

Agenda Item No: 7 **Report No:** 191/13
Report Title: Outdoor Play Provision in the Lewes District
Report To: Scrutiny Committee **Date:** 21 November 2013
Cabinet Member: Cllr Nicholson
Ward(s) Affected: All
Report By: Director of Planning and Environmental Services
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Purpose of Report:

Scrutiny Committee has asked that a Review of The Provision of Children's Play Areas in Urban and Rural Areas be carried out.

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1 To note this initial report on the provision of children's outdoor play in the district.
 - 2 To agree whether any further work is required at this time, especially given the potential devolution of sites to Parish and Town Councils.
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Reasons for Recommendations

- 1 At a previous meeting, the Scrutiny Committee requested that a report be brought to a future meeting, outlining the provision of outdoor play facilities within the Lewes District. Councillors also suggested that a Review could be undertaken to assess the level of provision for children's play areas in urban and rural areas as there was an assumption that, in rural areas, children had more space to play.

Information

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- 2.1 The Lewes District area has approximately 62 play areas. Lewes District Council currently owns and manages 32 of these, with the remainder owned by Town or Parish Councils.

- 2.2** These figures include skate parks and multi-use games areas as outdoor play facilities.
- 2.3** All of the LDC play area sites are installed and maintained to the current European Standards BSEN 1176. Safety within play areas can fall into various laws, both Common and Statute, including the Health and Safety at Work etc Act (1974), Occupiers Liability Act etc. However accidents in well-maintained play areas are rare.
- 2.4** Lewes District Council play areas are inspected on a weekly basis (an operational inspection) by an inspector trained to RPII certificate standards (Register of Play Inspectors International). An independent play area inspector is employed annually to carry out a more detailed inspection. Both of these services are also offered to our partner Town and Parish Councils.
- 2.5** Over recent years, there has been a strong shift away from “risk free” play areas, for two main reasons. Firstly because these play areas had been designed for safety first, not children first, therefore they had become very boring and static. Secondly, because it has been recognised that children need some risk, in order to learn from playing.
- 2.6** There has also been a trend towards “natural” play. This may still involve some formal play equipment, but also relies on the creation of grass banks, willow walks, sand pits, water play etc. Experience has shown these areas, where children can be much more creative, have proved much more popular than just static play equipment.

Play Provision across the Lewes District

- 2.7** The Fields in Trust (formally the National Playing Fields Association), have categorised play areas into several types.
- a) NEAP: Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play.
This is an unsupervised site servicing a substantial residential area, equipped mainly for unaccompanied older children between 8 and 14, but with opportunities for play for younger children, older children and those with special needs. Ideally, it should be located within 15 minutes walking time of home. NEAPs should offer a minimum of 8 types of play equipment, a minimum activity area of 1,000 square metres, with a kickabout area, wheeled play opportunities, seating, and a minimum 30 metre buffer zone between the activity area and the boundary of the nearest residential property.
 - b) LEAP: Local Equipped Area for Play
This is an unsupervised play area equipped for children of early school age. Ideally, it should be located within a 5 minutes walking time of home, mainly catering for accompanied children aged from 4 to 8, although consideration should be given to the needs of supervised children from birth to 4 years, unaccompanied children

slightly older than 8, and children with special needs. LEAPs should offer at least 5 types of play equipment, seating for accompanying adults, a minimum activity area of 400 square metres and a buffer zone to allow a minimum 20 metre distance between the edge of the activity area and the boundary of the nearest residential property, taking into account possible disturbance to nearby residents.

c) LAP: Local Area for Play “Door step” play areas.

This is a small area of unsupervised open space specifically designated for young children for play activities close to where they live. LAPs should be appropriate for low-key games such as tag or hopscotch. Ideally, the LAP should be located within one minute’s walking time of home, catering mainly for 4-6 year olds, and also suitable for children with disabilities. There should be a minimum activity area of 100 square metres, as well as a buffer zone sufficient to minimise audible and visual intrusion to adjacent residents. A minimum distance of 5 metres should exist between the edge of the activity area and ground-floor windows in full view of the activity area. Gable ends or other exposed house walls should be protected from use for ball games, for example through a 1 metre strip of dense planting.

2.8 The plans shown in Appendices 1 – 6 show all of the district play areas. The circles around each site are coloured dependent on whether the play area is a LAP, LEAP or NEAP. LAPs are shown in purple, LEAPs are shown in black and NEAPs are shown in red. The circle diameters show the approximate catchment zone based on the recommended walking distances.

2.9 The recommended amount of play space for children is 0.25 hectares per 1000 of the population.

2.10 The Fields in Trust make specific recommendations for rural communities:

- 1000 people or more: there should be full provision of LAPs, LEAPs and NEAPS.
- 250 to 1000 people: there should be provision of LAPs and LEAPs or local landscaped areas for play, with priority afforded to the LEAPs as equipped areas.
- 100 to 250 people: there should be the provision of a LEAP, for existing housing areas, a local landscaped area for play or a casual play area and, for new developments, LAPs. These should be located as close as possible to the heart of the settlement. However, it is recognised that within existing communities the only available land may be orientated towards one end of the settlement.

- Less than 100 people: there should be provision of a LEAP for existing housing areas and LAPs for play in any new developments. These should be located as close as possible to the centre. However, it is recognised that within existing communities the only available land may be orientated towards one end of the settlement.
- Many village schools have sufficient grounds to provide safe play opportunities and are often so central to village life that they may permit access outside normal school hours. Where they do not have any play equipment, there may be potential for a joint initiative with the village community and the parish council.

2.11 In order to provide a definitive report on where play facilities are lacking, compared to the recommended standards of the Fields in Trust, a detailed piece of work would be required. Using walking distance “circles” on a plan should be used as a guide only, as other considerations such as busy roads, water courses, blocked access routes etc all need to be taken into account. (See Appendix 7) However, the attached appendices give a general idea of where play facilities are lacking.

2.12 Within the Lewes District, due to many fully established housing areas, it is not often possible to find sites for new play areas that are suitable. They may be too close to properties, be poorly accessible, or simply, there may just not be any available space. Most new play area sites would come as a result of planning agreements for new developments, where the provision of on-site play facilities may be a requirement.

Financial Appraisal

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- 3.1** The Parks Section of LDC has an annual budget of £3030 for repairs to existing play areas. It can also draw upon the Building Maintenance Reserve fund for more major repairs.
- 3.2** There is no specific budget set aside for the provision of new play areas or for the refurbishment of existing ones.
- 3.3** Section 106 monies, from developer contributions, is available for the installation of new or improvement to existing play areas, however these monies have to be used in specific areas and for specific purposes, as defined in each individual agreement.

Legal Implications

4 None

Sustainability Implications

- 5 I have not completed the Sustainability Implications Questionnaire as this Report is exempt from the requirement because it is a progress report.

Risk Management Implications

- 6 *There are no risk management implications arising from this report.*

Equality Screening

- 7 I have completed the initial Equality Impact Assessment screening exercise and have identified no negative impacts arising from this Report. Therefore, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

Background Papers

- 8 LDC Play Strategy

Appendices

- 9 Appendix 1-6: Play Area Location plans
Appendix 7: Alternative Mapping Technique
Appendix 8: Play Areas within the Lewes District.