

## **Green Spaces Investment - Strategic Vision**

REPORT OF: DIRECTOR FOR PEOPLE AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES  
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Wards Affected: All  
Key Decision: No  
Report to: Scrutiny Committee Place and Environment  
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### **Purpose of Report**

1. To accompany the presentation to Scrutiny Committee providing a Strategic Vision for the delivery of the priorities identified in the Playing Pitch and Play and Amenity Green Space Studies for the period 2023/24 to 2035.
2. The purpose of the data and analysis in this report, and the accompanying presentation is to enable the Committee to carry out its function to improve the lives of local people through improved public services. Green spaces are an important asset for our communities and environment. The Council's circa 400 green spaces and 130 play areas require maintenance, repairs and renewals as well as investment over their lifetime. This investment, as funds become available, is to ensure they continue to meet the needs of local communities, the changing environment while ensuring value for money across the district.
3. The Vision aims to achieve two things:
  - a) to provide an evidence base for collecting S106 contributions to support improvements in our green spaces; and
  - b) to enable the development of a blueprint for investment and improvements in our open spaces when resources become available.

### **Recommendations**

4. The Committee is Recommended to:
  - a) Endorse the principles of the Strategic Vision for the delivery of the Playing Pitch and Play and Amenity Green Space Studies.
  - b) Endorse the review, over the coming 12 months of 'Tier 4' play areas

### **Background**

5. In June 2018 the Council engaged Ethos Environmental Planning to produce an updated Study of the District's playing pitches and, separately, to produce a Play and Amenity Green Space Study.
6. These Studies aimed to ensure that all Mid Sussex residents have access to a network of high quality and accessible outdoor play areas and green spaces by providing a policy framework to cover the period 2019- 2031. They set out the principles that should guide the future development of and investment in the Council's playing pitches, amenity green spaces and play areas.

7. To provide a sound evidence base, the four key drivers in developing the Playing Pitch Study were:
  - a) To produce an up-to-date assessment of supply (quantity, quality, and accessibility) and demand for existing provision.
  - b) To analyse the data and provide recommendations for the improvement and/ or rationalisation of existing provision.
  - c) To establish future needs because of housing and population growth, demographic changes, and demand from users.
  - d) To secure investment in existing facilities primarily through S106
8. The key aims of the Play and Amenity Green Space Study were as follows:
  - a) To collate information about existing children's playing space and amenity green space provision.
  - b) To set local standards in terms of quantity, quality and access to children's playing space and amenity green spaces.
  - c) To assess the existing provision and identify any deficits, surpluses, and improvement needs.
  - d) To help secure external funds for the development of new and existing provision.
9. Both studies looked at sport, play and green space provision across the district, not solely provision on land or in facilities owned by the District Council; and both were informed by community consultation, as well as the views of the Town and Parish Councils, and neighbouring authorities. In the case of the Playing Pitch Study, local sports clubs and National Governing Bodies for each sport were also consulted.

### **Study Recommendations**

10. The Playing Pitch Study highlights current issues with the quality, accessibility, and quantity of facilities; alongside potential future issues arising from projected housing growth; and has a detailed Implementation Plan. This has been published online: <https://www.midsussex.gov.uk/media/5331/playing-pitch-indicative-implementation-plan.pdf> .
11. This plan is broken down by geographical area, as well as on a site-by-site and sport-by-sport basis; however, the key objectives, which are applicable district-wide were:
  - To protect existing provision and create viable and sustainable sites, by making the best use of existing resources.
  - To provide sufficient and appropriate high-quality facilities and opportunities (enhanced and new) to meet demand to 2031.
  - To raise the profile of the pitch sports in contributing to enhanced mental and physical health and well-being.
  - To enhance and manage facilities to ensure retention of players and attraction of new participants, particularly those still underrepresented in the pitch sports such as women, girls, and people with disabilities.
  - To create a delivery framework for people and organisations to work together to share skills, expertise, resources, and facilities in implementing the Strategy.
12. In addition, the Strategy identified a range of specific priority projects.

13. The Play and Amenity Green Space Study outlined key findings across all consultees:
  - a) There are not enough facilities for teenagers.
  - b) There are enough parks, open spaces, recreation grounds and sports facilities.
  - c) Parks, open spaces, woodlands, and nature reserves were of sufficient quality.
14. Key recommendations were made, based on the consultation results and the review of existing provision (not just on land owned by the District Council). These were:
  - a) There is a shortfall of at least one of the categories of amenity green space and children's and youth play space in all parishes, although not all facilities were underprovided for in all parishes. It was therefore recommended that facilities should be protected where there is an existing shortfall.
  - b) Green spaces which have significant nature conservation, historical or cultural value should be protected, even if there is an identified surplus in that local area.
  - c) The quality of green spaces and play areas should be improved and Management Plans (if not already established) should be developed for the main parks and recreation grounds.

### **Parks Investment Programme**

15. In 2019, the Council embarked on the 'Parks Investment Programme'. This was designed to 'bridge the gap' between the review and development of these Studies and their likely implementation. It established a strategic approach to securing resources for developing green spaces and procuring work as the funding becomes available.
16. Over the period 2019-2022, the parks Investment Programme delivered six new/improved play areas and saw the production of Park Masterplans for six of the Council's key neighbourhood parks. Work is ongoing on the implementation of these master plans on a prioritised basis, in line with available resources.
17. One of the key lessons learned from the Parks Investment Project was that the Council's ambitions for traditional park amenities (e.g., soft landscaping and play areas) and built infrastructure (e.g., pavilions and tennis courts), have not historically been considered together. This meant that improvement plans did not always align, leading to missed opportunities.

### **Developing the Strategic Vision**

18. The first step in delivering on the outcomes and recommendations from the studies is the development of a Strategic Vision, to serve as a blueprint for investment in our green spaces as resources become available. This work took place through 2021 and 2022.
19. An officer working group was convened to produce a single Strategic Vision, incorporating the recommendations from both the Playing Pitch and Play and Amenity Green Space Studies, and also taking into account play provision scores.

20. The working group identified five key areas against which to assess each green space, play area and sports pitch, and identify its relative priority for improvement, pending the identification of the necessary funding:
  - a) The need for more youth provision
  - b) The availability of existing and forthcoming s.106 funding
  - c) The quality, range, and variety of existing play space provision
  - d) Reference to priorities identified within the Playing Pitch Study Action Plan
  - e) The need to address identified deficits (including accounting for planned future housing growth)
21. Another key strand of this work was to understand which of the Council's green spaces might be candidates for a site-wide masterplan (of the type currently being delivered at Hemsley's Meadow, Mount Noddy and Victoria Park). This assessment was carried out based on the current layout and location of the space, the range of facilities it currently offers, and its importance as a strategic/ neighbourhood facility.
22. Lessons learned from the Parks Investment Programme about pavilions, outdoor sports courts and multi-use games areas have also been taken into account. This ensures a whole area approach which captures all key priorities for investment in a single place.
23. It should be noted however that only pavilions for which the Council has maintenance and management responsibility have been considered. Those owned by, or leased to third parties would need to be considered for investment on a case-by-case basis as and when the site operator presents a business case.

### **Play Area Review**

24. It was identified in the Play and Amenity Green Space Study that most stakeholders feel there is sufficient supply of play areas across the district; and the quantitative assessment confirms an over provision of play areas in some areas of the district. Effectively, there are areas in the district where there are too many small play areas with limited play value.
25. In total, the Council maintains over 130 play areas and, during the Coronavirus pandemic, to inform a phased re-opening programme, Officers undertook a desk-based assessment of which play areas were considered to be of lower value than others, placing them into four tiers, as follows:
  - Tier 1 play areas- located in the Council's high profile, destination parks.
  - Tier 2 and Tier 3 play areas- located in large rural centres or areas where there is no other access to play facilities.
  - Tier 4 play areas- small, local facilities of limited play value where other, better play areas are within easy walking distance.
26. Following lockdown, only the play areas in Tiers 1-3 were initially opened. This ensured a good geographical spread of open play areas, providing coverage in our towns and villages (where not covered by a high-profile play facility), and wherever possible, ensuring that everyone had access to a play area within 1,000 metres of their home.

27. It is proposed that these play areas (of which there are approximately 40) will be subject to a detailed review over the coming 12 months, building on the previous desk-based study. This will identify whether they should be retrospectively added into the programme for future investment at the appropriate time, consolidated with another play area or removed entirely.

### **Prioritised Programme**

28. Applying the principles outlined above, the table at Appendix 1 sets out a draft prioritised programme of works.
29. This is intended to serve as an evidence base for securing and collecting s106 contributions, and to identify a prioritised programme of improvements that can be progressed as funding and resources become available.

### **Financial Implications**

30. As noted above, a key consideration for the prioritisation of projects was the availability of s.106 funding. Therefore, where possible, those sites where existing funding is available (or where there is a future funding commitment) have been promoted. This is to avoid too great a draw on the Council's reserves, ensure collected s106 is spent before it becomes time-expired, and also allow time for the collection of s106 in locations where there is a current deficit of funds.
31. The work that has been carried out to date on available s106 has been high-level, looking at both money in the bank and money that has been signed-for but not yet received, to provide an idea of what might be available.
32. Alongside this work, Officers have been exploring any scope there might be to re-negotiate and re-allocate some of the money we have already collected between projects in the same ward/ locality. An approach to this is currently being tested with the first round of Parks Masterplans and, if successful, it may enable (subject to the agreement of the developers involved) some of the money that is currently allocated to lower-priority projects to be pulled forward, to fund higher-priority projects; with a view to collecting money for those lower priority projects nearer the time.
33. In addition to the work on s106, consideration is given, during the development of every project as to what external funding might be available to supplement the budget and further reduce the call on General Reserves. Examples include Football Foundation, Lottery Funding, UKSPF and funding from Town/ Parish councils.

### **Risk Management Implications**

34. A number of project risks have been identified. The key risks are as follows, and these will be closely monitored and managed as the programme is taken forward:
  - a) Project budget- Whilst the programme has been carefully designed to minimise the draw on Capital Reserves, additional funding may be required to implement some of the individual projects, depending on their timing and the ability to negotiate the reallocation of some collected s106/ secure external funding.
  - b) Increasing costs- Construction and labour costs are increasing, and it is possible that outline budgets may not be sufficient to achieve all identified improvements. These increases are also impacting on lead times and may impact on the number of companies bidding for aspects of the programme.

## **Equality and Customer Service Implications**

35. Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out, as required, as projects come forward.

## **Sustainability Implications**

36. The delivery of the Parks Delivery Plan will support a number of the actions identified in the Sustainable Economy Strategy, as follows:
  - a) Use the Council's contracts to encourage procurement of goods and services from local SMEs and third sector organisations
  - b) Support and deliver, where possible, a package of improvements, including public realm improvements, to enhance the economic resilience and attractiveness of the District's town and village centres, including delivering the Council's Car Parking Strategy and Parks Investment Plan.
  - c) Continue to secure a Green Flag award for at least one park in each town centre.
  - d) Refresh the management plans for the Council's countryside sites to ensure they deliver maximum benefit in terms of biodiversity and environmental impact.
  - e) Build on the success of local rewilding initiatives to oversee a managed and incremental growth in the proportion of Council-owned land managed for biodiversity under the national BLUE campaign.

## **Background Papers**

None

## Appendix 1

Priority	Category	Project	Funding
1	Playgrounds	Begin review of 'Tier 4' Play areas.	Within existing resources
		Refurbish Leylands Park Bike Track and Dirt Jumps	Existing revenue funding
	Parks Masterplans	Commencement of Phase 1 Park Masterplan implementation at:  Victoria Park, Haywards Heath Mount Noddy Recreation Ground, East Grinstead Hemsleys Meadow and Andrews Field, Pease Pottage	S106/ UKSPF/ Capital reserves allocated
	Sports Pitches	Resurface and/ or colour deck/ repaint:  Tennis Courts at Beech Hurst Gardens and Lindfield Common	Beech Hurst Charity Funding/ Existing revenue funding
	Pavilions	Commence refurbishment/ upgrade Hickmans Lane Pavilion.	S106/ Capital reserves allocated/ external funding (Football Foundation)
2	Playgrounds	Conclude review of 'Tier 4' Play areas and development of action plan.	Within existing resources
		Refurbish Playground at Marle Place, Burgess Hill	Within existing resources
	Parks Masterplans	Continuation of Phase 1 Park Masterplan implementation at:  Victoria Park, Haywards Heath Mount Noddy Recreation Ground, East Grinstead Hemsleys Meadow and Andrews Field, Pease Pottage  Commencement of Phase 2 Park Masterplan implementation at:	S106/ UKSPF/ Capital reserves allocated

Priority	Category	Project	Funding
		London Road Recreation Ground, Hassocks (excluding building) Brooklands Park, East Grinstead St Johns Park, Burgess Hill (including BHCC pavilion improvements)	S106/ UKSPF/ Capital reserves/ BHTC/ BHCC TBC
	Sports Pitches	Colour deck/ repaint MUGAs at  Tim Farmer Rec Marle Place	S106/ Existing revenue funding
37. 3	Playgrounds	Refurbish Playgrounds at:  Primrose Close, Burgess Hill Pavilion Way, East Grinstead The Glades, East Grinstead Pinewood Way, Haywards Heath Balcombe Recreation Ground	S106/ Capital reserves TBC
	Sports Pitches	Sports pitch improvements at:  Balcombe Recreation Ground KGV Playing Field, Crawley Down  Resurface and colour deck/ repaint:  Tennis Courts at John Pears, St Johns, Victoria Park MUGAs at Turners Hill, Albourne Recreation Ground, Bolney Recreation Ground	S106   Existing revenue funding
4	Parks Masterplans	Prepare Parks Masterplan for Clair Park, Haywards Heath	General reserves
	Playgrounds	Refurbish Playgrounds at:  Balcombe Recreation Ground Barley Drive, Burgess Hill Coulstock Way, Burgess Hill Wyvern Way, Burgess Hill Imberhorne Lane Recreation Ground, East Grinstead Priory Way, Haywards Heath Dunlop Close, Sayers Common	S106/ Capital reserves TBC



Priority	Category	Project	Funding
	Sports Pitches	Sports pitch improvements at:  Humphry's Field, Copthorne Imberhorne Lane Recreation Ground, East Grinstead Whitemans Green, Cuckfield	S106/ Capital reserves TBC
	Pavilions	Refurbish pavilion at Whitemans Green, Cuckfield	S106/ Capital reserves/ External Funding- TBC
5	Playgrounds	Refurbish Playgrounds at:  Denham Rd, Burgess Hill Warelands, Burgess Hill Newton Avenue, East Grinstead Parklands, Hassocks Oakhurst, Sayers Common Scaynes Hill Recreation Ground Sharpthorne Recreation Ground	S106/ Capital reserves TBC
	Sports Pitches	Sports pitch improvements at The Havens, Crawley Down	S106/ Capital reserves TBC