



Consultation Draft

Play Strategy

2021 - 2026

Owner: Service Director - Leisure, Culture and Wellbeing

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FOREWORD

By Cllr Jill Mannion Brunt, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing



Chesterfield Borough Council has a proud history of supporting play opportunities across the borough. Despite the financial challenges faced by local authorities we have continued to invest in our play spaces as we recognised the value to our communities.

Play forms a vital part of a child's growth and development, not just their physical development but their social and cognitive development too. Children play in many ways and at many different times and places. For children and young people, play is more than just 'letting-off steam', it is what they do in their own time, for their own reasons.

In preparing this strategy, we have asked many children and young people and their parents and carers what barriers they face in accessing play spaces. We aim to reduce these barriers over the coming years with an emphasis on supporting those most in need, including children with disabilities and children in areas of deprivation with less life opportunities.

Our aim is to provide all children living and visiting Chesterfield access to good quality play spaces. The challenge in respect of play areas and play spaces is to make sure they deliver a good experience for their users. Children want play spaces they can enjoy and have fun safely. Adults want play spaces where children can develop physical and decision-making skills that will help them in all parts of their lives.

This strategy sets out the Council's commitment to making that a reality.

SECTION 1: Policy statement

1.1 Introduction

In order to be able to set out a plan to maintain and develop excellent play spaces we need to understand our current provision, its strengths and its limitations including the amount, location, quality and different types of play space. We must also be aware of the planning context so that new developments can have suitable facilities to help build new communities. The latest guidance and best practice will also be key in helping us to target resources in the locations most needing them.

Our Play Strategy establishes an understanding and ambition for Children's play in the borough from 2021 until 2026. A robust evidence base for the strategy has been drawn from national policies and initiatives, local consultation and analysis of existing play provision.

We recognise that children and young people are the experts on play and they often show great ingenuity in playing in many different and sometimes challenging circumstances. Throughout the development of this strategy we have listened to children, young people, parents, carers and the wider community to find out what is important to them in play provision and what the barriers are. We are making a commitment to continue this approach with a consultation being a key part of any future refurbishment or installation project.

1.2 Strategy scope

The Play Strategy aims to provide high quality play opportunities for children and young people aged 0 – 19 years. This will include a detailed breakdown of the refurbishment and development of fixed play structures within the Council's ownership and how we might develop further informal play opportunities in public open space in general. The strategy will also provide guidance on the standards for play provision, which we will encourage other play area developers to adopt. The scope of the strategy goes beyond traditional 'fixed equipped' play areas e.g. slides and swings in fenced off areas. Instead 'play spaces' that embrace the natural landscape and create diversity in play are considered within the role of the strategy, enabling and facilitating free choice for play in the wider park

environment. Play provision is geared towards 'free play' i.e. freely available, free of charge and free to choose.

We also recognise that the play children engage in at home, school and commercial venues is important to their development, but these play experiences are not under the control of the Council and are therefore not included within the scope of this strategy.

To inform the strategy a robust evidence base has been produced to assess the quantity, quality and accessibility to freely reachable play spaces.

1.3 **Strategy aims**

The Play Strategy will evaluate and assess the quality, quantity and accessibility of current play provision within Chesterfield borough and identify areas of improvement and enable those improvements across the borough to take place. This will provide a rationale for investment in play provision, set standards for investment in play provision and help to determine where future investment should be directed. Additional aims include:

- To increase play opportunities for children, young people and families
- To widen the understanding of play and enable innovation
- Improving play accessibility for our children, young people and diverse communities
- To facilitate play opportunities that are inclusive and accessible to all children and young people
- Raising the standard, quality and experience of play opportunities across Chesterfield borough
- Ensuring that play opportunities are properly resourced and sustainable

SECTION 2: The impact of play

2.1 **Why is play important?**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations in 1989, spells out the basic human rights to which every child, everywhere, is entitled. The Convention sets out several statements called articles. These are the rights of all children and young people up to the age of

18. These include Article 31, the right to engage in play and recreational activities. Children all have a natural desire to play. They play because it is fun, and it makes them happy. When children play, they can be who they want to be and play how they want to play.

2.2 **What is play?**

is what children choose to do in their free time, it can and does happen anywhere. Children's play needs are diverse and so too are people's definition of what play is or is not. In order to set a framework for delivering and developing play spaces in the borough, we define play as:

'what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in the own way, and for their own reasons.'

Play can take place in many different places; from designated play areas to green open spaces, woods, the streets where children live and, on the way, to places where children go.

2.3 **The benefits of play**

Research shows that play has many benefits for children, families and the wider community, as well as improving health and quality of life, as illustrated in the diagram below:



Play England's 'A world without play' considers the effects of a lack of play on children's lives. It highlights 'the importance of play, particularly outdoor play, for increasing levels of physical activity, alongside other positive influences on a child's well-being', such as opportunities to understand and respect the natural world.

2.4 Inactivity in children

Current national guidance (UK Active) recommends that children over 5 years old should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity every day. Children under 5 that are able to walk unaided should be physically active for at least 3 hours spread throughout the day. The UK Active's study found that across England, only 24% of girls and 32% of boys aged between 2 years old and 15 years old were meeting these recommendations and this is having a significant impact on children's health.

19.5% of children in Year 6 within Chesterfield borough are classified as obese. This is not significantly different from the England average (20%). However, there are some areas of the borough where this figure is above 35%. These tend to correlate with areas with higher levels of deprivation and poorer health profiles.

2.5 **Play and health and wellbeing**

Physically active play can make unique contributions to children's health, wellbeing and holistic development, which cannot be obtained from more structured forms of physical activity or formal sport. Anyone can take part in it, there is no cost, low skill entry level, no specific rules, no specific equipment and no uniform. Research supports the assertion that physical activity is vital for children's learning and for their physical wellbeing. However, recent research has shown that activity levels in the UK, along with those in much of the developed world, are falling and that only half of 7-year olds in the UK achieve an hour's physical activity a day. Research from *Designed to Move: A Physical Activity Action Agenda* shows that from 1961 to 2005, levels of physical activity in the UK dropped by 20% and if current trends continue, will reduce by more than 35% by 2030.

In addition to the positive effects physical activity can have on mental well-being. Outdoor play provisions can also be beneficial to mental health and well-being by providing important opportunities to interact with nature. The positive effect interaction with nature has on our mental well-being has been well documented. Spending time in green environments whether combined with physical activity or for passive relaxation is said to have restorative qualities which help the human body recover from the demands of modern everyday life. Children with easy access to nature are more able to cope with a stressful life than those in urban habitats lacking green space. It can improve cognitive function and has been shown to improve a child's ability to direct their attention. This re-iterates the importance of outdoor play provisions, especially in more urban areas, and their potential to provide a link between children and nature.

SECTION 3: Barriers to play

3.1 Barriers to Play

There are several common barriers identified through a wealth of research, which can prevent or reduce children and young people from playing outdoors.

Disability, ethnicity and faith – Inaccessible play facilities and concerns about the behaviour of other people using facilities can create social and physical barriers to the enjoyment of disabled children's right to play. A recent national survey of 1,000 parents of disabled children demonstrated how their children were often excluded from play opportunities. Parks and playgrounds were the least user-friendly, with few facilities for disabled children and young people. Research has also indicated that ethnicity and faith can be a factor in reduced access to play to a range of factors again due to concerns about the behaviour of other users of facilities and community cohesion.

Traffic – a survey commissioned in 2013 by Play England, Play Wales, Play Scotland and Playboard Northern Ireland, found that over 53% of parents and carers had concerns about traffic. This is an issue that consistently appears high on the list of factors restricting outdoor play. The growing dominance of the car in residential streets, along with concerns about road safety, restricts the space and opportunity for children and young people to engage in active outdoor play and can affect a child's ability to reach a play space independently by walking or cycling. Studies show dramatic decreases in children's independent mobility, a major factor in their access to play opportunities. For example, the proportion of 7- and 8-year olds walking unaccompanied to school fell from 80 per cent in 1971 to nine per cent in 1990.

Negative attitudes and behaviour - children and young people themselves can be a cause of concern in the community. Children are often told to stop playing in the streets or area near their home. There can be a perception that children congregating in groups is threatening but many children do this for their own sense of security. Social barriers such as fear can lead to people linking children and young people socialising in public space with anti-social behaviour. These types of negative attitudes towards children have led to the banning of activities that appeal to younger people, such as ball games and skateboarding in community spaces.

Outcomes focussed on play provision – the replacement of free, self-directed play, with an increase in prescribed educational activities or childcare outcomes restricts children’s opportunities for playing. The role of free play in physical social and cognitive wellbeing has been ‘overlooked’ in many areas and much play provision has become outcome orientated. Play has therefore become an ‘unaffordable luxury’ in modern society, pushed aside to make way for organised activities that are more educational. In organised activities, children do not have the opportunity to direct their own play and create their own boundaries.

Reduction in free time – there are competing demands on children’s time, and so time to play freely is limited. Added to that, many parents are faced with time pressures of their own, which can impact on how children are transported to play areas, especially children living in more isolated areas. This contributes to children having a more sedentary lifestyle, as they turn to games consoles and social media in replacement of active, outdoor play.

Parental anxiety – perceived dangers and parental fears can reduce the amount of time children spend in outdoor open space. Building confidence in the use of our parks and open spaces for safe play is vital.

Section 4: Evidence base – Refer to Appendix A

4.1 Population

Based on 2019 figures from the Office of National Statistics 21% of the population of Chesterfield borough is aged 19 or under approximately 22,000 people.

4.2 Parks and Open Spaces assessment

In 2018 the Council undertook a series of audits to establish the quantity, accessibility, quality of parks and open spaces in the borough and more importantly how the value and contribution that these spaces make to the

quality of life for residents. A key part of the audit included the impact on children and young people. Quantity, quality and travel times were considered as part of this assessment.

Quantity assessment

The purpose of the quantity assessment is to establish the type, range and location of current freely available play facilities and opportunities. There are currently 81 equipped play spaces within the borough equating to 5.17 hectares (0.05 hectares per 1,000 population). The Fields In Trust (FIT) standard suggests 0.25 hectares per 1,000 population as a guideline quantity standard. However informal open space in a parent site in which a play space is located will also contribute to the play offer. If such sites are also included in the calculation, then a total of 37.17 hectares is identified; an equivalent to 0.37 hectares per 1,000 population.

The table below gives an overview of existing provision in each ward under the following definitions:

LAPS – Local Area for Play – single play item

LEAPS – Local Equipped Area For Play – a minimum of five play types i.e. sliding and swinging e.g. Princess Street, Chester Street Wharf Lane

NEAPS – Neighbourhood Equipped Area For Play – to include for Kindergarten play, Multi Use Games Areas and Skate Parks e.g. Stand Road Park, Eastwood Park and Brearley Park

Table 1 – Play provision by ward

Ward	LAPS	LEAPS	NEAPS	Total
Barrow Hill and New Whittington	1	1	2	4
Brimington North	0	2	1	3
Brimington South	3	2	0	5
Brockwell	0	2	0	2
Dunston	0	2	0	2
Hasland	7	3	1	11
Holmebrook	0	1	0	1
Hollingwood, Inkersall and Duckmanton	2	4	1	7
Linacre	6	1	1	8
Loundsley Green	0	2	1	3
Lowgates	1	3	1	5
Middlecroft and Poolsbrook	1	2	2	5

Moor	0	1	1	1
Old Whittington	1	2	0	3
Rother		2	1	4
St Helens	0	2	1	3

St Leonards	2	4	1	7
Walton	2	2	0	4
West	0	2	0	2

It is recommended that current provision levels of play space provision are to be used as the recommended quantity standards for Chesterfield. In general, the amount of play space provision is very or quite satisfactory by most respondents to the community survey. On this basis, the recommendation is for the current provision levels to be used as the recommended quantity standards for Chesterfield. This will better reflect existing provision levels and expectations whilst ensuring future demand from housing growth is not detrimental to existing provision levels.

The table below out the recommendations for the quantity standards for play space in Chesterfield.

Table 2 - adopted standard for play space provision

Typology	Explanation	Recommended quantity standard (Ha per 1,000 population)
Provision for children and young people	All equipped play provision including informal amenity greenspaces (below two ha) which host a play site	0.27

4.3 Travel assessment

Access to play provision has been established through applying the classification of play spaces and distance thresholds in the play strategy audit through Open Space Assessment PPG17 audit findings and GIS mapping which have contributed to ward profiles.

Accessibility catchments for play space are a tool to identify communities currently not served by existing facilities. It is recognised that factors that

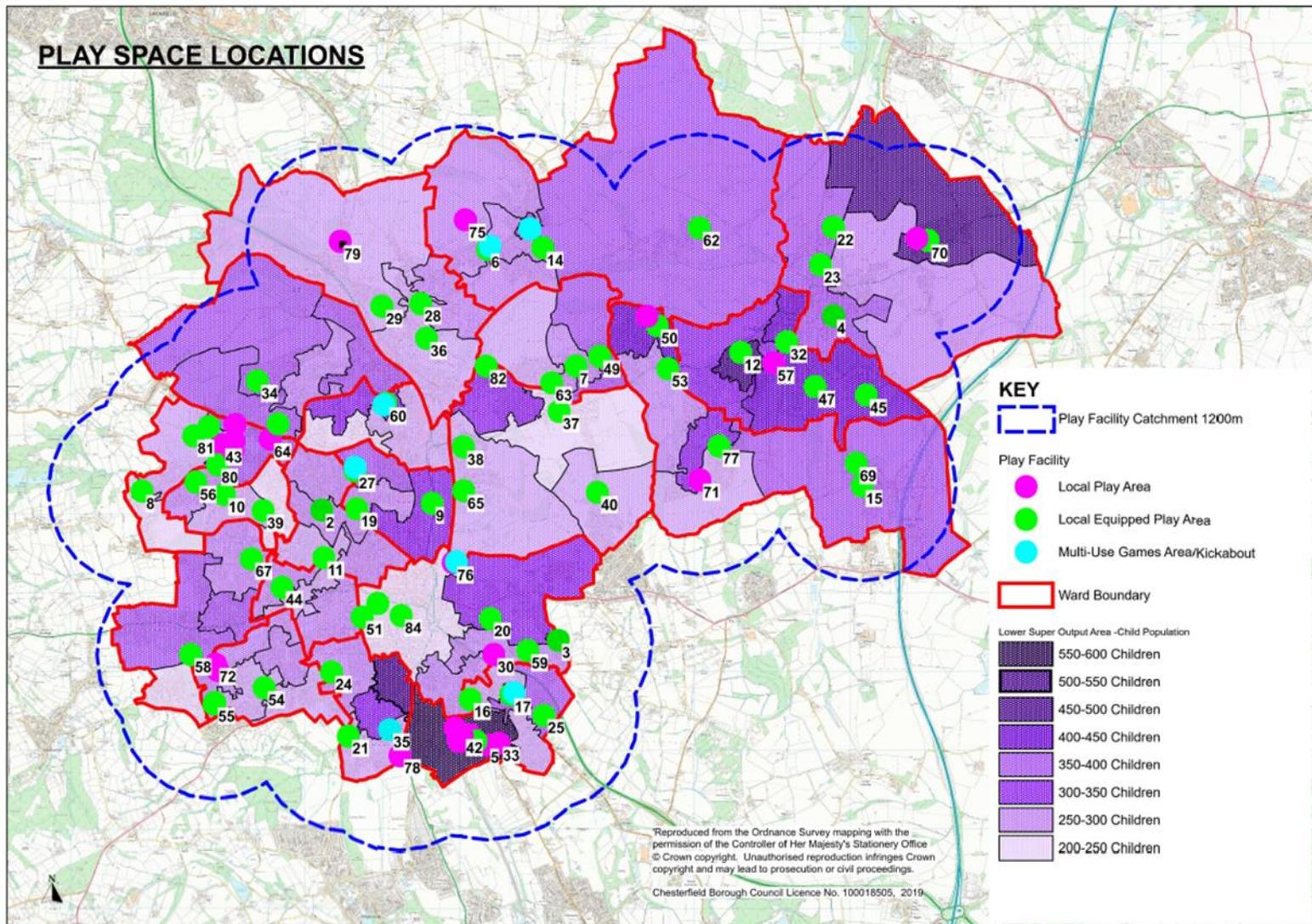
underpin catchment areas vary from person to person, day to day and season to season. For the purposes of this process this problem is overcome by accepting the concept of 'effective catchments', defined as the distance that would be

travelled by the majority of users. The PPG17 target for accessibility is to use the Fields in Trust median accessibility standard, which is defined in terms of walking distances from home to play areas:

- Local Areas of Play (**LAPs**): accompanied walking distance **100m** (1-3 minutes' walk)
- Local Equipped Areas of Play (**LEAPs**): walking distance **400m** (5 minutes' walk)
- Neighbourhood Equipped Areas of Play (**NEAPs**): walking distance **1,000m** (15 minutes' walk)

In acknowledging the difficulty in achieving this standard, especially in urban areas, the PPG17 study proposes that open spaces used for other purposes be opened to play and that existing areas offer a greater variety of play opportunities where space allows. This policy requires a local solution, as play provision for older children and young people is often considered to disturb other uses of open space and those living adjacent.

Catchment areas are overlaid on the mapping of sites to help identify potential gaps in provision for each analysis area. In effect these are circular 'as the crow flies' areas (radial catchments). They do not simulate actual walking distances based on pedestrian routes or barriers to movement (a costly method). However, significant barriers to movement are also mapped to help recognise instances where access to open space provision may be restricted.



- 4.4 Results of the community survey have been used to set initial accessibility catchments. This is presented in table below and is applied to help inform potential deficiencies in play space provision. This standard has been adopted by the council for any new developments as they arise. The map overleaf shows the catchment mapping when the equivalent radial distance of 1200m is applied.

Table 3 – adopted standard for access to a play space

Open space type		Accessibility catchment	Equivalent radial distance
Play areas & provision for young people	Children's play	15-minute walk time	1,200m
	Youth provision	15-minute walk time	1,200m

4.5 **Equality Act 2010**

When assessing our play spaces, we ensure accessibility to and within the site, adjustments are made where practicable, quality assessment of the equipment is also carried out to ensure inclusion and signage and safety information is also shown pictorial. For new provision it is written into procurement tenders to ensure appropriate aspects of the Act are implemented both for play equipment provision, access to and from the sites, signage and seating.

4.6 **Parks and Open Space Assessment Community Survey – Play provision**

Respondents were asked what types of open and play space they like to visit. The most common type of open space to visit is parks with 81%. Other forms of open space they like to visit are play areas (66%), nature areas (63%), small grassed areas near home (49%) and sports pitches (38%).

The most common reason for visiting these types of open space is to play (81%). Meeting with friends (61%), exercising (51%) and to visit with family (46%) are commonly also cited reasons for visiting.

Respondents were asked what type of play provision they prefer to visit, formal and/or informal play spaces. There is an even split between formal and informal with a slightly higher proportion of respondents preferring more natural play opportunities (52%).

Respondents were asked what would make open spaces near them better. The most popular answers include sites to be clean and tidy (65%) and for more play equipment (64%).

Respondents were asked what deters you from using your local play space. The most popular answers were stranger danger (55.80%), not age appropriate (45.2%), high volumes of traffic (41.6%) and older children/adults (31.5%).

4.7 **Condition Survey**

Sites were also assessed against their age and current condition, levels of anti-social behaviour, independent insurance inspection reports, compliance with current standards and for play value.

Section 5: Our vision and themes

5.1 **Our vision for play**

“For every play space to be a destination, by creating a variety of sustainable play spaces that offer children and young people of all ages and abilities accessible, quality, challenging and fun opportunities for play.”

5.2 **Key themes**

Informed by the audits and consultation and linking into key strategic documents and priorities, a series of Play Strategy Themes have been developed. These set out the core objectives for the Play Strategy to develop and implement the needs and aspirations of children and young people in Chesterfield and will be the reference point for all action and delivery plans arising from the strategy.

Theme 1 - Raise awareness of play

The Council and its partners will raise awareness of the importance of play, in developing children’s and young person’s physical and social life skills. We want to develop a targeted approach to communicating messages about play opportunities to children and young people. This will:

- Improve participation and usage of current and future provision and maximise the benefits of play
- Provide a more inclusive approach to play
- Help to educate children, parents and carers of the importance of play in development

- Reduce negative perceptions of children and young people at play

Key improvement activities will include improving our website, social media and traditional media presence and maximising partnership communication channels. We will also ensure the dialogue continues with children, young people, parents and carers to enhance our understanding of needs and aspirations.

Theme 2 - Raising the quality of play

Raising the quality of play opportunities to children and young people will provide greater choice and more stimulating environments to develop physical and social skills. Our strategy for play will ensure that children and young people in our area have access to excellent play facilities in order to:

- Promote children's creativity, physical, mental and emotional well-being and healthy growth
- Recognise children's needs to test boundaries
- Balance opportunities for risk taking with prevention of serious harm
- Promote social interaction and respect for others
- Ensure all future facilities comply fully with the Disability Discrimination Act
- Work with partner agencies to assess the number of children and young people with additional needs

Key improvement activities include ensuring consultation with children, young people, parents and carers is undertaken when planning provision upgrades and new provision. We will undertake regular inspections and assessments of equipped play sites including repair, planned maintenance and replacement. All new play equipment will be assessed against Equality Act requirements to maximise inclusive play.

Theme 3 - Improving the range and accessibility of play provision

A facility or service, which fails to meet user needs, will no doubt receive little use. This would be a waste of resource and missed opportunity for our children and young people. By auditing our current play provision, we have been able to assess and better understand gaps in service provision, in particular by undertaking regular consultation with children and young people be able to ascertain what they find inspiring and how their needs might change

over the period of the strategy. Our play facilities and services must be fit for purposes of the user group they are intended for, so we need them to:

- Extend children's choice and control
- Make different kinds of play available
- Promote independence and self esteem
- Reduce barriers to play and increases the level of equal access

Key improvement activities include reviewing provision in line with the play audit findings to ensure geographic and user needs are met. This includes continuing to provide current levels of play provision where appropriate but also considering alternative use of areas where provision is no longer required or play spaces are low quality and value with limited scope for improvement.

Theme 4 - Informal and natural play opportunities

Embracing the natural landscape creates endless diversity in play as every play space will be different and different landscapes can offer different opportunities. Within the consultation and analysis, it is evident that there are competing pressures to expose children to an element of appropriate risk to improve the overall play experience and also to ensure these risks are controlled to keep people safe. Managed correctly, this theme has potential to enable children to interact with their environment and play in less formally contrived situations. A consequence of this will be improved physical fitness and mental health and wellbeing. We aim to:

- Make for effective and efficient use of our play spaces for all types of play
- Provide more opportunities for children and young people in the natural environment
- Stimulate more innovation in play activity

Key improvement activities include providing play opportunities which are inviting, remove physical barriers and introduce natural elements.

Theme 5 - Providing more resources to improve and develop play opportunities

Play adds great value for our communities in particular for children's happiness, health and development. We need to ensure that adequate resource is

available meet this need. The Strategy for Play will ensure that funding opportunities are identified to:

- Provide the necessary capital funding to develop new play opportunities
- Sustain funding to maintain current and future equipped play sites and their ongoing management

Key improvement activities include prioritising areas for investment and securing external funding where possible to further develop and renew existing play provision. Sites will also be identified that can be refurbished as part of the council homes estate improvement programme.

Theme 6 - Strategic Management and Growth Sites

A prerequisite for the play agenda in Chesterfield is the overriding vision to influence planning and policy making process. Associated with this is the desire to make collective decisions about play opportunities and enable resources to be utilised efficient and effectively. We will:

- Identify funding opportunities through community infrastructure levy for sites in close proximity to housing growth areas
- Continue to negotiate for on-site play provision on new developments with management agreements for ongoing maintenance agreements and/or off-site contributions to play facilities at existing play facilities and/or community parks
- Continue to influence excellent design and provision during the planning process

Section 6: Key policies

6.1 Policies

In order to establish the level of provision, and quality of service the following has been developed as policy guidance. Use of this guidance will enable Chesterfield Borough Council to measure performance against nationally recognised benchmark criteria, and also enable the creation of a local standard for play space as part of the Parks and Open Space Strategy.

Local play spaces and facilities with a catchment area of 1200 metres - the aim is to provide an equipped play area within a residential area, where the play area is no more than 1200 metres from home.

Neighbourhood spaces and facilities with a catchment area of 1200 metres

- large equipped destination play areas primarily for children of all ages providing a mixture of facilities which may include wheeled facilities, kick-about areas or multi use games areas.

Safety and quality – to ensure play venues are maintained at a good standard they will receive a technical assessment every calendar month by fully trained staff and a yearly independent inspection will be carried out by the council's insurers.

6.2 **Priorities and Actions**

By using the data obtained from a range of sources, findings of the audit and mapping we can make informed decisions about how play space provision currently meets the needs of the children and young people of Chesterfield borough and how to plan for future needs. We will use a system of classification that can determine the future use of a site and prioritise those sites where funding should be directed to bringing sites up to the required quality standard. Sites will be classified as follows:

- **Sustain** – has received investment within the last ten years, continue to maintain quality through normal routine maintenance and inspection.
- **Enhance** – invest to bring up to modern standard – could include naturalistic play elements as well as fixed play equipment.
- **Enhance/Sustain** – invest to bring up to modern standard – an existing facility may be at sustain standard for the primary play provision for toddlers and juniors but there might be demand for additional facilities for older children i.e. a multi-use games area in a community park.
- **Modify** – consider adaptation to informal play space/naturalistic play space/retained as public open space. Disposal of a site could be considered if there is an oversupply of play space in the area and if investment wouldn't improve the overall quality and value.

We will use the findings of the open space assessment and audits for play to determine which sites should be considered for enhancement. These are often in a strategic location and/or are recognised as serving an important role.

6.3 **Natural play**

As part of the review, consideration to providing more natural play opportunities with landscaping has been given. A slightly higher proportion of survey respondents cited preferring natural play opportunities as opposed to traditional play equipment. The introduction of other forms of play activity is also recommended for consideration.

6.4 **Outdoor gyms**

Outdoor gym equipment is recognised nationally as a popular and inclusive form of physical activity for young people and adults. This could also assist in helping to tackle the challenges of an ageing population. Chesterfield borough will see a greater increase in the 65+ age band than any other age band up to 2036. The low impact exercise opportunities offered by outdoor gym equipment could therefore help with the challenges of an ageing population as well as providing physical activity opportunities for other age groups.

Section 7: Play space investment and funding

7.1 **5-year Investment Plan**

We will develop a 5-year investment plan to determine those play spaces in need of investment. Key features will include estimated costs for raising each of the existing play areas identified to a safe and enticing standard in line with the council's vision for play. Also included will be the life expectancy for the play area and an allocated year to carry out improvements. These dates may change as funding or other resources change, but the development plan and audit will be reviewed every year to keep account of changes. This could include where developer's funds, unexpected windfall opportunities and grant aid are available, creating a need to fast track these play areas in order to meet target spend dates.

The 2018 Open Space Assessment and CBC Play Assessment identified gaps in provision for older children. This provision is traditionally found in community and destination parks.

7.2 Sustaining and delivering new play provision in new residential development

Future population growth will provide added demand to the requirements for open space provision. An increase in population will create increases in use of provision which in turn will reduce the lifespan of existing sites and/or features (e.g. play equipment, maintenance regimes etc). This will lead to the increased requirement to refurbish and/or replace such forms of provision. Consequently, there is a need to plan for the requirements and needs of future population growth.

Section 8: Delivery, monitoring and review

8.1 Play Strategy Delivery

We will develop a delivery plan to support the delivery of the key themes. Delivery of the play strategy will ultimately be the responsibility of Chesterfield Borough Council; however, we will continue to work in partnership where possible and engage with local communities including children and young people to maximise delivery of the strategy. Feedback from consultation has and will continue to be the main factor in delivering play provision throughout the Borough.

8.2 Monitoring and review

The development of a delivery and investment plan will be a key tool to manage, control and report on progress. Progress against the delivery and investment plan will be monitored and challenged via the Cabinet Portfolio holder on an annual basis to ensure that actions remain on target. This will also include the opportunity to make any amendments to the delivery and investment plan responding to emerging needs and challenges. Key performance information will also be monitored and challenged during the

plan period including satisfaction and usage data, quality and value for money updates.



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