



EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	Assessment of Play Area Development Opportunities
Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date:	11 th December 2017
Is this an Executive Decision:	NO
Is this a Key Decision:	NO
Is the Report Confidential:	NO
If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A LGA 1972:	[]
<p>Essential Signatories:</p> <p>ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN THE NAME OF A HEAD OF SERVICE</p> <p>Monitoring Officer: Angela Wakefield</p> <p>Date03/11/2017. Signature</p> <p>Chief Finance Officer: Sal Khan</p> <p>Date3/11/2017. Signature</p>	

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

Date: 11th December 2017

REPORT TITLE: Assessment of Play Area Development Opportunities

PORTFOLIO: Cultural Services

HEAD OF SERVICE: Mark Rizk

CONTACT OFFICER: Andy Mason Ext. No. 1037

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1. This purpose of this report is to provide an update on the previous report (October 2015) when cabinet made a decision to focus on the maintenance of play areas rather than their development. If appropriate recommendations will be made based on the review.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. The decision to focus on maintenance rather than development of play areas has not had a detrimental effect on play assets across the borough. The existing stock is being maintained to a good standard.

2.2. There has been opportunities for community led initiatives where equipment has been added or improved. Such opportunities may arise in the future where there is evidence of need and the project is achievable.

2.3. Whilst limited there may also be funding opportunities such as S106 money and external funding secured by community organisations to add to or improve existing play areas if the need is identified.

2.4. The conclusion of the report is that the current arrangements would continue to provide good quality play assets and represents value for money.

3. Background

- 3.1. The report of 2015 followed the completion of a five year play area improvement plan across all of East Staffordshire that had utilised allocated funding from this authority and also funding provided through Section 106 from developers.
 - 3.1.1. The previous report led to a cabinet decision to provide additional funding to the maintenance element of the play area budget and not to commit to any further play area development.
 - 3.1.2. When this decision was made it was also decided that this would not prevent any additional improvements if there were community groups that had identified particular sites for improvement and who had also raised funding to do this.
 - 3.1.3. It was also stipulated that this decision would be reviewed in two years, hence this report coming forward.

4. Contribution to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1. Value for Money Council Services
- 4.2. Protecting and Strengthening Communities

5. Current position

- 5.1. Since 2015 the focus for the Open Spaces Team with regard to play areas has been toward maintenance.
 - 5.1.1. Work undertaken during the period since the last report includes repainting of some play areas in addition to repairs from wear and tear or damage caused, as well as ongoing maintenance following inspections.
 - 5.1.2. The 2015 report highlighted that the condition of the play areas was in general 'good' and that through the inspection and maintenance regime this could be maintained. This proposition was based on the outcome of the inspection reports that are carried out annually by independent inspectors.
 - 5.1.3. The grading of faults provides five categories of risk from very low to very high. When looking at the detail of the last report in November 2016, it is worth highlighting that there was not a single fault found that is graded as high risk or very high risk.

Key to Inspection (highest rating on one piece of equipment at the site)	
1-5	Very Low Risk
6-10	Low Risk
11-15	Moderate Risk
16-20	High
21-25	Very High

Table 1 Categories of Risk following Inspection

5.1.4. Comparison of the independent inspection reports from 2013 and 2016 shows that whilst there has been an increase in the number of faults identified, the number of faults in the moderate category have fallen and no faults have been categorised as high or very high.

Inspection Year	Number of sites	Number faults	Number of Faults Moderate or Above
2013	79	1015	11 (1%)
2014	78	707	7 (1%)
2015	79	1438	15 (1%)
2016	81	2118	14 (0.6%)

Table 2 Result of Independent inspections

5.1.5. The inspection of sites can be a little subjective and also faults are not necessarily limited to pieces of equipment. For example, it can be something as simple as the entrance gate not being a different colour to the fence which is something that is recommended as an assistance to people with visual impairment.

5.1.6. In 2016 there were only 14 faults found that were graded as moderate and the remaining 2,117 falling into the low risk or very low risk categories. Previously there were 15 such faults out of 1438 faults identified. The improvement is in large part due to the inspection regime.

5.1.7. Also of note is the fact that in 2016, 38 faults were identified as being caused by vandalism. Only one was identified as moderate and that is minor fire damage caused to a section of wet pour surfacing. The remainder of this type of fault were either minor fire damage or graffiti and were graded low or very low risk. The advice for this type of damage is to monitor for signs of deterioration. Unfortunately, the findings in 2015 were not categorised and therefore a comparison can't be made.

5.1.8. Spending from maintenance budgets is higher than at the same time in 2016/17 and this appears to be accounted for by a rise in damage caused to equipment rather than wear and tear. This sort of spike has been referred to in previous reports but is not something that

necessarily happens every year. In general, year on year, there is a surplus in this budget. In 2017/18 the maintenance budget for play areas is £77,831 and a total of £26,717 had been spent up to the end of October. The amount of spending at the end of October 2016 was £14,649 and spending for the whole of 2016/17 was £44,000. This highlights that despite the unpredictability of spending, when repairs are required that cannot be attributed to wear and tear maintenance costs can be contained within this particular budget.

- 5.1.9. The upcoming independent assessment (yet to be finalised) of all open spaces across East Staffs, regardless of ownership, states “children’s play areas score particularly well for quality, with 90% of sites rating above the set quality threshold.”
- 5.1.10. It is important that the inspection regime is maintained so that sites within the borough continue to pass the inspections and improve the ratings that the equipment receives.

5.2. Community Development

- 5.2.1 One of the other considerations from the 2015 report was even without play area development, there was still scope for improvements if identified by community groups. Since the original report there have been instances where this has happened.
- 5.2.2 Community groups have for several years had the ability to identify local priorities and in the main this has been facilitated through the Neighbourhood Working Team. Whilst the number of instances where this has involved play area improvement is not great, there have been examples where communities have achieved their aims in conjunction with ESBC.
- 5.2.3 Edge Hill Park in Stapenhill has benefited from some extra equipment for toddlers following an initiative by Stapenhill Parish Council. They identified the need through their councillors talking to people within the Parish.
- 5.2.4 Canterbury Road Park in Winshill was raised as a local priority by the Neighbourhood Resource Centre. They had found that people in the area wanted the facility to exercise and successfully secured funding through Tesco Bags of Help fund. With a contribution from Winshill Parish Council and ESBC the equipment was installed in the summer of 2016.
- 5.2.5 In Oak Road, Barton under Needwood, a community consultation exercise led to additional equipment being installed for older children as the existing facility catered for the younger age group. These improvements were funded through The Dunstall Key Trust and a contribution from ESBC and was completed in the summer of 2016.

- 5.2.6 The current workforce including contractors have developed many skills in terms of maintaining play areas and identifying improvements and could undertake a limited appraisal of play assets but providing a platform that allows communities to highlight what they believe is required can be just as effective. Where communities come forward with ideas that are founded in evidence of need, the practicality of what is being proposed can then be explored (see figure 1 below).
- 5.2.7 An example of where this has happened is Ashbrook in Brizlincote. This area was identified at a parish council meeting by parents of young children who felt that the site, though small could be improved as it was one that was rarely used. A simple consultation process led by local parents with local people was conducted and what followed saw a single swing replaced with a double bay with toddler seat. In addition a redundant item was replaced with a see saw.

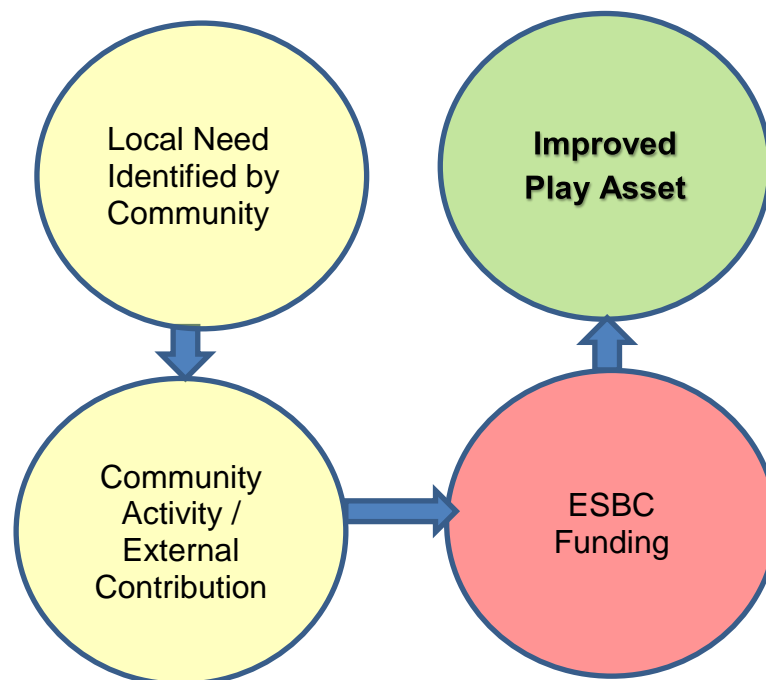


Figure 1 Utilising Funding to Improve an Asset

5.3 Further considerations

- 5.3.1 Whilst development of play areas has not been undertaken for the last two years, moving forward, opportunities to work with communities on a particular site where they have identified need should still be feasible.
- 5.3.2 Sites such as Ashbrook, for example, are fairly straightforward and can be funded through the existing maintenance budget. However, in

general these sites are for younger children whereas sites that cater for older users are not always equipment related but more to do with the layout or the infrastructure.

- 5.3.3 If an area is confirmed as in need of updating and if the community are providing the impetus to the project, then the cost could be partially met from other funding streams.
- 5.3.4 Unity Park was altered over 10 years ago at a cost of around £100,000 and was a project driven by a partnership with the parish council with external funding such as The Big Lottery Fund. The result was a compromise between those that wanted the open space utilised for play and those that were against it. The site is under review and some low level consultation is being undertaken especially with regard to layout. This is in part due to ongoing tensions that continue to exist around its use (or misuse), although latest police data indicates that anti-social behaviour in that area is falling.
- 5.3.5 If a suitable scheme is drawn up then work to secure funding can commence.
- 5.3.6 As a local authority the external funding opportunities for such projects are more limited than they are for community organisations. There may be options to utilise s106 funding where it is not identified for a specified development and this could also include monies set aside for general maintenance of open spaces.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The investment made during the last play area asset plan had a positive effect on play areas in housing development across East Staffordshire and improved the play value of these small sites.
- 6.2 The ongoing maintenance program and inspection regime has ensured that the existing stock is still of a good standard and the demands of keeping it this way have not put undue strain on budgets. The quality and value of our sites is likely to be reinforced and supported by the upcoming Open Space Assessment.
- 6.3 It is unlikely that a play area development would have to be undertaken in a moment's notice which means that should there be a need for major works on a particular site then there would be time to plan ahead.

7 Financial Considerations

This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial

Management Unit: Anya Murray

7.1 The main financial issues arising from this Report are as follows:

	Budget	Actuals	Budget	Actuals	Budget	Budget	Budget
	2016/17	2016/17	2017/18	2017/18 to date	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Revenue Funding							
Playground Maintenance	77,831	44,848	77,831	26,717	77,831	77,831	77,831
Revenue Monies bought forward for incomplete schemes	24,000						
Community Schemes Supported		22,455					
Total	101,831	67,303	0	26,717	77,831	77,831	77,831
Capital Funding							
Neighbourhood Fund ¹ Successful bids for Playground Related Equipment out of:-	33,000	33,000	6,422	6,422	nk	nk	nk
Neighbourhood Fund ¹ Total Monies	205,456 ²	172,797	130,770 ²	16,295	100,000	100,000	nk
Notes							
1. Formerly Neighbourhood Development Fund							
2. Neighbourhood Fund Total Monies include carry forward from previous years							

7.2 If a project was to be developed that included Neighbourhood Funding then this would not impact on the revenue budget for installation but would have an impact for maintenance going forward.

8 Risk Assessment and Management

8.1 The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:

8.2 **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits):

8.2.1 Local facilities are improved with local groups based on evidence of need.

8.2.2 More engagement with communities with measurable outputs

8.2.3 Capacity building opportunities with local community groups

8.3 **Negative** (Threats):

8.3.1 Risk with community not being able to deliver on their elements of project

8.3.2 Funding opportunities limited

8.3.3 Less able communities may not be able to develop their ideas for their local area.

8.4 The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register.

9 **Legal Considerations**

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:
Angela Wakefield.*

9.1 There are no significant legal issues arising from this Report although if a community organisation commissioned a project on land owned by ESBC then it would have to be adopted upon completion.

10 **Equalities and Health**

10.1 **Equality impacts:** An equality and health impact assessment is attached as Appendix (1).

10.2 **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed.

10.3 There are no actionable equality or health issues arising from this Report.

11 **Human Rights**

11.1 There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report

12 **Sustainability** (including climate change and change adaptation measures)

12.1 Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability
No

12.2 Please detail any positive/negative aspects:

12.2.1 Positive (Opportunities/Benefits)

12.2.2 Negative (threats)

13 **Recommendation(s)**

13.1 To continue the current arrangements that serve East Staffordshire well. Where opportunities present themselves alongside community groups to utilise external funding opportunities they should be taken.

13.2 Continue to review the existing assets and identify any key sites that are in need of upgrade or replacement by the value of the site in terms of what it

offers to the local community. Where a community bring forward a project for delivery then future maintenance will be managed within the existing revenue/capital MTFS arrangements.

14 **Background Papers**

14.1 Report to Cabinet October 2015

14.2 Draft Open Spaces Assessment Document.

15 **Appendices**

15.1 Appendix 1: Risk Matrix

15.2 Appendix 2: EHIA