

Report of: Executive Director City Services

To: City Executive Board

Date: 3rd September 2008

Item No:

Title of Report: Play Area Facility Action Plan

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To seek approval for a framework which will set out how the City Council will in future manage the refurbishment of Play Areas.

Key decision? No

Executive lead member: Councillor Antonia Bance

Report Approved by:

Finance: Sarah Fogden

Legal: Lindsay Cane

Policy Framework:

Transform Oxford City Council by improving value for money and service performance.

Stronger and more inclusive communities.

Recommendation(s): That the Play Area Refurbishment Framework appended to this report be approved

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a framework and process for making decisions about the refurbishment and provision of play areas.

1.2 The framework document attached to this report sets out:

- the context within which decisions will be made
- a process for determining the programme of refurbishments and new play areas
- In what circumstances a play area would not be refurbished.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 None arising directly out of this report.

3. Legal Implications

3.1 The framework document is intended as guidance for future decision-making. It reflects the constitution of the Council in respect of the respective roles of the City Executive Board and Area Committees.

4. Equalities Issues

4.1 The framework reflects demographics and relative deprivation and encourages consultation with stakeholders.

5. Options

5.1 The City Executive Board could adopt the framework in its present form, amend it or decide not to adopt an framework and make decisions as and when required based on the merits of the situation at that time. The benefits of having a framework are seen to be that there is clarity about the context and process for decision-making.

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Background papers:

Version number: 3

Play Area Facility Action Plan

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this document is to provide a framework that will guide decision making about the refurbishment and provision of play areas.
- 1.2. Our aims are set out in the Council's Green Spaces Strategy, <http://www.oxford.gov.uk/council/greenspacesstrategy.cfm>

These aims are:

1. **To ensure equity of access and diversity of provision.**
2. **To encourage participation in healthier lifestyles.**
3. **To advance lifelong learning.**
4. **To protect and enhance the natural and built environment.**
5. **To enhance the recognition of Oxford through the pursuit of excellence, both locally and internationally.**
6. **To nurture and encourage community spirit and well being.**

Our aims for play areas are:-

1. To provide a range of safe and accessible play areas across the City which reflect the needs of local communities
2. Empower local communities to play a role in the future of their play areas through local Area Committees
3. Encourage and facilitate local groups to support their play areas in funding and local management
4. Find alternative uses for play areas, which are acceptable to the local community, where a formal playground approach is no longer appropriate.

This document outlines how the Council's work in relation to play facilities will ensure the delivery of these aims by:

1. Identifying a hierarchy of provision for play areas across the city to ensure access for all
2. Providing a framework by which a budget and programme of work will be identified for the refurbishment and provision of play areas
3. Involving local communities in as many decisions as possible about the play areas in their areas.
4. Support and facilitate "Friends Groups" and Parish Councils to look after their local play area
5. Working with local communities to identify suitable alternative uses where the formal play playground approach is no longer appropriate.

1.3. Background

The Council manages and maintains 97 play areas throughout Oxford. While many of our play areas are very popular, some are not well used. Some were installed along with the original housing during the interwar and post-war period. They were designed for the demands of a population that has changed demographically and behaviourally. Much of the equipment dates back 30 years or more, do not meet current guidelines in respect of community

safety and now offer little play value to present generations of children whose expectations have changed.

2. Strategic Context

In August 2005 a Green Space Study was completed which provided an assessment of the quantity, quality, and value of all green space in Oxford including play facilities. It looked at provision both across the city as a whole.

The Oxford City Green Space Study incorporated several different assessments, including:

- a. An assessment of the **supply** of open space through qualitative audit. It recommended a City standard of 5.75ha/1000 population.
- b. A **quality** audit of sites. The average quality score is 61%, with scores ranging from 33-93%. The highest scoring sites are mainly City Parks and Churchyards, tending to be distributed in Central and Southern parts of the city. The lowest scoring sites are mainly playgrounds and local parks, with a concentration of low scoring sites in the eastern part of the city especially Wood Farm. As 70% is considered a 'Good' quality site this is the recommended aspirational score all sites should achieve.
- c. An assessment of **value**, which considers the wider role of the site within its local context, levels and type of use and the wider benefits including ecological, landscape and historical designations.
- d. Evaluation of current needs for open space through **consultation**.
- e. An estimate of possible future demand and the establishment of a hierarchy of green space provision to meet this need.

The Green Space Strategy identified four main issues in relation to play facility provision across the city of Oxford:

- a. A relatively high level of provision in Wood Farm, Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys.
- b. A relatively low level of provision in North Oxford, Northway and Jericho
- c. Poor quality play areas across the city
- d. Lack of teenage play facilities in the City
- e. A need for substantial funding to bring all the sites up to the target standard

Members of the Council in reviewing this work confirmed that the relatively high provision in the areas mentioned above properly reflected the needs of those communities and was not by itself a reason for rationalization of the number of play areas.

The survey work undertaken provides much useful information to call on in making investment and other decisions.

Using the data from the green space study each of the 97 play areas in Oxford has been classified into three categories of play area:

PLAY AREA HIERARCHY		
LOCAL	NEIGHBOURHOOD	CITY
Site overlooked Dogs out signs Maximum of 5 items of equipment Enclosed by fence or barrier Self closing Gate Primarily for children aged 4-6	Site overlooked Dogs out signs Maximum of 8 items of equipment Enclosed by fence & Self closing gate Safety surface	Site overlooked Dogs out signs 10 items of equipment or more Enclosed by fence & Self closing gate Safety surface

It remains an aim to maintain a balance of such facilities across the City with a higher density of local play areas in areas of high-density housing and relative deprivation. Thereby reducing the need to travel to a suitable play area in those parts of the City.

3. Consultation

The public were initially consulted in Autumn 2003 by means of household questionnaires and focus groups. A further round of consultation was undertaken in the Spring 2005, which took the form of a telephone based consultation exercise, and a separate youth consultation exercise in the form of a questionnaire sent to local schools.

A detailed consultation exercise was also undertaken in 2001 specifically related to play areas in Wood Farm, Blackbird Leys and Greater leys. Consultation has also been undertaken on individual playground refurbishment projects over the past four years which has identified common themes across all projects related to play facilities in the City.

The result of this consultation was considered in the green space study when analysing use and demand and forms a part of the basis for the recommendations of this play facility framework. Further consultation will take place on implementation of individual projects.

Oxford City Council has signed up to the Greenspaces GreenSTAT project. GreenSTAT is a system that gives local residents the opportunity to comment on the quality of their open spaces and how well they feel they are being managed and maintained. It allows site managers to compare the results with others up and down the country to give a truly national voice of what we think about our open spaces. GreenSTAT includes play areas and this system will be used to consult on the recommendations.

Teenage facilities

The green space study also assessed teenage play facilities within the City. These include street sports sites, basketball courts and skate parks. The study assessed the distribution of these facilities within the city combined with access, demand, quality and value. The study highlighted that there was a deficiency of teenage facilities within the City and recommended that the number of facilities be increased. In implementing this programme we will have regard to the demographics of an area in deciding what is appropriate provision in that area.

Areas of Under provision

It is proposed that the Green Space Strategy be utilised as evidence to gain developer contributions, in line with the City's Local Plan, increase and or improve provision of play facilities in areas where there is currently a low level of provision for example Littlemore and North Oxford.

4. Refurbishment Programme

The Council will maintain a refurbishment programme funded through revenue and capital budgets. The Council will take opportunities to capitalise play area refurbishments and use Prudential Borrowing to tackle the backlog of refurbishments across the city.

Each year as part of the service and budget planning process of the Council Officers will propose an updated draft refurbishment programme for play areas across the City. The draft programme will reflect the anticipated budget provision and any external funding likely to be available. Area Committees will be consulted on the draft programme.

In proposing the programme the officers shall have regard to:-

- The data contained in the Green Spaces Audit updated to reflect recent developments and refurbishments
- The demographics of an area and the current level of useage of play areas, the relative levels of deprivation and child poverty in the area.
- The current condition of a play area
- The views of the community and other stakeholders.

Once the Council's budget has been approved the officers having adapted as necessary the draft programme to complement the approved budget will put the revised draft programme to the Council's Area Committees for comment. The programme will then be put to the City Executive Board for approval.

Development Programme

The Council will maintain a programme for the development and of play areas reflecting the different and changing needs across the City.

As part of the service and budget planning process officers will propose a draft Development Programme which will relate to the needs of the areas of the City, any capital budget available to the Area Committees, Developer Contribution and external funding available and any other relevant budget likely to be approved by the Council.

Area Committees will be consulted on the draft programme.

Once the Council's budget has been approved the officers having adapted as necessary the draft programme to complement the approved budget will put the revised draft programme to the Council's Area Committees for comment. The programme will then be put to the City Executive Board for approval.

Alternative Uses for Play Areas

In the event that there is a consensus that a play area no longer meets local needs or is no longer appropriate in its current form where the Council is satisfied that there is adequate local provisions, the Council will consult the local community about appropriate uses for the site.

Friends Groups

The Council will through its Area Co-ordinators, Area Committees and Parks Service will support the formation and development of "Friends Groups" who may become involved with: -

- The management of the Play Area
- The implementation the refurbishment and development programme
- Securing external funding for the play area
- Becoming a local voice for the play area.

Parish Councils

The Council will seek to work collaboratively with Parish Councils in maintaining their play areas. Benefits in kind, for example shared procurement and joint funding will be considered.

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