

Cheshire West and Chester Play Strategy Tier 1



Cheshire West
and Chester

2016 – 2020



Report produced on behalf of Cheshire West and Chester Council by Leisure and the Environment in association with Ethos Environmental Planning



Cheshire West and Chester Play Strategy - Tier 1

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1. Introduction – aims, objectives and policy

1.1 Introduction and rationale for the Play Strategy

Why a Play Strategy?

The Play Strategy has been formulated to serve Cheshire West and Chester as it aims to encompass the roles and contributions of all partners involved in developing and managing play spaces across the Borough. As a practical strategy document, the Play Strategy needs to demonstrate how it fits with and supports the delivery of the new Council Plan.

The Strategy places play facilities and services within a local and national strategic context. As well as clearly demonstrating the value of play in its own right, the strategy also makes explicit their vital contribution to the wider social agenda – public health, regeneration, community development, social inclusion, and community safety.

The Play Strategy is a strategy for all publically accessible play spaces and outdoor youth facilities, not simply the Borough Council's own provision. As such, a partnership approach is essential - one that involves all play space providers.

The approach taken in the Play Strategy aims to address play provision deficiencies by placing emphasis on the role of local consultation within the recommended play space improvement process. It is important in all cases to fully embrace community consultation, providing sufficient flexibility to ensure that provision is in line with the needs and aspirations of local children, young people, and residents.

How will play improvements and investment be prioritised?

The delivery mechanisms will centre around a system together with the resources identified in order to manage, monitor, evaluate and review the implementation of the Play Strategy via four Locality Frameworks.

The Framework documents provide a valuable evidence based resource that can be used by all partners with an interest in play and youth facilities. The Frameworks list all designated play spaces and youth facilities within the locality i.e. those managed by the borough council, town and parish councils, housing associations, recreation trusts etc. In addition they provide a strategic play profile for the locality; and a guide to making prioritising choices in relation to potential improvement works.

They are called Frameworks rather than plans because they do not aim to produce a prescriptive play area delivery plan that partners must follow; rather they provide evidence that partners can use in reviewing, developing and implementing their own individual local delivery plans.

It is important to note that in terms of potential new play facilities covering gaps in provision, the current financial constraints within local authority and partner budgets must be taken into account when looking at priority planning. The Borough Council, for example, is currently not committing to procuring any new play areas and is prioritising its current play assets in terms of improvements.

How will the Strategy be monitored and updated?

The Strategy and associated Locality Frameworks are 'live' documents which will be the subject of continuing updates and review. The Strategy therefore recommends that a strategic Play Partnership be formed to monitor progress and development. The membership should include the main Borough Council Play services involved in play provision; and a range of representatives from the other partners such as town/parish council, housing associations, strategic voluntary sector organisations and local voluntary groups.

The Play Partnership would also be informed by existing support mechanisms within each of the four Localities to review and update the Play Strategy and the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks.

1.2 Strategy Overview

The **Cheshire West and Chester Play Strategy** is comprised of two "tiers" of documents as noted below:

- Tier 1 - A borough-wide strategy that provides guidance on policy and best practice in outdoor public play provision. The Tier 1 strategy makes the case for play and demonstrates the Play Strategy's alignment with corporate strategic policy such as the Council Plan; and the Health and Wellbeing and Growth agendas. It also embeds the principle of inclusive play throughout.
- Tier 2 - Four Locality Play Improvement frameworks. These supply detailed analysis of play spaces and outdoor youth facilities at the Locality level.

The strategy has been drafted by **Ethos Environmental Planning** in association with **Leisure and the Environment**. It was developed in close collaboration with the Borough Council and local partners such as Town and Parish Councils, voluntary sector organisations, community groups and housing associations.

This document is the **Tier 1 Cheshire West and Chester Play Strategy**

The Tier One Strategy broadly follows the format recommended in 'Planning for Play'¹ adapted to suit local circumstances. Within this structure it:

¹ Planning for Play: Guidance on the development and implementation of a local play strategy - Play England 2006

- Articulates and formulates policy statements covering all aspects of Play and Youth facility provision; as well as making formal recognition of the contribution of Play to the wider social agendas and relevant national agendas. It highlights links with recent studies such as the Open Spaces study and Playing Pitch Strategy.
- Provides guidance on good play space design practice, risk and challenge in play, and inclusive play.
- Highlights options and opportunities for internal and external funding to support the delivery of the strategy.
- Makes recommendations in relation to the roles of partners and stakeholders in relation to the development, management and sustainability of play and youth facilities.

The strategy has been developed in a financial environment of reducing local authority budgets. It recognises that future planning for play improvements need to be realistic, achievable and sustainable. This means making the most of capital expenditure that is available or becomes available and minimising revenue and maintenance costs. In this respect a partnership approach is key - maximising the potential for securing a diverse range of funding and encouraging active community support and partnership.

1.3 Scope of Strategy, aims and objectives

Definition of Play

There are a number of possible definitions of Play and Play Provision and this strategy adopts the following based on those contained in 'Getting Serious about Play - Department for Culture, Media & Sport' (2004)

Definition of Play

"Play means what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons".

By **Play Provision** we mean "a space, some facilities or equipment intended to give children the opportunity to play..... At its most successful, it offers children and young people as much choice, control and freedom as possible within reasonable boundaries. The children and young people may themselves choose play involving certain rules or, in some cases, informal sport."

Scope

This strategy seeks to inform the shape and direction of the Borough Council and partners' priorities and developments for play and outdoor youth facilities from 2016 to 2020. It sets out the role and case for Play in the context of the new Council Plan. It aims to provide a

strategy for Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC) in general, recognising the potential contributions of all partners involved in providing and developing Play and Outdoor Youth Facilities across the Borough.

The play strategy aims to complement relevant national strategies while placing the needs and aspirations of local people at its core. In so doing it will place the development of local play opportunities in the wider regional and national context.

The scope of the strategy includes outdoor play spaces and outdoor youth facilities. It does not cover indoor or supervised play/youth facilities. The age range for the strategy is for children and young people up to 19 years old.

The Play Strategy is a strategy for all publically accessible play spaces and outdoor youth facilities, not simply the Council's own provision. As such, a partnership approach is essential - one that involves all play space providers.

Play space and outdoor youth provision is considered in its widest sense including access to "playable space" i.e. not restricted to formal equipped play areas. "Connectivity" to and between playable spaces also needs to be borne in mind.

Aims

The aims of the strategy are:

- To support the provision of high quality play and outdoor youth facilities sufficient to meet the needs and aspirations of Cheshire West and Chester's children, young people and their families
- To ensure that such provision is effectively planned and co-ordinated, well designed and that appropriate budgets are available to enable implementation and sustainability
- To ensure that the strategy supports the aims of relevant national strategy and key local strategic documents and, in turn, influences and feeds in to the development of future local strategy and policy
- To ensure that all provision is planned with the active involvement and engagement of the Borough's children and young people
- To ensure inclusive play spaces are provided where they are needed and help facilitate the provision of high-quality facilities that are accessible to all
- To ensure that play opportunities should meet demand, encourage participation and enable children and young people "to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child" (Article 31 UN Convention)

Objectives

- To provide evidence of the need for play opportunities and facilities; identifying shortfalls and surpluses in provision to enable an informed approach for the future

- To analyse existing provision and establish the future policy of children’s play provision within the Borough Council area
- To provide four Locality Play Improvement Frameworks to guide the Council and its partners work programme over the next 4 years
- To recommend a system and resources in order to manage, monitor, evaluate and review the implementation of the Play strategy and the Locality Frameworks

General Principles

- The Play Strategy is for Cheshire West and Chester as a whole – not just the Borough Council. It aims to encompass the roles and contributions of all partners involved in developing and managing Play spaces across the Borough
- Consultation and engagement with children and young people is essential in the planning and delivery of play and youth facility improvement projects
- The strategy will place local issues in the context of relevant local and the national strategy

1.4 Policy Statements

The Policy Statements are structured in relation to the key themes and relevant priorities of the Council Plan which is considered in detail in Section 4.2 below. The two main themes of relevance are Thriving Residents and Thriving Communities².

Thriving Residents

Priority	Policy Statement
All of our families, children and young people are supported to get the best start in life	<p>P1. The Strategy recognises that outdoor play has a key role in improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people through the promotion of active and healthy lifestyles.</p> <p>P2. Strategy partners will work towards ensuring that all play provision is fully inclusive and accessible.</p>

² Though in broad terms the Strategy also contributes to *Thriving Economy* - See Section 4.2 below

Thriving Communities

Priority	Policy Statement
Cleanest, safest and most sustainable neighbourhoods in the country	<p>P3. Strategy partners will protect and enhance Play and Youth Facilities in the Borough, following good practice in relation to design quality, inclusion and risk/benefit procedures³.</p> <p>P4. Strategy partners will invest in new provision/improvements to play spaces and youth facilities only if the sustainability of the spaces/facilities can be demonstrated and justified in the area identified.</p> <p>P5. The Strategy recognises the role that play and youth facilities have in enriching the lives of young people, in offering them stimulating and rewarding alternatives to anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>P6. Strategy partners will aim to make appropriate public spaces as child friendly as possible, ensuring that parks, housing estates, shopping areas and other public spaces within the Borough, are as safe and conducive as possible to children's play.</p>
Vibrant and healthy communities with inclusive leisure, heritage and culture opportunities.	<p>P7. The Strategy recognises the important role played by Town/Parish Councils, Housing Associations and the Voluntary and Community sector in relation to the provision of play spaces. The Borough Council will work in partnership with all such to improve play and youth facilities.</p>
Our resources are well managed and reflect the priorities of residents	<p>P8. Play spaces and youth facilities will be provided/improved on the basis of a strategic analysis of local need with the aim of providing an equitable distribution of facilities and services across the Borough; with priority being given to provision where it is most needed⁴.</p> <p>P9. Children, young people, their families and the wider community will be positively engaged in the planning of play spaces and youth facilities through appropriate consultation and active involvement.</p> <p>P10. Strategy partners will seek to maximise returns from external funding opportunities and the potential of planning obligations and agreements with developers in order to facilitate the improvement and enhancement of Play and Youth Facility provision and to support its future maintenance⁵.</p>

³ See Section 9 below

⁴ See Section 7 below

⁵ See Section 7 below; the Locality Frameworks; and the Funding appendix

2. The case for play

2.1 The UN Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK Government in December 1991 recognises the importance of play for the child. Article 31 of the Convention says that:

"States recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts."

Related to that right are the child's rights to freedom of expression and association, enshrined in Articles 12, 13, 14, and 15 of the UN Convention.

2.2 The Importance of Play⁶

The importance of Play can be illustrated from two perspectives:

- The benefits of Play for children
- The wider social benefits

The benefits of play for children

There is considerable evidence that play is a vital activity in relation to healthy child development, for example, Play -

- Provides children with opportunities to enjoy freedom, and exercise choice and control over their actions
- Offers children opportunities for testing boundaries and exploring risk
- Offers a very wide range of physical, social and intellectual experiences for children.
- Fosters children's independence and self-esteem
- Develops children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction.
- Supports the child's wellbeing, healthy growth and development
- Increases children's knowledge and understanding.
- Promotes children's creativity and capacity to learn

Play Deprivation

There is also a growing consensus about some of the possible implications of play deprivation, based on reasonable assumptions about the role of personal experience and self-directed activity in the development of a range of competences. Depending on the types of play opportunity that are lacking, children could be affected in the following ways:

⁶ Research Evidence - Play for a change (Play England)

- Poorer ability in motor tasks
- Lower levels of physical activity
- Poorer ability to deal with stressful or traumatic situations and events
- Poorer ability to assess and manage risk
- Poorer social skills, leading to difficulties in negotiating social situations such as dealing with conflict and cultural difference

The Social benefits of Play

In summary, Play -

- Helps reduce the involvement of children and young people in anti-social behaviour, in the short term; and plays a part in promoting social cohesion in the longer term
- Supports families and communities, by providing a focus for informal networks of family support, and by allowing children autonomy within an environment which parents feel secure about
- Makes an important contribution, in parallel with education, in developing adults who are creative and effective in the social and economic sphere
- Offers opportunities for exploring cultural identity and difference

These outcomes, which are in part the consequences of play, are of importance to a range of stakeholders. The potential benefits are of relevance to community health targets, social and economic regeneration and youth justice, for example.

The Play Strategy recognises these benefits which highlight the need and justification for ongoing investment in play spaces and youth facilities.

3. How the strategy was developed

3.1 Overview

Essentially, the Strategy was completed in line with the guidance provided by Play England in their document *Planning for Play* (suitably modified to reflect local circumstances and requirements). The Strategy provides a framework for development for all those involved in using, providing, and managing outdoor play and youth facilities in Cheshire West and Chester. The Strategy process therefore ensured that all key stakeholders were aware and involved in its development.

The Strategy places local facilities and services within a local and national strategic context. As well as clearly demonstrating the value of play in its own right, the strategy also makes explicit their vital contribution to the wider social agenda – public health, regeneration, community development, social inclusion, and community safety.

3.2 Summary of method

The strategy process involved eight main stages:

1. Audit and Mapping

A comprehensive audit and mapping of designated play spaces and youth facilities across the Borough. This included site visits and quality assessments of all the play and youth facilities and the mapping of these sites on a Geographical Information System (GIS).

2. Consultation and Community Engagement

An extensive consultation and engagement programme including:

- Review of existing consultation data
- Stakeholder Workshops (an initial borough-wide workshop and four Locality based sessions).
- Surveys of children and young people
- Surveys of town and parish councils
- Surveys of local play and youth organisations
- Interviews and engagement with key stakeholders (Borough Council and external partners)

3. Providing strategic context

This involved reviews of relevant local and national policy to highlight:

- How the Play Strategy sits within the local and national strategic framework.
- Identifying the contribution the Play Strategy can make to the wider strategic agendas.

4. Policy development

This involved:

- Developing clear aims and objectives for the strategy and defining its scope.
- Reviewing the consultation findings and audit and drawing out key policy areas.
- Ensuring that policy proposals are consistent with and support the delivery of wider strategic objectives e.g. the emerging Local Plan.

5. Analysing the supply of and need for play spaces and youth facilities

This involved:

- Detailed analysis of the consultation findings
- Review of the local standards for play spaces and youth facilities developed in the Open Spaces Study to ensure consistency between the two documents.
- Agreeing prioritisation criteria to guide the development of the locality based Play Improvement Frameworks
- Applying the standards and prioritisation criteria across the Borough to identify gaps and any surpluses of provision.

6. Partnership roles

Based on discussion with Borough Council officers and key partners this section looks at current and potential roles and responsibilities for managing and developing play and youth facilities in Cheshire West and Chester.

7. Good Practice, Quality and Funding

The Strategy includes good practice guidance in three main areas:

- Play space design
- Risk and challenge
- Inclusion

Finally, there is a funding appendix (Appendix 2) providing information on potential external funding opportunities for the Borough Council and local partners.

8. Development of Action Plans (Tiers 1 and 2)

Based on an analysis of all the above the Strategy includes:

- An Action Plan for the Borough including arrangements for monitoring and review of the Play Strategy.
- Locality Play Improvement Frameworks for each of the 4 Locality Areas (Ellesmere Port, Chester, Northwich/Winsford and Rural).

4. Strategic context

4.1 National context

The need to improve provision for children to play is acknowledged in a range of national policy areas: from planning, open spaces and transport to health, education and childcare. Local authorities in England have a duty, under the Children Act (2004), to co-operate in their provision for the enjoyment of play and recreation as part of the key outcomes for all children.

Play is important not simply for its own intrinsic value, but also for its potential contribution to achieving other national objectives relating to health and urban and rural renaissance, for example:

- Play helps promote active lifestyles, and can therefore help to meet national objectives set by government for physical exercise and recreation.
- Play and play space in general is a user of open space, and can therefore help in improving and conserving the stock of open space in towns, cities and rural areas. This will not only have benefit for play, but also for local amenity, health and in realising 'sustainable communities', as promoted nationally.

Public Health

The general value of open spaces and physical activity to health

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) have pointed out that "physical activity is not only fun and enjoyable, it is essential for good health, helping to prevent or manage over 20 conditions and diseases. This includes heart disease, diabetes, some cancers and obesity. It can also help improve people's mental health and wellbeing."

NICE Local Authority Briefing - Public health

Supporting people of all ages to be more physically active can help local authorities meet their new public health responsibilities. Specifically, it will impact on a range of indicators identified in the public health and the adult social care outcomes frameworks including:

- use of green space for exercise/health reasons
- child development
- excess weight in children
- proportion of physically active and inactive adults
- self-reported wellbeing and health-related quality of life
- mortality from cardiovascular diseases (including heart disease and stroke), cancer and respiratory diseases.

More specifically, in relation to the Play Strategy, Public Health England have provided a health equity briefing: 'Local action on health inequalities: Improving access to green spaces'.

Public Health England - health equity briefing: Local action on health inequalities: Improving access to green spaces. Summary of key points

- There is significant and growing evidence on the health benefits of access to good quality green spaces. The benefits include better self-rated health; lower body mass index, overweight and obesity levels; improved mental health and wellbeing; increased longevity
- There is unequal access to green space across England. People living in the most deprived areas are less likely to live near green spaces and will therefore have fewer opportunities to experience the health benefits of green space compared with people living in less deprived areas
- Increasing the use of good quality green space for all social groups is likely to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities. It can also bring other benefits such as greater community cohesion and reduced social isolation.
- Local authorities play a vital role in protecting, maintaining and improving local green spaces and can create new areas of green space to improve access for all communities. Such efforts require joint work across different parts of the local authority and beyond, particularly public health, planning, transport, and parks and leisure

Providing opportunities for physical activity by developing and maintaining appropriate facilities such as play areas and outdoor youth provision is therefore very important in relation to promoting better public health. Public Health services nationally therefore tend to have an interest in all aspects of active recreation facility provision; and this is reflected in the views of the team in Cheshire West and Chester.

Spatial Planning - the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

It is a requirement of the NPPF that all local authorities should undertake an Open Spaces study considering the supply of and demand for all kinds of open spaces including children's play space and outdoor youth facilities. Paragraphs 73 and 74 of the NPPF state that "assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required".

The NPPF also recognises that access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for play, sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of communities.

An Open Spaces Study for Cheshire West and Chester was undertaken in 2015. This included an assessment of need for play and youth facilities. This assessment also took into account the most recent Fields in Trust national spatial planning guidance: *Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play - Beyond the Six Acre Standard (2015)*.

The Play strategy takes into account and is consistent with the findings of the Cheshire West and Chester Open Spaces Study.

Planning for Play

The government has not provided specific guidance on the development of local Play Strategies and the most recent detailed guidance on the production of local play strategies was jointly published by Play England and the BIG Lottery Fund in April 2006. The purpose of this document is to support local authorities and their partners in preparing strategies for improving children's play opportunities.

The Cheshire West and Chester Play Strategy process has been completed in line with the guidance provided in "Planning for Play".

4.2 Local Context

How it fits in with other plans

The Play Strategy is fully joined-up with other key plans and strategies being developed across the borough as illustrated below:



The Council Plan (2016-20) - helping the borough thrive

As a practical strategy document the Play Strategy needs to demonstrate how it fits with and supports the delivery of the Council Plan.

The Council Plan sets the overall direction for the Council for 2016-20. It:

- outlines the vision and priorities of the Council
- describes the difference the Council is seeking to make and the actions required
- provides a focus for all services and decisions
- informs the allocation of resources
- fully aligns with the priorities shared with the Council's partner organisations
- helps the Council to monitor our progress and take stock of achievements

The key relationships are as follows:

- The Health and Wellbeing Strategy includes a number of priorities shared between the Council and other key partners in the public, voluntary and business sector
- The Council Plan also links with the Local Plan which guides development and planning across the borough
- The Council Plan also sets the framework for District Plans covering priorities for the four specific localities across the borough which will be overseen by District Committees. It also shapes the content and discussions for the Council's Development Boards

The Council Plan sets clear Priorities within three main themes:

- Thriving Residents
- Thriving Communities
- Thriving Economy

Links with the Play Strategy

The primary Play Strategy links to the themes and specific priorities are noted below:

Thriving Residents

Priority	Play Strategy link
All of our families, children and young people are supported to get the best start in life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CWAC Public Health team highlights that promoting access to good quality outdoor play and youth facilities provides regular and free exercise opportunities for children and young people; and that participation in play activity has clear benefits to health and wellbeing - as well as helping to reduce levels of obesity.

This theme highlights specific targets relating to reducing levels of childhood obesity. The Council Plan pledges that it will "take concerted action to tackle childhood obesity and healthy weight: this includes... access to active lifestyles".

Thriving Communities

Priority	Play Strategy link
Cleanest, safest and most sustainable neighbourhoods in the country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well designed and located outdoor play and youth facilities can help provide positive opportunities for young people to meet in appropriate safe places; and help reduce anti-social behaviour. Partnership work helps to ensure sustainability.
Good quality and affordable housing that meets the needs of our diverse communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local housing associations recognise that access to good quality play and youth facilities within and near to their residential areas is an important aspect of providing a satisfactory environment for their residents; and that working in partnership with the Borough Council is the best way of achieving this goal.
Vibrant and healthy communities with inclusive leisure, heritage and culture opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive play spaces and outdoor youth facilities provide easily accessible, free open access play and activity opportunities to children, young people and their families. Many town and parish councils, local "Friends of" groups, and community organisations have been involved with framing the play strategy; and in taking on various levels of responsibility in relation to potential fund raising, management and maintenance of such sites.
Our resources are well managed and reflect the priorities of residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Play Strategy conducted extensive consultation to ensure future provision is planned in line with residents' priorities. Strategy partners highlighted that working in partnership can raise funds to improve play spaces and save costs in relation to ongoing maintenance.

Thriving Economy

Priority	Play Strategy link
People are well educated, skilled and earn a decent living	<p>The Councils Growth Strategy Manager highlights the importance of Play to the Growth Strategy and Economic Regeneration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A population/workforce that is fit and well - physically and mentally - is a key foundation of a vibrant local economy. Adult health and wellbeing tends to be correlated with childhood health and wellbeing. Having access to outdoor play contributes significantly to children and young people's health hence is key to future economic success. Provision of green infrastructure including play space and youth facilities is a key element of good residential design and high quality provision is an important factor in maintaining the value of land and housing. Provision of play spaces therefore contributes to the value of the local housing market.
A great place to do business	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality green infrastructure and play spaces is also important in relation to attracting and retaining families/workforce in an area and hence a supporting factor in maintaining the local economy.
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The Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2014-19

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy sets out the strategic framework for improving health and reducing inequalities across the borough and provides a basis for the commissioning of health, social care and wellbeing services.

The vision:

Our vision for this strategy is to improve the health and wellbeing of our local population and reduce health inequalities, enabling residents to live more fulfilling, independent and healthy lives. We will do this by working with communities and residents to improve opportunities for all to have a healthy, safe and fulfilling life.

Links with the Play Strategy

High level outcomes related to the priorities of relevance to the Play Strategy are:

- Every child and young person has the best start in life in Cheshire West and Chester
- People lead more healthy lifestyles, (including a reduction in drug and alcohol-related harm)
- Improved mental health, wellbeing and personal resilience for our residents

The Public Health Team understands and values the important role that access to high quality, well managed play spaces provides in relation to reaching health and wellbeing targets for Cheshire West and Chester. In particular they highlight that regular visits to play areas and outdoor youth facilities can help with:

- Reducing childhood obesity - a key target for public health
- Supporting children's emotional health and wellbeing - another key strand in the Public Health Team's work. Developing "resilience" is an important element of this

The Public Health Team also note that:

- While encouraging children and young people's participation in sport is often highlighted in relation to public health the value of play to children's health and wellbeing is often not fully recognised.
- Encouraging and supporting active play to become part of everyday life can be a significant factor in relation to enhancing children's emotional health and wellbeing. Having easy access to good quality play areas is a key element of this.

- Research has shown that in key stages of children's lives e.g. transition from primary to secondary school many children suffer from anxiety and stress and enabling outdoor play and access to green spaces can be an important factor in helping reduce negative health impacts.

Smokefree Playgrounds Initiative

This project put signage in place at all 122 Council owned playgrounds across Cheshire West and Chester to raise awareness of the need to **denormalise** *smoking behaviour* of cigarettes and e-cigarettes amongst children.

'Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England' (2011) described what the Government would do to reduce tobacco use over the next five years. In the plan, support is given to local communities and organisations who want to go further than the requirements of smokefree laws in creating environments free from second-hand smoke (e.g. in children's playgrounds, outdoor parts of shopping centres and venues associated with sports and leisure activities).

The purpose of the Play Smokefree code of practice is to:

- Reduce exposure of children to smoking and to help decrease the number of young people starting to smoke
- Decrease cigarette litter such as cigarette butts, empty packets and wrappers
- Reduce the risk of children putting toxic cigarette butts into their mouths
- Make play areas more pleasant and to protect wildlife

The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) 2010-26

The first Sustainable Community Strategy ('Together we can aim high 2010-2026') was prepared in 2010 and set out a vision for the future social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the area:

'By 2026 West Cheshire will be even more prosperous and attractive: a really great place to live, work, learn and visit. The borough will play a full role in the region and beyond, fulfilling our changing responsibilities and enabling our residents to benefit from the opportunities in the twenty first century.'

It then set out a number of commitments, and how these can be achieved, in order to work towards the vision.

In July 2012 the Sustainable Community Strategy was refreshed (Altogether Better: an interim partnership plan, July 2012). The Interim Partnership Plan was prepared jointly by the Local Strategic Partnership (West Cheshire Together) and the Health and Wellbeing Board for Cheshire West and Chester. The document builds upon the first SCS and sets out how to make a real difference to the wellbeing of our communities over the period to 2017.

Eight strategic priorities have been identified as follows:

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all to feel safe and secure and maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
- Have a thriving and strong economy and create quality work and learning opportunities for all
- Support all to have a healthy standard of living and strengthen ill health prevention;
- Create sustainable places and communities
- Enable older people to lead healthier and fulfilling lives
- Create a strong sense of community pride in our area
- Have sustainable health and social care services that are delivered at the right place and the right time

Links with the Play Strategy

Key outcomes identified that are relevant to the Play Strategy include:

- Promote positive wellbeing which can have high social and economic benefits;
- Encourage people to adopt healthy lifestyles across the borough
- Enhance and promote access to green spaces;

The SCS also identifies the natural environment, green and open spaces as an asset and highlights the benefits in relation to physical and mental wellbeing.

The Open Spaces Study (2016-30)

The study was undertaken by Ethos Environmental Planning to update an existing Open Space Assessment and Assessment of Need undertaken in 2011. The document is intended to inform the development of the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan and to ensure that a robust evidence base is available to support the emerging policies within it, up to 2030. The study was carried out in line with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Local spatial planning standards for play and youth facilities were developed in relation to quantity, quality and access. The standards that are proposed are for minimum guidance levels of provision. So, just because geographical areas may enjoy levels of provision exceeding minimum standards does not mean there is a surplus, as all such provision may be well used.

The standards for provision of children's play space/teen facilities are considered further in Section 7 below.

Links with the Play Strategy

- The Open Spaces study sets spatial planning standards for play and youth facilities which the Play Strategy adopts and reiterates
- The Open Spaces study provides useful information about all kinds of public open spaces - not just designated play and youth provision. Much of this provides additional "playable space" as is emphasised in the Play Strategy

The Playing Pitch Strategy (2015-25)

The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) presents a supply and demand assessment of playing pitch facilities in accordance with Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance: 'An approach to developing and delivering a playing pitch strategy'. It has been followed to develop a clear picture of the balance between the local supply of, and demand for, playing pitches and other outdoor sports facilities.

While the PPS is focused on formal pitch sports provision (football, cricket, rugby and hockey) its schools audit provided information on Multi-Use Games areas⁷ some of which are open access, providing informal play opportunities; and the study looked at the community use of school pitches (though very few of these are available for informal open access play use).

Links with the Play Strategy

- Provides audit information on school based Multi-Use Games Areas which overlaps with youth play provision on sites providing open access
- MUGA and open access pitch sports grounds, recreation grounds etc. can provide useful sites when considering the development of play and youth facilities on what are in effect multi-use "hub" sites for play and recreation
- The potential for hub sites to provide opportunities for joint funding initiatives (play, sport, recreation, accessibility improvements)

Locality Ward Plans

Each of the four Locality Teams in Cheshire West and Chester is producing an annual Locality Ward Plan which highlights specific projects to pursue (across all service areas) in the year following.

Links with the Play Strategy

- Tier 2 of The Play Strategy is comprised of four Locality Play Improvement Frameworks. These highlight a range of potential site specific play improvement opportunities within the locality. The Frameworks can be reviewed to feed into the Locality Ward Plans ensuring sustained future connectivity.
- The Ward Plans can assist in local decision making in securing local funding opportunities to support play area improvements.

⁷ The Playing Pitch Study did not analyse the supply of and demand for MUGAs. This is currently being undertaken as part of a Borough-wide Facilities Strategy.

5. Cheshire West and Chester – play profile

5.1 Overview of Cheshire West and Chester

Cheshire West and Chester covers a large geographic and demographically diverse area and is the fourth largest authority in the North West. The north western part of the borough has particularly strong links with north east Wales and Merseyside which is reflected in levels of cross-commuting. To the east the borough borders Cheshire East and has particularly strong links with the town of Middlewich that is surrounded on three sides by Cheshire West and Chester. There are also links to Warrington, Greater Manchester and Shropshire.

Over 329,000 people live in Cheshire West and Chester, with over 160,000 people working in the borough. The area is characterised by attractive countryside, varied landscapes and diverse settlements ranging from the historic city of Chester to small rural hamlets. Chester, Ellesmere Port and Northwich dominate the northern part of the borough and sit within or adjoining the North Cheshire Green Belt which covers 42 percent of the borough's land area. Three of the larger rural settlements, Neston, Frodsham and Helsby, are also located in the Green Belt in the more urbanised north of the borough.

A third of the borough's residents live in the rural area that runs from Neston in the north, which borders Wirral, to the boundary with Shropshire in the south. The rural area in the south is more sparsely populated and many of the settlements, especially in the north, are effectively dormitory settlements that are dependent on larger towns for employment opportunities. Car use is generally very high and isolation and access to services is an issue for some rural residents. Within the rural area there are ten key service centres which provide a good range of facilities and services for surrounding areas.

The number of children and young people aged 0-19 in the borough was 74,000 in 2012, and is forecast to increase by 5% to over 77,500 by 2022. At a very local level some small areas record rates of child poverty at around 40% and around 1 in 3 children and young people live in more deprived areas. Children in the borough's deprived areas have significantly higher rates of excess weight.

Locality Areas

Cheshire West and Chester Council provide many local community services within a Locality Area framework. The four locality areas are listed below (and shown in figure 1), and form the geographical areas for the Tier 2 Locality Play Improvement Frameworks.

- Chester
- Ellesmere Port
- Northwich and Winsford
- Rural

5.2 Child population

The breakdown of the child population within the Borough is shown in the table below⁸:

Table 1 Detailed breakdown of child population for Cheshire West and Chester

Age Range	Number
Age 0-4	18,784
Age 5-8	18,638
Age 9-14	17,686
Age 15-19	19,352

The distribution of the under 19 child population across the borough varies considerably by ward as can be seen in the next table.

⁸ Figures based on the mid-year 2014 population estimates

Table 2 Child population (under 19) in Cheshire West and Chester including breakdown by ward

Area		Total Children	Total ward	% Population Under 19
Cheshire West and Chester		74,020	329,608	22.46%
Ward Name	Locality			
Blacon	Chester	3,597	13,626	26.40%
Boughton	Chester	800	5,444	14.70%
Chester City	Chester	544	3,853	14.12%
Chester Villages	Rural Communities	1,955	8,548	22.87%
Davenham and Moulton	Northwich and Winsford	3,332	13,569	24.56%
Dodleston and Huntington	Rural Communities	1,015	3,958	25.64%
Ellesmere Port Town	Ellesmere Port	2,437	9,103	26.77%
Elton	Rural Communities	993	4,557	21.79%
Farndon	Rural Communities	892	4,011	22.24%
Frodsham	Rural Communities	1,925	9,077	21.21%
Garden Quarter	Chester	1,136	5,318	21.36%
Gowy	Rural Communities	860	3,924	21.92%
Grange	Ellesmere Port	1,265	4,649	27.21%
Great Boughton	Chester	1,972	8,984	21.95%
Handbridge Park	Chester	1,680	8,840	19.00%
Hartford and Greenbank	Northwich and Winsford	1,896	8,360	22.68%
Helsby	Rural Communities	1,042	4,972	20.96%
Hoole	Chester	1,918	9,359	20.49%
Kingsley	Rural Communities	829	4,222	19.64%
Lache	Chester	1,542	5,760	26.77%
Ledsham and Manor	Ellesmere Port	1,606	7,796	20.60%
Little Neston and Burton	Rural Communities	1,562	8,485	18.41%
Malpas	Rural Communities	799	3,975	20.10%
Marbury	Northwich and Winsford	2,513	12,069	20.82%
Neston	Rural Communities	1,014	4,329	23.42%
Netherpool	Ellesmere Port	812	3,287	24.70%
Newton	Chester	2,010	9,556	21.03%
Parkgate	Rural Communities	581	3,591	16.18%
Rossmore	Ellesmere Port	1,137	3,808	29.86%
Saughall and Mollington	Rural Communities	905	4,463	20.28%
Shakerley	Northwich and Winsford	887	4,214	21.05%
St. Paul's	Ellesmere Port	2,157	9,256	23.30%
Strawberry	Ellesmere Port	1,087	5,086	21.37%
Sutton	Ellesmere Port	2,020	9,176	22.01%
Tarporley	Rural Communities	977	4,398	22.21%
Tarvin and Kelsall	Rural Communities	1,771	8,217	21.55%
Tattenhall	Rural Communities	912	4,374	20.85%
Upton	Chester	2,203	8,905	24.74%
Weaver and Cuddington	Northwich and Winsford	2,720	12,779	21.28%
Whitby	Ellesmere Port	1,679	8,102	20.72%
Willaston and Thornton	Rural Communities	674	3,825	17.62%
Winnington and Castle	Northwich and Winsford	2,223	9,271	23.98%
Winsford Over and Verdin	Northwich and Winsford	3,601	13,414	26.85%
Winsford Swanlow and Dene	Northwich and Winsford	2,070	9,012	22.97%
Winsford Wharton	Northwich and Winsford	2,495	9,765	25.55%
Witton and Rudheath	Northwich and Winsford	1,975	8,321	23.74%

5.3 Health

Reducing childhood obesity is a key target in the Council Plan. Child health and wellbeing also came out of the Locality Area workshops as a key factor for prioritising play area improvements within Cheshire West and Chester. In relation to excess weight, analysis of statistics from the Cheshire West and Chester JSNA show that:

- Cheshire West and Chester has significantly higher levels of excess weight in reception age children than England as a whole (the North West also has significantly higher levels)
- The majority of the Ellesmere Port Locality Area show particularly high levels of excess weight, as do parts of Chester and areas within the Rural Locality Areas

5.4 Child Deprivation

In considering prioritisation of provision it is important to consider children from less well off families who are likely to be in particular need of free open access play provision and for whom barriers such as cost and transport are likely to be most significant. In this respect a good tool for analysis is the index of deprivation within the governments Index of Multiple Deprivation – ‘Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI)’.

Using IDACI ranks grouped by scoring system e.g. score of 3 the areas with the highest levels of child/youth deprivation were identified, as were areas with the lowest levels, down to a score of 0.

- The highest levels of child/youth deprivation within the Borough are within the Ellesmere Port Locality Area, in parts of the Rural Locality Area (Neston and Elton), parts of the Chester Locality Area (notably Blacon and Lache) and parts of the Northwich and Winsford Locality Area
- Other areas with relatively high levels of deprivation include parts of the Rural Area (notably parts of Malpas, Gowy, Elton, Frodsham, Little Neston and Burton and Saughall and Mollington)
- Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford and Chester all have areas of relatively high levels of child/youth deprivation

5.5 Rural Access/Deprivation

It is also important to consider issues in relation to geographical barriers to play i.e. those areas where it may be more difficult to access play facilities. The 'Geographical Barriers to Services' sub-domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation is a good tool for analysis in this respect.

Geographical barriers grouped by scoring system e.g. score of 3 were identified, and are the areas with the highest barriers to access rank, as were areas with the lowest levels, down to a score of 0.

The highest levels of deprivation in relation to geographical barriers to services within the Borough are generally within the Rural Areas.

5.6 Child population projections

Table 3 shows the projected population of Cheshire West and Chester's children and young people up to 2022 and 2032. The data has been extracted from the Population Forecasts (March 2015) report, produced by the Cheshire West and Chester Strategic Intelligence Team.

The number of children (aged 0 to 15) will increase by 8% between 2012 and 2022, from 58,300 to 62,700 children aged 0-15. The greatest increase will be in those aged 5 to 10. After 2026, numbers of children will start to decline.

Table 3 Forecasts of children

Age group	Population			% Change	
	2012	2022	2032	2012-22	2012-32
0-4	18,300	18,700	17,900	2%	-2%
5-10	21,200	24,200	23,200	14%	9%
11-15	18,700	19,800	20,900	6%	12%
Total 0-15	58,300	62,700	62,000	8%	6%

The forecast child population increase will only exacerbate the identified overall shortfalls of play provision identified in the borough in particular in relation to youth facilities (and the high demand for such facilities), unless new provision can be provided⁹.

It should also be noted that in practice there may well be wards and settlements where the child and teenage population may increase above the forecast levels (for example, in relation to new residential developments).

⁹ In this respect availability of play area investment funding is key.

6. Review of community engagement

Introduction

This section outlines the various methods through which information has been gathered to establish the needs and aspirations of children, young people, their parents/carers, and the wider community in relation to play provision for children and young people. It also summarises the play needs identified through the process. Consultation and engagement has been achieved through:

- Stakeholder Workshops (borough-wide and locality based)
- Surveys to children and young people
- Play and youth organisations survey
- Town and Parish Council's survey
- Stakeholder interviews
- Review of the residents survey undertaken for the 2016 Open Spaces Study

The detailed findings from the review of community engagement can be found in **Appendix 3**.

6.1 Stakeholder workshops

Key stakeholders workshop (borough-wide)

A borough-wide stakeholder's workshop was held in December 2015. The broad aims of this workshop was:

- To provide a briefing and overview of the Play Strategy scope and production process at the earliest opportunity.
- To secure a range of stakeholders' views on issues and future options for Play and Youth facility provision in Cheshire West and Chester.
- For key stakeholders to introduce themselves and their particular interest in play.

Key points highlighted from workshop session

Key points are highlighted in the table below:

Key issues and challenges	Strengths, assets, opportunities and aspirations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play area design needs to meet local needs • Maintenance costs/replacement of equipment – maintenance and aftercare is key • Close co-operation with council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking note of local information and knowledge • Involving children at an early stage • Skill exchange • Creation of a hub for play best

<p>Planning Team is required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety and parents attitudes towards safety • Winter (low use)/Lighting of play areas • Fundraising can be complex and time consuming • Apathy from local community • Legalities of use e.g. co-ordination and clarity of legal notices and enforcement • Dog control • Managing expectations 	<p>practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoke free play areas • Natural play and Forest Schools • Learning from other areas • Community involvement - health benefits, reduces anti-social behaviour etc. • Could old equipment be re-used?
<p>Priorities for the future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve accessibility, including disabled access and safer (and sustainable) routes to play • Identifying available funding and best practice in applying • Use of natural play where appropriate – less costly and can be more engaging than fixed play • Fusion between budgets within and outside of the council • Adding resources to school play areas for community use • Perhaps fewer, better, bigger equipped play areas – multi-functional facilities. • S106 funding - properly thought through and allocated to the right place. • Risk Assessments – Often seem onerous. This could put off volunteers or others involvement in managing/developing play sites. 	<p>Stakeholder roles and responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a Play Forum for play related dialogue – could act as a mechanism for developing and monitoring the Play Strategy • Developing the Play Strategy as a 'live' document that is accessible to all • Engaging with the community e.g. Friends Groups to foster 'ownership' • Encouraging volunteers • Let children lead – use local knowledge and involve parents • Investigate if existing green space could be re-used or even sold.

Locality based workshops

Workshops were undertaken in each of the four Locality Areas during February 2016, with the aim of identifying measurable criteria/priority factors that can be applied to all outdoor play areas/potential sites to provide a framework to guide future improvement works for the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks.

Locality Officers from each area invited key stakeholders to attend the workshops, and each of the workshop sessions were led and delivered by Ethos Environmental Planning/LandE.

The review of workshop findings were used to finalise the prioritisation criteria used in the Locality Play Improvement frameworks (See Section 7 below).

6.2 Surveys

Children and young people

The survey was developed in liaison with the Cheshire West and Chester Youth Service Team. The team promoted the survey via an online system as well as distributing and collecting hard copies. 240 responses were received from young people from 11 to 20 years old.

Local Play and Youth Organisations

In liaison with the Cheshire West and Chester Youth Service Team and the umbrella voluntary sector Youth Federation, local play and youth organisations were surveyed via an online questionnaire. Responses were received from 25 groups.

Town and Parish Councils

Within Cheshire West and Chester there are 95 parish/town councils. Surveys were sent to all parish councils together with two reminders to chase responses as needed¹⁰. In total 59 parish councils responded. If a response was not received from a town council or key service area parish the latest neighbourhood/parish plan was reviewed in relation to identified play/youth issues and plans/aspirations.

The survey included issues relating to the quantity, quality and accessibility of play spaces and youth facilities. There was also an opportunity for the local councils to highlight any priorities they might have for new or improved provision.

For parish/town councils in Cheshire West and Chester the aspects of most common concern regarding play provision are:

¹⁰ To ensure responses from the Town Councils and the ten key service centre parishes, telephone reminders were also made.

- Not enough areas for teenagers e.g. skateparks, shelters etc and the quality of existing play areas
- The need for additional Multi-use games areas in some parishes

Plans and aspirations of individual town and parish councils are featured in the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks.

Review of the Residents Survey undertaken for the 2016 Open Spaces Study

An online survey of the Borough Council's Citizen's Panel (supplemented by a postal general household survey) was undertaken as part of the 2016 Open Spaces Study. This covered all kinds of public open spaces including play and outdoor youth facilities.

6.3 Stakeholder interviews

Interviews were held with a wide range of stakeholders including:

Cheshire West and Chester Council

- Total Environment
- Place Operations
- The Locality Teams
- The Public Health Team
- The Growth Strategy Manager
- The Youth Service
- The Senior Access Officer
- Regeneration teams

Partners

- Town and parish councils
- Mersey Forest
- Groundwork
- Weaver Vale Housing Trust
- The Woodland Trust
- The National Trust

6.4 Review of community engagement - key findings

Quantity

- Youth play provision is generally considered underprovided for across the Borough with 60% of the 2015 Citizens Panel/household survey answering that there were not enough facilities for older children and teenagers
- 70% of children and young people in the youth survey agreed that there was a need for more outdoor youth facilities and spaces for young people (13+) to meet in their local area. Play and youth organisations also highlight a shortage of teenage provision
- A shortage of wheeled sports facilities and youth shelters/hang out spaces are particularly notable with 73%/69% of play/youth organisation respondents stating there were not enough of such facilities
- 59% of Citizen's Panel/household respondents thought there were enough play areas for younger children (12 and under). A majority (54%) of children and young people agreed that there are enough play areas for younger children in their local area. 54% of play/youth organisations respondents were also satisfied with the quantity of formal equipped playgrounds for younger children (under 13's)
- A clear majority of and play/youth organisations also highlight a need for more Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs)

Quality

- In general residents are reasonably happy with the quality of equipped play areas across the Borough (50% of the Citizen's Panel/household respondents rated them as being very good or good - 35% adequate. However, 15 % rated them as poor or very poor)
- Cheshire West and Chester's grass kickabout areas and equipped playgrounds scored the highest satisfaction levels with local play and youth groups, with nearly 80% rating them as least as "adequate". Of the 80%: 48% rated kickabout areas as good or very good and 46% rated play areas similarly
- There were much lower levels of satisfaction overall with outdoor youth facilities. The Citizen's Panel/household responses indicated that only 12% rated them as good or very good compared to 48% who rated them as poor or very poor
- 54% of children and young people in the youth survey agreed that play areas for younger children are well maintained and of good quality. By contrast, a clear majority (65%) of children and young people thought that youth facilities and spaces for young people to meet are not well maintained or of good quality
- Play and youth organisations further confirmed these observations with most kinds of youth facilities being rated as poor or very poor most notably "challenging" teenage play spaces and wheeled sports facilities. Over 80% rated the former as being poor or very poor and 65% similarly for the latter

Access

- 88% of children and young people in the youth survey said that they would be prepared to walk further than normal to somewhere that had more to do and was more interesting
- Organisational respondents noted the difficulty with access to local provision in some more rural areas – citing poor public transport, long walks or general inaccessibility as barriers to access

- The Senior Access Officer noted that for play areas it is important that access paths to play equipment is good; that there is adequate space between items of play equipment; that seats are provided nearby; that the equipment is designed to be accessible for a wide range of ability levels and so forth

Priorities for improvement

- Other than improving parks in general the most commonly chosen top priorities for young people (youth survey) were provision of skateboard, BMX and wheeled sports facilities and shelters and outdoor seated areas
- For youth and play organisations the most commonly highlighted priorities for improvement are youth shelter/hang out areas (56% highlight this as one of their top 3 priorities); and wheeled sports provision (48% similarly)
- Other common high priorities for youth and play organisations are play areas with challenging equipment for teenagers (44%) and MUGAs (36%)

Other Issues / General Observations

- Stakeholders highlight the importance of ensuring that when new play spaces and youth facilities are developed, or investment made into improvements, it is essential to ensure that ongoing budgetary provision is sufficient for maintenance
- Many town and parish councils have an interest in play and youth facilities and there is potential for them to take more responsibility for providing local play spaces
- There is potential for improved communication systems and partnership working between CWAC council and housing associations in relation to developing and improving play and youth facilities in the Borough
- Many stakeholders highlight the importance of involving children and young people in all aspects of play and youth facility provision e.g. location, the kind of provision most needed, design, access issues etc
- Children and teenagers play and hang out regularly “on the street”, on amenity and natural green space, near local shops, etc as well as on spaces specifically planned for play and youth facilities. The study should therefore highlight planning related issues aimed at making the wider open space and residential environment more child-friendly
- A key barrier to teenagers’ use of “public” open space is that they are often moved on by nearby residents and authorities such as the police. They need more tolerance and places recognised as “theirs”
- Play England provide excellent guidance on play and spatial planning; play space design; a Quality Assessment Tool for play spaces; and managing risk in play. Some of these could be adopted as guidance and Supplementary Planning Documents

7. Local provision examined – play spaces and outdoor youth facilities

7.1 Types of play spaces and youth facilities

The Play Strategy audited and mapped provision under two headings:

- **Children’s Play Space** – Play provision that cater for the needs of children up to and around 12 years. Currently the majority of these sites are comprised of "traditional" equipped play areas
- **Youth Play Space** - informal recreation opportunities for, broadly, the 13 to 19 age group, and which might include facilities like skateboard parks, basketball courts and ‘free access’ Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs)

In practice, there will always be some blurring around the edges in terms of younger children using equipment aimed for youths and vice versa.

It is also important to recognise that children and young people will play/‘hang out’ in almost all publicly accessible “space” ranging from the street, town centres and squares, parks, playing fields, “amenity” grassed areas etc. (as well as the more recognisable play and youth facility areas such as equipped playgrounds, youth shelters, BMX and skateboard parks, Multi-use Games Areas etc.). These types of open space provide informal play opportunities and are covered within the CWAC Open Space Study.

How the audit was carried out

‘Planning for Play’ highlights the importance of a comprehensive audit of both play spaces and play services in order to establish a “base line” from which to plan for future provision. The full audit is available as an excel spreadsheet and has been inputted onto the Borough Council’s GIS system.

In order to build up an accurate picture of current play provision in Cheshire West and Chester, the audit process involved:

- analysis of existing GIS data held by Cheshire West and Chester Council
- desktop mapping of play areas from aerial photography
- questionnaires to town and parish councils
- liaison with council officers

Site visits were undertaken at 290 children’s play areas and youth place areas/facilities to assess the existing and potential quality issues.

Sites were visited and a photographic record made of key features, along with a description of the play space/youth facility and recommendations for improvements. An assessment of the quality of the site was undertaken using the following criteria:

- Play Value
- Management and maintenance
- Accessibility
- Safety

Details of the quality scoring/ranking given to each play area/youth facility is detailed within section 5 of the Locality Area Frameworks. The quality audit database has been provided to the council as part of the Open Space Study. A summary of the play spaces (children and youth) included within the quality audit is also provided within the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks.

7.2 Overview of play provision

This section provides an overview of the existing level of provision of play space and youth facilities across the borough.

Provision of play spaces and youth facilities

There is a total of 200 children's play areas and 90 youth facilities/play areas within the borough.

They have been grouped into three categories of priorities for improvement (high, medium and low), based on the prioritisation process/scoring criteria set out within the Locality Frameworks (see section 7.5 below).

Large scale maps and a GIS database of sites have been provided as an electronic database to the council.

7.3 Spatial Planning Standards

Quantity

The Play Strategy adopts the quantity standards for play space developed in the Cheshire West and Chester Open Space Study. These are summarised in table 4.

Table 4: Quantity standards for play space (from Cheshire West and Chester Open Space Study)

Typology	Quantity standards (ha/1000 population)
Play Space (Children)	0.05
Play Space (Youth)	0.03

Current quantity of play space within the borough

The Open Spaces Study concluded that overall across the borough there is an under supply of both children's play space and youth play space. To address this identified shortfall provides a huge challenge within the context of current funding constraints.

Table 5 Existing supply of children's and youth play space across the borough

Typology	Existing Provision (Ha)	Existing Provision (Ha/1000)	Required Provision (Ha)	Required provision (Ha/1000)	Supply (Ha)	Supply (Ha/1000)	Overall Supply
Play Space (Children)	15.89	0.05	16.48	0.05	-0.59	0.00	UNDER SUPPLY
Play Space (Youth)	4.89	0.01	9.89	0.03	-5.00	-0.02	UNDER SUPPLY

Table 6 shows how the provision varies within individual wards. The majority of wards do not meet the quantity standard for youth play space. There are also many wards that fall below the quantity standard for children's play space.

Table 6 Existing Supply of children's and youth play space by ward against the CWAC Standard (ha)

WARD	Play Space (Children)	Play Space (Youth)
Blacon Ward	0.44	-0.24
Boughton Ward	-0.01	-0.16
Chester City Ward	-0.09	-0.1
Chester Villages Ward	-0.02	-0.12
Davenham and Moulton Ward	-0.33	-0.31
Dodleston and Huntington Ward	0.62	0.1

Ellesmere Port Town Ward	-0.15	0.02
Elton Ward	0.16	-0.11
Farndon Ward	0.01	-0.08
Frodsham Ward	-0.15	-0.04
Garden Quarter Ward	-0.09	-0.01
Gowy Ward	0.09	-0.12
Grange Ward	-0.09	-0.07
Great Boughton Ward	0.17	0
Handbridge Park Ward	0.11	0.08
Hartford and Greenbank Ward	0.08	-0.22
Helsby Ward	-0.16	-0.13
Hoole Ward	0	0.04
Kingsley Ward	0.16	-0.11
Lache Ward	-0.23	-0.08
Ledsham and Manor Ward	-0.39	-0.23
Little Neston and Burton Ward	-0.16	-0.24
Malpas Ward	-0.06	-0.07
Marbury Ward	0.29	-0.18
Neston Ward	0.04	0.01
Netherpool Ward	0.12	-0.07
Newton Ward	-0.36	0.05
Parkgate Ward	-0.11	-0.11
Rossmore Ward	-0.09	-0.07
Saughall and Mollington Ward	-0.07	-0.12
Shakerley Ward	0.4	-0.13
St Pauls Ward	0.02	-0.15
Strawberry Ward	-0.25	-0.15
Sutton Ward	-0.15	-0.23
Tarporley Ward	-0.17	-0.12
Tarvin and Kelsall Ward	-0.15	-0.2
Tattenhall Ward	-0.17	-0.04
Upton Ward	-0.21	-0.24
Weaver and Cuddington Ward	-0.11	-0.19
Whitby Ward	-0.03	-0.09
Willaston and Thornton Ward	0.08	-0.11
Winnington and Castle Ward	-0.15	-0.17
Winsford Over and Verdin Ward	0.18	0.07
Winsford Swanlow and Dene Ward	-0.21	-0.21
Winsford Wharton Ward	0.45	-0.08
Witton and Rudheath Ward	0.31	-0.16

Quality

The Open Spaces Study makes reference to Play England guidance on play provision which suggests that the following range of provision should be aimed for in urban areas:

- A** Door-step spaces close to home - these may simply be small areas of public playable open space rather than designated equipped play areas
- B** Local play spaces – larger areas within easy walking distance specifically designed for play
- C** Neighbourhood spaces for play – larger play spaces within walking distance incorporating outdoor youth play provision
- D** Destination/family sites – accessible by bicycle, public transport and with car parking.

Moving forward, Play England would like their new Design Guide; *'Design for Play'* to be referenced and added as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in standard configuration. Disability access is also an important issue for Play England and they would like local authorities to adopt the KIDS¹¹ publication; *'Inclusion by Design'* as an SPD¹².

Play England also highlight a potential need for a different approach for smaller settlements and rural areas where the doorstep, local, neighbourhood, and destination hierarchy is unlikely to be appropriate.

The Play Strategy adopts specific design quality and inclusivity guidance to clarify the quality standards established in the Open Spaces Study: *See Section 9 below.*

The Play Strategy audit revealed that while most play equipment across the borough is well maintained and in fairly good condition, there is a large variation in the quality of play space in terms of size, design quality and play value.

A summary of the play spaces (children and youth) included within the quality audit is provided within the Locality Area Frameworks.

Access

The Play Strategy adopts the access standards for play spaces and youth facilities set out in the Open Spaces Study as summarised in Table 7 below:

¹¹ KIDS, is a charity which in its 40 years, has pioneered a number of approaches and programmes for disabled children and young people.

¹² Play England have also developed a *'Quality Assessment Tool'* which can be used to judge the quality of individual play spaces.

Table 7: Cheshire West and Chester Open Space Study - Access Standards for children and youth play space

Typology	Access standard
Play Space (Children)	480 metres or 10 minutes' walk time
Play Space (Youth)	600 metres or 12-13 minutes' walk time

Analysis of access to play spaces and youth facilities needs to be considered at local level and this analysis is included in the Locality Area Frameworks.

7.4 Play provision in rural areas - standards and reasonable levels of provision

The Play Strategy also acknowledges the views of Play England and Fields in Trust who note that while the quantity and access thresholds within spatial planning standards work well for cities, towns and larger villages they are not always so of direct help to parish councils and local organisations looking to address the need/aspiration for play and outdoor youth spaces in small rural parishes

Small rural parishes need a different approach as many simply do not have the required population for the application of the above standards to meet children and young people's need for local play space. However, children and young people within these areas still need access to play spaces.

These issues are taken into account in the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks which, for rural areas, suggest a reasonable level of play provision for smaller parishes to aim for, appropriate to population size (these suggested levels of provision complement and remain consistent with the local standards of the Open Spaces Study).

It is important to note that the "reasonable levels of provision" approach used in the rural locality frameworks is a strategic means of identifying how provision could be prioritised and not a spatial "standard" for provision.

In addition, practical solutions to transport to facilities out of small settlements and outreach programmes can facilitate access to play opportunities for smaller settlements.

Application of spatial planning standards

It is worth, finally, noting the need for flexibility, care and oversight in relation to the application of spatial planning standards. If the quantity and access elements of standards are applied too rigidly without due consideration of the quality element the approach can have certain disadvantages. For example, the process:

- May be inflexible and not take local circumstances into account
- May be difficult to apply in areas where land uses are largely fixed

- May be applied automatically without checking against local needs or wishes. It may not involve adequate local participation
- May discourage creativity
- May not fully take into account some important factors (such as location)

The approach taken in the Play Strategy aims to address these risks by placing emphasis on the role of local consultation within the recommended play space improvement process. It is important in all cases to fully embrace community consultation, providing sufficient flexibility to ensure that provision is in line with the needs and aspirations of local children, young people, and residents.

The Play Strategy provides additional guidance and clarification of the Quality element of the Open Spaces Study standards which minimise the potential risks noted above. This could involve, for example, a greater emphasis upon planning for playable space through landscaping and imaginative design, rather than simply providing formal play equipment; or developing locally designed meeting places for young people rather than off-the-shelf youth shelters (in an appropriate location as determined in liaison with young people).

7.5 Prioritisation of Play Improvement Projects - Locality Play Improvement Frameworks

Locality play improvement frameworks

The framework documents provide a valuable evidence based resource that can be used by all partners with an interest in play and youth facilities. The frameworks list all designated play spaces and youth facilities within the locality i.e. those managed by the borough council, town and parish councils, housing associations, recreation trusts etc. In addition they provide a strategic play profile for the locality; and a guide to making prioritising choices in relation to potential improvement works.

Prioritisation framework

'Planning for Play' suggests that prioritisation for play space improvements should be based on an objective assessment to determine where improvements are most needed. The strategy follows this guidance by applying needs criteria to all sites (the criteria were developed following consultation via four locality area play workshops)¹³.

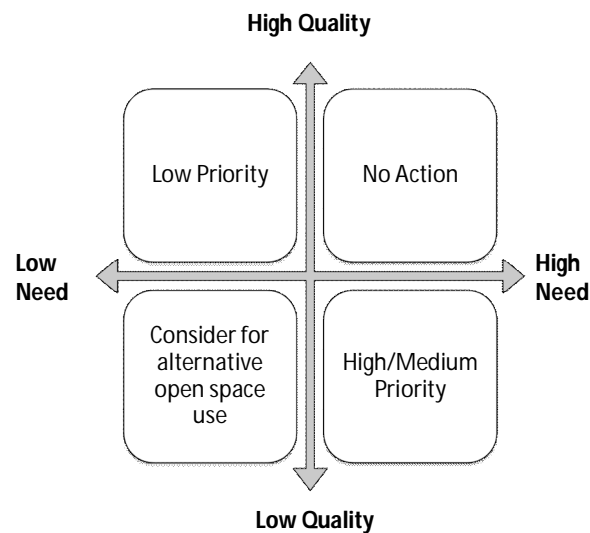
The criteria are based on:

- Current quality of sites and their potential for improvement
- Proximity/access to other play areas; and proximity to community facilities
- Demographics e.g. numbers of children and young people in the area/catchment

¹³ Full details of the criteria and the rationale for their selection can be found in Appendix 5

- Child health and wellbeing
- Levels of child/youth deprivation
- Geographical barriers to play - rural access

The principal behind the prioritisation approach is illustrated by the diagram below.



As a result of this process the framework categorises all sites in the locality under four broad headings:

- High priority for improvement
- Medium priority for improvement
- Low priority – no significant improvement action needed
- Consider alternative open space use

It is important to understand that the latter option refers to the specific designation as a play area meaning that the space could be considered for other uses or be adapted as unequipped playable space where it may well provide useful "doorstep" type provision.

Why a Framework?

It is called a framework document rather than a plan because it does not aim to produce a prescriptive play area delivery plan that partners must follow; rather it provides evidence that partners can use in reviewing, developing and implementing their own individual delivery plans.

The framework simply provides an overview of all sites in the locality area and applies objective needs based criteria to all those sites - to arrive at the strategically determined site categorisation classifications.

How can it be used?

Some examples are provided below:

- As a reference in relation to developing or reviewing individual partners' delivery plans
- Reference to the Framework can help partners to decide which of many potential improvement projects could be most effectively targeted in relation to need and external funding bids
- Where sites are identified as priorities in the Framework this identification, along with providing details of the objective means by which they were highlighted, will add significant weight to any potential funding bids
- It can help partners to decide which projects to focus resources on in terms of further investigation and in relation to providing advice and guidance to local community play space initiatives
- If there are a high number of small poor quality sites in an urban area, say, the Framework's identification of potential sites for alternative open space use can help in deciding options for the future e.g. to consider the viability of some sites and consider the option of providing a smaller number of accessible higher quality sites
- By reference to the External Funding Appendix 2 to check if this includes potential external funding sources that could be applied for

The Play Strategy recognises that in terms of the different partners' own delivery plans there are key additional practical factors that need to be considered, most notably in relation to the availability of capital funding and management/maintenance sustainability¹⁴.

In practice this may mean that in certain circumstances the strategic priority classification will take second place to practical achievability. To illustrate by way of some examples:

- A site that is identified as a medium strategic priority may in practice have attracted capital or S106 funding and demonstrable sustainability that makes it's improvement achievable. This project is therefore included in the partner's delivery plan
- A strategically identified high priority site is able to secure capital/S106 funding but cannot demonstrate ongoing sustainability. This project is not included in the partner's delivery plan (until the sustainability issue is overcome)
- A site that is identified as a medium priority has strong active community support including a commitment to raise capital funds and to demonstrate long-term sustainability. This project is added to the partner's delivery plan

¹⁴ This relates primarily to the need to be able to show that there is sufficient capital funding to implement the scheme; and that there is also a clear and robust plan to demonstrate how the play area will be maintained in the future e.g. is there confirmed revenue funding sufficient to maintain the site long term; a long term commuted sum from a developer ongoing community commitment to manage the site etc.

8. Working together – partnerships – roles and responsibilities

8.1 Introduction

The potential for building on existing partnership work in relation to developing, managing and maintaining play spaces and youth facilities; and for the implementation and monitoring of the play strategy has been highlighted in much of the play strategy consultation.

Some of the key players are:

1. Cheshire West and Chester Council - various departments
2. Town/parish councils and local recreation trusts
3. Housing Associations
4. Strategic voluntary sector organisations
5. Local voluntary groups
6. Housing Developers (Play Area Management)

8.2 Current roles

A summary of the various roles and function of the above in relation to play are noted in the table below:

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Department	Key Functions re Play space and outdoor Youth Provision
Place Operations	Overall Operational management, operational maintenance and health and safety role for Borough Council play areas and where appropriate under contract, maintenance and health/safety inspection role for other play areas . Advice to local groups and play space initiatives. Developing the Council's Play Strategy and its monitoring/review
Total Environment	In partnership with Council's Spatial Planning Team, Strategic support role: assistance with improvement programmes; and planning development work e.g. S106/CIL – Advising and monitoring developer play provision whether it be on-site or off-site contributions, informal open spaces and playing pitches and liaison with Place Operations. Wider Local Plan Policy, Other Strategy input, e.g. Playing Pitch Strategy, Facilities Strategy, Rights of Way Improvement Plan. TE also provide design services as a delivery function.
Locality Teams	Local contact/engagement, support, signposting, funding advice and community consultation in relation to play spaces and youth facilities. Ward Plan development and monitoring – linking with play strategy and site projects/improvements. Member engagement.

Many other Borough Council services have links with play spaces and youth facilities including:

- Youth Services - mainly in relation to helping with consultation with young people
- Children's services - in relation to preschool age play in particular
- Education and schools - in relation to community use of play areas, MUGAs, pitches etc. and engagement with schools to assist with local school community consultation
- Spatial Planning - planning policy and development control - open space play area standards and planning applications – on-going co-ordination of S106 for Play Provision with Total Environment Team. Local Plan link
- Regeneration teams - in relation to new areas of development, funding opportunities, planning for play and open spaces –engagement with Parish and Town Councils and Localities Teams, community consultation
- Community Safety wardens and park rangers - engagement with adults, children and young people; support with community consultation
- Legal and regulatory services e.g. potential asset transfer of play spaces to parish councils, recreation trusts etc. Dog Control Orders (Review 2017)

Town/parish councils and recreation trusts

Many play areas and youth facilities are owned and/or managed by town and parish councils, particularly in the rural areas; and some are managed by local recreation trusts (often in close contact with their town or parish council).

Many of these sites are managed and maintained with little or no contact with the Borough Council. However with the development of the Borough Council Locality Teams there is an increasing level of communication with town and parish councils, leading to greater calls for technical and funding advice particularly in relation to the potential development of new or refurbished play spaces and youth facilities.

The Council Plan notes that the Borough Council will "support Town and Parish Councils and community groups to take on local services and assets that contribute to clean attractive neighbourhoods where appropriate"¹⁵.

As regards play spaces there is therefore potential, where appropriate, for town and parish councils entering into dialogue with the Borough Council to consider taking additional responsibility for the ownership and/or management of Borough Council play and youth facilities situated within the parish.

It should also be noted that some Town and Parish Councils are more proactive than others and this largely depends on levels of resources, expertise and funding.

¹⁵ The Council Plan 2016-20 - Page 22 - What we will do to make a difference - bullet point 7.

Housing Associations

There are a number of housing associations working within Cheshire West and Chester of which two, Weaver Vale and Muir, manage some local play areas/youth facilities. In addition, there have been discussions between the Borough Council and Sanctuary Housing/Avenue Services relating to the possibility of Sanctuary taking responsibility for some play and youth facilities within the estates they manage.

Some of the Housing Associations have their own play development plans and policies.

All the housing associations take an interest in the availability of play and youth facilities for children and young people within or adjacent to their estates and many have community/resident liaison officers who engage with children and young people. It is important that these officers liaise closely with Borough Council Officers in terms of looking at partnerships and sharing of resources/expertise/best practice.

Strategic Voluntary Sector Organisations

The two main strategic voluntary sector organisations with specific interests in developing play and youth facilities are Groundwork and Mersey Forest, both of these have well established relationships with the Borough Council. Mersey Forest have particular expertise in the development and delivery of well designed natural play spaces; and Groundwork provide a wide range of services from the production of local play strategies to the development and project management of specific play area improvements. Mersey Forest are currently working in partnership with the Borough Council's Total Environment Team

Active Cheshire have also expressed support in relation to the development of play spaces and youth facilities in relation to their "Great Outdoors" strand of interest. They see the development of such informal open access outdoor facilities as being in direct support of their aim to encourage more children and young people to take part in regular exercise (in relation to tackling childhood obesity and improving health and wellbeing).

Local voluntary groups

There are a number of local voluntary groups with an interest in play areas and youth facilities such as "Friends of" groups, community/residents organisations and play/youth organisations. These are active to varying degrees but can be extremely valuable in many ways e.g. helping with local consultation, taking on practical maintenance tasks, reporting damage to play spaces, feeding into possible designs for play areas, submitting funding bids to sources not open to the Borough Council etc. The Borough Council encourages the formation of Friends of Groups to supplement Council Play Area Management.

8.3 Future roles and partnership development

Broadly speaking stakeholders indicated general satisfaction with the extent of partnership working but that there were opportunities for development and further clarification of roles and responsibilities. Some suggestions for the future are noted below:

Internal Borough Council roles

Department	Clarification/development of role
Place Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall management, including responsibility for maintenance and Health and Safety of Borough Council play areas • Delivery of the Borough Council's Play Improvement Plan from 2016 onwards. • Responsible overall for delivery and monitoring and review of the Play Strategy in liaison with partners (internal and external) • Annual review of the Play Improvement Plan in relation to Borough Council sites (taking into account the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks). • Liaison with and advice to town/parish councils, community organisations/Friends of Groups in relation to Borough Council Sites. • Technical advice re play as requested from Locality Teams, TE and direct from other partners e.g. parish councils. (new and existing sites)
Total Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of Green Infrastructure strategies such as the Playing Pitch Strategy; the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP); Outdoor Facilities Strategy and the Open Spaces Audit in partnership with Spatial Planning Team (Local Plan Process) • TE liaise with Planning in relation to the development and implementation of S106 agreements and the allocation of commuted sums arising from residential development. TE to provide regular monitoring information on new developments in relation to play, open space and playing pitch provision to inform annual reviews • TE provide advice and guidance to non-borough council managed play spaces in relation to new facilities and refurbishments • Assisting with the delivery & implementation of improvement schemes eg design services • TE are currently progressing collaborative working with Mersey Forest with the view to providing an extensive range of products and services relating to the natural and built environment. This will encompass outdoor play, youth provision and natural play
Locality Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local point of contact with play space managers and community organisations in their locality (Borough Council and partners) • Support to TE and Place Operations in relation to local consultations on play space and youth facilities • Co-ordination and signposting role between local partners and other Council services involved with play. • Support with the regular review of the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks in liaison with internal and external partners • Provide advice and guidance to local partners and community organisations e.g. funding opportunities re potential play area improvements

Other council services with interests in play will continue to be involved as appropriate.

Schools

Many stakeholders highlighted the potential for greater community use of outdoor spaces on school sites for play and youth activity. Some schools have play areas on site, others have MUGAs or artificial turf pitches but relatively few of these facilities are available for community use after school, at weekends or during school holidays. Schools often cite health and safety, security and caretaking issues as reasons why their facilities cannot be made more accessible for community use.

The Play Strategy suggests that schools review the potential for community use of outdoor play and youth facilities and work in partnership with the borough council and other providers to provide greater community use.

Schools can also play a useful role in relation to local consultation relating to nearby play areas and outdoor youth facilities and related user surveys. Greater links with schools in terms of securing school community volunteers to work on play improvement projects, whether it be consultation and eco related work, i.e. planting and opportunities to tie in with curricular study.

Town/parish councils and recreation trusts

Potential options include:

- Further development of partnership links re play between Town/parish Councils and Recreation Trusts and the Borough Council locality teams
- Potential for working together to jointly commission services such as play area improvements, grounds maintenance, play area inspections and insurance
- Town/Parish Councils and Recreation Trusts to use the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks to review improvement delivery plans and to support funding bids and to ensure continuity with adjacent provision by others
- Some Town/Parish Councils and Recreation Trusts may consider whether they wish to enter dialogue with the Borough Council in relation to taking on responsibility for managing local play spaces and youth facilities currently managed by the Borough Council

Housing associations

Potential options include:

- Potential for further developing partnership working with the Borough Council to improve play spaces and youth facilities within or adjacent to their housing areas

- Housing Associations can use the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks to review improvement delivery plans and to support funding bids to ensure continuity with adjacent provision by others
- Some Housing Associations may consider whether they wish to enter dialogue with the Borough Council in relation to taking on responsibility for managing local play spaces and youth facilities currently managed by the Borough Council

Strategic voluntary sector organisations

Potential options include:

- Further development of partnership working between Mersey Forest and the Borough Council relating to play spaces that are suitable for a "natural play" approach to design
- Groundwork offer a wide range of services in relation to play, providing opportunities for partners such as town and parish councils to work with them on strategic analyses of provision and/or specific play area improvement programmes
- Active Cheshire may be able to work with the Borough Council and local partners in relation to developing child and young people participation programmes utilising outdoor play and youth facility sites
- The Strategic Voluntary Sector Organisations may be able to advise partners and community organisations in relation to potential funding programmes, and provide support in putting bids together

Local voluntary groups

Potential options include:

- Further developing the roles of such groups (if support is provided by the Borough Council or partners re capacity building): e.g. helping with local consultation, taking on practical maintenance tasks, reporting damage to play spaces, and feeding into possible designs for play areas
- Some funding streams are open to community and voluntary groups that are not available to local authorities. With support, local organisations could be encouraged to apply for appropriate funding as part of a play area improvement project
- Some local voluntary groups may consider whether they wish to enter dialogue with the Borough Council in relation to taking on responsibility for managing local play spaces and youth facilities currently managed by the Borough Council

9. Good practice and guidance – quality and risk

This section provides guidance in 3 key areas:

- Play space design
- Risk and challenge
- Inclusion

9.1 Play space design principles - spatial planning quality standards

The Play Strategy adopts the Play England publication 'Design for Play: a guide to creating successful play spaces' as its guide to good practice in play space design. The full document can be downloaded from <http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/design-for-play.aspx>

The Play Strategy recommends that this guidance is used as part of the quality element of the local spatial planning standards proposed in the 2016 Open Spaces Study.

This resource provides detailed guidance on all aspects of design as well as recommending a 6 stage "design cycle" process:

The design cycle:

- Prepare
- Design
- Construct
- Use
- Maintain
- Review

The key design principles:

Creating inspiring places for play

Creating natural and imaginative play settings requires a fresh design-led approach to commissioning, based on ten principles, encapsulated in one golden rule.

The golden rule

A successful play space is a place in its own right, specially designed for its location, in such a way as to provide as much play value as possible.

The ten design principles

Successful play spaces should:

1. Be site-specific - designed for their site
2. Be well located
3. Make use of natural elements
4. Provide a wide range of play experiences

5. Be accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
6. Meet community needs (based on consultation)
7. Have an element of flexibility built into the layout e.g. can be used by varying ability and age groups in different ways
8. Build in opportunities to take risks and challenges
9. Be sustainable, and appropriately maintained
10. Allow for change and evolution

Sustainability

It is important to emphasise that sustainability and maintenance considerations are a key element of the above design principles. For example, this means that the site specific "golden rule" may take into account that some urban sites may be particularly prone to vandalism and a key consideration may be the robustness of play equipment provided.

9.2 Designing for inclusive play - spatial planning quality standards

The Play Strategy adopts the guidance provided in 'Inclusion by Design - a guide to creating accessible play and childcare environments' published by KIDS - the disabled children and young people's charity.

The Play Strategy recommends that this guidance is used as part of the Quality element of the local spatial planning standards proposed in the 2016 Open Spaces Study.

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act aims to ensure that all those who are disabled have the same access to public services (and by implication, public parks and playgrounds) as those who are not disabled.

Successful play spaces should, as far as is reasonably possible, offer the same quality and extent of play experience to disabled children and young people as is available to those who are not disabled, whilst accepting that not all equipment can be completely accessible to everyone.

'Inclusion by Design' sets out the following six principles, established by the Disability Rights Commission, which form the foundation of inclusive design:

1. Ease of use
2. Freedom of choice and access to mainstream activities
3. Diversity and difference
4. Legibility and predictability
5. Quality
6. Safety

The principles are also informed by an understanding of a **process** of inclusive design - a process that:

- Begins at the beginning
- Sees the design and management of the built environment as inextricable partners
- Takes account of user experience at every stage of the development
- Is equally applicable to the development of landscapes, structure, materials and finishes, fixtures and fittings, management and information
- Brings together functional and aesthetic considerations
- Is regularly monitored and evaluated

'Inclusion by Design' also looks at how these principles have been applied in practice on a number of sites.

Most importantly, play space should feel welcoming to all children. The publication 'Can Play, Will Play' shows that social barriers to disabled access can be greater than physical ones.

There are now a number of specially designed pieces of 'accessible' equipment that are often popular with both disabled and non-disabled children, however equipment which is specially designed for disabled children can encourage segregation so should be used with care.

Equipment allowing flexible use, such as a swing, which can take many forms, or a 'wobble dish', can be preferable. 'Inclusion by Design' offers more detailed advice.

9.3 Managing risk in play provision

The Play Strategy adopts the High Level Statement from the Play Safety Forum and Health and Safety Executive : 'Children's play and leisure: Promoting a balanced approach'.

It also adopts the associated detailed approach recommended in the Play England Document 'Managing Risk in Play Provision: implementation guide'. This is endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive. The full guide can be downloaded at:

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/managing-risk-in-play-provision-implementation-guide.aspx>

Issues relating to how to manage risk in relation to the provision and management of play spaces are often a key concern of owners and managers of play spaces. It is therefore important to ensure that the foundation of any recommended approach is well researched and justified.

The general approach recommended in the statement in relation to balancing risk and the benefits of providing challenging play opportunities is summarised in the key "High Level Statement" jointly adopted by the national Play Safety Forum and the Health and Safety Executive.

High Level Statement from the Play Safety Forum and Health and Safety Executive : Children's play and leisure: promoting a balanced approach (2012 - in full)

1. Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. The reasons for these misunderstandings are many and varied. They include fears of litigation or criminal prosecution because even the most trivial risk has not been removed. There can be frustration with the amounts of paperwork involved, and misunderstanding about what needs to be done to control significant risks.
2. The purpose of this statement is to give clear messages which tackle these misunderstandings. In this statement, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) makes clear that, as a regulator, it recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities.
3. HSE fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, whilst well-managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential danger.
4. HSE wants to make sure that mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities.
5. This statement provides all those with a stake in encouraging children to play with a clear picture of HSE's perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's primary interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law and our investigations are targeted at these issues.

Recognising the benefits of play

Key message: 'Play is great for children's wellbeing and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool'.

6. HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.
7. Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe

and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.

8. Striking the right balance does mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities.
- Focusing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user.
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity.
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed.
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full.

9. Striking the right balance does not mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced.
- Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket.
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities.
- Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment.
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen.

What parents and society should expect from play providers

Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork'.

10. Play providers should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

11. They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

12. It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- The beneficial aspects of play – and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge – are not unnecessarily reduced
- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful

- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication 'Managing Risk in Play Provision: implementation guide' which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. **HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.**

If things go wrong

Key message: 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion'.

14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.

15. In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility, and cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.

9.4 Playable Space

Children and young people should be able to play freely in their local neighbourhoods. Providing play opportunities is as much about creating general public space that offers play opportunities, as it is about designing and developing designated play spaces.

What is 'playable' space?

Playable space is one expression of 'shared' public space, which meets the needs of different people at the same time. Support for playable spaces can greatly extend the range of play opportunities offered to children and can be highly cost effective. A positive attitude towards children and young people and their play is a key feature of good playable spaces, and helps create a more child-friendly society.

What characterises playable space?

Good playable spaces are welcoming to children and young people. Children and young people need to feel welcome in playable spaces. Most public open spaces and parks have enormous potential for play and children and young people should be encouraged and supported in playing in these spaces. The use of, for example 'No ball games' and 'Keep off the grass' signs should be routinely questioned and avoided unless there are strong safety reasons for their use. The assumption that most structures should be designed with

- Good playable space can include informal play features
- Good playable space should be monitored for unexpected hazards
- Good playable space is shared space, which respects the needs of all users

Public space is generally shared space and the different groups of users may have differing needs for the way the space is designed. Often it is possible to meet many of these different needs by careful design that clarifies the potential use.

9.5 Play equipment, natural play and boundaries/fencing

Play equipment

Children really enjoy using play equipment and all the challenges it offers. Playground equipment is particularly good at providing for more active play, including movement such as climbing, swinging, sliding and rotating, which are not easy to provide through other means.

Good play spaces will provide a setting which enhances equipment and makes it even more fun to use. The presence of play equipment signals that children are welcome and that their play is encouraged and supported.

Questions about play equipment

- What play experiences do we want the equipment to offer?
- How will the equipment attract and engage disabled children?
- Are there any ways the flexibility of use can be extended?
- Is there scope for improving existing equipment, or its setting, to provide greater play value?

Careful choice is required in order to get equipment that offers a range of play opportunities and can be used flexibly by children of different ages and interests. When buying unfamiliar equipment it helps to get an understanding of its play value and potential if the designer and commissioner visit sites where it is already in use and can see how the equipment is being used by children. Equipment manufacturers can also advise on the best types of

equipment for different play experiences and many are keen to try new designs and combinations of equipment.

The Association of Play Industries (API) is the trade association of equipment suppliers and manufacturers. Members of the API have been checked for reliability and offer a wide variety of types of products, as well as design advice. Manufacturers should be able to help the designer understand the role of industry standards, working with the designer on a risk/benefit assessment, especially when items in a play space do not comply strictly with the standards or are not covered by them.

The design-led approach to play space development helps ensure that each play space is unique, sometimes also including structures and equipment that are 'non-prescriptive' in their design, allowing for flexible use and creative, imaginative play.

Things to remember in choosing equipment

- Locate equipment carefully in its setting as the right setting will enhance a piece of equipment considerably. Use the spaces between equipment positively
- Include some equipment which can be used flexibly and is 'non-prescriptive' in its use
- Choose equipment which helps make the play space inclusive: hammock swings, 'accessible roundabouts' and equipment which accommodates companion or helper, such as wide slides or big circulation platforms
- Ensure that final equipment choices have been subject to local consultation

Natural Play

Not all designated play spaces need traditional fixed play equipment. When thinking of site specific design, landscaping and the inclusion of natural elements such as boulders, tree trunks and mounds can enhance play spaces. Natural play design can fit well within the wider open space and increase the scope for creative play and imaginative games.

Natural playable space can also be encouraged within country parks, nature areas etc, where the provision of traditional play equipment may be regarded as inappropriate.

Natural play design can be suitable for both urban and rural settings but careful consideration needs to be made in relation to sustainability and maintenance.

Boundaries and fencing

The decision about whether or not to put a fence or boundary round a play space will depend on many factors specific to the location and potential use of each site. Fenced boundaries around play spaces tend to make them feel segregated from their surroundings and there is a growing view that the presence of fencing can discourage some children from using the play space.

Fencing can also imply that this is where children are meant to be – and that they only belong here, rather than elsewhere in the public domain. Internal fencing which separates different age groups is rarely needed and the removal of this will usually improve the feeling of the play space.

On the other hand, although there is no legal requirement or recommendation for fencing in industry standards, a barrier may sometimes be desirable. Parents and carers – especially of younger children – may appreciate the sense of security which a fenced boundary creates to keep their children safe from straying outside the play space or from dogs. However, there may be other more satisfactory ways of creating boundaries that add to the play value of the space and make it feel more pleasant to use. Planting a hedge; creating a change in level; siting the whole space in a shallow hollow in the ground; surrounding it with a low wall where people can also sit; the possibilities are numerous.

Though fences can be effective in keeping dogs out, on some sites owners have even taken advantage of the fencing to let their dogs run free inside the play spaces; on one site in east London, the training of fighting dogs inside play spaces was stopped quickly by the removal of the boundary fencing.

In many locations it should be possible to adopt a much more positive attitude to the management of dogs, than trying to fence them out.

Questions about fencing:

- Does the site really need to be fenced in? If so – what is the purpose of the fence?
- Is a fence necessary or might another type of boundary be effective?
- What type of boundary would add play value and complement the look of the setting?
- How could the presence of dogs be dealt with positively on the site?

The use and type of gates are also important considerations. Some play space inspectors recommend not using gates unless these are essential, as self-closing hinges can cause accidents.

Many older play spaces are located in the middle of an open space, surrounded only by a bare fenced boundary, with no tree or shrub planting. Sometimes the most useful way of improving an existing play space like this is to make improvements to its setting, especially the boundary treatment, rather than making changes to the play space itself.

In locations where there is a busy road or other potential hazard, or where the space is catering for younger children or those who find it difficult to stay in one place and may be in danger if they do not, fencing or secure boundaries may be essential, but it is still possible to design this in a way that suits both the site and the needs of the children.

10. The Play Strategy Action Plan and Locality Play Improvement Frameworks

10.1 The Play Strategy Action Plan

The Action Plan covers broad strategic actions relating to the Tier 1 Play Strategy. The Locality Play Improvement Frameworks supply detailed evidence in relation to the development of site-specific options for new and improved play and outdoor youth facilities at local delivery plan level.

The plan is structured within the framework of the Council Plan and is focussed on two of its main themes - Thriving Residents and Thriving Communities. It shows how each action point links to specific priority objectives within those two themes.

The plan highlights specific tasks relating to each individual policy statement in the Play Strategy. For each action point a lead role is assigned thereby identifying responsibility for delivery.

The Action Plan is produced as a separate document and will need to be reviewed on an annual basis.

10.2 The Locality Play Improvement Frameworks

The framework documents provide a valuable evidence based resource that can be used by all partners with an interest in play and youth facilities. The frameworks list all designated play spaces and youth facilities within the locality i.e. those managed by the borough council, town and parish councils, housing associations, recreation trusts etc. In addition they provide a strategic play profile for the locality; and a guide to making prioritising choices in relation to potential improvement works.

The Play Strategy recommends that the Borough Council and strategy partners make use of the frameworks, particularly the prioritisation recommendations, to review their own detailed play space improvement delivery plans to take into account the framework findings.

10.3 Funding and delivery plans

In terms of the Action Plan and the implementation of any prioritised improvement projects identified through the frameworks, securing capital funding and ensuring sustainability are crucial. Each of the partners will therefore need to review their own internal levels of funding available for implementation of their own individual delivery plans.

In the case of the Borough Council this will include review of capital and revenue budgets, S106 funds, access to New Homes Bonus funds, potential for contributions from delegated council members budgets etc.

In many cases, for all strategy partners there will be a need to secure external funding to enable implementation. The strategy process therefore also included a review of potential external funding opportunities (Appendix 2).

This appendix supplies a list of potential funding opportunities relating to the development of play and youth facilities; and for playable space and natural play within parks, public open spaces etc. The material is split into funding available to differing sectors of partners involved in play developments namely:

- The Borough Council
- Town and parish councils
- Housing Associations
- Recreation Trusts
- Voluntary Sector/community organisations

There is considerable overlap in the sector lists as some funds are open to applications from more than one sector. Some sources, however, are only open to one sector. This reinforces the importance of partnership working as, for example, for a Borough Council owned site it may be possible for an associated voluntary sector organisation to apply for funds to implement a jointly agreed project.

In relation to funding it is also suggested that the Borough Council officers eg. Locality Teams, may be able to provide support to strategy partners in developing and submitting funding bids.

It is important to note that in terms of potential new play spaces covering gaps in provision, the current financial constraints within local authority budgets must be taken into account when looking at priority planning. For example, the Borough Council currently is not committing to any new play areas and is prioritising its existing play assets in terms of improvements.

10.4 Monitoring and review: the play partnership

In discussions with stakeholders and at the locality play workshops interest was expressed about the feasibility of developing ongoing networking groups to share information and experiences; and to review progress in relation to the Play Strategy and the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks.

There will also be a need to monitor and review the Play Strategy. It is therefore recommended that a play partnership be formed with a membership including the three

main Borough Council services noted above (Place Operations, Total Environment and Locality Teams) plus other council services as appropriate; and a range of representatives from the other partners noted e.g. town/parish council, housing associations, strategic voluntary sector organisations and local voluntary groups.

The play partnership would also be informed by existing support mechanisms within each of the four Localities to review and update the Play Strategy and the Locality Play Improvement Frameworks.

The Play Partnership is key to the successful delivery, monitoring and review of the Play Strategy up to 2020 and its establishment is a key short-term action of the Tier 1 Action Plan.