

PLAY AREA REVIEW

1. Introduction

1.1. The Environment & Transport Select Committee, at its meeting held on 18 July 2012 established a Play Area Review Group to consider whether the Council was taking the right approach in developing its policies and strategies associated with fixed play provision and whether that provision is appropriately located and fit for purpose.

1.2 The Review Group will meet on a number of occasions and at this first meeting will concentrate and consider current planning policies, as annexed to the report.

Annex A: List of Adopted Policies that impact on play provision

Annex B: Relevant part of the Local Plan on Leisure

Annex C: Supplementary Planning Guidance – Leisure, Recreation and Sports Facilities

1.3 During consideration of play area provision, the Group may wish to feed comments into the play strategy consultation. It is expected that a Play Strategy will be agreed by the Cabinet in January 2013.

2. Overview

2.1 Fixed play areas are generally located in public open space and range in scale from the smallest sites with a single item to large areas with ball areas, wheeled sports and a range of play equipment for all ages.

2.2 Figure 1 shows some of the linkages between play and other functions of the council and its partners. Play is key to both the physical and cognitive development of young people and successful play areas can help to regenerate areas and increase community cohesion.

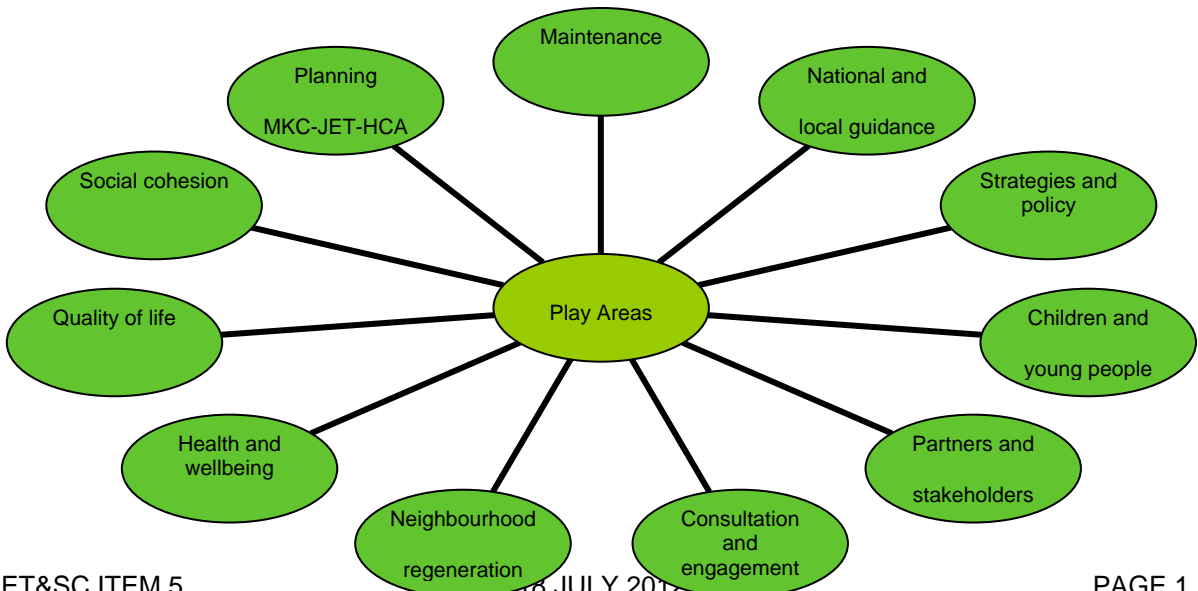


Fig. 1 Spider diagram showing the links between play areas and other areas and functions

3. Background

- 3.1 Play area provision has evolved as Milton Keynes has developed; the level of provision over time has been guided by adopted policies – see Annex A. This has resulted in a wide disparity in numbers and types of play spaces in one area compared to another i.e.
- a) Stantonbury has 29 play sites (originally in excess of 47) and a population of 3700 (1 play area for 127 head of population)
 - b) Two Mile Ash has 4 play sites and a population of 4150 (1 play area for 1037 head of population)
 - c) In the growth areas typically there is a play area for every 700 – 800 head of population; this is as a result of the SPG for leisure and recreation.
- 3.2 Since the Local Plan was adopted in 2005 the provision and approach to new facilities has become more uniform.
- 3.3 The Council currently manages 492 sites across the Borough.
- 3.4 The Parks Trust are to be offered all new play areas in the growth areas, at present they have 4 in Broughton and 1 at Willen Lake.
- 3.5 As part of the Capital asset transfer The Parks Trust, Parishes and Town Councils are also to be consulted on their interest on taking on assets, including play areas.
- 3.6 Advances in standards of play equipment deliver greater physical challenges – movement, balance etc and social play opportunities. However changes in social attitudes can mean that the noise generated by groups of youngsters can be unwelcome for neighbouring households.

4. Current situation

- 4.1 In recent months several issues have arisen around play areas, this has refocused attention on a potentially divisive issue, in particular
- a) Broughton Gate skate facility
 - b) Middleton local play area
 - c) Walnut Tree
- 4.2 Whilst play is seen as good and benevolent, on occasion play areas can generate noise and disturbance, either through the large numbers of children who use the facility or by a minority who seek to abuse them.
- 4.3 We are starting to see more organisations becoming responsible for the management of play as localism and devolution of local service provision within local communities

- 4.4 There is an increase in number of older people using the larger play facilities (skate parks, basket ball and five-a-side courts etc) and there is an ever increasing demand for parking provision and access to toilets at these types of sites.
- 4.5 In the growth areas the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and S106 arrangements ensure sufficient capital is secured to build new facilities and through the Joint Environmental Team (JET) and other working groups the whole open space is scrutinised to ensure it is sustainable and of high quality. Additionally through the planning obligations – S106 adequate revenue is sought in order they may be managed in perpetuity.
- 4.6 The present arrangement is to pass all growth area public space and play areas to the Parks Trust. It is therefore important that the existing policies and guidance are fit for purpose to allow play for younger and older children.

5. The way forward

- 5.1 In light of these developing issues where play is changing and suitable locations need to be found, the review group will be reviewing the current and developing strategies and frameworks on play and review the effect of the local plan and SPG associated with play facilities.
- 5.2 The Review Group will undertake site visits to a number of play areas in the borough as part of its considerations.