



To: Executive Councillor for City Centre and Public Places (and Deputy Leader): Councillor Carina O'Reilly

Report by: Alistair Wilson - Streets and Open Space Development Manager

Relevant scrutiny committee: Community Services Scrutiny 8/10/2015

Wards affected: All - Abbey Arbury Castle Cherry Hinton Coleridge East Chesterton King's Hedges Market Newnham Petersfield Queen Edith's Romsey Trumpington West Chesterton

## **OUTDOOR PLAY INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

### **Key Decision**

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#### **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 The proposed strategy detailed in appendix A of this report provides a strategic framework to steer future outdoor play provision and associated investment decisions.
- 1.2 The strategy has been informed by a detailed audit of outdoor play provision including an assessment of current quantity, quality and accessibility against current and future population growth. The results of this assessment have been used to identify deficiencies in provision in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility.
- 1.3 The strategy has been developed in consultation with both internal and external stakeholders including senior officers of the Council whose responsibilities relate to children's and young people's play provision.
- 1.4 The strategy makes recommendations which aim to maximise the use of available resources and associated future investment opportunities to deliver high quality, high value, well used outdoor play provision for children and young people over the period 2016 to 2021.

## **2. Recommendations**

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- a) Approve the proposed outdoor play investment strategy at appendix A; and
- b) Instruct Officers to:
  - i. Prepare ward based profiles to inform the planning and decision making around the allocation of Section 106, CIL and other such investment opportunities on outdoor play provision;
  - ii. Use the ward profiles to inform reviews of specific outdoor play spaces considered to be low value/ low use involving key stakeholders, including children, young people and their families and local Ward councillors;
  - iii. Prepare an investment plan for both local and strategic play provision, informed by the strategy and ward profiles;
  - iv. Use the investment plan to make recommendations on the allocation of funds for both local and strategic outdoor play provision, such as S106, CIL, bids to the Council's capital plan, and external investment opportunities; and
  - v. Develop a design guide to aid future planning and delivery of good quality/ high value children's and young people's outdoor play provision.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 The strategic direction of the Council's outdoor play provision has been previously considered in the broader context and setting of the Parks Management Plan 2010-2014<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.2 The ongoing period of public sector austerity and associated financial pressures have highlighted the need for a review of the Council's current outdoor play provision and associated investment needs and for the development of a new supporting long term strategy. One of the key aims of the proposed new strategy is to inform and guide current and future investment in the delivery of high quality, high value, and well used outdoor play opportunities for children and young people.

## **4 Audit and assessment**

- 4.1 In January 2015, Streets and Open Spaces launched a period of audit

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<sup>1</sup> Committee decision 10/CS/12 Cambridge Parks 2010 - 2014  
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and assessment of outdoor play provision to inform the development of the proposed new strategy. This research included the following areas of work:

- A review and update of the quantitative and qualitative assessment results of fixed play provision previously carried out in 2010 for the Parks Management Plan;
- An examination of current levels of fixed play provision against the 2011 Census data at ward level;
- Consideration of whether current provision is still 'fit for purpose', 'well located' and 'well used';
- Consideration of whether current play provision should be redesigned to better meet the needs of catchment community.

4.2 The research undertaken has resulted in the following findings, which have been used to inform the new strategy:

- The identification of outdoor play spaces that are considered integral to city wide provision and should be protected.
- Deficiencies in the quantity, accessibility, quality and value of outdoor play provision that need to be addressed.
- Requirements in new provision to meet future needs or address existing deficiencies.
- Outdoor equipped play facilities that are poorly located and no longer fit for purpose
- Clear criteria for future investment decisions on outdoor play provision

4.3 In addition to the above, the following key strategic issues and options were identified:

- Current public sector financial pressures are likely to increase and continue for a number of years. Can the City Council sustain the provision and maintenance of the current 90+ equipped play spaces?
- Nearly two in five (39%) outdoor play spaces in Cambridge have a very limited number and range of equipment. Should there be a programme of redesign/ consolidation of current provision, targeting low use/ low quality equipped play spaces?
- A number of current outdoor play spaces serve overlapping catchment areas. Should some of these be considered for decommissioning and redesign as amenity open space or other community use?

- A number of local authorities have developed what are termed 'Destination Playgrounds', ie. large play spaces which serve a strategic catchment audience. Should the Council focus future investment on creating additional 'destination' play spaces?
- Child poverty and multiple deprivation is concentrated in the four wards of King's Hedges, Abbey, East Chesterton and Arbury. Should these four wards be given priority when decisions about play area consolidation and investment are to be determined.

4.4 These key strategic issues and options were considered at two stakeholder workshops, one involving Executive Councillors and the other, Council officers representing Children & Young People, Streets & Open Spaces and Planning Policy services; and at a Council organised focus group involving a representative sample of local residents.

## **5 Strategic direction**

5.1 The proposed new strategy sets out the Council's vision and strategic aims for the provision of outdoor play for children and young people over the period 2016-21. The proposed vision and aims are as follows:

### **5.1.1 Vision**

"Play is a fundamental right<sup>2</sup> and need for the health and well-being of children and young people, and is crucial in shaping their development and learning. Cambridge City Council will support and promote investment in the sustainable provision of good quality, high value outdoor play, which meets the needs of the city's children and young people through the implementation of this strategy over the period 2016-2021."

### **5.1.2 Aims**

- a) To sustain the provision of good quality/ high value outdoor play across the city;
- b) To provide equitable access to good quality/ high value outdoor play provision for all sections of the community;
- c) To target investment in the provision of high quality/ high value/ low cost outdoor play provision to address current deficiencies, both in terms of quantity and/ or quality;

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<sup>2</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child  
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- d) To fully engage local children, young people and their families in the review and decision making process surrounding the provision of outdoor play
- e) To ensure outdoor play provision, especially on new development sites, is good quality/ high value and meets the needs of the catchment community”

5.2 In support of the implementation of the vision and aims, the strategy recommends the following key actions:

- a) Prepare ward based profiles to inform the planning and decision making around the allocation of Section 106, CIL and other such investment opportunities on outdoor play provision;
- b) Use the ward profiles, to inform reviews of outdoor play spaces considered to be low value/ low use, involving key stakeholders, including children, young people and their families and local Ward councillors;
- c) Prepare an investment plan for both local and strategic play provision, informed by the strategy and ward profiles;
- d) Use the investment plan to determine allocation of S106 funds project bids to the Council’s capital plan and other external investment opportunities for both local and strategic outdoor play provision; and
- e) Develop a design guide to aid future planning and delivery of good quality/ high value children’s and young people’s outdoor play provision.

## 6. Implications

### (a) **Financial Implications**

The City Council currently manages 88 outdoor play spaces across 14 wards with an annual revenue budget of approximately £84,000. This budget covers routine maintenance, equipment and surfacing repair and minor replacements, painting and topping up loose fill surfaces (bark & sand). In addition to the routine maintenance, £77,000 revenue expenditure is allocated to undertake major repairs of existing play areas which are reaching the end of its product lifecycle of typically 11 years.

The Council no longer makes budgetary provision for Repairs and Renewals. Instead, such items are considered on a case by case basis through the new Capital Plan Programme process. The Strategy will be used to direct capital investment in outdoor play provision.

Since the new S106 pooling constraints came into force on 6 April 2015, the Council has only been able to enter into just a few new S106 agreements. This has affected all public realm infrastructure contribution types significantly, including fixed play provision.

(b) **Staffing Implications**

The recently completed service review and the associated restructure of Streets and Open Spaces, has created capacity within the new service to support the Strategy's development and implementation.

(c) **Equality and Poverty Implications**

The completed EQIA has indicated positive impacts, namely equal access to good quality/ high value outdoor play across the city; the engagement of local children, young people and their families in the review and decision making process surrounding changes to and investment in specific outdoor play spaces.

To ensure outdoor play provision is good quality/ high value and meets the needs of the catchment community, EQIAs shall be completed on individual projects delivered as a consequence of this strategy, to ensure positive impacts are maximised and any negative impacts mitigated.

(d) **Environmental Implications**

The new strategy's aims and associated actions are likely to have a low positive environmental impact. For example, opportunities to replace low value equipped play provision with low cost (maintenance)/ high value 'natural play' or equivalent provision will reduce daily and monthly inspection rounds and associated vehicle emissions; and free up space to be redesigned/ landscaped, including planting and wildlife habitat.

(e) **Procurement**

Some of the recommended actions flowing from the Strategy will result in procurement decisions needing to be made by the Council. Separate reports on these actions will be provided at an appropriate future time.

(f) **Consultation and communication**

Key strategic issues and options were considered at two stakeholder workshops, one involving Executive Councillors and the other, Council officers representing Children & Young People, Streets & Open Spaces and Planning Policy services; and at a Council organised focus group involving a representative sample of local residents.

(g) **Community Safety**

There are no significant community safety issues associated with the strategy.

**7. Background Papers**

- 10/CS/12 Parks Management Plan 2010-2014.

**8. Appendices**

- 'Outdoor Play Investment Strategy'; September 2015, Ashley Godfrey Associates.

**9. Inspection of papers**

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

Author's Name:	Alistair Wilson
Author's Phone Number:	01223 - 458514
Author's Email:	<a href="mailto:alistair.wilson@cambridge.gov.uk">alistair.wilson@cambridge.gov.uk</a>