

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PLAY AREA REVIEW GROUP HELD ON THURSDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2012 AT 6PM**

**Members Present:** Councillors John Hawthorn, Douglas McCall and Rob Middleton

**Also Present:** Councillor John Bint

**Officers Present:** Mike Brown (Assistant Director of Neighbourhood Services), Nick Fenwick (Assistant Director of Planning, Economy & Development), Phil Snell (Project Manager), Rob Ward (Neighbourhood Manager) and Lesley Sung (Overview & Scrutiny Officer)

**Election of Chair**

It was moved by Councillor Middleton and seconded by Councillor Hawthorn and

Agreed

That Councillor McCall be elected as the Chair of the Play Area Review Group.

**Terms of Reference**

Agreed:

That the Terms of Reference be agreed, subject to the following addition:

“4. To Review and recommend changes to policy where appropriate.”

**Play Area Review****General Discussion**

The Group discussed and considered existing policy relating to play areas such as the relevant parts of the Local Plan, namely L3, and the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Leisure, Recreation and Sports Facilities.

Officers explained that the standards as set out in L3 of the Local Plan had emanated from the National Playing Fields Association Guidance and made reference to the table on page 42 of the report which indicated the trigger points for the provision of play area / recreation / sports facilities sought per number of dwellings.

Members and Officers acknowledged that this was a restrictive policy based on numbers of dwellings rather than the quality of provision to be provided. However, the footnote to L3 allowed for some flexibility.

Since the Local Plan had been produced, that National Playing Fields Association had produced

further guidance that attempted to provide some common standards for the design and quality of play provision. Although the standards had remained very much the same, the guidance recognised the importance of natural play placed more emphasis on the design aspects of facilities.

#### **Issues discussed:**

- 1. Current policies and strategies**
- 2. Noisy sports**
- 3. Provision of specialist facilities i.e skate park, BMX**
- 4. Separation distances between residential properties and facilities**
- 5. Phasing and Timing of provision – should play areas be built before or after housing has been built?**
- 6. A way forward to ensure the Council has mechanisms in place to ensure that policies are adhered to and appropriate provision is provided whilst having flexibility within its policies to allow for negotiation with developers.**
- 7. Flexibility in Play Provision e.g trends, children getting older etc.**
- 8. Consolidation of play areas**
- 9. Assessing the impact of play area provision**

The Committee considered the following points needed to be taken into consideration prior to making any final decisions about the way forward:

#### **1. Current Policies and Strategies**

- Since the introduction of the Local Plan, the knowledge and expertise gained with regard to play has meant that there is a need to review the current policies with regard to play provision.
- The Group noted that the review of supplementary planning guidance had been put on hold until implementation of the Core Strategy with the intention that Development Planning Documents would contain policies and strategies that were specific to play area design, type of equipment, age range etc.
- Current policy could encourage noisy play, such as skate parks to be built close to residential properties (See L3 – separation distances)

#### **2. Noisy Play / Sports**

- The Group acknowledged that some play facilities will create more noise than others depending on type of equipment provided and the intended age range.

#### **3. Provision of Specialist Facilities**

- The Group recognised the need to provide specialist play for all age ranges but that this required a flexibility of approach. For example, if the Council wished to provide a large, iconic play area, then the impact on residents living nearby should be considered and issues around proximity to residents may need to be negotiated.

#### **4. Separation Distances between Residential Properties and Facilities**

- Separation distances between residential properties and some play facilities may require some flexibility of approach, particularly when providing specialist facilities that

may attract more people than those residing in the local area. Issues to be considered are noise, nuisance, additional parking, provision of additional facilities such as toilets. Broughton Skate Park was given as an example of where flexibility in separation distances could have been applied.

- Further consideration be given to include skate parks as a 'noisy sport' to ensure they are covered by policy L8. At present the classification of skate parks could mean provision with a separation distance at a minimum of 40m between the facility and housing.
- Further consideration to be given to review and amend policies and strategies to cater for specialist play, wheeled sports and the provision of something 'different' to the normal provision.

## **5. Phasing and Timing**

- Further consideration be given to the phasing and timing of play area provision. Should play areas be built prior to any provision of housing to ensure that nearby residents know specifically what will be located near to homes or should the facility be built after the homes with community engagement about the type of facility the community would like to see?
- If the former, then consider policies to give an indication of the type of play area / equipment is likely to be installed at the site e.g. an area for young children, older children, teenagers / adults.

## **6. Negotiations with Developers**

- To give further consideration to amending policies to allow flexibility in the siting and location of play areas whilst acknowledging that developers may wish to provide facilities that suit their finances / preferences. A developer will want to maximise profit by building as many houses as possible and this may lead to developers providing play areas in low density areas which will have less play value than in those areas that are of higher density. (Higher density / smaller housing is likely to attract young couples and young families who gain higher value from the provision of play areas).

## **7. Flexibility of Play Provision**

- To give further consideration to the type of equipment being provided and how that provision will meet future need. For example, a new housing estate may attract young couples and it is likely there will be a need for a provision for very young children. However, as those children grow older, then the type of play provision will change.
- The Group acknowledged the complexities between providing the right balance of play area provision in a place of low density housing.

## **8. Consolidation of Play Areas**

- This to be given further consideration at the next meeting.

## 9. Assessing the Impact

- The Group considered the need for impact assessments to be undertaken when building a play facility. Consideration should be given to location and who may be impacted by the play area. For example, it was not apparent from the development control papers that the Claridge Park play area would be sited 100m from a secondary school which has contributed to the problems experienced by residents living by the park.

<b>Review Group Work Plan</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Item</b>
13 September 2012	Site Inspections
	The Review Group to visit a number of play area sites throughout the Borough
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Broughton Skate Plaza – this is an area where a number of complaints have been received by residents of noisy play.</li> <li>2. Claridge Park – this play area was closed due to anti-social behaviour. It is an example of where an impact assessment could have highlighted some of the issues that have arisen at the site.</li> <li>3. Drive past Oakgrove new development site – to consider the site and discuss how concerns may be avoided.</li> <li>4. Bradwell Common – one of the borough’s older sites. The Group will consider at the next meeting what can be done about the older play areas that have little flexibility for change.</li> <li>5. Piggot Drive, Shenley Church End – An example of where the Fix-it team have renovated one of the older play areas at little cost.</li> <li>6. Site at Garden behind Community Centre – CMK – an example that was outside of council policy but was granted by the development control committee based on the wishes and needs of the local community.</li> <li>7. Two Mile Ash play area – An example of a good quality play area that provides excellent facilities for the local community.</li> </ol>
25 September 2012	Play Area Review Group meeting – focussing on existing play areas and their compliance with current policies. To consider how to deal with older areas that have little flexibility for change and to look at issues around renovation, redevelopment and consolidation of play areas. Also to consider issues around those areas that have cause for concern.
October 2012	Play Area Review Group meeting - To consider issues around maintenance and life-span of play area facilities. Possibly look at finance and budgeting issues and the council’s approach to play area spend.
November 2012	Play Area Review Group Meeting To recommend amendments to play area strategies and policies as appropriate.

	To feed into the Play Strategy which is to be considered by Cabinet in January 2012
November 2012	Final meeting to approve report and recommendations (if necessary)

No.	Actions	Owner
1	Work Programme to be updated	Lesley Sung
2	Arrangements for Site Visit	Rob Ward / Lesley Sung
3.	Data on demographics – how the type of play equipment for a play area is assessed based on the demographics of an area	Nick Fenwick
4.	Notes and observations from site visits to be provided at the next meeting	Lesley Sung

Dates for Future Meetings	Venue	Time
Tuesday 25 September 2012	Room 3, Civic Offices	6.15pm
October 2012 (exact date TBC)	TBC	6.15pm
November 2012 (exact date TBC)	TBC	6.15pm
November 2012 (exact date TBC)	TBC	6.15pm