

Community Committee	
Meeting Date	4 September 2024
Report Title	Play Area Improvement Plan 2024-2027
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure
Lead Officer	Rob Lucas, Greenspace Technical Officer
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. Members are asked to approve the proposed Play Area Improvement Plan for 2024 to 2027 detailed in appendix 1

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to ask Members to agree with the proposed Play Area Improvement Plan for 2024 to 2027 which identifies the use of externally sourced funds only and does not impact on the Council's capital reserves.

2 Background

- 2.1 Swale Borough Council (SBC) has 78 active play areas across the Borough offering a wide range of activities to all ages from toddlers to adults. Each of the play areas differ in accordance to their intended use and user group; for example, large 'destination' venues such as Beachfieds, Sheerness and Faversham Recreation Ground have a large spectrum of equipment often spreading over more than one 'play area' which caters for the high footfall of those travelling specifically to the site whereas the small 'door step' sites such as Diligent Drive and Abbey Rise cater more for local residents within walking distance and offer a smaller range of equipment.
- 2.2 All play areas are managed by SBC's Greenspace Team to the agreed standards set out in BS EN1176 and BS EN1177 which include weekly 'visual' inspections carried out by Greenspace Maintenance & Inspection Officers (GM&IOs), quarterly 'operational' inspections and annual 'main' inspections carried out by an external ROSPA qualified Inspector. All inspection findings are formally recorded with any remedial actions or maintenance requirements carried out by either GM&IO's or a suitably qualified and experienced sub-contractor.
- 2.3 An annual 'RAG' assessment is carried out by all those directly involved in the operational activities on all play areas which covers a wide range of information including age, type, availability (geographical), defects, maintenance costs, risk assessment, service requests/complaints and a visual assessment. All this

information is collated and used to help potential development refurbishment, maintenance schedules etc.

- 2.4 In 2021 and 2022 a programme of refurbishment works was carried out to 26 play areas which included repainting/repairs to all metal parts (including removal of corrossions and other defects), upgrading of key parts (seats, hand grips, play panels, wooden beams etc) to enhance quality of the play value and upgrading/provision of additional benches/bins etc to improve the experience of the parent/adult supervisor. This work was funded via the special project fund (around £60,000 in total) and greatly improved the visual appearance, play value and general visitor experience as well prolonging the economic life on many multi activity units and individual pieces of play equipment.
- 2.5 SBC has had an extensive improvement programme over many years – from 2018 to 2023, £1.2 million has been spent on 22 sites on both replacement of existing and significant redevelopment of play areas across the Borough. The funding has come from a variety of sources including capital projects, Parish Councils, special project fund, S106, HLF bids, member grants, area committee funds and COMFF.
- 2.6 Due to the current financial situation being experienced by all local authorities and the constraints these have put on SBC, the proposed Play Area Improvement Plan for 2024 to 2027 does not include any SBC capital or reserve funding but instead focuses on fully utilising available S106 funds. The use of only S106 funds does limit where the development work can be undertaken, which is evidenced by the programme for 2024-2027 being more 'Faversham' focused. The programme for 2018 – 2023 was more focused on the 'Sittingbourne' and 'Isle of Sheppey' areas.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Members are asked to approve the proposed Play Area Improvement Plan for 2024-2027.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 Using capital or reserve funds to further enhance the Play Area Improvement Plan was considered, especially around play areas with higher scores on the RAG assessment. This was rejected due to the current financial position and the associated constraints.
- 4.2 Applying for further external funding options around play development was considered, however, there is currently minimal funding available and with Officer time limited it did not appear to be either a cost effective or efficient use of resource time.

4.3 Option to engage a consultant to review and potentially apply for additional funding was considered, however, the cost of engagement appeared disproportionate to the potential funding likely to be achieved.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 Consultation for the plan was limited to Officers involved within the Greenspace and Leisure teams.

5.2 Given playgrounds are such a key community facility, public consultation will be undertaken for projects which involve major redevelopment of sites which potentially will change their play value and user demographic. We will also engage with ward councillors, Town & Parish Councils and may run online public consultations as required.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The new Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027 has been developed. The Play Area Improvement Plan sits within the ‘Community’ priority. Enabling our residents to live, work and enjoy their leisure time safely in our borough and to support community resilience.
Financial, Resource and Property	<p>Funding for the plan is from S106 funding and will not impact on Council capital or reserve funds.</p> <p>Following a meeting on 20 May 2024, IAM agreed that the remaining £14.5k in the park’s infrastructure bid would be allocated to the playground improvement programme. On review of the RAG assessment document the allocation of funds would best benefit the play area at Batteries Close which currently sits with a ‘red’ rating and has required significant levels of investment from the revenue budget over the past 3 years.</p> <p>Ongoing maintenance of redeveloped sites will sit within the Council’s existing revenue budgets.</p>
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	<p>SBC’s Legal Team will need to provide the necessary support to complete awarded contracts using SBC’s current standard Terms & Conditions.</p> <p>The advertising, tendering, and awarding of all projects will follow the SBCI’s current Commissioning and Procurement Policies and Contract Standing Orders.</p>
Crime and Disorder	None identified for the development of the plan.

	As is the nature of all open space it does provide opportunity for vandalism/anti-social behaviour however the provision of appropriate facilities for children and young adults will hopefully assist in achieving the targets for the reduction of vandalism and other crime and disorder.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	All evaluation of project tenders will consider the carbon footprint of the delivery and will also consider other related environmental impacts such as the chain management of the steel to be used.
Health and Wellbeing	The provision of improved outdoor facilities for toddlers, juniors, and young adults of all abilities with a range of equipment will encourage healthy activity, social interaction, and mental wellbeing.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	<p>None identified within the development of the plan.</p> <p>During project installations the areas will be closed off with 2m temporary fencing.</p> <p>Play areas will be enclosed with 1.2m fencing and equipped with self-closing gate mechanisms.</p> <p>Equipment for toddlers, juniors and teens will be set within their own zones with areas for appropriate adults to attend included.</p>
Risk Management and Health and Safety	<p>None identified within the development of the plan.</p> <p>During project installations CDM 2015 regulations will apply to the removal of old equipment and the installation of the new play area design. This will be monitored by Council staff throughout the build process and hand over period.</p> <p>Once installed the equipment will fall under the current play area inspection regime which follows BS EN1176 guidance.</p> <p>Any identified faults will be repaired, initially through the warranty process and subsequently through existing revenue budgets.</p>
Equality and Diversity	Project specifications will be designed and scored to best benefit the widest selection of children and young adults as well as meeting disability and access requirements.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified.

7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix I – Play Area Improvement Plan 2024 -2027.

2023/24

Site	Area	Ward	Detail	Estimated Cost
Iwade Recreation Ground	Sittingbourne	Bobbing, Iwade & Lower Halstow	Additional play area equipment	£12,000.00
Barton's Point	Isle Of Sheppey	Minster Cliffs	Additional play area equipment	£20,000.00
			TOTAL	£32,000.00

2024/25

Site	Area	Ward	Detail	Estimated Cost
Grove Park	Sittingbourne	Borden & Grove Park	Additional play area equipment	£4,000.00
The Glen	Isle Of Sheppey	Minster Cliffs	Additional play area equipment	£10,000.00
Lower Road	Faversham	St Anne's	Installation of new play area	£100,000.00
West Faversham Community Centre	Faversham	St Anne's	Additional play area equipment	£28,000.00
Batteries Close	Sittingbourne	Teynham & Lynstead	Replace existing play area equipment	£14,500.00
			TOTAL	£156,500.00

2025/26

Site	Area	Ward	Detail	Estimated Cost
Abbey Rise	Isle Of Sheppey	Queenborough & Halfway	Additional play area equipment	£4,000.00
Sumpter Way	Faversham	Watling	Installation of new play area	£120,000.00
KGV Faversham	Faversham	Watling	Additional play area equipment	£57,000.00
			Total	£181,000.00

2026/27

Site	Area		Detail	Estimated Cost
KGV Queenborough	Isle Of Sheppey	Queenborough & Halfway	Additional play area equipment	£35,000.00
Reedland Crescent	Faversham	Priory	Additional play area equipment	£30,000.00
			Total	£65,000.00

8 Background Papers

None