



BCP Council **Plan for Play**

Play and Wheeled Activity Strategy



Foreword

Welcome to the Plan for Play, the Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council green space play and wheeled activity strategy.

My childhood play took me to extremes, and all of them, I now understand, were a fun way to test the social realities into which one is born. Surely this is a most important evolutionary function of play—finding out what is fun and fair or not fair on the field of life.” Jaak Panksepp, Neuroscientist and psychobiologist, 1943–2017

*“We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing”
George Bernard Shaw:*



Councillor Andy Hadley
Portfolio Holder for
Climate Response,
Environment and
Energy

As the BCP area has grown, spaces for play have not kept pace with development. We have a variety of provision that is unequally distributed, variable in quality, age and range of equipment.

Inclusive play and access to play is important for children and families and carers from across all the protected characteristic groups, including disabled people from across all the impairment groups.

And yet we see a serious and significant decline in play facilities, and access to quality provision. This is why we need a Plan for Play. This strategic approach uses a robust evidence base for its decision making and calls on best practice from Play England, Skate GB and other sources. It seeks significant funding to deliver a large scale of improvement and to create modern, accessible and affordable play and wheeled spaces across BCP.

You're never too old to play! Play provides children and everyone with the safe space to explore, socialise, develop imagination and learn about the world and themselves.

Play and using green space helps to relieve stress, boost mood and improve overall wellbeing for all of us. Play is a natural and enjoyable way to keep active, stay well and be happy. Play is a serious business!



Councillor Sandra Moore
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Partnerships

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Accompanying documents:

- Design Guide
- Improvement Plan



1 Plan for Play



Vision

Developed following public consultation a vision for the future of play across BCP and our **Plan for Play** is:

“To provide high quality, accessible, safe and inclusive play spaces, where everyone of all abilities, across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, can learn, have fun and be active through play.

All ages and abilities should feel safe, confident and excited to use our play spaces as part of leading fulfilled lives with brighter futures.”

Introduction

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.

BCP Council’s play stock is largely inherited from the preceding Councils and is in major decline towards end of life soon. There is therefore a challenge to set out the future needs for anyone wanting to play in BCP.

Without investment, there is a real risk of wholesale removal of equipment and site closures. 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.

Funding the required level of investment will be a challenge, however this will be clearer and easier with a defined strategy in place, helping to prioritise any available funding. This is supported by the valued work of community and stakeholder groups who are of increasing importance in championing, resourcing and sustaining local play needs.

The Council’s own Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will be an important funding mechanism, the source of that funding is from developer contributions for the delivery of infrastructure to support housing growth; alongside external funding more available to charities and community groups.

Extensive evidence defines where the highest demand for new facilities is across BCP and provides a platform for decision making. All communities and their stakeholders will advocate for their play spaces to be at the top of this list. The strategy therefore sets out a rationale for delivery in a prioritised manner and process. It identifies the need for defect repairs, repurposing, refurbishment, replacement and creation of new play spaces; while taking in to account the diverse needs of our community.

Play spaces, whether that be stepping logs on the way to school or a large destination site with a range of play, wheeled and social spaces, need to be fully considered in their setting and to respond to the local environment and requirements of residents.

High quality landscape design should be used to ensure all factors are considered in any provision: ensuring they last a long time, provide value for money, are well used and loved and provide a range of stimulation, challenge and enjoyment; and created to be accessible and inclusive. The Design Guide provides the overview of the requirements.

This suite of strategy documents, BCP Council’s ‘Plan for Play’, is an opportunity to state the importance of play for all ages and ensure our provision for future generations is prioritised.



153

Play Spaces



18

Wheeled Spaces

171 **Total Number Play Spaces**

Priority 1. Create high quality and sustainable play provision

Priority 2. Strategic vision

Priority 3. Embed the Design Guide

Priority 4. Actively seek short- and long-term funding

Priority 5. Enable communities



70% of consultation responses say they use their local space once a week.

Annual revenue budget £151,000 pa

Half of families with disabled children say their local playground isn't accessible



Around 1 in 5 year 6 children in BCP are obese



£11m

Total works required

£3.9m Phase 1:



- **1 new play space**
- **10 refurbishments**
- **7 sites replaced**

142

Revised total number of play spaces



2 Strategic context

BCP Council Corporate Strategy

Play spaces and the green spaces they are in are at the heart of the BCP Corporate Strategy priorities:

- **Our place and environment:**
Vibrant places, where people and nature flourish, with a thriving economy in a healthy, natural environment
- **Our people and communities:**
Everyone leads a fulfilled life, maximising opportunity for all.

Green Infrastructure Strategy

4 goals that align and support the creation of high-quality play spaces and their users from the Green Infrastructure Strategy:

- Encourage healthy living and well-being
- Strengthen resilience to climate change
- Support nature recovery and biodiversity
- Support economic recovery, prosperity and placemaking

Local Cycling and Walking

Infrastructure plan. States the importance of accessible active travel routes to amenities such as green spaces and playgrounds. Link to Play Streets.

Movement for Movement. Active Dorset call to action, “to...enable more movement for everyone. To embed movement in everything we do, in every decision we make, no matter how big or small”.

The Council have a duty to meet the Single Equality Act, General and Specific Duties and make an overt commitment to delivering on these internally and externally through service standards, contract management and key performance indicators

These over-arching Council wide strategies support and help to guide the Plan for Play aims:

Plan for Play Aims

1. Improve the public realm as a child-friendly environment which offers stimulating and challenging play opportunities suitable for everyone.
2. Ensure our play spaces are clean, safe and non-threatening
3. Work with partners to identify opportunities for improving places for children and young people to play
4. Encourage local people to use our play spaces to benefit their health and well-being.
5. Work to reduce the barriers that prevent children from accessing and playing in the general public domain.
6. Encourage children and young people to encounter the natural environment
7. Deliver excellent value and high performance while keeping residents at the heart of what we do.

Data from 2023 BCP residents' survey.

Most important council services:

84%

Parks, playgrounds, open spaces, seafront

Ranked second, behind collecting rubbish and recycling.

The BCP Greenspace Play and Wheeled Activity Strategy has been written to ensure there are:

- Modern, safe and fully inclusive play spaces for all ages (play areas and wheeled play) across BCP, close to where people live and in relation to need.
- Secured long-term funding for consistent, sustainable, inclusive and equitable play provision.
- Resilient management and maintenance programmes in place

This should be achieved by:

- ✓ Establishing an accurate picture of the current play provision.
- ✓ An improvement plan for the future of the play areas/wheeled play in the BCP Council conurbation, determining the best use of space, funding and community contributions required.
- ✓ A Design Guide for the use of developers, community groups and the council. This provides key design principles for creating successful play spaces and sets out requirements for materials and construction to ensure that a high level of quality, safety, robustness and longevity is achieved; and that play spaces can affordably maintained in the future.
- ✓ Establishing sufficient revenue budgets and capital funding.



Upton Country Park woodland play area

3 Importance of Play

Play is the way children interact with and make sense of the world: it is an innate desire to explore, socialise and have fun and involves a process of observing, testing, imitating, and enjoying the environment they are in and people they are with.

Play encompasses children's behaviour which is self-directed with the freedom to choose how and when they play, without agenda, set goals or reward.

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 appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

Research at a national and global level has proven that play is fundamental to the healthy development of a child. It is the framework through which they learn and strengthens children's mental health.

Through play, children become able to:

- build and sustain relationships with people and place
- challenge the limits of their physical selves and environments
- problem solve effectively

Most importantly, having sufficient opportunities for play is a key indicator of a happy child: play is pleasure – it contributes to quality of life and sense of well-being.

BCP Council recognises the value of high quality, well designed outdoor play and wheeled play spaces and is committed to delivering a range of play opportunities to enable children and young people to learn through play, develop essential life skills and an understanding of their culture and local environment as an important element on the path to adulthood

National Context

BCP Council is not alone in facing significant financial pressures. Play as a non-statutory service is subject to revenue budget pressures. The impact of incremental decline in play equipment and play spaces across the area is a primary driver for bringing forward the Plan for Play.

The picture in BCP sadly reflects the state of play across the country. In July 2024 Play England wrote an open letter to the UK Government stating the importance of play, seeking change in the planning system to provide play sufficiency legislation.

The need to state this case, and a call for a new National Play strategy, is a result of years of austerity and reductions in Local Authority budgets resulting in the serious decline in play standards, availability and quality across the country.

The Play England strategy calls for the Government to introduce 'Play Sufficiency' legislation, that would establish guidance that Local Authorities must follow and bring children's right to play and recreation into meaningful practice. It would:

- ensure all children, young people and families have access to enough time, space and opportunity and permission to play.
- protect, provide and enhance opportunities for play and recreation at home, at school and throughout the public realm.

Health and local context

BCP has 2,500 hectares of green space and play has an essential role for people in our communities to lead healthy lifestyles. Access to green space, nature and opportunities for play, recreation and leisure are integral to enabling healthy lifestyles.

The impacts of future climate change will be felt most by those in more deprived and dense urban areas, they will be more prone to our extreme weather events such as drought and high temperatures, flash flooding and storms.

It is important to ensure that these parts of BCP are prioritised, so they have the highest possible quality of green space, including play and wheeled facilities. The Improvement Plan takes these factors in to account when considering which spaces to target for improvement first.

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. For example, NHS Dorset's aim of preventing 50,000 children across Dorset from becoming overweight by 2040 as set out in the Joint Forward Plan.



A range of evidence comments on the importance of play and access to green space:

“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. Play contributes to these outcomes by supporting regular movement (physical activity), social interaction and cognitive development and other benefits.¹

“Evidence shows that living in a greener environment can promote and protect good health, and aid in recovery from illness and help with managing poor health. People who have greater exposure to greenspace have a range of more favourable physiological outcomes.

Greener environments are also associated with better mental health and wellbeing outcomes including reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and fatigue, and enhanced quality of life for both children and adults.

Greenspace can help to bind communities together, reduce loneliness, and mitigate the negative effects of air pollution, excessive noise, heat and flooding²

While the health of children and young people locally compare favourably to the rest of England across many indicators, BCP’s Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) shows that there are areas for improvement and inequalities within BCP where play offers opportunities for improvement such as:

Healthy Weight: Supporting all children, including those who are underweight, to achieve a healthy weight is a key challenge for BCP Council. ³

Around 1 in 5 year 6 children are obese and there is significant variation between Wards with higher prevalence of excess weight and obesity seen in some of the most deprived areas of BCP. A recent study has shown that in one Bournemouth ward, 34.1% of year 6 pupils were classed as obese⁴

Mental health and wellbeing: The rate of inpatient admissions for mental health conditions (143.2 per 100,000) and the rate for self-harm (706.9 per 100,000) are both worse across BCP than the England average highlighting the need for action to improve mental and emotional wellbeing.⁴



Multi-sport rebound wall at Alexandra Park.



¹ Defra, 2017 Microsoft Word - Evidence Statement on the links between natural environments and human health.docx (beyondgreenspace.net)

² Public Health England. Improving access to greenspace A new review for 2020

³ <https://nhsdorset.nhs.uk/voice/jointforwardplan/>

⁴ Local health, public health data for small geographic areas - Data | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care (phe.org.uk)

Play and Physical Activity

Importantly, within BCP, there are inequalities in levels of activity with children in more deprived areas more likely to be less active than children in the least deprived areas.

Dorset's Physical Activity Strategy 'A Movement for Movement' sets out a whole system approach for increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour. Providing equitable access to opportunities for play will support the strategy by enabling children and young people to build movement into daily life.

Children's Services

BCP Children's services (selected) priorities

- To improve health and well-being
- Children feel valued and that they belong
- All our children and young people live somewhere they feel safe and loved

Children in BCP compared to the national average

- are more likely to suffer from poor mental health and have lower levels of wellbeing
- are more likely to be known to the criminal justice system

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Design Guide provides detail on how to design quality play spaces to meet all needs, this includes different forms of access, different types of play and play equipment and considerations for disabled people across the impairment groups.

As the social enterprise arm of Access Dorset, DOTs disability has undertaken an independent review of the Design guide and Plan for Play and made recommendations to mitigate against the risk of discriminatory practice. An even greater role will come with the Improvement plan and its delivery.

Initial conversations with community partners and representatives will inform the development of a range of accessible and inclusive 'working together' approaches

Reference is to people with disabilities across the impairment groups:

- Visual Impairment
- Hearing Impairment
- Deaf people
- Learning Difficulties
- Neurodivergence
- Mental Wellbeing
- Long term Health Condition
- Physical Impairment



Hamworthy park play area and paddling pool

The consultation programme will work with DOTS both in its design and future implementation.

Other recommendations include:

- to work with Access Dorset to develop, co-ordinate and maintain a sustainable and empowered Reference Group, representing disabled children and disabled parents and carers from across the impairment groups and BCP wide charities.
- working across Parks, Transport, Tourism and other departments is central to an 'Accessible and Inclusive Bournemouth
- the duty to meet the Single Equality Act, General and Specific Duties.

The importance of this work is highlighted by a 2022 national survey by the charity Scope⁵. This identified:

- half of families with disabled children say their local playground isn't accessible (49%)
- One in seven (13%) could not enjoy the playground as a family because siblings were unable to play together.

Planning context

Play in the urban environment, beyond traditional play areas, is essential to ensure play opportunities are maximised, through routes to local centres, schools or green spaces.

Embedding play within improvements to the public realm and in support of Green Infrastructure, 'Play on the way' and 'Play streets', is a low cost and high impact way of encouraging play.

Innovative design of these spaces can provide play value through jumping, climbing and exploring different materials, surfaces and textures, whilst travelling through our towns.

The design guide sets out a full planning context for play and references for design criteria.

These can be delivered through the Green Infrastructure Framework and Sustainable Urban Drainage legislation, requiring developers to include more urban greening and sustainability into their applications. These will be supported in the forthcoming BCP Local Plan.



Fisherman's Walk Play area

⁵ <https://www.scope.org.uk/media/press-releases/playground-accessibility>

4 Scope of the Plan

The Plan for Play aims to secure the future of play areas and wheeled sports provision in BCP Council. We have had to limit the scope of this strategy to ensure it remains achievable to include:

- ✔ BCP Council owned play areas including rebound walls, natural play, play trails, play sculptures and Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs) and wheeled provisions including skate parks (timber ramps, ramps and rails, concrete bowls, concrete) BMX tracks (gravel, dirt & concrete,) and Cyclogyms.
- ✔ 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.
- ✔ Referenced to BCP's Green spaces, so not indoor or private spaces, such as school playgrounds that are generally inaccessible to the public
- ✔ The Plan for Play does not include other play opportunities across the conurbation such as splash parks, adult outdoor fitness equipment, or facilities managed by organised groups, such as the velodrome; these are all out of scope.
- ✔ Town Council and Parish owned and maintained sites are included.

Private (developer) owned facilities are not included. The Strategy only considers future investment needs and prioritisation of BCP owned facilities.

The purpose of the BCP Greenspace Play and Wheeled Activity Strategy is to provide a short, flexible and easy to understand document that provides a clear focus on the future of play and wheeled activity across BCP.

It will bring together all agencies in BCP who have an interest and involvement in children's play and use of wheeled facilities in green spaces, which collectively will improve opportunities for users in the area. The intention is that this process will create a long-term action and investment plan.

Revenue budgets are too small to meaningfully manage our current facilities and ability to access capital funds (internally or externally) are very limited and are resource heavy. Play areas are expensive to maintain, or rebuild, and any investment needs to be carefully targeted to ensure spatial provision and quality of offer is appropriate.

Without a strategy the Council are unable to prioritise improvements and understand the spatial requirements for play and wheeled facilities, at a time when there is a lot of degrading equipment and facilities leading to removal of items or full closures and requests for improvement are frequent.

At the same time the needs of young people and all users of play facilities has never been greater to support people's health and well-being, combat child obesity, mental health issues and engagement with nature.

With current limitations on resources this highlights the importance for a strategy and action plan. The strategy is based on a robust and detailed evidence base consisting of a survey the existing infrastructure and an analysis of community need, informing the priorities and decision making.



Highcliffe Recreation Ground, Christchurch

5 Plan for Play Priorities

It is acknowledged that there are limitations on Council finances and the ability to deliver all aspirations in the strategy may be limited. However, the Plan for Play sets out 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.

The over-arching priorities for the Plan for Play set a strategic intent and set out key decision making for the future provision of facilities, their spatial context, scale and purpose; they are the outcomes we are trying to achieve through the Plan for Play.

The design guide sets out key guidance for creating successful play spaces and should be read in conjunction with these priorities.

Priority 1. Create high quality and sustainable play provision:

- a. reduce the total number of sites we manage to meet current and future financial pressures, whilst still providing a good range of facilities for all ages.
- b. deliver equitable access to play by prioritising those areas most in need of facilities.
- c. have fewer but larger and better equipped sites, for play and BMX/Skate.
- d. make defect repairs as quickly as possible to make play areas usable again

Priority 2. Future strategic vision

- a. destination sites are developed and strategically managed to provide high quality sites that support all ages, abilities and a wide range of play opportunity.
- b. identify opportunities to deliver a space for BMX/MTB dirt tracks and circular off-road cycle routes.
- c. promote new opportunities for skateboarding and play within Bournemouth Town centre, and other urban centres.
- d. encourage 'doorstep play' within new and existing developments to ensure those up to 6 years old have play opportunities within easy walking distance.

Priority 3. Embed the Design Guide

- a. use robust and long-lasting equipment, maximise play value and longevity; whilst seeking diversity of play experience and challenge.
- b. ensure play and related facilities are for all ages and abilities. Spaces will be well designed to be accessible and inclusive, meet best practice and with extra consideration for spaces for teenagers and in particular girls.
- c. increase biodiversity in our play spaces through wildlife friendly planting, grassy meadows, bird boxes and bug hotels. Integrate play into the natural environment to allow children to experience nature.
- d. through the planning application process influence the provision of high quality, accessible and inclusive play and child-friendly design in new developments in line with the Design Guide.

Priority 4. Actively seek short- and long-term funding

- a. within BCP Council seek funding from the Strategic and Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy.
- b. positive partnership working with local communities to ensure quality place-making and to maximise funding opportunities.
- c. develop partnerships and opportunities with local businesses to support facilities

- d. maximise the opportunities for play spaces to support local businesses, e.g. park cafes, heritage attractions and local centres.
- e. as part of large projects when seeking significant funds, e.g. from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Priority 5. Enable communities:

- a. develop, co-ordinate and maintain a sustainable and empowered Reference Group, representing disabled children and disabled parents and carers from across the impairment groups and BCP wide charities and user led groups
- b. with a web-based Play Hub, including a funding toolkit, links to partners, links for play champions and useful information that will enable community support for their play facilities.
- c. work with stakeholders to improve play and how spaces are used and accessed, including community events and improvement projects
- d. Work with partners to improve play environments for children and adults with disabilities.
- e. Ensure engagement with children and young people is at the heart of the design process.
- f. Develop and implement a BCP Play Street policy to allow residents to create temporary car-free zones/doorstep play and play on the way opportunities that link to green spaces, schools and local centres.



Shelley Park play area

6 Current provision

Strategy evidence base

A robust evidence base has been compiled from winter 2022/23 (Appendix 8) with early public consultation alongside the gathering of site-based information to inform the strategy.

The evidence base has been used to create an assessment of current provision, with quality criteria used to form an assessment of the future decision-making for each facility, based on the overall site audit, equipment life span and independent inspection data.

BCP Council owns:

- 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 spaces in scope are 171.**

Key elements of the evidence base:

- **Public consultation:** Early engagement to establish how and where people access play, their favourite activities, how long they stay and comment on the draft vision. Youth Forum workshop and stakeholder workshop.
- **Amalgamation of data from the 3 legacy authorities**
- **Annual independent safety inspection data** and reports on life expectancy. Detailed independent inspections of all 2867 play assets.

- **Full site inspection review** of all 171 play spaces.
- **171 site audits** undertaken by officers across strategic green space, Grounds maintenance and Recreation teams. Audit of design & usability, play value, safety, community links and inclusivity to gather a whole site appraisal. These site audits complement the individual safety inspections and provide a wider viewpoint.
- **Spatial data review**, an understanding of play provision per ward and using demographic information to understand needs of different areas.
- **Key demographics and data.** The assessment of all sites considered the following key metrics:
 - Play area location and size
 - Local population data, focussing on age of children by ward, 0-4, 5-9, 10-15 years old.
 - Indices of multiple deprivation ranking
 - Play equipment scores for life expectancy
 - Play audit scores
 - Walk times to green spaces

All the key elements of the evidence base informed a ranking and fed in to the prioritisation of works detailed in the Improvement Plan.



7 State of BCP play

Many BCP owned Play Spaces are in decline and equipment is starting to fail and needs repair, refurbishment or full replacement.

Each playground has a limited lifespan and will require ongoing maintenance and refurbishment or replacement every 10-15 years.

The last time BCP received central government funding for play, 'Play Builder', was 2009/10. Since this time there has been ad-hoc interventions using planning obligations (developer contributions) or external funding for specific sites and projects. These are often led or supported by local community groups and stakeholders.

Appendix 7 provides details on Christchurch provision and the 2019/20 'play matters' project. £1.2m of investment means the facilities remain in good condition and have a relatively long life-span.

Bournemouth's play spaces are in the worst condition, having received little recent investment.

Play spaces across Poole are in the middle ground, with many spaces needing investment, but with a greater number of newer facilities than Bournemouth.

Play audits assessed overall site quality and their facilities, this included a consideration of their access features and adapted equipment for people with disabilities.

Play spatial context

For users in our communities, play provision spans ward boundaries. People travel to their favourite spaces or those nearest to play, socialise and for recreation.

70% of consultation responses say they use their local space once a week.

Access to spaces is often curtailed by barriers such as major roads, inaccessible spaces such as significant built forms like hospitals, the airport and industrial estates; or from rivers and the natural landscape.

Play spaces are therefore often concentrated in residential areas, with development over time being ad hoc across the area, creating a patchwork of provision.

BCP's spatial provision is heavily influenced by the geographic constraints of the area, the two harbours, extensive lowland heath, river corridors and its agricultural land, industrial sites and the airport. These are non-residential areas or typically have very low housing density.

The gap in provision in these areas is to be expected and are in the following areas:

- Commons ward, dominated by Bournemouth airport, the rivers Stour and Avon and Hurn forest
- Agricultural area of Burton and Grange
- Northern Poole, areas of Merley, Broadstone and Canford Heath wards, feature extensive 'wild space', extensive heathland and wooded nature reserves.
- Lower Parkstone and Lilliput area has little significant amenity greenspace and in an area featuring large properties and private garden space.

Predicted rate of decline:

Over the next 10 years, without significant intervention, all BCP's play areas will have declined to the point of having to be removed.

In less than 5 years half of our play areas are estimated to be at the end of working life.



BCP COUNCIL PLAN FOR PLAY

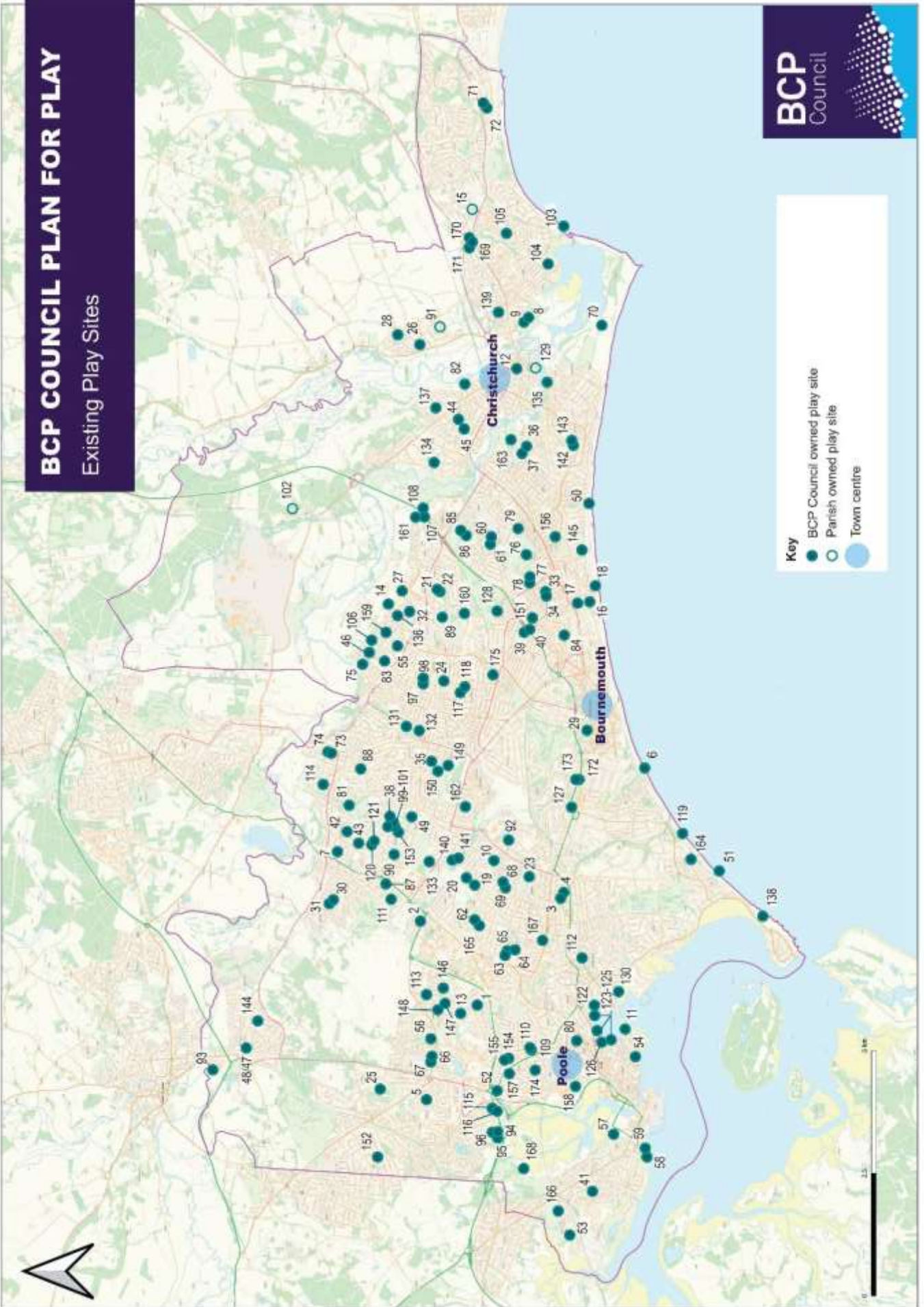
Existing Play Sites

BCP
Council



Key

- BCP Council owned play site
- Parish owned play site
- Town centre



9 Future for Play

Fewer play spaces

In the future the overall number of play areas managed by the Council will be fewer but of higher quality, meeting more need and being more accessible.

In Christchurch (2018/19) small sites with little provision were repurposed and removed. The reduction in numbers follows careful assessment of need and ensures adequate provision can be made within acceptable parameters.

Sites for repurposing are mostly very small and offer little play value (Appendix 5). It is appreciated that every play space will have some benefit for local users, however, it is not viable to retain them all owing to severity of decline of equipment and current financial resources.

In areas with multiple play spaces strategic decisions will be taken to reduce their number in favour of increasing quality and overall level of provision. More equipment on one site will improve both the quality and usability of the play offered and at the same time minimise maintenance costs,



Poor quality equipment.

Quality and provision

The Improvement plan considers the future of where play areas are located and makes difficult decisions on individual spaces.

Those sites listed for refurbishment or replacement will significantly improve in quality and offer, offsetting some of the impact of the need to repurpose some sites.

Improved provision of play on these sites will offer increased challenge, use by a wider range of ages, cater for wider needs and abilities.

Modernising our play stock as part of this process will create contemporary spaces that are robust and replace equipment that can often be many decades old.

They will be more accessible to all users, meet modern inclusive standards as well as benefit from a whole site approach considering play in the wider landscape, rather than in small, fenced areas, meeting relevant standards and guidance.



Poole Park Jungle adventure play area

Definition of types of play area:

The Design Guide defines the different play spaces, and this is summarised below. These typologies are used in the Improvement Plan and define the level of investment funding for each space.

They should also be used in the future as new provision is planned and provided.

Doorstep Play Space

On-site amenity landscaped space, as part of a combined play facility, or walking route; aimed at young children within view of known adult

Local Play Space

A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children that can walk with ease

Neighbourhood Play Space

A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travel longer distances independently, and can reach safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and with a wider range of play experiences

Multi-play & Wheeled Activity Hub

A designed area suitable for a variety of recreational uses but with a focus on ball games, wheeled activity, performance space and social space. No formal supervision.

Destination Play Space

A large destination play space within a key site offering wider recreational experience. Aimed at larger groups and longer visits; tend to have car parking, a cafe and toilets



'Percussion' play, Highcliffe recreation ground

Key points from the Design Guide:

Creating spaces inclusive of disabled people

- Successful play spaces offer enjoyable play experiences to disabled children and young people, and to those who are non-disabled, whilst accepting that not all elements of the play space can be accessible to everyone
- Though many play providers focus on equipment that is wheelchair-accessible, it is important to recognise that this may miss meet the needs of a specific group of children.
- The 'Plan Inclusive Play Areas' (PiPA) methodology for inclusive design should be used when new proposals are being developed
- Inclusive play equipment and play spaces will ensure that as many senses as possible are engaged from a seated and a standing position.

Teenagers particularly enjoy socialising and congregating together and should have legitimate presence in shared public and communal areas.

- Provision for play and informal recreation should be balanced with providing social spaces where they can enjoy spending time making friends.

Safe and inclusive spaces for girls

- Girls often feel excluded from play spaces
- Key recommendations from the charity Make Space for Girls should be used to inform future design work
- Engagement is key and girls need to be involved early in the process.

Play should be situated in the right location, where children and young people would want to play naturally.

Play should be designed to support engagement and time in nature. Children need freedom to explore the natural world to support their development and wellbeing.

10 Wheeled play summary

Wheeled and skate facilities are often spaces where a range of ages of people come together to practice their skills. From first rides on scooters and balance bikes, to adult skaters still honing their jumps and tricks.

The term 'Wheeled' refers to informal spaces, free to use, for all ages and abilities for those on scooters, balance bikes, bmx's, jump bikes, skateboards, long boards, roller blades and anything else.

They are also social spaces, especially for young people, to hang out and a place to meet with friends.

BCP has a mix of wheeled sports facilities that includes, skate ramps, concrete skate parks, concrete bowls, pump tracks and BMX tracks.

There has been little recent investment into the wheeled facilities across BCP. Christchurch Council invested in a new large concrete skate park in 2019 at Two Riversmeet site, and a new concrete bowl was built at Duck Lane in Bournemouth in 2015.

There are 13 skate/wheeled facilities spread across the conurbation. The 20-minute walk time mapping shows a contiguous area from sites near Fleetsbridge in Poole heading North-East to Slade's and Redhill in Bournemouth. This suggests sufficient provision in these areas.

There is a large gap beyond Baiter in Poole, along the south of the conurbation through to Kings Park in Bournemouth, although the provision of green space in these areas is also relatively low.

Quality and scale of provision:

- Baiter Skate Park and Slade's farm are both very popular and are destination sites that people will travel to but have been in decline for many years.
- These two with Bourne Valley concrete bowl, Arena Skate Park (Two Riversmeet, Christchurch) and Kings Park are the most heavily used.
- Provision at Sherborn Crescent on Canford Heath, Moore Avenue in West Howe, Redhill Park and Noyce gardens in Bournemouth are very small facilities with grind rails or single ramps that offer very little value or meaningful experience.

Case study 1

Baiter Park Locals

Baiter skate park has been identified for improvement for many years, owing to the metal ramps and frames rusting and deteriorating.

Pre-covid a group of users set up the Baiter Park Locals and secured some funding and held skate jams to seek support for a redevelopment project.

As a key destination site, we are looking to resurrect the work at Baiter to work in partnership, re-engage with skaters and users, and ultimately seek funding and the construction of a new facility.



Skate future state

Skate is classed as a more strategic provision than play areas, being fewer in number and needing more careful design considerations for setting and location.

For the larger destinations users will travel further with an importance placed on access and routes to the sites and use of the urban landscape along the travel routes.

Smaller local facilities act as starter points and introductions to learn skills and develop confidence.

Future provision will use a hub and spoke model across BCP, with large destination sites supported by a handful of strategically positioned smaller facilities:

- Replacing Baiter Skate Park in Poole with a destination concrete skate facility due to the size of the site and location to local transport and rail links.
 - Liaising with Christchurch Town Council to maintain the Two Riversmeet site as a destination space in the East of the conurbation.
- Identifying a Bournemouth town centre site for a destination facility has proven to be difficult, owing to land use, ownership and other constraints. There remains an aspiration for a carefully located provision linking to the informal use by skaters of the town centre.
 - The smaller wheeled facilities across the conurbation will act as transition sites to support younger and newer users.

There is interest from local community groups for smaller wheeled facilities across the conurbation. It is recommended that we have a smaller number but high-quality stock of wheeled facilities due to the limited resource and budget to maintain this type of provision.

Case study 2

Play Moor, Skate Moor

In 2019 Poole Community Trust worked with local residents and stakeholders to source funding for, design and build a new play area at Foreland Road, Hamworthy (photo, right).

The passionate working group always aspired to a second phase of project, to build a new skate facility. The group have an agreement in place with BCP to seek tenders and designs, while securing funding, for a new facility to be sited near to the play area.

The project, if successful, will provide a local 'spoke' provision in the model described above.



11 Existing Infrastructure

Key figures from the evidence base

The annual revenue budget of £151,000 pa (2023/24) is spread thinly across all the sites and assets. £16,000 of this budget is used for annual inspection and reporting software. Every play and wheeled space receive an annual, independent inspection.



Play areas, and our public realm in general, receive a lot of wear and tear, are subject to anti-social behaviour and require regular site maintenance to ensure they are safe, clean and accessible for all users.

Typical repair costs vary according to the type of equipment. Traditional, steel-framed equipment has fewer moving parts but less play value. More modern equipment uses more timber or has moving parts with bearings and joints that are costlier to repair, but create greater variety, challenge and play value.

Play & Wheeled spaces receive visual and moving-parts maintenance inspection on a weekly, fortnightly, monthly basis dependant on size and usage.

BCP has 6 employees trained to undertake routine play inspections, managed by the Grounds Maintenance service.

The Inspectors undertake basic repairs, inspect and keep clean the play spaces. Play areas are governed by British Standards that are adhered to, including guidance on fall zones, entrapment & safety surfacing.

- EN 1176: Play equipment standard
- BS EN 1177:2018: impact attenuating playground surfacing

The £135,000 budget available after annual costs is used to make basic defect repairs and to keep equipment operational. Equipment is specified to ensure parts are easily replaced or repaired.



Summary of investment needs:

The necessary works required on each site have been categorised as follows:

No work where improvements have been completed within the last year using the current revenue budget (prior to the spend freeze), insurance or capital funding.

Defect repairs would typically be funded by revenue funding. (current spending controls owing to Council-wide financial pressures does not allow or cover the repairs needed)

Repurposing space owing to the number of defects, play value, location or close proximity to other sites in better condition, or a better location is available; means that play equipment will be removed.

Refurbishments are a mid-range intervention required with some equipment to be replaced; others to be improved e.g., new swing seats or multi-unit.

Replacement where sites are beyond end of life and in need of redesign and full replacement. There could also be opportunities to repurpose multiple sites in a geographic area and provide a single new site nearby.

12 Summary of Improvement plan

The Total estimated budget required to complete all the recommended works is £10,821,662.

The cost of delivery also needs to fund and include resourcing for:

- public consultation on specific areas or sites, including staff time, producing consultation materials, displays etc.
- background surveys, such as topographic/trees/ground investigation etc
- Landscape architect design work and related costs at approximately 12% of capital cost per site

The Improvement Plan supports the BCP Plan for Play and should be read in conjunction with the main document and other supporting information.

BCP's play needs are significant and this improvement plan sets out a best-case approach to improving play quality, provision and standards, with a phased approach over the next 5 years.

The phased approach allows for a staggered draw down and approval of any available funding.

A phased programme ensures consultation and delivery is reviewed and adapted as progress is made.

Full funding of this approach may not be possible and so the timeline or some decisions may have to be delayed, deferred or, in the worst case, more sites repurposed and closed as equipment declines.

Given the size of the investment and improvement required, a phased approach is being recommended to:

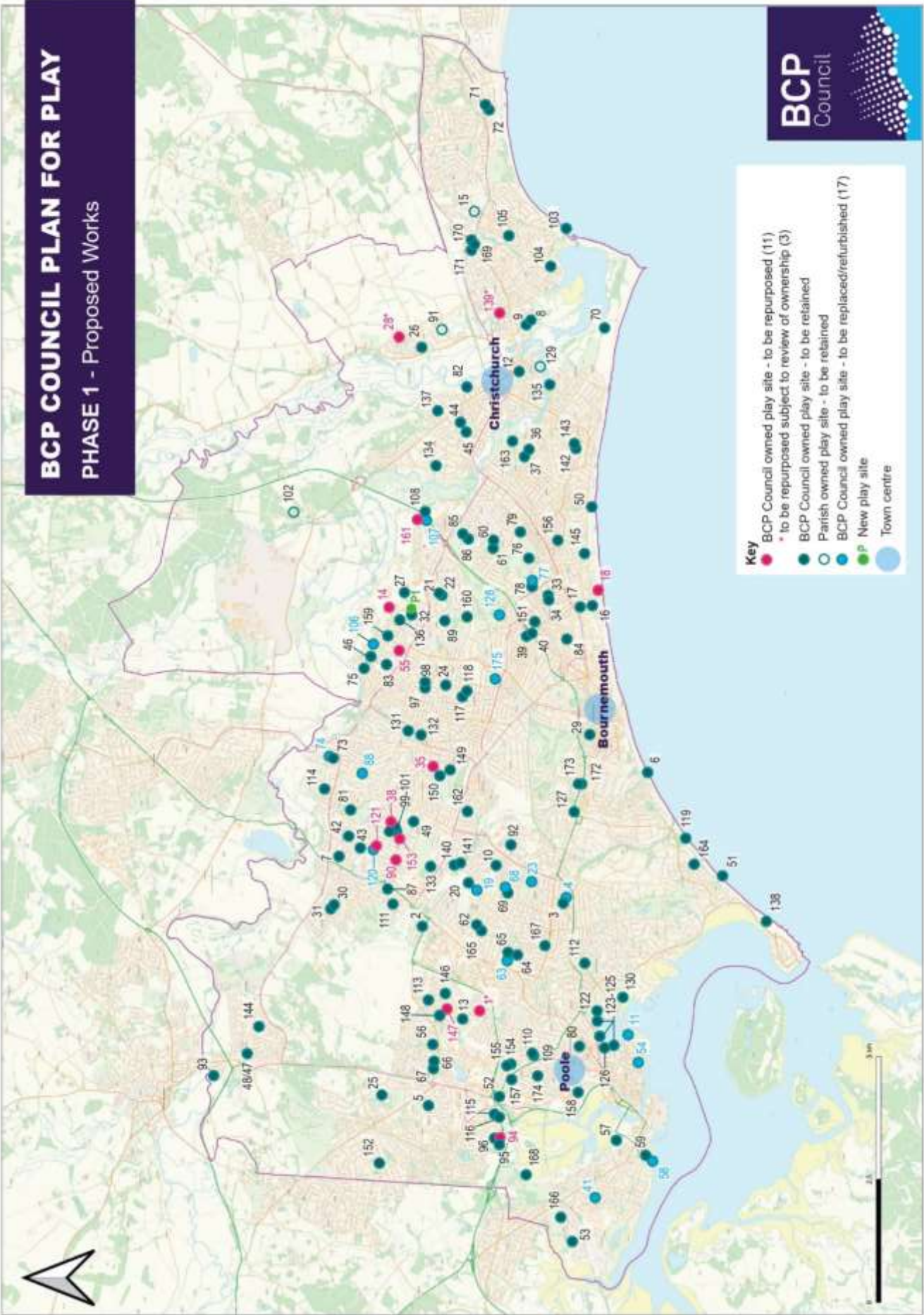
- Deliver immediate repairs to keep facilities open, improved and back in use as soon as possible.
- Refurbish and replace retained sites before any repurposing takes place nearby.
 - Repurpose some facilities where nearby alternatives are available, in better condition or can be significantly improved to offset the loss of another site.
 - A 5-year programme of refurbishment, replacement and some creation of new play areas to ensure sites repurposed are replaced with larger, better centres of play.
- Ensure every play area is well considered and its local value within local communities is understood.
- Consider any charity or commercial businesses that are dependent on footfall derived from the nearby facility.
- Addresses the deficiency in maintenance budgets and future investment as current levels are not sufficient to retain the current level of provision across BCP.



BCP COUNCIL PLAN FOR PLAY PHASE 1 - Proposed Works



- Key**
- BCP Council owned play site - to be repurposed (11)
 - * to be repurposed subject to review of ownership (3)
 - BCP Council owned play site - to be retained
 - Parish owned play site - to be retained
 - BCP Council owned play site - to be replaced/refurbished (17)
 - New play site
 - Town centre



14 Retain or repurpose green space.

The decision to repurpose any facility is not taken lightly and the following factors have been considered in creating the investment plan:

- Proximity to other facilities and their quality
- Walking time to facilities, including any significant barriers to access, e.g. main roads, rail lines etc
- Space and location in creating high quality future play spaces
- Type of equipment in current locations
- Demographics, areas of deprivation and numbers of children in the area.
- Resultant walk times to remaining facilities

Each site to be repurposed has been detailed in Appendix 3 where photos are included, highlighting the small nature of the site, or limited range of equipment.

Following closure, these spaces are to be considered on an individual basis, some can be left in a condition that allows play to be reinstated in the future, should capital and revenue funding allow for this.



Bug hotel in the Selkirk Close, Merley play area

Sites will remain allocated as Open Space and future use will be considered to ensure anti-social behaviour does not increase and a negative spiral occurs. Opportunities for new uses, such as informal recreation, natural play or improvements to biodiversity will be brought forward.

In a very few cases, the land will be considered for asset disposal or alternative use, such as housing, with any income sought for re-investment in to nearby play facilities.

The spatial mapping of all play spaces helps to show that sites for repurposing will not have an impact on people's walk times to play spaces. This is because they are taking place where there are multiple facilities close to each other and are in dense residential areas.

Repurposing of sites will only take place once improvements have been made to nearby facilities.



Slide at Cornish gardens, Bournemouth.

15 Consultation

There will be a BCP-wide play consultation that will allow comments on each play and wheeled space, seek views on future improvements and gather information about how and where people play. Everyone will be able to have their say on each space that is important to them.

Sharing and setting out the rationale and information related to the key decision making will be needed on the repurposing of sites. How this is managed across certain areas, the phasing and improvements to ensure nearby sites are improved first will be explained.

Where a cluster of play areas exists, there will be consultation to cover all these in a single approach. These will not be based on ward boundaries but where facilities and their geography naturally cluster sites together.

Consultation will be phased to align with the improvement plan and is further detailed in Appendix 1

The public consultation will seek opinion on a range of factors, such as:

- Style and theming of new play facilities.
- Types of equipment and facilities for the area.
- Where there are options to consider which site is repurposed and to what extent, this will be consulted upon.

Stakeholders seeking to support the improvements through fund raising will also be engaged through this process, allowing them to be part of the decision-making process.

Any decisions to change the improvement plan recommendations, such as retaining a site instead of it being repurposed, will need to be factored into the future revenue, inspection and maintenance budget, as well as additional refurbishment costs.

There is a need to reduce the number of play facilities in certain areas, to create fewer but better play areas.

There is also a financial need to reduce the number of play facilities and that is set out as a Plan for Play principle that needs to be met.



Arena Skate Park, Christchurch (photo courtesy of Maverick Industries)

16 Consultation and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Once approved and adopted by the Council, the Plan for Play and delivery of improvements will be taken forward.

The design of many current play spaces, especially the older ones do not meet diversity needs. It is imperative the Plan for Play is representative and provides key steps to ensuring an inclusive approach to design of new facilities.

This should include, but not be limited to:

- Using the Equalities Impact Assessment as a live tool, used as part of the on-going programme delivery and guiding its work.
- A Reference Group, representing disabled children and disabled parents and carers from across the impairment groups and BCP wide charities and user led groups, is established.
- Use a social model of disability as a framework for understanding and responding to disability.
- Deliver on the definitions of Accessibility and Inclusivity used by PiPA Play
- Access audits are delivered by disabled people with lived experience of the environment is undertaken for all projects to ensure that the barriers and potential solutions are understood from the perspective of those with lived experience of the environment.
- That an Access Register for each play space is developed and maintained as to ensure the maintenance of the key features.



17 Improvement Plan indicative timeline

The Improvement Plan is dependent on securing funding and mobilising staff resource for delivery. Should Phase 1 capital and resourcing be put in place then the indicative timeline is as follows:

Timing	Action
Dec 2024	BCP Cabinet, Full Council
Jan – Mar	Set up budgets Recruit for project resourcing Project website to go live at https://bcpprojects.net/
April - May	Prioritise defect repairs, equipment to be procured early to improve conditions. Phased consultation on clusters of engagement to be published and first phases to start. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working group • Reference group • Specialist engagement Publish plan of Phase 1 improvements and works.
May - June	First detailed area consultations with programme of engagement and consultation
Sept onwards	First wave of replacement and refurbishments for construction.

18 Future funding and provision

Revenue funding

Existing revenue budgets are limited and average out annually at £789 per site. This has an impact on the ability to repair equipment and keep sites in good condition.

In addition to the budget for maintenance, repairs and replacements of individual items, budget is required to increase resilience in the grounds maintenance team tasked with inspecting and maintain the equipment.

Investing in skills for staff to undertake repairs, identify defects early and limit damage and have an active role in managing the spaces is important. This creates a method of investing in people that can reduce longer term replacement costs.

The Improvement Plan also has a key role here in ensuring new facilities are robust and long lasting, but also support a maintenance regime for our inspectors. Being able to quickly replace damaged items caused by anti-social behaviour helps to keep sites in good condition and halt a spiral of decline. People are then happier to use the play spaces and that in itself helps to push anti-social behaviour away from these spaces.

This approach is detailed in the Plan for Play priorities and is a key element of this strategy, not only seeking significant capital funds for investment, but also increased support for daily operation.



Missing toddler swing at Slade's Farm; Missing cable way at Arne Avenue.

Capital Funding and opportunities

The primary source of funding for significant investment is the **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**.

CIL and other developer contributions are secured through legal agreements and are used on the delivery of infrastructure to support housing growth.

Housing development across BCP is characterised by and set to rely on the use of brownfield sites and the 'densification' of urban areas. There are more people living alongside the same levels of greenspace, and other public realm facilities. As each development arrives, and the local population increases, so the use and pressure on existing spaces increases.

Use of CIL to offset this increase in pressure by improving standards of play is entirely appropriate and the plan for Play is calling for significant investment from CIL for the Improvement plan delivery.

At the time of the writing the Plan for Play, the strategic CIL reserves are being considered for strategic use across the Council. The current review will bring forward requests for priority investment linked to future housing growth. It is therefore helpful that the Improvement Plan considers the housing allocations in the forthcoming Local Plan, identifies areas of growth and aligns investment and improvement of facilities to offset the changes this will bring in our communities.

Other funding opportunities to support the strategic allocation of CIL will be sought:

Communities:

- Working closely and collaboratively with communities is essential to bring forward high quality play spaces that will feel owned and loved by their users.
- Neighbourhood Forums with ring-fenced funding drawn down for local needs from CIL can support play investment. In 2024 Broadstone neighbourhood Forum completed the installation of a new play space using such funds, in partnership with BCP. (Appendix 7)
- Various stakeholders and partner organisations, such as Friends and residents' groups, and more formal charities like Poole Communities Trust and The Parks Foundation, can support through collaborative projects and fund raising.
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund, land-fill tax credits and individual or charitable grant giving are other routes to secure funding for individual projects.
- It is acknowledged that fund raising for projects that will significantly contribute towards play provision, e.g. greater than £50,000, is often a long and onerous process, requiring a lot of evidence of need, community support and innovation to make a bid stand out to often over-subscribed funders.
- Practical volunteering in play areas is possible, if supervised, for tasks such as painting of fences and equipment, clearing vegetation, or installing natural features such as bug hotels.

Parishes

BCP area currently has 5 civil parishes, these are Burton and Winkton Parish Council, Christchurch Town Council, Throop and Holdenhurst Village Council, Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council, and Hurn Parish Council.

In some of these parishes, play areas have been transferred from BCP Council to the civil parish, with the civil parish then taking over the budget and operational responsibility, for example the Quomps splash park in Christchurch and Bluebell Close play area in Highcliffe.

Some parishes already have their own play areas which they manage, either on their own land, or through private lease arrangements.

Civil parishes have an important role in play provision, this may result in additional funding for play through council tax precepts. Either enabling more localised management of these facilities and an increased ability to fund infrastructure improvements, or fund-raising in partnership with BCP Council.

Civil parishes are significant partners who can work with BCP in developing play provision within their areas.

Further parish or community councils are being considered across BCP that could, in time, offer alternative funding for infrastructure improvements. It should be noted however that parishes may require facilities to have a good lifespan and be in a reasonable condition before transferring.

Businesses

- Through the development of the Plan for Play local businesses have already come forward to show support for their local spaces. Whether through Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) or directly from business owners, there is potential for small and medium enterprises through to larger corporate organisations to support facilities.
- On-site recognition of sponsorship or donations through sign boards or notices is to be developed alongside publicity for organisations to benefit from any donations towards facilities.
- Some play spaces act as important support for businesses. These should be prioritised for

- improvement where possible to ensure that park cafes, heritage attractions and local centres continue to benefit from the footfall generated by the play facility.
- Opportunities for corporate volunteering are also to be developed to support play areas and local green spaces. Offering opportunities to support organisations' Environmental, Social and Governance responsibilities are to be developed, for example painting of fences and equipment, clearing vegetation, or installing natural features such as bug hotels.
 - There are benefits to the local tourism industry and economy through the wider quality of place-shaping. Spaces such as the Quomps in Christchurch and Bournemouth Lower/Central gardens play an active role in these destinations for visitors, and therefore support the local retail and food and beverage outlets.

Destination sites and potential funding

The Improvement Plan focusses on community need and support for the high number of spaces that fall in to Doorstep, Local and Neighbourhood categories. Multi-million-pound schemes are likely to include funding for play spaces. The most recent BCP example of this is in Poole Park, where a £3.7m project funded two new play areas, opened in 2021, with a budget of £400,000.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund is currently the only significant avenue for such funding, outside of local regeneration, development and corporate support. Typical Lottery projects over £2m will take 4-6 years to develop and deliver and require approximately 20% match funding and significant resource.

The future pipeline of significant projects for destination sites that could seek NLHF grants, or other similar-sized investment should it come forward, includes:

- Kings Park. With significant investment needs across the two play spaces, the park requires a

- Masterplan and significant investment across the green space.
- Slade's Farm as a destination wheeled play site is of strategic importance and in need of significant repair and improvement.
 - Sites such as Littledown have potential to draw investment funds from commercial partners owing to their strategic location
 - Bournemouth's lower and central gardens have previously been identified for a Lottery bid and town centre improvements are a priority for the Council. A public realm improvements bid could include new play, skate and urban greening improvements. These could receive support from local businesses as well as Lottery or central government support and play a key role in the town centre regeneration, economic benefits and wider tourism offer of the town.

Alternative provision

Schools often have large recreation spaces and play facilities that could be utilised outside of school hours, when they normally lay dormant. Schools would have to meet the challenges of site security and risk of anti-social behaviour on the equipment.

However, there these spaces do offer a way to plug some gaps in future provision and could be considered in the future as part of the play estate. There is precedent for this with sports pitches.



Bluebell Close, Christchurch