

## PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Monday, 5 September 2022

**Title:** Play Area Review

**Contact Officer:** Project Officer - Nicky Cayley

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### **Background**

The Project officer was tasked with reviewing all play areas in the Town Council's ownership, with a view to the Council developing a programme of rolling renewals.

This in line with policy IS1 of the Open Spaces Strategy – **Improving and Investing in Our Infrastructure Provision.**

*'Undertake a condition survey of children's play areas, then prepare and adopt a planned improvement and upgrade plan.'*

### **Current Situation**

The Project Officer has below listed the play areas with the relevant play equipment, consideration of inclusive play equipment and overall condition with a view to prioritising renewal. Members may wish to note that inclusive play equipment covers children with autism/sensory processing disorders, motor impairments including wheelchair users), Down's syndrome, ADHD. Learning disabilities and visual impairments.

#### Park Road

The Council's newest play area refurbished in 2021.

- Fixed horse rocker
- Slide
- Trim trail
- Space net
- Swings including 2 x toddler and an accessible seat
- Aeroplane imaginative play piece
- Small spinning dish
- Rocker
- Play panel
- Bench

The accessible swing, aeroplane, play panel and the small spinning dish are inclusive.

This play area will not need renewing for 10 – 15 years.

### Quarry Road

- Rotaweb spinner
- Alphabet play panel
- Green wiggly play panel
- Postbox play panel
- Slide
- Toddler swings x 2
- Flatbed swings
- See saw
- Rocker x 2
- Climbing hut
- Goal posts

The last two items are newly installed.

There is cracking to the wet pour surfacing and some patched repairs. The park is still serviceable although items such as the slide and see saw are very dated and the see saw does not work well. The D shackles on the flat bed swings are also worn and were highlighted in the latest RoSPA inspection.

The climbing hut is inclusive as it is a quiet place for children and the three play panels are also inclusive.

In terms of life span it is due for renewal in about 5 years. However, with the two new items it should be possible to extend this with the exception of any health and safety issues.

### Oxlease Play Area

- Flatbed swings
- 2 x toddler swings
- Basket swing
- Caterpillar springy
- Wooden sheep
- Memorial bench
- Multi Climb
- See saw
- Toddler mini climb and slide

- Spinning dish
- Picnic bench
- Round picnic bench
- Goal post

This play area was installed in late 2017. It should have a lifespan of 10 -15 years. The 2022 RoSPA inspection has pick up some issues that should be dealt with under routine maintenance – missing caps, wearing bolts and chains, excessive lateral movement on the see saw and trip hazards due to poorly maintained grassed areas. If these issues are dealt with then the park should see out its intended lifespan. The Operations Officer has ordered some replacement wood for the main multi climb. It does have an extremely high usage, due in part to its close proximity to The Blake School.

The basket swing and large spinning dish are inclusive.

### The Leys

- Maze bench
- Zip wire
- Supernova
- Rotaweb climber
- Black forest multi climb
- Small multi play climber with slide
- Magnifying glasses
- Story Chair
- See saw (currently out of use)
- Mixed swing set - double toddler, 1 x basket, 1 x horizontal rope
- Mixed swing set – 1 x basket, 2 x flat bed
- Basket swing
- Trampoline
- Tunnel
- Toddler multi climb
- Double rocker
- Splash pad

The Leys Play area was opened in 2015 and should have 10 – 15 years before it is renewed. The latest RoSPA inspection has highlighted a few urgent maintenance items (loose bolts, wear to bushes and shackles, missing bushes etc) and most seriously potential timber rot in the single basket swing’s frame. Timber is very aesthetic, but it is not as long lasting as other materials.

There are also significant issues with the surfacing – mainly broken grass mat which protrudes from the ground causing trip hazards. Due to the fact that The Leys is very highly used all year round, the grass does not get a chance to cover the grass mat, leading to it being broken and then curling and protruding from the ground. There are often public comments (including in the annual satisfaction survey) about how muddy the play area is – which is largely due to the excessive use that it gets. Possible solutions would be to increase the use of bark as a surfacing (this requires digging out of the surrounding areas) or to use wet pour - this is not environmental, is prone to cracking and damage and is expensive. Another possible surface for investigation is synthetic grass.

The basket swings, story chair, magnifying glasses and trampoline are inclusive.

Due to its high usage and the fact that the park is largely made of timber, it is likely that the park may need significant sections replaced before 2030.

### Burwell QE2

- Hangout shelter
- Picnic bench
- Zip wire
- Supernova
- Small Blackforest multi climb
- Gyro spinner see saw
- Rotator turnstile
- Slide
- Basket swing
- Swing set – 4 x flatbed
- Swing mixed set – 2 x toddler, 1 x basket
- Rocker see saw
- Playhouse climber
- MUGA

The climbing hut and rocker see saw were installed in 2020 and the black forest in 2015 at the same time as The Leys. The zip wire was installed in 2014. With the exception of the possibility of some rot in the black forest multi climb, as it is made out of wood, the other items are all in good condition and the area is not heavily used.

The see saw rocker, playhouse climber, magnifying glasses and basket swings are inclusive.

The play area is a low priority for renewal.

### Woodgreen

- Benches
- Rotaweb climber
- Multi play with slide
- Rockers
- Double rocker
- Swings – 2 x toddler, 2 x flat bed
- Surfboard swing
- Talk Tubes

The park was opened in 2011 and should have at least a 15-year life span. The most recent RoSPA inspection has identified a few issues that are repairable as well as issues with the wet pour (shrinkage and cracks). The play area is lacking inclusive items, although the talk tubes could be used by mobility impaired children.

This play area is not high priority for renewal.

#### Fieldmere

- Picnic bench
- Goal post
- Multi play with slide
- Rotator turnstile
- Basket swing
- Swings with climber – 1 x toddler, 1 x tyre, 1 x horizontal rope
- Rocker
- Trim trail

The play area was renewed completely in 2014 and the trim trail and rocker were installed in 2020. With maintenance, the play area should have the usual 10 – 15-year lifespan. The basket swing is inclusive.

This play area is not high priority for renewal.

#### Moorland Road

- Play Panel
- Rocker
- Rotator turnstile
- Slide
- Mixed swings – 2 x toddler, 2 x rocker
- Single end MUGA
- Rotaweb climber

The slide is dated and there is no date of manufacture. However, other items were installed in 2004 and 2006 with the rotaweb climber being installed in 2020. The RoSPA inspection showed few issues apart from wet pour trip hazards. The park does, however, look tired and relatively empty for its size. If one takes 15 years as an average lifespan then this park should be one of the priorities for renewal. The play panel is inclusive.

#### King George V

- Leap frog
- Multiplay with bridge
- Play panel
- Elephant rocker
- Rocker see saw
- Swings – 2 toddler, 2 flat bed
- Carousel roundabout
- Overhead climber Ixo Unit

The Ixo unit and carousel were installed in 2020. The leapfrog is in good condition as is the rocker see saw. The RoSPA Inspection indicated that the swings (which date from the 1970s) are reaching the end of their lifespan and the multi play is showing signs of wear on the chains. The carousel and play panel are inclusive.

The play area should be mid-priority for renewal, but if the swings fail and cannot be repaired it may need to be done sooner rather than later.

#### Eton Close

- Toddler trim trail
- Goal posts

The trim trail was manufactured circa 2000. The RoSPA inspection has noted that the moving parts of the unit are seized and it does not seem possible to repair these. It is also a very small area within a huge field, and there is certainly space for more equipment. There is no inclusive equipment. With the Cogges Triangle development coming on stream, this area would be a priority for replacement.

#### Waterford Road

Currently in the ownership of West Oxfordshire District Council, this play area on Madley Park estate is in the process of being handed over to the Town Council. An appendix to this report is attached.

### Suggested Order of Priority for Replacement

In suggesting an order, the Project Officer has taken into account not only the age of the play area, but also the condition and usage level. She would be happy to accompany members on a tour of the play areas if it is felt that this would be helpful.

1. Eton Close
2. Moorland Road
3. King George V
4. Quarry Road
5. Waterford Road (if taken on)
6. The Leys
7. Burwell
8. Oxlease
9. Woodgreen
10. Park Road

### Inclusivity

Attached to this report is a guide to inclusive play equipment. The Project Officer would like to suggest that every play area going forward should have at least one piece of inclusive equipment included. There were several comments in the annual satisfaction survey which also mentioned this aspect in relation to play areas,

The Disability Discrimination Act introduced in 1995 gives disabled people rights in the areas of access to goods, facilities and services and from October 2004 Part III of the Act requires that organisations may have to make 'reasonable adjustments' to the physical features within premises to overcome barriers to access. Within the definition of premises are not just buildings and indoor facilities but also high streets, parks and open spaces. Adjustments could relate to steps, seating, access points, paths and equipment.

Inclusive equipment may mean a sheltered area for children with autism or sensory needs, and spinning/swinging is beneficial for all children, including those with hearing difficulties and learning difficulties as it creates vestibular stimulation. In terms of young people in wheelchairs, play areas need to be planned so that they can access the equipment via wheelchair suitable paths. Whilst swings that can accommodate a wheelchair are available, basket and pod swings can also be a good option as children can sit or lay in them. Sight impaired children may enjoy tactile equipment.

All of the big play manufacturers have dedicated inclusive ranges.

## National Standards

The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) has produced minimum standards for the provision of children's play facilities. These standards are recognised as being a useful yardstick against which local authorities can judge the distribution and content of play areas. The NPFA identifies 3 categories of play area:-

- Local Area for Play (LAP) – A low key games area. Aimed at 4–6-year-olds and younger children for play activities close to home. LAPS do not have to have any specific play equipment in them but rely more on demonstrative features indicating that play is positively encouraged. Catchment area = 1 minute walking time for an accompanied child or approximately 100m walking distance.
- Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) – A small play area with about 5 types of equipment. Aimed at 4–8-year-olds. Consider needs of under 4's and slightly over 8's. Catchment Area = 5 minutes walking time for an accompanied child, or approximately 400m walking distance.
- Neighbourhood Equipped Play Area (NEAP) – A larger play area with about 8 types of equipment. Aimed at 8-14 age group. Facilities for wheeled and ball play should be provided. Catchment Area = 15 minutes walking time for either accompanied or unaccompanied children which is about 1000m walking distance.

Most of the Town Council's play areas fall into the LEAP category, with The Leys being a mix of a LEAP and a NEAP.

## Next Steps

The next steps for the Council would be to formulate a priority list of the play areas most in need of refurbishment.

Clearly, if a piece of equipment is broken in a play area, it will need to be replaced, but the Project Officer would like to suggest that the Council should be looking to move away from a piecemeal approach and take a more holistic view.

## **Environmental impact**

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

There is not much choice in terms of recycled play equipment, although one company has just brought out a range using recycled materials, which reduces the carbon footprint of a play area. It is currently more expensive than the non-recycled products.



## **Financial implications**

Play area equipment, installation and post inspections are expensive but as can be seen from The Leys, play areas are extremely popular with the town's families. Not only do they encourage children to be active but they provide something free of charge. The Council should be setting aside a good sum of money each year in preparation for renewing these areas as well as for emergency repairs. The Black Forest multi climb at The Leys, for example, is currently priced at £61, 806.00.

Currently the reserve for play areas stands at £26,800. The cost for the renewal of Park Road play area was over £30, 000 and the Council was able to refurbish the existing slide and use a climbing net that was in storage.

As a comparison, Chesham Town Council agreed in its play area strategy 2009 – 15 to set aside £40, 000 per annum for play areas, - which could be used as match funding if any funding was available. Certainly, the Council could request S106 funding for play equipment at Eton Close from the Cogges Triangle Development.

## **Recommendations**

1. That the report be noted;
2. That, members may like to consider a task and finish group to lead on the future management plan or,
3. That, members decide if they would like to undertake a tour of play areas;
4. That, the Committee considers and confirms the priority of play areas for refurbishment;
5. That, the Committee considers if it wishes to take a holistic approach to renewing play areas;
6. That, the Committee considers a timeframe for renewing each park, and sets target dates;
7. That, the Council commits to putting in place at least one piece in inclusive equipment in each play area;
8. That, the Committee makes recommendations to Council on budgets/ear marked reserves for each play area.