

# Outdoor Play Spaces Investment Strategy

**To:** Councillor Sam Carling, Executive Councillor for Open Spaces and City Services

Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee 21st March 2024

**Report by:** James Elms, Director of City Services

Tel: 01223 458514.

Email: [alistair.wilson@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:alistair.wilson@cambridge.gov.uk)

**Wards affected:**

ALL.

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Outdoor Play Place Spaces Investment Strategy (Strategy) detailed in Appendix B of this report provides a framework to steer future outdoor play provision and associated investment decisions. The Strategy is supported by a Business Intelligence (BI) Platform<sup>1</sup> which will enable the Council to use real time data to respond to changes in the play portfolio in an informed, timely and business efficient and effective manner.
- 1.2 The Strategy has been developed using an updated audit of outdoor play provision including an assessment of the play portfolio's current quantity, quality, and accessibility against current and future population growth.

---

<sup>1</sup> Power BI is a technology-driven business intelligence tool provided by Microsoft for analysing and visualising raw data to present actionable information. It combines business analytics, data visualisation, and best practices that help an organisation to make data-driven decision.

- 1.3 The results of this assessment have been used to devise a ‘tiered’ system to identify where deficiencies and over provision exist in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility and explores how these factors can be evaluated and overcome.
- 1.4 The Strategy updates and reviews the previous work dated 2016-2021 and responds to population growth but also the delivery of new play provision in the City as well as proposing a new data driven approach.
- 1.5 The strategic approach informs how the Council can think differently about the future of the service delivery and to investigate ways to make smarter decisions, the project and its outputs have been led using the Power BI Platform.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended to:
  - a) Approve and adopt the proposed Outdoor Play Spaces Investment Strategy as set out in appendix B; and
  - b) Instruct Officers to adopt and implement the key conclusions and recommendations from the report as follows:
    - i. To licence the software platform to enable the council to maintain real-time data for the play space provision strategy and drive business efficiency within the portfolio,
    - ii. Implement the proposed tiered structure for the play space provision, incorporating different tiers to streamline processes, enhance efficiency, and provide a more organised approach to the delivery of play spaces across the City.
    - iii. To review financial focus, direct attention and resources towards sites that currently have limited equipment, aiming to diversify and enhance recreational offerings.
    - iv. Explore the possibility of transitioning the play space surfaces in areas covered only by grass to versatile multifunctional, year-round surfaces that can accommodate various activities particularly in lower order tier sites.
    - v. Use the tiered data to make future 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.

- c) Instruct Officers to use the data and information to enhance the Councils webpages in relation to outdoor play spaces; to include maps with lists of equipment available at each site and accompanying photographs.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 The strategic direction of the Council's outdoor play provision has been previously informed by the Outdoor Play Investment Strategy'; September 2015, this strategy has now elapsed.
- 3.2 There has been significant growth in the city during the period of the aged Strategy and the expected onward population growth will place future demands on the Council in terms of continued investment and infrastructure needs, to deliver a modern, fit-for-purpose play space provision, and one that reflects the local community and that can be delivered within the strategic context of existing and future demands.
- 3.3 To understand the strategic context of addressing the demand of play space provision, the Council has commissioned a comprehensive evaluation of its current assets. This evaluation and audit include play, skate parks and in some cases the related community facilities that are available throughout the city. The evaluation has helped to determine if these assets are sufficient for current and future needs.
- 3.3 The evaluation provides a way forward for how the play space provision can be maximised across the city, to ensure that each community and neighbourhood has the right amount of provision within each local community.

### **4 Audit and assessment**

- 4.1 During 2023, the (as was) Environmental Services, Asset Development Team now City Services independently commissioned a full audit and assessment of outdoor play provision to inform the development of the proposed updated and future proof Strategy. This research included the following areas of work:
  - a) Audit of exactly what is currently provided at each location.
  - b) Ensuring that the play space provision aligns with the local community's needs.
  - c) Confirming that the play space provision is designed to meet its intended purpose effectively.

- d) Developing a strategic vision for play space provision within the city.
- e) Gain an understanding of the investment and infrastructure requirements necessary to meet the play space facility needs.

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

- a) There are currently 103 play spaces across the City that provide a play space provision for a population of 145,683 people.
- b) 15% of the population is between the age of 0-16 (22,195 people).
- c) It currently costs Council on average c£1,602 per play space per year to maintain the provision.<sup>2</sup>
- d) Following the implementation of a tiered, hierarchy approach to the segmentation of all play spaces
  - 10 were ranked as Tier 1,
  - 7 as Tier 2,
  - 22 as Tier 3 and
  - 64 as Tier 4.
- e) Following the classification of the play spaces, 45 of the 103 were rated green (strategic important) 25 were rated amber (requires investment or additional maintenance) and 33 were rated red (not strategically important).
- f) It is clear, when investigating the catchment analysis for all tiers, that there are areas of the city that have significant overlaps in play provision.
- g) Through the overlaying of the tiered hierarchy and the classification processes, it became clear that there is an oversupply of Tier 4 sites, the majority of which are not considered strategically important (30 out of 33 red / Tier 4)
- h) Further work is required to consider whether the Council can continue to sustain to manage 103 play parks, over varying strategic importance.

---

<sup>2</sup> There is additional financial provision in the S106 agreements relating to new play areas delivered by the City's growth.

- i) The assessment has also identified that there are opportunities to improve the overall service through additional maintenance and investment.
- j) The strategic expansion of play space offerings throughout the city has the potential to stimulate the timely development of complementary amenities in suitable locations, through the proposed tiered framework this will support and inform decision making to classify forthcoming facility provision and investment.

## **5 Strategic uses of the data and information**

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 from 2024. The Strategy reviews how the play park service is categorised to make detailed decisions that allow Council to 'strategically select' the play parks to invest in. This involves placing each play space into a tiered hierarchy and then also ranking them using red/amber and green categories. By use of a BI Platform data can be continuously updated to enable the Strategy to be a continuous tool for play. The data can be adapted in multiple ways to help support the Council in a strategic, well-informed decision making.

### **5.1.1 Vision**

*'To investigate ways to reduce operational costs and create business efficiencies whilst simultaneously safeguarding and wherever possible improving the overall quality of the delivery of the service'.*

### **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 that is inclusive for all sections of the community, age range and aligns with local community needs.
- 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.

- d) To ensure outdoor play provision, especially on new development sites, is good quality/ high value and meets the needs of the catchment community”
- e) Through BI ensure that the play portfolio is maintained in ‘real time’ to allow targeted and meaningful investment that is supported by data year on year.

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

- a) Implementation of a BI to establish a cutting-edge system that not only meets the current project’s requirements but also evolves continuously.
- b) Investigate new surfaces to ascertain whether transitioning the play space surfaces in areas covered only by grass to versatile, year-round surfaces that can accommodate various activities is possible.
- c) Review financial focus to ensure that attention and financial resources towards play sites that are high in value but that currently have limited equipment, aiming to diversify and enhance recreational offerings.
- d) Implement a tiered structure for the play space provision, incorporating different tiers to streamline processes, enhance efficiency, and provide a more organised approach to the delivery of play spaces across the City.
- e) Implement a regular reporting schedule encompassing quarterly, bi-annual, and annual intervals, ensuring that the data presented in dashboards is consistently updated.
- f) Integrate on-going maintenance reports and related data into the existing Council play space platform to create by centralising all information, to ensure a comprehensive and business efficient view of both operational and maintenance aspects.
- g) Consider the tier 4/red play spaces as a short-term action, considering the importance of retaining the tier 4 ranked sites that have been classified as red. This action will help streamline the service and target financial resources efficiently.

## **6 Implications**

### **a) Financial Implications**

The City Council currently manages 103 outdoor play spaces across 14 wards with an annual revenue budget of approximately £86,000. 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, £79,000 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 Strategy and its priority setting will be used to direct both the remaining section 106 and capital funding into outdoor play provision.

During the period of the last strategy S106 monies have been utilised to a large extent via expenditure on play area improvements with very little remaining city wide that can be spent specifically on play. The new strategy will help to target what is remaining by a clearly defined strategic approach and placing the funding where it is most needed.

Where 106 funding is limited and where it is evident that a play area is coming to end of its useful lifespan and where general maintenance repair cannot be used effectively to overcome the issues, the Council will continue to consider large scale repairs and renewals on a case-by-case basis through the new Capital Plan Programme process.

## **b) Staffing Implications**

City Services is part way through organisational change as part of the Our Cambridge Transformation Programme and this proposed Strategy and approach will form part of the considerations of any service reconfigurations or changes.

### **c) Equality and Poverty Implications**

The EQIA has identified the positive contributions that play can make in respect of inclusivity and disability.

The review and update of the Council's outdoor play provision strategy presents an opportunity to enhance the accessibility, inclusivity, and cultural relevance of play spaces across the city. By proactively addressing potential inequalities and consulting with diverse stakeholders, the Council can ensure that outdoor play remains a positive and enriching experience for all members of the community.

Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are to be established in the software to track the implementation and impact of the updated outdoor play provision strategy. This should include ongoing consultation with stakeholders and periodic assessments of accessibility, usage patterns, and satisfaction levels among different demographic groups. Any disparities or unintended consequences should be promptly addressed through targeted interventions.

### **d) Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

The new Strategy aims, and associated actions are likely to have a low positive environmental impact. For example, opportunities to replace and enhance 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 Implications**

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) Community Safety Implications**

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



## **7. Consultation and communication considerations**

Whilst the work commissioned did not include a public consultation element, the 2016-2021 strategy had elements of engagement that could be referenced and would have largely remained unaltered.

The introduction of BI system will have the capability of a public interface element which will enable the public to engage and view report data as well as providing the opportunity to contribute to future proposed provision changes.

## **8. Background papers**

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

- 10/CS/12 Parks Management Plan 2010-2014.
- 'Outdoor Play Investment Strategy'; September 2015, Ashley Godfrey Associates.
- Play Space Provision - Appendix Items Cambridge City Council February 2024

## **9. Appendices**

Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix B – Play Space Provision; February 2024, Passport 365

## **10. Inspection of papers**

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report, please contact Mr Anthony French, Asset Development Manager, 01223458521, [anthony.french@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:anthony.french@cambridge.gov.uk)

## Appendix A

### Cambridge City Council Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

This tool helps the Council ensure that we fulfil legal obligations of the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) to have due regard to the need to –

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Guidance on how to complete this tool can be found on the Cambridge City Council intranet. For specific questions on the tool email Helen Crowther Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer at [equalities@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cambridge.gov.uk) or phone 01223 457046.

Once you have drafted the EqIA please send this to [equalities@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cambridge.gov.uk) for checking. For advice on consulting on equality impacts, please contact Graham Saint, Strategy Officer, ([graham.saint@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:graham.saint@cambridge.gov.uk) or 01223 457044).

<b>1. Title of strategy, policy, plan, project, contract, or major change to your service</b>
Outdoor Play Spaces Investment Strategy will seek. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) To sustain the provision of good quality/ high value outdoor play across the city.</li><li>b) To provide equitable access to good quality/ high value outdoor play provision that is inclusive for all sections of the community, age range and aligns with local community needs.</li><li>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.</li><li>d) To ensure outdoor play provision, especially on new development sites, is good quality/ high value and meets the needs of the catchment community”</li><li>e) Through BI ensure that the play portfolio is maintained in ‘real time’ to allow targeted and meaningful investment that is supported by data year on year.</li></ul>
<b>2. Webpage link to full details of the strategy, policy, plan, project, contract, or major change to your service (if available)</b>
<a href="#">Environment and Community Services Committee 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024</a>

**3. What is the objective or purpose of your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract, or major change to your service?**

The Council recognises the importance of ensuring equitable access to outdoor play spaces across the city. The previous Outdoor Play Investment Strategy, implemented in September 2015, has lapsed, necessitating a comprehensive review and update to address the evolving needs of our growing population. This Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) aims to evaluate the potential impacts of the proposed changes to outdoor play provision on various demographic groups within the community.

The objective of this policy is to review and update the strategic direction of the Council's outdoor play provision to align with current and future demands. This includes ensuring that play spaces are modern, fit-for-purpose, reflective of local community needs, and can accommodate the anticipated population growth.

**4. Responsible service**

City Services - Streets and Open Spaces

**5. Who will be affected by this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract, or major change to your service?**

**(Please tick all that apply)**

- Residents
- Visitors
- Staff

Cambridge residents, community and other groups, businesses and workers, visitors and City Council staff with families will all be able to make use of and enjoy future play investment driven by this strategy.

**6. What type of strategy, policy, plan, project, contract, or major change to your service is this?**

- New
- Major change
- Minor change

**7. Are other departments or partners involved in delivering this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract, or major change to your service? (Please tick)**

- Yes
- No

Future investment proposals underpinned by this strategy also need to align to the Council's Planning Guidelines and also to the section 106 guidelines on parameters of spend.

**8. Has the report on your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract, or major change to your service gone to Committee? If so, which one?**

[Environment and Community Services Committee 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024](#)

**9. What research methods/ evidence have you used in order to identify equality impacts of your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?**

A comprehensive review and update of the Council's outdoor play provision strategy which supersedes the 2015 strategy which has recently expired. The new strategy has provided an opportunity to enhance the accessibility, inclusivity, and cultural relevance of play spaces across the city.

By proactively addressing potential inequalities and consulting with diverse stakeholders, the Council can ensure that outdoor play remains a positive and enriching experience for all members of the community.

## **10. Potential impacts**

For each category below, please explain if the strategy, policy, plan, project, contract, or major change to your service could have a positive/ negative impact or no impact. Where an impact has been identified, please explain what it is. Consider impacts on service users, visitors, and staff members separately.

**(a) Age - Please also consider any safeguarding issues for children and adults at risk.**

Children and young people are primary users of outdoor play spaces. The review and update of outdoor play provision aim to ensure that play areas cater to the diverse needs and preferences of different age groups, promoting inclusivity and enjoyment for all.

**(b) Disability**

It is essential to consider accessibility features in the design and renovation of outdoor play spaces to accommodate individuals with disabilities. The updated provision should prioritise inclusivity, ensuring that play areas are accessible to children and caregivers with various mobility and sensory impairments.

**(c) Gender reassignment**

Outdoor play provision should be designed and maintained in a manner that encourages participation from all genders. Efforts should be made to ensure that play areas are welcoming and safe environments for children of all genders.

**(d) Marriage and civil partnership**

No impact

**(e) Pregnancy and maternity**

It is recommended that accompanying provision, such as seating areas are considered in the design and thematic element of play spaces.

**(f) Race – Note that the protected characteristic ‘race’ refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.**

The design and thematic elements of outdoor play spaces should reflect the cultural diversity of the local community, fostering a sense of belonging and identity among children from different ethnic backgrounds.

**(g) Religion or belief**

The design and thematic elements of outdoor play spaces should reflect the cultural diversity of the local community, fostering a sense of belonging and identity among children from different cultural backgrounds.

**(h) Sex**

No impact

**(i) Sexual orientation**

No impact.

**(j) Other factors that may lead to inequality – in particular, please consider the impact of any changes on:**

- **Low-income groups or those experiencing the impacts of poverty.**
- **People of any age with care experience – this refers to individuals who spent part of their childhood in the care system due to situations beyond their control, primarily arising from abuse and neglect within their families. The term “Care experience” is a description of a definition in law, it includes anyone that had the state as its corporate parent by virtue of a care order in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and amendments.**
- **Groups who have more than one protected characteristic that taken together create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. (Here you are being asked to consider intersectionality, and for more information see: [https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1\\_159kt25q](https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1_159kt25q)).**

Outdoor play provision should be distributed equitably across communities, irrespective of socioeconomic status. The review should consider the affordability and accessibility of play spaces to ensure that all children have equal opportunities for recreation and socialisation.

**11. Action plan – New equality impacts will be identified in different stages throughout the planning and implementation stages of changes to your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract, or major change to your service. How will you monitor these going forward? Also, how will you ensure that any potential negative impacts of the changes will be mitigated? (Please include dates where possible for when you will update this EqIA accordingly.)**

Mitigation Measures:

Project delivery consultation: Engage with diverse stakeholders, including community groups, parents, children, and individuals with disabilities, throughout the review process to gather feedback and insights on their specific needs and preferences.

Accessibility: Incorporate universal design principles to ensure that outdoor play spaces are accessible and inclusive for individuals with disabilities.

Equity Consideration: Prioritise the allocation of resources to underserved communities to address disparities in outdoor play provision.

Cultural Sensitivity: Consult with representatives from diverse cultural and ethnic groups to ensure that the design and thematic elements of play spaces resonate with the community's cultural heritage and traditions.

## 12. Do you have any additional comments?

This Equalities Impact Assessment highlights the importance of considering the diverse needs and experiences of equality groups in the investment of play provision in the future. By implementing appropriate mitigation strategies and engaging with stakeholders, it is possible to ensure that this investment aligns to inclusive and accessible play provision for all members of the community.

## 13. Sign off.

Name and job title of lead officer for this equality impact assessment: Anthony French (Asset Development Manager, City Services)

Names and job titles of other assessment team members and people consulted: Helen Crowther (Equality & Anti-Poverty Officer).

Date of EqIA sign off: March 2024

Date of next review of the equalities impact assessment: To be confirmed.

Date to be published on Cambridge City Council website: To be confirmed

**All EqIAs need to be sent to the Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer at [equalities@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cambridge.gov.uk)**