

SUBJECT:	Fixed Play Area Assessments and Future Action
MEETING:	Children and Young People's Select Committee
DATE TO BE CONSIDERED:	8th December 2020
WARDS AFFECTED:	All Wards

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present members with the outcome of the play value assessment of fixed play provision in the county;
- 1.2 To propose a way forward for future fixed play provision in Monmouthshire.

2. RECOMMENDATION that members

- 2.1 receive and note the outcome of the play value assessments;
- 2.2 scrutinise the proposals set out in this report as a future “blueprint” for fixed play provision in the county, in particular the suggestion of a pilot project in the town of Monmouth.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The council has a large stock of fixed play areas across the county, which consists of a mix of older play areas - many inherited from predecessor authorities - and newer play areas provided via Section 106 Agreements drawn up and agreed as part of the granting of planning permission for new residential developments. For these newer play areas, the council receives commuted sum payments from developers to cover the estimated costs of maintenance for the first ten to twenty years – but there isn't, and never really has been, a dedicated budget for maintaining the older play area stock.
- 3.2 The classification of play areas in the county is based on the Fields in Trust (formerly National Playing Fields Association) Six Acre Standard and comprises three types of play area as follows:
 1. NEAPS (Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play) – a larger play area with a wide range of equipment and designed to serve a wider age group;
 2. LEAPS (Local Equipped Areas for Play) – a smaller or mid-size play area designed for the primary school age group;
 3. LAPS (Local Areas for Play) – a small “estate-type” play area with a small amount of equipment and designed for the pre-school age group.
- 3.3 Last year the council, funded by a Welsh Government Play Opportunities Grant, carried out a play value assessment of all its play areas and some play

areas owned and/or managed by town and community councils. In total, some 110 play areas were assessed by an independent consultant using the assessment form attached to this report at **Appendix A**.

- 3.4 These assessments were undertaken in line with the actions identified in the Council's play action plan and in the knowledge from previous research that fixed play is not the only contribution to play opportunities. In addition to the supervised SHEP and open access play provisions delivered in the school summer holidays there are a number of other opportunities for children's play that can be delivered through green infrastructure initiatives, wild play sessions and creating child-centred settings that encourage children to experiment in their natural environment.
- 3.5 The action areas outlined in the Play Action Plan include
1. Local environment quality and a wider green infrastructure approach
 2. Community development – supporting and enabling community action
 3. Street play – community training, street closures and play value
 4. Exploring the potential for the use of school grounds to facilitate play
 5. Fixed play
 - a) play value, inclusivity and natural play potential
 - b) rationalisation/improvement of fixed play, based on assessment
 - c) planning guidance (links to LDP), review of play standards
 - d) progress delivery of new enhanced play area at Chippenham
 - e) supporting and enabling community driven play proposals
 - f) consideration of play opportunities in rural areas
- 3.6 The outcome of the play area assessments is that only three fixed play areas were ranked as "good" (56-84), ten were ranked as "adequate" (29-55) and the rest ranked as "poor" (0-28). The lowest ranking score was 1/84 and the highest was 69/84. The three "top rated" sites in terms of play value were the Usk Playpark, the Bailey Park Play Area and the play area at King George V Playing Field in Caldicot (town council-owned), in that order. A copy of the full list of assessments and individual site reports are available upon request.
- 3.7 It should be stressed that the assessments carried out relate to play value considerations only. The councils fixed play areas are inspected on a regular basis (in most cases weekly) and all of them are safe to use – but they offer little in terms of play value and most if not all are constructed mainly of steel or metal equipment designed for longevity and relative ease of maintenance. Also, a number of the smaller new play areas will have registered a lower score, as they are specifically designed for a younger age group.

- 3.8 It is not considered viable to continue to support 110+ play areas due to the ongoing and increasing costs of maintenance and reducing budgets, so the following action is proposed:
1. Rationalise the number of fixed play areas in the county and re-provision those that are recommended for closure – the opportunities for rationalisation are more likely to occur in the four main settlements;
 2. Move away from the current Fields in Trust (FiT) classification in favour of a two tier classification of Neighbourhood and Doorstep Play Areas and use this to rationalise the number of urban-based play areas in the four main towns;
 3. Use the revised classification when assessing layout plans for new residential developments in the county;
 4. Carry out a rationalisation of fixed play provision in the town of Monmouth as an initial pilot, which can then be rolled out to the other three main towns.
 5. In future the council to move towards the provision of play equipment constructed of more natural materials such as sustainable hardwoods (e.g. robinia), with a high level of accessible equipment.
- 3.9 It is not proposed to impose a rigid approach to this new classification and no changes will be made without prior consultation with the relevant local members, town councils, friends groups and local residents.
- 3.10 The re-provisioning of play areas could include alternative uses such as community food growing areas (e.g. fruit trees, mini allotments or veg beds), local provenance tree nurseries/mini forests, wildlife nature areas, re-wilded mini meadows that can double up as wild play areas and pollinator planting.
- 3.11 Consultation with the local community on proposed re-provisioning would take place under the banner of the Local Nature Partnership, working with partners such as town councils, the Gwent Wildlife Trust, Natural Resources Wales, local transition and climate change groups, social landlords and local schools. If the process is successful in Monmouth and is rolled out subsequently to other areas then the local stakeholders in each area may be different.

4.0 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

The options available are to:

1. take no action and continue with the current arrangements;
2. proceed with the proposals outlined in paragraph 3.6 of this report, which follow the actions outlined in the Play Action Plan approved by members;
3. take some other action to address the outcome of the play value assessments

5.0 REASONS

- 5.1 To implement the actions approved by Cabinet in the adopted play action plan
- 5.2 To address the play value shortcomings in the council's stock of fixed play provision, identified in the assessments undertaken in 2019;
- 5.2 To ensure that the council's fixed play areas are placed on a more sustainable footing for the future and to enable better prioritisation of the scarce resources available as and when these arise.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The current funding for maintaining play areas (other than those maintained from commuted sum payments provided by developers for the newer sites) comes from the grounds maintenance budget, which is currently under pressure due to the need for savings against a background of ever growing demands and community expectations.
- 6.2 Unless action is taken to address the current situation the council could well find itself with a large stock of deteriorating assets, with items of play equipment having to be removed and not replaced.
- 6.3 If there is an agreed rationalisation programme, with priority sites identified for investment when funding does become available (e.g. through S106 Agreements, external funding opportunities, etc.) then investment decisions can be made on an informed basis.
- 6.4 It is worth noting that there is currently approximately £400,000 worth of S106 funding reserved for investment in a number of play areas across the county. This includes a sum of £100,000 reserved for the relocated/new play area at Chippenham village green in Monmouth and £130,000 for investment in the community council owned play area at Mardy Playing Field.

7.0 WELL BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

See attached at **Appendix B**.

8.0 CONSULTEES

Cabinet Members

CYP Select Committee

S106 Working Group

Senior Leadership Team

Section151 Officer

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. MCC Play Action Plan approved by Cabinet
2. Play Value Assessment Report – Sport and Leisure Consulting Ltd
3. Detailed list (and results) of the sites included in the assessments

10.0 AUTHOR

Mike Moran, Community Infrastructure Coordinator

Tel: 07894 573834

Email: mikemoran@monmouthshire.gov.uk

APPENDIX A

Play Assessment Project for Monmouthshire County Council		
Report By:	Site Name:	Date of Visit:
	Type: (LAP/Local/Destination)	
Contact and Visit By:	Site Address:	

Age Group: 0-6 Years	Score	Age Group: 7-12 Years	Score
Traditional Play Values		Traditional Play Values	
Swinging	0	Swinging	0
Sliding	0	Sliding	0
Rocking	0	Hanging	0
Climbing	0	Climbing	0
Balance	0	Balance	0
Rotating / Spinning	0	Rotating / Spinning	0
Inclusive / Less-abled	0	Inclusive / Less-abled	0
Development Play Values		Development Play Values	
Social Play	0	Social Play	0
Physical and Personal Development	0	Physical and Personal Development	0
Imagination	0	Imagination	0
Sensory	0	Sensory	0
Problem Solving / Educational	0	Problem Solving / Educational	0
Natural Play	0	Natural Play	0
<i>Additional (e.g. Bounce, Zip Wire)</i>	0	<i>Additional (e.g. Bounce, Zip Wire)</i>	0
TOTAL	0/42	TOTAL	0/42
SCORING RESULT: 0/84			
<i>Poor</i>		<i>Adequate</i>	
		<i>Good</i>	

Other Considerations	General Comments & Observations
Seating Available	
Surfacing	
Access and Location	
Distance to Local/Destination playpark	

Individual Value Result	Score	Total Playground Result	Score
Non-existent	0	Poor	0 – 28
Low	1	Adequate	29 – 55
Medium	2	Good	55 - 84
High	3		