. Appendix 6 provides an options analysis and risk assessment for the Plan for Play.

Background papers

None

Appendices

1. Plan for Play
2. Design Guide
3. Improvement Plan
4. Consultation
5. Repurposing site list
6. Options analysis
7. Maps of play provision
8. Evidence base
9. Illustrated play area typologies
10. EIA