

REPORT OF **Head of Communities and Place**

To: **Community and Resources**

Subject: **Play Area Strategy**

Date: **25th January, 2021**

Reference:

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To present the draft Torridge District Council Play Area Strategy for adoption and consider the recommendation from External Overview and Scrutiny in relation to finances associated with its delivery.

1. INTRODUCTION

At a meeting of emergency External Overview and Scrutiny committee on 18/11/2020, it was resolved that the presented draft of the document should be recommended to Community and Resources Committee for adoption (subject to some changes as set out on section 2 of the report) and a recommendation should be made to this committee to establish an annual investment and maintenance budget for it's delivery.

In response to comments made during debate at External Overview and Scrutiny, TDC officers in conjunction with the Lead Member for Community, Culture and Leisure (Councillor Cottle-Hunkin), have adapted the strategy so that it gives a clearer understanding of what members would like the Council to do going forward.

The overarching intention of the strategy is that is communicates clearly the role that the Council wishes to have in the provision of play and how we undertake to work in partnership with others.

Members have previously expressed a desire that the Council should ensure provision of a clear strategy for how to manage the play areas which Torridge District Council owns. The intention is to ensure that limited resources can be utilised effectively, and investment appropriately targeted to provide the best possible strategic provision, whilst also enabling communities who are interested in taking control of their own play spaces.

2. REPORT

Why do we need this strategy?

Without a clear strategy, we have no clear vision of where we are and where we want to be with the condition of our play areas. This is our core objective in developing the Play Area Strategy. TDC needs to focus on maintaining the excellent spaces we have in the area and improving certain sites so that our communities have space to enjoy where they feel safe and are able to go with family and friends to enjoy and take them away from pressures of everyday life.

- Play Area - Play provision for our children is vital in their cognitive, physical and social development. Our role is to make sure that these sites are accessible and available as much as possible for our children to enjoy and develop but to concentrate on quality rather than quantity.
- Equality - Recognise and show our commitment to equality by ensuring that all areas are accessible and therefore enjoyed by those with disabilities and by those that may not find traveling to other areas easy.

The new draft of the Play Area Strategy outlines;

Section 1

- the importance of play for all within our communities
- the importance of protecting our play areas

Section 2 (plus additional document)

- a mapping exercise of Torridge District Council parks and an appraisal of their condition as of September 2019 plus any improvements made on certain sites since then.

Section 3

- a clear indication of site and timeline of when improvements are to be made by
- clear recognition that Torridge District Council receives no funding for improving play areas but has a will to create and support local community groups in creating funding and helping to deliver safe and enjoyable play areas.
- knock on effects of Covid-19

Most recent changes made to draft strategy

- Condition ranking of some sites now classed as 'Requires Attention' rather than Satisfactory
- Now clearer that TDC is open for consideration of asset transfer of certain play areas if suitable for all parties involved
- Highlights the requirement for resources to appropriately deliver the strategy
- Discards the idea of a play champion
- Confirms that be the Estates department will be responsible for overseeing delivery of the strategy with the input of various officers from other departments mainly Economic Development, Planning and Finance.

Next steps

Following adoption the Play Strategy will be use as a guiding document for the management of our spaces and in the community development work we undertake in relation to play with our communities.

Among the first tasks to complete will be to complete the condition survey of all facilities and to commence dialogue with our communities to understand their aspiration in relation to play and their capacities to work in partnership with us to improve and sustain high quality provision.

From this initial piece of work it will then be possible to determine the scale of financial resource required to deliver the aspiration of the strategy, when those resources would be required and the debate around affordability can be had.

3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

The Play Area Strategy is designed to ensure that spaces which are maintained by Torridge District Council are well managed and maintained, limiting the associated legal risks.

Financial Implications

The Play Area Strategy is designed to ensure that Torridge District Council's finances can be used strategically to provide the best possible play experiences rather than being spread too thinly and undermining impact, whilst also allowing local communities to have a stronger influence over their local provision. This will involve long-term planning to ensure that maintenance and equipment life-cycles are planned for to project future financial requirements.

There is already significant annual expenditure on maintenance of the play estate, as well as an identified sum in the capital programme, but this strategy is intended to provide guidance on how that is best used.

It might not be possible to increase the financial resources directed at play and this matter will be debated in the budget setting process. If that is indeed the case this strategy should, at the very least, guide the council in the use of the resources it has to ensure the greatest possible benefit.

Human Resources Implications

The Play Area Strategy is designed to ensure that Torridge District Council's internal team capacity can be used strategically to provide the best possible play and open space experiences rather than being spread too thinly and undermining impact, whilst also allowing local communities to have a stronger influence over their local provision.

Sustainability/Biodiversity Implications

Sustainability is at the heart of the natural capital approach within the Play Area Strategy.

Equality/Diversity

By ensuring that resources can be strategically targeted Torridge District Council will be able to invest appropriately in Play Areas to ensure that they can be accessible for all.

Risk Management

The Play Area Strategy is designed to ensure that spaces which are maintained by Torridge District Council's are well managed and maintained, limiting the associated risks.

Compliance with Policies and Strategies

It is recognised in the North Devon & Torridge Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013-2031 section 6) that play areas are in need of refurbishment and improvement across Torridge and that Victoria Park will be the 'flagship play area' for Torridge.

From the same strategy, consultation did not identify any specific current demand for new parks and gardens provision. It is likely that large sized additional provisions of the country park, town common and accessible countryside affected this perception.

Data Protection (GDPR) Implications

None

Lead Member Views

The Lead member, Cllr Cottle Hunkin, has been very closely involved in the development of the Play Strategy and as a member of External Overview and Scrutiny committee has endorsed the Strategy for approval.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Why is this work important?

This strategy and subsequent action/ business plans will provide Torridge District Council, and the communities within the Torridge area, with a clear pathway for maintaining and developing the play areas within our area whilst also ensuring that finances can be used effectively and efficiently.

We want our residents to be proud of where we live and to show off what we have for visitors to the area.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members:

Consider the Recommendation from External Overview and Scrutiny committee:

- That a maintenance budget for play areas be allocated.
- That the Play Area Strategy (subject to any amendments required and when accompanied by all necessary additional information) be endorsed and that it now progress to Community and Resources Committee for adoption at the earliest opportunity.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Consultations:	Date of consultation - 214/01/20
Officers consulted -	Chief Executive Head of Legal and Governance Head of Communities and Place Head of Finance (S151 Officer) Economic Development Officer Property and Procurement Manager Community Engagement Project Officer
Contact Officer:	