

PLAY AREA REVIEW GROUP

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PLAY AREAS – THE CURRENT PICTURE

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1. The Current Picture

1.1 There are currently 500 play areas in Milton Keynes containing 5298 assets with an estimated value of £14.15m. Additionally there is approximately 50 redundant sites which were once play areas but have had the equipment removed but the hard landscaping and safety surface remains.

2. The Fix-It team

2.1 The Fix-it Team inspects, cleans and maintains 492 of the 501 with the other 9 being maintained by the Parks Trust. The team currently spends 70% of its resource on play areas, the remaining 30% dealing with other responsibilities within MK such as benches, bollards, signs, pergolas, ascot railing, bridges, paving and walls on landscape land.

2.2 The team consists of 7 teams of two (operative and assistant) and a team leader. 4 of the teams carry out the scheduled inspections, cleansing and routine repairs of the play areas. 3 teams carry out major repairs and rebuild projects as well as the majority of the other works. On average they resolve 520 issues per month ranging from excess litter to complete refurbishments.

3. Numbers and Condition of Play Areas

3.1 Of the 492 play areas, 83 have a single item of equipment, 80 have two items, 59 have 3 items, 172 are categorised as LEAPs (Local Extended Area of Play) with 5 or more items of play and 85 are categorised as NEAPs (Neighbourhood Extended Area of Play) as they have 8 or more items of play as well as other facilities such as a MUGA, skate ramp and/or youth shelter.

3.2 The condition of each asset is recorded on an asset management system and the breakdown is as follows:

567 Assets (10.7%)	As New	3184 Assets (60.1%)	Average
683 Assets (12.9%)	Good	864 Assets (16.3%)	Poor

4. Maintenance and Funding

4.1 The department has a revenue budget of £215,000 which is used to purchase replacement parts from play equipment manufacturers, bins, benches, signage,

materials such as wood, fixings, paint, tools, uniforms and PPE, top up bark, weed killer, repairs to wetpour surface and fund the cost of the annual inspections (£18k).

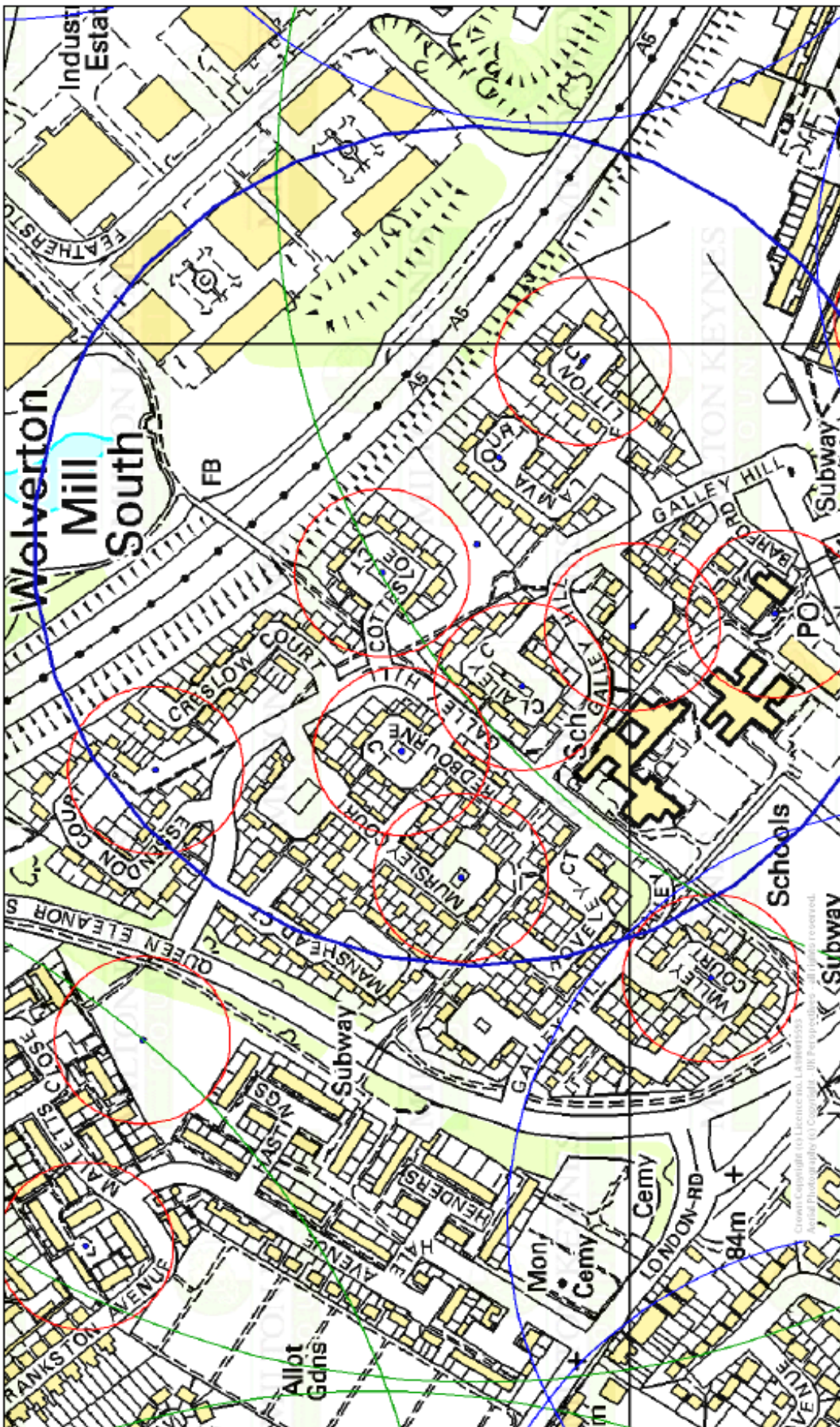
- 4.2 Therefore £215,000 x (70%) / 492 sites equates to around £305 per play area p.a.
- 4.3 This budget is not sufficient to provide capital replacement equipment which can often run into tens of thousands of pounds for a single item.
- 4.4 The team works closely with the parishes and town councils with regard to the **Parish Partnership Fund** whereby approximately £100k (50k parish, 50k MKC) is spent on capital replacement or new items as requested by the parish or town council.
- 4.5 Funding from **S106** is sometimes available in areas of housing development but only in lieu of on site provision and only within the catchment of the development site. Occasionally this can be used to improve surrounding existing play areas that are impacted by the development.
- 4.6 **Other funding** such as from WREN is available where local residents groups can, if they have initial capital, bid for funding to upgrade their local play area. This tends to happen where there is a proactive group rather than necessarily in the areas of greatest need. This has however resulted in many successful improvement projects over the past few years including in such areas as Tinkers Bridge, Eaglestone and Beanhill. There are currently projects in the pipeline for Galley Hill, Greenleys, Loughton and CMK.

Galley Hill Case Study

Galley Hill has the most play areas per population in Milton Keynes with 8 areas covering a population of 650. These comprise of 5 sites with just a single climbing unit, 2 sites with a few items and one main site with several aging items.



Above are two of the single item play areas which are within the courts. To the left is the main central play area with just two sets of swings a spring item and two climbing frames. All are approx. 40 years old, with old equipment offering little play value and worn out hard landscaping and safety surface.



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Galley Hill Catchments.

The small circles show the 60m catchment of the small play areas. The large circle is the 300m catchment area of the LEAP (Local Extended Area of Play)

Following approaches by an active resident and support from Stony Stratford Town Council it was decided to initiate a project with a view to bidding for funding to rebuild the main play area.

It was logical at the time to take this opportunity to test local opinion in relation to the removal of some or all of the single item play areas. Following a wide consultation there was strong support for the refurbishment project however several respondents expressed concern around the removal of the climbing frames in the courts. (see below)

Whilst this project is proceeding the issue around the removals is unresolved. The main concern is "who makes the decision". There is clearly a local wish by some residents to hang onto these small play areas however in terms of their play value and their on going maintenance cost there is a logical argument to their removal

Comments from Resident on Removal of Court Equipment

- **IMPORTANT: PLEASE** do not take away small areas. They are important to the younger children who can be a little independent under the watchful eye of their parents. It helps families to get to know their neighbours
- Court equipment should stay as some children are too young to go to the park alone & parents can feel safe to allow them out to play in the courts. Taking the court equipment away will just encourage ball games which people don't like so close to windows & cars
- I've lived on G/Hill from day one, nearly 40yrs. Both my siblings in childhood, happy days were spent on the frame in Willey Court. However then as now – whatever is chosen – safety must be paramount
- We would be very disappointed to have the climbing frame removed from Essenden Court, this has been much enjoyed over the years and continues to be used. If need be we would be happy to help refurbish and maintain it with a working party. We also think it's a good thing to have children's play facilities within sight of their own homes
- Some of the small play area's are of good play value as parents can watch them safely. The one next to Creslow Court is often used
- I think it would be a shame to loose the play areas where parents can easily watch their children play. They only need a fresh coat of paint, this could be done by working parties or people doing community service. Much cheaper than returning them to grass. I got lots of use of these when I was young
- I would like to keep the play area in Manshead Court and have it revamped also. The park is long overdue but as my children are still young I feel a small play area like Essenden Court has it not too much to ask
- I feel the small play areas should be kept in the individual courts with the equipment changed to items similar to that in courts that are well used ie. Similar to the tractor climbing frame in Cottesloe Court

- Ref: small play areas in the courts are valuable to the younger children/parents not old enough to walk to the large park alone. Parents would also meet each other in these areas
- Also could you leave equipment in courts for younger children who are only allowed to go out the front of their house
- If you take away play equipment and grass over it will encourage football. I don't envy people having their windows and cars hit