

SUBJECT:	Fixed Play Assessments and Future Action
MEETING:	Cabinet
DATE TO BE CONSIDERED:	20th January 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, subject to consultation, the council

- 2.1 rationalises the number of fixed play areas in the county and re-provisions those that are recommended for closure – the opportunities for rationalisation are more likely to occur in the four main settlements;
- 2.2 replaces the current Fields in Trust (FiT) classification in favour of a two-tier classification of Neighbourhood and Doorstep Play Areas and that this is used to rationalise the number of urban-based play areas in the four main towns;
- 2.3. uses this revised classification when assessing layout plans for new residential developments in the county;
- 2.4 carries 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 main settlements;.
- 2.5. in future moves towards the provision of play equipment constructed of more natural materials such as sustainable hardwoods (e.g. robinia), with a greater proportion of accessible equipment.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognises that every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities. In Wales play is a statutory duty of local authorities set out in Section 11 of the Play Opportunities, Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. This legislation is part of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty agenda. Section 11 came into effect fully in 2014 and it requires local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas.

- 3.2 As part of the legislation councils have a duty to undertake full play sufficiency assessments every three years and to produce an annual play action plan. The current Play Action Plan was approved by Cabinet in May 2019. The action areas outlined in respect of Matter C – Space for Children to Play 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
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 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**.

- 3.6 These assessments were undertaken in line with the actions identified in the Council's play action plan, as set out in para 3.2, 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.
- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 It is not considered viable to continue to support 110+ play areas due to the ongoing and increasing costs of maintenance and the lack of an adequate maintenance budget for fixed play. If the recommendations in this report are adopted the council will still use the Fields in Trust Six Acre Standard as an assessment tool for determining standards of public open space provision and will continue to work with Fields in Trust to protect public open spaces in the county – the only change proposed is the move to larger neighbourhood play areas to serve a particular neighbourhood and investment in better provisioned doorstep fixed play provision in income deprived areas within the county. Officers will continue to work with town and community councils and other local organisations that are responsible for some of the fixed play provisions for which they are responsible.
- 3.10 It is not proposed to impose a rigid approach to the new classification and no changes will be made without prior consultation with the relevant local members, town councils, friends groups and local residents. The council has been awarded funding this year from the LP4N (local places for nature) fund to carry out a study in Monmouth to see how some of the smaller play areas there could be re-provisioned and to propose landscape improvements on five existing play areas in the Overmonnow2 LSOA (lower super output area) where 23% of household are income-deprived.

- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 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 slightly different.

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

The EQIA is attached to this report at **Appendix B**. This highlights the need to prioritise future investment (from S106 and other funding sources) in doorstep fixed play provisions located in income-deprived areas within the county.

5.0 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Option	Benefits	Disadvantages	Recommendation
Take no action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy option – no need to plan anything; • Continue applying for funding as and when it becomes available but with no overall plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not comply with approved Play Action Plan; • Existing play area stock continues to deteriorate; • Eventual closure of some play areas; 	This option is not recommended as it prolongs an existing problem and stores up more difficult issues for the future.
Proceed with actions and recommendations set out in the report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complies with approved Play Action Plan; • Creates a more sustainable plan for fixed play in the future; • Provides a template for investment in income deprived communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expenditure is focussed in one area in the first year; • There is a risk that further funding will be delayed or will not materialise 	There is no “quick fix” or easy solution to this long term issue but these recommendations provide a plan for future action and offer a positive long term solution.
Take some other action to address the outcome of the play value assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on the alternative(s) chosen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on the alternative(s) chosen 	

6.0 EVALUATION CRITERIA

This decision will be evaluated via feedback with users at the completion of the works and the position will be reviewed annually when the Play Action Plan is being prepared.

7.0 REASONS

- 7.1 To implement the actions approved by Cabinet in the adopted play action plan
- 7.2 To address the play value shortcomings in the council's stock of fixed play provision, identified in the assessments undertaken in 2019;
- 7.2 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.

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 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 limited resources against a background of ever growing demands and community expectations.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 If there is an agreed rationalisation programme, with priority sites identified for investment when funding does become available then investment decisions can be made on an informed basis.
- 8.4 It is not envisaged that the proposals to improve fixed play provision in the main settlements will create a capital budget pressure in the next four to five years. Once a programme of improvements has been drawn up it is proposed to implement changes using mainly S106 contributions and future Welsh Government AWPOG funding as and when that becomes available. Officers will also support and work with voluntary sector "friends" groups when they make applications for grants from external bodies such as the Community Fund, the National Lottery and the Community Facilities Fund. In terms of the timescale for completing the roll out programme, this will very much depend upon the availability of funding from the sources identified above.
- 8.5 The Council has been allocated £60,000 from AWPOG (All Wales Play Opportunities Grant) to spend on improvements to doorstep play areas in the Overmonnow2 LSOA, namely King's Fee, Goldwire Lane and Hendre Close.

8.6 It is also 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 £111,000 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.

9.0 CONSULTTEES

Cabinet Members	CYP Select Committee
Local Members	Monmouth Town Council
S106 Working Group	Senior Leadership Team
Section151 Officer	

The CYP Select Committee supported the proposals but some members were concerned about the possible implications of reduced provision on children's development, and expressed dissatisfaction at the reduction of play's budget in recent years. The committee recommended the proposal be taken to cabinet for approval.

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Wales - A Play Friendly Country, 2014 – Welsh Government Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities
2. MCC Play Action Plan approved by Cabinet
3. Play Value Assessment Report – Sport and Leisure Consulting Ltd
4. Detailed list (and results) of the sites included in the assessments
5. Report to Children and Young Peoples' Select Committee – Dec 2020

11.0 AUTHOR

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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>		

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		