

<b>Agenda Item No:</b>	<b>7</b>	
<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>18 December 2023</b>	
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>Open Spaces - Play Areas Capital Investment Policy</b>	

## **1 Purpose / Summary**

- 1.1 This paper details a planned refurbishment programme for FDC's play areas and the FDC capital investment necessary in the short term.

## **2 Key Issues**

- 2.1 The Council recognises the importance of play areas for our local communities, for both health and community cohesion.
- 2.2 Fenland manages many open spaces throughout the district - around 135 hectares in total. This includes 6 open cemeteries, 50 play areas, 5 skate parks and 20 closed churchyards.
- 2.3 Play areas receive a two-weekly safety inspection from a qualified member of the grounds maintenance contractor and are also monitored by the Open Spaces Horticulture Officer.
- 2.4 In addition, the British and European safety standard BS EN1176 and the Health and Safety Executive strongly recommend that all play areas have at least one inspection every year from an independent suitably qualified body such as RoSPA. Childrens playgrounds should be inspected annually by an independent specialist to ensure the long-term safety of the site, equipment and ancillary items. This will also meet legal and insurance responsibilities as well as complying with the requirements of EN1176 (the European Playground Standard). FDC have in the past commissioned ROSPA to carry out this inspection but will also investigate other more cost-effective local providers.
- 2.5 Fenland carry out repairs to existing play equipment and ancillaries through the revenue budget. In the past year approximately £90,000 worth of repairs have been carried out, with significant costs on safety surfacing, more complicated parts required for equipment and parts due in response to the March 2023 ROSPA inspection.
- 2.6 With these significant costs and the number of play areas and pieces of play equipment under the Council's ownership, it is proposed that replacing equipment deemed beyond economic repair should be carried out only when S106 funds are available or if the local Parish / Town Council have agreed to fund necessary replacements if Section 106 funding are not available. If neither source of financial support are forthcoming the piece of play equipment will be removed and not replaced [the proposed policy approach].
- 2.7 A programme of play area improvement and replacement continues. Since 2019, the Council has facilitated a spend of £514,000 to date. These improvements have been funded by FDC capital support and Section 106 funding, as well as leveraging in supplementary third-party grants from bodies such as FCC Communities Foundation and the Amey Cespa Community Fund - both landfill tax credit supported schemes.
- 2.8 Following the extensive programs of improvements in the last decade covering all areas, the Council's future work will now focus on S106 and grant funded projects only, with the emphasis on enhancing the destination play areas such as West End Park in March, The Manor in Whittlesey, Wisbech Park, Furrowfields and Wenny Rec in Chatteris which prove the most popular with the local community where the s106 funding can be justifiably linked to the development [the proposed policy approach].

- 2.9 This paper details the play areas across Fenland and their current condition and then highlights details regarding which play areas will reach the end of their useful life in the coming five years and the subsequent necessary planned expenditure per site – this approach is only for sites where Section 106 funding for works are available. Where additional Section 106 funding becomes available, the programme may be expanded to cover other play areas that are at end of life [the proposed policy approach].
- 2.10 Play areas not owned or maintained by FDC will remain the responsibility of the owner whether that be a private individual, builder or housing association etc. The Council will not take on further liabilities in term of adopting site, nor carry out repairs on a third party owned open space [the proposed policy approach].
- 2.11 New areas installed by developers as a result of planning applications will remain the responsibly of the developer and will not be adopted by FDC. This has been the practice for the past few years [ the current policy approach].
- 2.12 Other than as listed in section 3.3 of the main Report, in making decisions on the schemes of proposed replacements of, improvements to, or consolidation of play areas within the four Town Council areas, the views of the District Councillors in each town shall be taken into account by Cabinet, such views to be obtained by convening virtual meetings of the relevant councillors within the next six months to consider any alternative utilisation within their town of the capital and revenue resources currently anticipated to be available for play areas in that town. Once these views are known, a further report shall be presented to Cabinet.

### **3 Recommendations**

- 3.1 That Cabinet approves the policy approach to future spending on play areas and play area adoptions as identified in this report in sections 2.2 – 2.9, subject to the provisions of section 2.12.
- 3.2 That Cabinet delegates to the S151 Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, responsibility to ensure funds that are made available to deliver the play area improvements detailed in section 3.3 of this report.
- 3.3 That Cabinet notes the changes proposed in Section 12 regarding St. Paul's Drive and Willy Terrace in Chatteris. Pinewood Avenue in Whittlesey and those in Malt Drive, Westhead Avenue and Burcroft Road in Wisbech, subject to the provisions of section 2.12.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/24AUG23/04

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Background Papers	

## Report:

### **1 Day to day management of Fenland's Play Areas**

- 1.0 The Council manages and maintains many play areas on our open spaces. Further information may be found on the council's website at:  
<https://www.fenland.gov.uk/playareas>
- 1.1 Each play area has an average of 5 pieces of equipment available - the Council is looking after hundreds of different pieces of equipment.
- 1.2 A two-weekly safety inspection is carried out at all play areas and skate parks, with any significant issues attended to promptly.
- 1.3 The Council uses the revenue budget to maintain the play areas safely and replace minor items. In the past 5 years, the Council has spent approximately £250,000 on play park maintenance from the revenue budget. This is a substantial increase of £100,000 on the previous 5 years due to increased spares and repairs costs and expensive safety surface repairs.

### **2 Improvement or Replacement of Play Areas**

Fenland saw a significant programme of key play area replacements take place 10 years ago. Whilst the replacement programme has slowed since then, significant investment continues, as highlighted by investment over the past 4 years in the following table.

- 2.1 Open Spaces capital spend in the past 4 years:

	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>Total</b>

Snowley Park, Whittlesey	£120,000				
Burdett Grove Whittlesey	£45,000				
Parson Drove		£30,000			
West End Park, March		£39,000			
Larham Way Chatteris		£30,000			
Huntingdon Rd Chatteris		£30,000			
Doddington Junior Play			£45,000		
Cricketers Way Chatteris			£40,000		
Wisbech Park				£135,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>£165,000</b>	<b>£129,000</b>	<b>£85,000</b>	<b>£135,000</b>	<b>£514,000</b>

- 2.2 Improvement and replacement works are currently reliant on FDC capital funding and limited Section 106 contributions, often supplemented by third party grant applications. In the past Fenland has been successful with attracting matched funding from Amey Cespa Community Fund, WREN (now renamed FCC Communities Foundation) and Clarion Futures.

### **3 Current play area conditions survey**

- 3.1 Fenland's play areas have been assessed, with a summary of each facility, approximate installation date and equipment condition detailed in Section 12.
- 3.2 The conditions survey work has informed the following matrix of planned play area replacement works over the coming 5 years.

### 3.3 Play Areas - proposed planned replacement and improvements work 2024/25 to 2028/29

Location	Park name	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28 tbc	2028/29 tbc	Section 106 Funding / other grant	FDC Capital requirement
March	The Avenue area improvements and additional equipment			£35,000			£35,000 S106	£0
Whittlesey	Manor, play area improvements	£45,000					£45,000 S106	£0
March	Robingoodfellows Multi Use Games Area & general improvements		£38,000				£38,000 S106	£0
Total		£45,000	£38,000	£35,000			£118,000	£0

## **4 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES**

- 4.1 To update Cabinet on the previous investment plan regarding play areas and highlight a needs-based investment programme for the following 5 years.

## **5 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 Needs based investment assessment of current play areas, highlighting required investment in the short term.

## **6 CONSULTATION**

Section 2.12 refers to future local elected Member consultation that will be conducted.

## **7 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 7.1 Consolidation of the end of life play area at St. Paul's Drive in Chatteris with the Furrowfields play area.
- 7.2 Retain the Council's current strategy of utilising the Council's capital/revenue budget to maintain and invest in new equipment however this represents a significant financial investment of the Council's resources at a time when the Council's finances are under significant strain.

## **8 IMPLICATIONS**

### **8.1 Legal Implications**

N/A

### **8.2 Financial Implications**

- 8.3 Capital expenditure necessary for replacing and refurbishing the play area is highlighted in the report.

### **8.4 Equality Implications**

- 8.5 When a play area is improved, equipment is considered carefully with equipment fitted that allows a disabled user the opportunity to play.

## **9 APPENDIX - Play Area conditions survey**

- 9.1 Fenland Council manages 50 play areas and 5 skate parks. Inspection of equipment at every site takes place every other week through the FDC contractor, currently Tivoli, and annually through ROSPA (most recently March 2023).

- 9.2 The sites are spread about the district amongst 4 towns (Wisbech and Chatteris have 9 play areas each, March 8 and Whittlesey 6) and 8 villages (Coates and Eastrea have 2 areas each, the others one).
- 9.3 There are other play areas in the district managed by Clarion, housing developers, Town and Parish Councils and these have not been included.
- 9.4 Size of the play areas varies, as does the nature of the equipment, but in total there are 380+ individual pieces of play equipment across the Fenland managed sites. This does not include bins, benches, fences or signage.
- 9.5 In general the equipment is in reasonable to good condition. Where items have been vandalised beyond repair or have become structurally unsafe, these have been removed. Where items can be repaired, this has taken place and Tivoli carries equipment which can remedy many minor eventualities without further intervention.
- 9.6 The 10 Areas that have been either fully replaced or refurbished since 2019 are equal to 20% of play area stock. This successful programme of works enabled FDC to remove the most dated areas and install new, destination style, play areas. One being at Snowley Park, Whittlesey and the most recent Wisbech Park.
- 9.7 The table and comments below list the existing stock, note the approximate installation date(s) and anticipated replacement dates that should be considered as part of the play area future investment programme. Any dates, historic or predicted, are indicative only. Whilst a piece of equipment or the entire stock of a park may be expected to last 15 - 20 or more years, heavy usage, vandalism, extreme weather or misuse will inevitably reduce the lifespan.
- 9.8 Benwick
- High Street. All equipment is in good condition. New site installed 2018. Replacement 20+ years
- 9.9 Chatteris
- Cricketers Way. Installed 2022. No works required.
  - Furrowfields Rec. Equipment is in good condition facilitating, the removal of the end-of-life equipment at St. Paul's Drive - creating a destination type space at Furrowfields.
  - Hunters Close. Equipment in reasonable condition although slide has been bent. Installed by developer c 2005. Replacement 10+ years.
  - Huntingdon Road (Infant and junior, infant replaced 21/22 plus new junior.) No works required.
  - Larham Way. Installed 21/22 no works required.
  - St Paul's Drive. Old equipment in rusty and poor condition – installed before 2000. Remove area completely as it holds no play value and is poorly located (See Furrowfields comments). Furrowfields Recreation ground is 300m away.

- Wenny Rec. New equipment 2020.
- Willey Terrace. Surface deterioration. Equipment old, (installed c 2012) limited but functional. Do not replace at end of lifestyle as other local facilities are more appropriate. Remove area at end of life offers little or no play value.

#### 9.10 Coates

- North Green. Equipment meets current standards, however it is of wood construction and high levels of preventative maintenance are starting to occur. Installed 2014. Replacement 7+ years.
- South Green. Limited equipment (installed c 2015) but slide (pre-2000) is in poor condition. Replacement slide being ordered 2023 through repairs budget.

#### 9.11 Doddington

- Beech Avenue, junior play installed 22/23, infant area repainted. No works required.

#### 9.12 Eastrea

- Springfields. All good condition (installed 2014). Replacement 15+ years.
- Thornham Way. All in reasonable condition - installed c 2005. Area repainted 22/23

#### 9.13 Friday Bridge

- West Drive. Reasonable condition. Installed by developer c 2010. Refurbishment 10+ years.

#### 9.14 Manea

- Williams Way. Good condition. Installed c 2012. Refurbishment 15 + years.
- Skate Park; maintained by Parish Council. Installed 21/22.

#### 9.15 March

- Albert Drive. Installed 2011. All reasonable condition. Refurbishment 15 + years.
- Dagless Way. Installed c 2012. Good condition. Refurbishment 15+ years.
- Gaul Road. Installed c 2012. Equipment in reasonable condition. Surface replaced 20/21 Replacement 15+ years.
- North Drive. Installed c 2014. All in reasonably good condition. Replacement 15+ years.
- Robingoodfellows. Installed c 2012. Mixture of new and old equipment. Explore install of purpose built MUGA and additional equipment in 2025/26.
- The Avenue. Installed c 2012. Good condition, consider additional equipment and refurbishment of area in 2026/27.



- West End Park. Mix of older and new equipment installed 21/22 Good condition. Replacement 15+ years (note limited scope for any expansion due to underground services). West End Park extension adoption in train with the developer - offering additional play facilities that are 1 year old.
- West End Park Outdoor Gym (Parts 1&2). Rarely used by the public. Installed c 2014. Periodic repairs to equipment but generally in good condition. Replacement 15+ years.
- Parson Drove. Installed 21/22 mix of new and old equipment, no works required.

#### 9.16 Whittlesey

- Burdett Grove. Installed 21/22 No works required.
- Manor Field. Installed c 2015. Mix of equipment but refreshment and install of new items to create a destination play area planned for 2024/25 using S106 and explore available grants. Any new equipment install will be subject to the result of an evaluation of the leisure centres and future plans for the buildings and their immediate environs.
- Pinewood Avenue. Installed c 1996. Old equipment – remove at end of life, offers little or no play value. Other facilities available locally.
- Snowley Park. Installed 20/21. No works required 20yrs+.
- Station Road. Installed c 2013. Area suffers from high levels of vandalism in particular the wet pour play safety surface which has had several thousands of pounds of repairs. To prevent further ongoing expenditure, removal of damaged equipment as and when until such time area is removed. Manor Play area is local to the site.
- Water Tower Park. Installed 2019. No changes required.

#### 9.17 Wisbech

- Barton Road. Installed in different stages. Swings and multi-point swings relatively new (c 2012) and other equipment c 2005. Average condition.
- Burcroft Road. Installed new swings and see-saw in 2018. Replacement or complete removal in 15 years. Limited equipment in this space; removal of equipment is recommended at the end of its life with no replacement.
- Conference Way. Installed c 2000. All equipment in average condition offers low play value.
- Copperfields Road, infant / junior play area. Installed c.2015. Good condition following recent repairs. 10-year life span.
- Heron Road. Installed c 2001. Average condition – repainted and fresh play bark 23/24.
- Jasmine Close. Installed climbing unit 2018. Swings installed c 2000.
- Malt Drive. Installed c 2001. Equipment is old but in average to good condition. Re painted and repairs 2023/24. Recommended removal as and when equipment is at end of life this space offers limited play value.

- Westmead Avenue. Installed c2003. Average condition new single pieces added 2021/22. Removal at end of life in approximately 10 years
- Wisbech Park. Installed 23/24. No works required.