

## REPORT OF

To: External O & S

Subject: Play Area strategy update

Date: 1<sup>st</sup> February 2023

Reference:

### PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update External O & S committee on the progress of actions from the adopted play area strategy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In November 2020 proposals were put forward to develop a single Play Area Strategy to help TDC manage and improve sites that had been deteriorating for many years with little improvements or approach for the management of these assets.

The target was to have all TDC play areas up to a 'good' rating by January 2023. In June 2021, TDC adopted the strategy and work began to bring the improvements to life. This report aims to provide an update on progress towards the delivery of that strategy.

## 2. REPORT

What has moved forward?

Work began immediately to improve communications between teams within TDC to make sure we have a clear plan to make progress. The Community Engagement Officer and members from the property and maintenance team have since met every 2 months to develop an action plan for improving the state of play areas across Torridge where possible and where funding allowed.

It was recognised that not all play areas that were originally listed are truly suitable for play areas due to their size so these have now been classed as social spaces and taken off the play area list. These will be maintained for simple social spaces which we know are as important for members of the public to enjoy. These sites are listed in the attached reports.

One decision that was quickly made is that anything that was broken or needed replacing should be classed as maintenance and therefore the TDC maintenance budget should be used to fix and replace such items. This immediately meant that sites could stay operational rather than equipment just being taken away and not replaced. Adding an item to a site would require separate funding.

Below is a table that highlights the rating of a set number of sites in May 2021



This table shows that our sites were in a worse condition than suggested in the condition report undertaken by Tivoli contractors in 2019, as reported in the strategy.

Excellent	X 4
Good	X 6
Requires Improvement	X 10
Poor	X 13
Total sites	33

Below is the same table but up to date as of December 2022. This includes the fact that the three elements of Victoria Park in Bideford have been split into three reportable sections. Bidford Skate Park has also been added, in line with the maintenance schedule.

Excellent	X 5	Now including Bideford Skate Park
Good	X 17	
Requires Improvement	X 6	+1 since separating Victoria Park sites
Poor	X 1	+1 since separating Victoria Park sites
Total sites	29	

There has been significant progress made in improving TDC play areas. Where sites need improving, work has either started or engagement with communities has taken place.

As things stand we are 4 play area sites away from achieving the January target, however, 3 of these sites have already begun and the other 2 are ongoing projects in Victoria Park which will require further external funding. This will be explained separately.

When all works have been completed, we will again try to offer play areas to local Parish or Town Councils for them to consider managing. This has already been tried but unfortunately no council has offered to take a site on. Probably not surprising considering the condition of some of them. If we can reduce the number of sites we have, this will enable us to save money.

Costs: Since the adoption of the Play Area Strategy, TDC has spent £69,126.16 (as of 18/1/2023) on maintenance and improvements to our play areas. A large amount of this was spent on improving the safety surfaces in many sites.

**Spend on "PLAY" job codes on CC 333**

2010	REPAIRS AND MTCE RESPONSIVE	56,110.97
2210	PLANNED MAINTENANCE	3,882.00
2318	PLAY EQUIPMENT INSPECTION	1,400.00
2880	GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS	7,733.19
	Spend Apr21 to Jan 23	<u>69,126.16</u>



Separately, there is £20,000 S106 funding going into Short Close Play area along with an additional £15,000 contribution from Bideford Town Council towards Short Close (and possibly Chestnut Drive), as agreed by Bideford TC.

Victoria Park:

This site has been largely kept separate from the rest of the strategy improvements other than continued maintenance.

The aim is still to take down the old wooden 'Bidefort' structure and replace that with a new, modern, large-scale item that will attract many local families and will also attract many visitors to the area.

As part of the Rural Prosperity Fund, RDC has applied for £150,347 to use for this improvement.

The junior area is in good condition other than one missing item, which we are looking to replace as soon as possible.

The infant's area will be the next stage to improve, and we will be looking to gain funding through the set up community group to help improve this area.

The community group have had resistance from local organisations to contribute due to TDC not committing any of their own funding. We will continue to work closely together to achieve these goals.

Next steps:

- The aim of the TDC working group is to continue to meet every 2 months to enable us to keep improving our play areas to make sure that all sites achieve the required 'good' rating as soon as possible. At this point it will be essential to then keep on top of future maintenance to make sure they are safe and enjoyable for our families and visitors.
- Have an annual independent inspection of all sites
- Keep raising funds where required for Victoria Park improvements.
- To include a 5 year maintenance plan into the strategy to make sure finances are available to keep on top of these improvements.
- Continue to engage with Parish and Town Councils to establish if there is a desire for them to take on the maintenance of sites within their location.
- Promote and celebrate our play areas where possible to maintain their usage.

### **3. IMPLICATIONS**

#### Legal Implications

If sites are not in safe condition.

Asset transfer, if any become a possibility for this approach

#### Financial Implications

Cost of maintaining sites and lack of capital funding available

#### Human Resources Implications

N/A



Sustainability/Biodiversity Implications

Making sure sustainable products are used where possible where funds allow

Equality/Diversity

Making sure sites are available for all users

Risk Management

Making sure all risks are eliminated by having suitable assessments in place

Compliance with Policies and Strategies

Keeping in line with play area strategy and policy DM09 within the local plan (protecting sites from development)

Data Protection (GDPR) Implications

N/A

Climate Change

Making sure sustainable products are used where possible where funds allow.

Ward Member and Lead Member Views

Date of Consultation -

**4. CONCLUSIONS**

A great amount of work has gone into improving our play areas and a lot of funds spent to get us where we are. A good team effort so far. There is more work to be done but we have made a very good start over the last 18 months and look forward to keeping on top of these improvements and seeing how developments at Victoria Park progress, especially if Rural Prosperity funding is forthcoming.

**5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

For Members to keep supporting the work of TDC officers towards delivery of the strategy.

**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Consultations: Date of Consultation –

Officers Consulted -

Contact Officer:

Background Papers:



