

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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meeting date: 24 AUGUST 2021  
title: PLAY AREAS  
submitted by: JOHN HEAP DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES  
principal author: MARK BEVERIDGE HEAD OF CULTURAL AND LEISURE SERVICES

### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide information about the state and range of equipment in the Council run play areas and to approve additional s106 funding for new equipment.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
- Community Objectives – To ensure a well-managed Council providing efficient services based on identified customer need.
  - Corporate Priorities – To help make people's lives healthier and safer.
  - Other Considerations – Improve existing play areas.

### 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Committee received a report in May outlining some of the issues with the play area stock. A request for further information was made and this report provides that.
- 2.2 Attached to this report is an inventory of the existing 18 Council play areas, showing the equipment at each site with an individual assessment and approximate age. There are more play areas in the Borough, beyond those owned by the Council, some the responsibility of a Town or Parish Council, others on private residential estates and the responsibility of the developers appointed management company, these are not included in this inventory.
- 2.3 As can be seen the range of equipment is very similar, as is the age and condition in each play area. It can be argued that our play areas, like many found up and down the country are formulaic, they lack real design and focus on (KFC), kit, fence and carpet (safety surface). This is primarily because when designing play areas, few local authorities can engage landscape architects to develop an area using the topography and natural features.
- 2.4 Fields in Trust first originated the following terms for play areas in the 1980s, when the need to provide detailed technical guidance for authorities on what exact provision should be made for children's play. The terms were widely adopted by both planners and play practitioners, and today are universally used when it comes to planning for play. These are not prescriptive definitions, thereby providing a degree of flexibility in play design.

#### a.LAP (Local Area for Play):

A small area of open space specifically designated and primarily laid out for very young children to play close to where they live i.e., within one minute's walking time. LAPs are designed to allow for ease of informal observation and supervision and primarily function to encourage informal play and social interaction for toddlers. The LAP requires no play equipment as such, relying more on demonstrative features indicating that play is positively encouraged.

b.LEAP (Locally Equipped Area for Play):

An area of open space specifically designed and laid out with features including equipment for children who are beginning to play independently. The number and nature of equipment and structures is a matter for local decision, though provision for a minimum number of six play experiences is recommended.

Play features including equipment are an integral part of the LEAP and the attractiveness of such spaces, though it is also important that the space can be used for physical activity and games. LEAPs can also include landscaped areas of play; containing little formal equipment but imaginatively designed and contoured, using as far as is possible natural materials such as logs or boulders which create an attractive setting for play.

c.NEAP (Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play):

This is an area of open space specifically designated, laid out and equipped mainly for older children but potentially with play opportunities for younger children as well. It can provide play equipment and a hard surface area for ball games or wheeled activities such as roller skating or cycling. It may provide other facilities such as a ramp for skateboarding, a rebound wall, and a shelter for meeting and socialising. NEAPs can often be combined with LEAP provision.

- 2.5 The importance of play and recreation in the life of every child has long been acknowledged by the international community, as evidenced by the proclamation in the United Nations 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child: “The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation... society and the public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right” (art. 7). This was further strengthened in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which explicitly states in article 31 that “States, Parties recognize 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.”
- 2.6 Playgrounds are vital in providing spaces where children can express and challenge themselves, be active, experience risk and develop life skills to manage it all the while being as safe as necessary, though not as safe as possible. That is why boosting the appeal of playgrounds and play spaces, so children and their carers want to visit, is so important. RoSPA advocates that playground offer a more open-ended and stimulating experience, with attention paid to the quality and variety of play experiences on offer. Another term for this is “play value”. Play value and play safety go hand in hand.
- 2.7 Successful play spaces are not simply ordered from a catalogue put in the ground and left. They require careful thought and planning, continuing care and maintenance (Play England 2008).
- 2.8 Play value itself is based on 3 categories:
  - a. Physical play experiences
    - spinning
    - sliding
    - rocking
    - swinging
    - climbing
    - balancing
    - jumping and bouncing
    - walking, running and rolling
    - movement from wheelchair or other aid
  - b. Sensory play experiences

- Tactile, auditory, visual, interaction with natural features
- Auditory
- Visual
- Interaction with natural features

c. Social Play experiences

- Cooperative play and social interaction.
- Dramatic and imaginative play.

- 2.9 All 18 Council play areas do not provide the same play value, nor are they intended to do so. Some are small and serve the immediate area others are large and serve both a wider residential population as well as visitors. Some fall somewhere between the two.
- 2.10 The approach to risk is something which has been the subject of considerable debate in relation to play areas, one school of thought being to remove the level of risk as far as possible, leading to a sanitised approach to play provision. The other option is for there to be an acceptable degree of risk which allows children to develop an awareness and understanding that certain behaviours have consequences.
- 2.11 National guidance recommends that children over 5-year-old should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) every day and children under 5, that are able to walk unaided should be physically active for at least 3 hours throughout a day. Across England only 24% of girls and 32% of boys aged 2 to 15 years old are meeting these recommendations (UK Active).
- 2.12 A 2019 study showed that by the age of 11 children are doing 1 hours less physical activity than they were at age 6 (British Heart Foundation), allied to this is an increasing issue of unhealthy weight for young children as they move from primary school into senior schools. This has issues for their long-term physical and mental health.
- 2.13 There is a proven link between a lack of garden and obesity in children (BHF, 2015), showing the clear value of public open space to help people and families as a whole benefit from healthier happier children.
- 2.14 There is the potential for public open space including play areas to provide opportunities for social interaction for the wider community and supports the development of a greater sense of community spirit, promoting social cohesion.
- 2.15 Public open spaces have a vital role in the everyday lives of children and young people, especially as a place for meeting friends.
- 2.16 Play England has always advocated for all children to have access to the "three frees" in play – that is that play should be free of charge, where children are free to come and go and where they are free to choose what they do when they are there.
- 2.17 National planning policy framework, para 96 states the importance of high-quality open space and opportunities for sport and physical activity as important to the health of local communities.

### 3 ISSUES

- 3.1 The general stock of equipment and safety surfaces are ageing though still functional. However, the general appearance of much of the equipment gives the impression of decay and deterioration. As an example, at Procters Field, Whalley, the preparation and painting of one piece of equipment took 2 men, 4 days, if that were multiplied out across the 18 play areas and all the equipment, it can be seen the huge number of

days required to simply paint the existing stock. The replacement of one element of the multi-play unit which was vandalised as well as two of the safety surfaces under equipment and repairs to others amounted to approximately £11k. Few parents or casual observers would comprehend how such a sum could be spent yet no new items were added other than the replacement rope bridge, such is the cost of play equipment and the safety surfaces required. Ideally, equipment would be replaced every 8-10 years, though few councils are likely to have budget provision for that to occur.

- 3.2 Annually the Council has £40k allocated to the play areas which covers the maintenance issues arising from normal wear and tear as well as vandalism related repairs/replacements. This represents less than 10% of the purchase cost of the items in our play area inventory, excluding the installation and safety surface. Therefore, having a plan to renovate even one play area per year is not feasible and would require a substantial increase in the budget to achieve that. The route to that, if the Committee want to see improvement made across the play area stock, would be to include a programme in the next capital budget process to be assessed as part of the other competing priorities which the Council has for allocating funding to.
- 3.3 There are various pieces of legislation which the Council must comply with in providing and operating play areas, the most important is the Health and Safety Act 1974 and the subsequent amendments. This places a responsibility on the council to ensure that the equipment and the sites are area safe for people to use and staff to work in. Therefore, issues such as inspections and maintenance are a key element.
- 3.4 The inspection regime is based around Council staff carrying out a visual inspection monthly, with an operational inspection every three months. The latter involves a physical check of the equipment, e.g., bolts, fixings etc. These are all recorded. The inspection sheets have recently been updated and will be further refined when staff requalify for their inspection certificates in October. In addition to these inspections, if any reports of damage or vandalism are received then the specific site would be checked as necessary. The Council's insurers Zurich also carry out an annual inspection by their qualified inspector. Zurich will then provide the Council with their recommendations, which normally consist of suggestions for replacement of swing chains or wear and tear on an item which will need monitoring. There have been no major recommendations made recently. Normally, if a small item requires replacement, such as a springer, that would be covered by the annual budget, however if it was a substantial piece, an assessment would have to be made on whether the item was removed entirely or a smaller piece installed, depending on the budget available at the time.

#### 4. BUDGETS AND SPEND ON PLAY AREAS

- 4.1. The Council currently has a capital programme budget for Play Area Improvements as shown below.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Original Budget	40,000	45,000	45,000	46,000
Slippage or Budget Moved from 2020/21	56,500			
Additional Approval in Year: Longridge Kestor Lane site	30,000			
Additional Approval in Year: Clitheroe Castle site	32,660			

<b>Total Available Budget in Year</b>	<b>159,160</b>	<b>45,000</b>	<b>45,000</b>	<b>46,000</b>
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- 4.2. This budget provides for incremental improvements to the 18 play areas each year. In addition, the budget is used to deal with ad hoc equipment replacement which arises annually, maintenance and general wear and tear, plus dealing with vandalism
- 4.3. Should there be a more specific scheme required, outside this budget provision, a capital bid could be submitted for a future capital programme and this would be considered against what other priorities the Council faces for the budget available at that time.
- 4.4. Looking back over the past five years, the budgets and spend on the capital programme have been as shown below:

	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
Original Budget	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000
Slippage or Budget Moved from Previous Year	0	6,780	12,940	18,870	30,830
Additional Approvals in Year	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Available Budget in Year</b>	<b>40,000</b>	<b>46,780</b>	<b>52,940</b>	<b>58,870</b>	<b>70,830</b>
<b>Actual Spend</b>	<b>33,216</b>	<b>33,843</b>	<b>33,908</b>	<b>27,484</b>	<b>14,322</b>
<b>Variance (negative values are underspends)</b>	<b>-6,784</b>	<b>-12,937</b>	<b>-19,032</b>	<b>-31,386</b>	<b>-56,508</b>
Slippage or Budget moved to the Next Year	6,780	12,940	18,870	30,830	56,500

- 4.5. As members will see above, Covid-19 impacted on spend under the capital programme in 2020/21, but the unspent budget has been moved in to the 2021/22 financial year, so no budget has been lost.
5. SECTION 106 MONIES IN RESPECT OF OAKMERE HOMES DEVELOPMENT ON CHATBURN ROAD
- 5.1 The Council have received Section 106 monies of £17,940 in respect of the Oakmere Homes development on Chatburn Road. Under this agreement these monies are permitted to be used for play area improvements.
- 5.2 It is proposed to use these monies to carry out the installation of new equipment at the Highmoor Park and Highfield Road sites. It is hoped to complete this work at the same time as the other improvement work at Clitheroe Castle.
- 5.3 Should members agree to this proposal, then committee will need to refer this matter to Policy and Finance Committee for an additional approval to the capital programme under the play areas scheme. If approved this would increase the capital budget for play areas in 2021/22 to £177,100.

Originally relating to:	2021/22 Budget £
Play Area Improvements – In Year Allocation	40,000
Play Area Improvements for 2020/21 <i>(moved to 2021/22 at the time of setting the revised estimate for 2020/21)</i>	40,000
Play Area Improvements for 2019/20 <i>(Unspent slippage from the 2019/20 financial year)</i>	16,500
Additional Approval for Longridge Kestor Lane Site	30,000
Additional Approval for Clitheroe Castle Site	32,660
Proposed Additional Approval for Highmoor Park and Highfield Road sites	17,940
<b>Total Resources Available for Play Area Improvements</b>	<b>177,100</b>

## 6 RISK ASSESSMENT

### 6.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – The £17,940 is an additional sum from a s106 agreement to spend on the two play areas identified
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – All works will be procured in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure. Rules. Council officers would oversee the letting and monitoring of the tender.
- Political – None arising as a direct result of this report
- Reputation – The error that we made earlier this year in removing all the equipment from Whalley Woodland play area demonstrated clearly, by the vigorous local reaction, the importance to residents of the Council's play areas. Having taken a severe reputational hit, committee recovered by its agility in re-assessing priorities to re-equip that play area as quickly as it was possible to achieve. Committee may wish to bear this mind when deciding how best to proceed.
- Equality & Diversity – there is limited provision for children with a disability in the play areas the Council provides. The play industry now provides a range of pieces which can be accessed by all children as well providing specific pieces designed for wheelchairs for example.

## 7 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 7.1 Approve the additional capital bid of £17,940 for use at Highfield Road and Highmoor Park, to be funded from s106 contributions by Oakmere Homes, for the 2021/22 Capital Programme and refer this to Policy and Finance Committee for final approval.

MARK BEVERIDGE  
HEAD OF CULTURAL AND LEISURE SERVICES

JOHN HEAP  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

## RVBC PLAY AREA INVENTORY

Please note replacement cost is an approximate sum for purchase only. Installation and replacement of safety surface would need to be assessed for condition. The average price per m2 for wet pour is between £60 and £100 depending on whether the surface is replacing an existing one or is a new installation. (The price is for standard black only, not coloured surfacing)

PLAY AREA	EQUIPMENT NAME	APPROXIMATE AGE	FENCED AREA	CONDITION 1-5 (5 is new)	REPLACEMENT COST £	SAFETY SURFACE
<b>CLITHEROE</b>						
Castle Grounds BB7 1BA	Baby cradle swing x 2	15 yrs	Yes	3	1,500	Yes, under play items rest of surface is grass
	Play Panel	15 yrs		3	4,000	
	Balance log bar	20 yrs		3	1,000	
	Balance plastic blocks	20 yrs		3	1,500	
	Spin sit-in roundabout	20 yrs		3	1,500	
	Seesaw	20 yrs		3	1,700	
	Supa nova spinner	10 yrs		3	4200	
	Swing basket	15 yrs		3	8,000	
	Baby cradle swings x 2	25 yrs		2/3	1,500	
	Multi-play	10 yrs		2/3	20,000	
	Junior swings x 2	25 yrs		2	1,500	
	Junior swings x 2	25 yrs		2	1,500	
	Junior swings x 2	25 yrs		2	1,500	
	Swing frame no swings	25 yrs		1	1,500	
	Springer, vandalised.	5yrs		Taken out	2,000	
	Mini sit in roundabout	10 yrs		3	3,000	
	Springer	10 yrs		3	1.000	
Springer	5 yrs	3	1,000			
Multi-play	25 yrs	2	16,000			
Slide	25 yrs	3	7,000			
Colthirst (Salthill) BB7 2EJ	Multi-play	20 yrs	yes	2/3	10,000	Yes, under play items
	Springer	5yrs		3	1,000	
	Baby cradle swings x 2	20 yrs		2/3	1,500	
Edisford Riverbank BB7 3LA	Junior swings x 4	30 yrs	Yes	2/3	3,000	Yes, under play items Grass rest of area
	Multi-play	30 yrs		2/3	16,000	

PLAY AREA	EQUIPMENT NAME	APPROXIMATE AGE	FENCED AREA	CONDITION 1-5 (5 is new)	REPLACEMENT COST £	SAFETY SURFACE
Edisford Riverbank BB7 3LA	Junior Swings x 4	20 yrs	No	2/3	3,000	Yes under play items
Hawthorne Place BB7 2HU	Baby cradle swings x 2	15 yrs	yes	3	1,500	Yes, under play items rest grass
	Junior swings x 2	15 yrs		3	1,500	
	Small multi-play	15 yrs		3	16,000	
Highfield Road (Littlemoor) BB7 1LD	Multi-play	20 yrs	Yes	2/3	16,000	Yes, under most of the play items, excludes trim trail Rest grass
	Springer	10 yrs		3	1,000	
	Springer	5 yrs		3	1,000	
	Springer	8 yrs		3	1,000	
	Baby cradle swings x 2	15 yrs		3	1,500	
	Baby cradle swings x 2	15 yrs		3	1,500	
	Seesaw	15 yrs		3	1,500	
	Trim trail	15 yrs		3	5,000	
	Junior swings x 2 seats	20 yrs		2/3	1,500	
	Junior swings x 2 seats	20 yrs		2/3	1,500	
	Junior multi-play	20 yrs		2/3	20,000	
Highmoor Park	Seesaw	20 yrs	yes	2/3	1,700	Yes, under the play items, rest tarmac
	Junior Swings x 2	20 yrs		2/3	1,500	
	Multi-play	20 yrs		2/3	16,000	
	Baby cradle swings x 2	20 yrs		2/3	1,500	
Low Moor BB7 2NN	Baby cradle swing x 2	15 yrs	Yes	3	1,500	Yes, under the play items Rest grass
	Springer	10 yrs		3	1,000	
	Springer	5 yrs		3	1,000	
	Small roundabout	15 yrs		3	3,000	
	Seesaw	15 yrs		3	1,700	
	Multi-play	15 yrs		3	18,000	
	Junior swings x 2	15 yrs		3	1,500	



PLAY AREA	EQUIPMENT NAME	APPROXIMATE AGE	FENCED AREA	CONDITION 1-5 (5 is new)	REPLACEMENT COST £	SAFETY SURFACE
Henthorn Park BB7 2QB	Baby roundabout	15 yrs	yes	3	3,000	Yes, under most of the play items Some tarmac and rest grass
	Springer	5 yrs		3	1,000	
	Baby cradle swings x 2	20 yrs		2/3	1,500	
	Multi-play	20 yrs		2/3	20,000	
	Trim trail	20 yrs		2/3	2,000	
	Seesaw	20 yrs		2/3	1,700	
	Slide	20 yrs		2/3	5,000	
	Multi-play	20 yrs		2/3	10,000	
	Junior swings x 2	20 yrs		2/3	1,500	
Salthill BB7 1PE	Slide	18 yrs	yes	2/3	5,000	Yes, under some of the play items Rest grass
	Criss-cross logs	18 yrs		3	1,000	
	Balance bars	18 yrs		3	1,000	
	Little climber with ramp	18 yrs		3	1,500	
	Monkey bars	18 yrs		3	1,500	
	Little balance frame	18 yrs		3	1,000	
	Balance bars large	18 yrs		2/3	2,500	
	Wooden balance beams	18 yrs		3	1,500	
	Balance posts	18 yrs		3	2,000	
	Exercise kit	18 yrs		3	1,500	
	Climber	18 yrs		3	2,000	
	Exercise kit 2	15 yrs		3	1,000	
	Balance posts and wire walk	20 yrs		2/3	2,500	
	Climbing posts	20 yrs		3	2,000	

PLAY AREA	EQUIPMENT NAME	APPROXIMATE AGE	FENCED AREA	CONDITION 1-5 (5 is new)	REPLACEMENT COST £	SAFETY SURFACE
<b>WHALLEY</b>						
Procters Field BB7 9TH	Small multi-play	20 yrs	Yes	3	10,000	Yes, under the individual play items Rest grass
	Mini stand and twirl	8 yrs		3	2,000	
	Junior swings 2 bay, 4 seats	15 yrs		3	1,500	
	Swing basket	8 yrs		3	3,000	
	Springer	10 yrs		3	1,000	
	Mini slide unit	10 yrs		3	15,000	
	Baby cradle swings x 2	20 yrs		3	1,500	
	Multi-play	20 yrs		2/3	8,000	
		20 yrs		4	16,000	
Whalley Woodland BB7 9UL To be installed 23/08/21	2x Wooden Bench	New	No	5	£1,180	Bark chippings
	1x Double swing with flat seats	New		5	£1,660	
	1x Hammock Swing	New		5	£1,880	
	1x Scale swing	New		5	£6,600	
	1x Beetle bridge	New		5	£6,150	
	1x Dish roundabout	New		5	£1,920	
	1x Tarzan	New		5	£1,130	
	1x Storks Nest	New		5	£1,510	
	1x Scissors	New			£740	
Woodlands Park BB7 9UG	Baby cradle swings x 2	10 yrs	yes	4	1,500	Yes, under the individual play items Res grass
	Multi-play	7yrs		4	6,000	
	Springer	10 yrs		4	1,000	

PLAY AREA	EQUIPMENT NAME	APPROXIMATE AGE	FENCED AREA	CONDITION 1-5 (5 is new)	REPLACEMENT COST £	SAFETY SURFACE
<b>LONGRIDGE</b>						
Kestor Lane PR3 3JJ	Multi-play Trim trail Junior multi-play Junior swings x 2 Junior swings x 2 Junior swings x 2 Springer Teacup Springer Seesaw Baby cradle swings x 2 Baby cradle swings x 2	20 yrs 5 yrs 20 yrs 20 yrs 20 yrs 20 yrs 8 yrs 3 yrs 8 yrs 8 yrs 15 yrs 15 yrs	Yes	3 3 2/3 2 2/3 2/3 3 3 3 3 2/3 2/3	15,000 10,000 15,000 1,500 1,500 1,500 1,000 2,500 1,000 1,700 1,500 1,500	Yes, under the individual play items Rest grass
John Smiths PR3 3TQ	Multi-play Springer Balance beams Balanced steps Springer Multi-play pirate ship	15 yrs 15 yrs 15 yrs 15 yrs 15 yrs 7 yrs	Yes	2/3 3 3 3 3 3	17,000 1,000 1,500 1,500 1,000 25,000	Yes, whole site
Mardale PR3 3FQ	Junior swings x 2 Baby cradle swings x 2 Springer Springer Multi-play	15 yrs 15 yrs 15 yrs 15 yrs 15 yrs	Yes	3 3 3 3 3	1,500 1,500 1,000 1,000 16,000	Yes, under the individual play items, rest tarmac/grass
Redwood PR3 3HA	Junior swings x 2 Multi-play Baby cradle swings x 2	7 yrs 23 yrs 23 yrs	yes	3 2/3 2/3	1,500 10,000 1,500	Yes, under the individual play items rest grass

PLAY AREA	EQUIPMENT NAME	APPROXIMATE AGE	FENCED AREA	CONDITION 1-5 (5 is new)	REPLACEMENT COST £	SAFETY SURFACE
<b>BARROW</b>						
Washbrook BB7 9BP	Junior Swings x 2	15 yrs	yes	2/3	1,500	Yes, under the individual play items Rest grass
	Baby cradle swings x 2	15 yrs		2/3	1,500	
	Multi-play	15 yrs		2/3	10,000	
	Springer	15 yrs		3	1,000	
	Seesaw	15 yrs		3	1,700	
	Roundabout	8 yrs		4	2,500	
<b>MELLOR</b>						
Feildens Arms BB2 7PD	Baby cradle swing x 1	17 yrs		2/3	1,500	Yes, under the individual play items
	Wooden climber with slide	17 yrs		2/3	5,000	