

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Delegated Officer Decision – 04 February 2025

Report Title

Children's Playgrounds Programme

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Assistant Director Approving Submission of the Report

Polly Hamilton, Assistant Director, Culture, Sport & Tourism

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report details the proposed allocation of capital funding from phase one of the Children's Playgrounds Programme. This phase enables three of the eight children's playgrounds to be replaced, to the value of £380k. It also seeks approval to consult with stakeholders (including residents, children and young people and Ward Members) on the detailed designs and plans for each of these play areas.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The proposed sites for Phase One of the Children's Playgrounds Programme are endorsed, along with the allocation of £380k.
2. Consultation takes place stakeholders (including residents, children and young people and Ward Members) on the detailed designs and plans for each of these play areas.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1a Equalities Impact Screening Part A
Appendix 1b Equalities Impact Assessment Part B
Appendix 2 Carbon Impact Assessment
Appendix 3 Inventory of Play Parks

Background Papers

Rother Valley Country Park and Thrybergh Country Park Levelling Up Fund [REPORT FOR CABINET & COMMISSIONER](#)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Children's Playgrounds Programme

1. Background

- 1.1 Green Spaces manages 37 play areas, and four skate parks. Whilst there is a modest budget to inspect and maintain play areas to keep them safe for users, there is no budget for cyclical replacement of play areas.
- 1.2 The Service historically use a mixture of external funding opportunities and section 106 developer contributions to replace play areas which have reached the end of their operational lifespan, but this type of funding is usually geographically explicit. Some play areas that need to be renewed or replaced are well in excess of their expected operational lifespan but there is no foreseeable funding opportunity to replace them.
- 1.3 In 2024, £916,000 from the Council's capital budget was made available over a three-year period from 2024 to 2027 to improve play provision at Thrybergh Country Park, Rother Valley Country Park and at least six additional play areas, which would otherwise not be funded for refurbishment or replacement.
- 1.4 This report details three of the eight children's playgrounds to be replaced as part of phase one of the programme to the value of £380k.
- 1.5 It also seeks approval to consult with stakeholders (including children and young people, residents and Ward Members) on the detailed designs and plans for each of these play areas.
- 1.6 A further report will be issued detailing the additional five sites which will form phase two of the programme.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 All Green Spaces with equipped play sites were assessed for investment through the children's playground programme.
- 2.2 The inventory of Green Spaces play facilities (attached at Appendix 3) was considered and prioritised to identify an initial three sites for redevelopment from the funding available through the children's playground programme. The first three sites are:
 - Chestnut Grove, Dinnington
 - Rother Valley Country Park
 - Thrybergh Country Park.
- 2.3 Whilst a significant number of sites need investment, prioritisation for works was based on factors such as:
 - the current condition of the sites
 - prior investments, and known future investments
 - geographical spread
 - local need

- timing related to other developments (in the case of the two country parks)

2.4 These first three sites can be progressed whilst further deliberations take place on the remainder of the Children’s Playgrounds Programme. A further five sites will be prioritised to form phase two of the programme, utilising the same criteria to inform decision-making and to ensure the inclusion of sites in the north of the borough.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Do not support the proposal:

The full list of play areas considered is supplied at Appendix 3. A range of play areas was considered for the first phase, however, the final three for the proposed first phase were selected on the basis of their best fit with the following criteria:

- no other funding opportunities available
- in areas close to or within deprived communities
- currently either in poor cosmetic state or have lost equipment through damage or wear that cannot be replaced or repaired through available revenue budgets.
- offering a geographical spread of investment
- well-timed due to other developments (in the case of the two country parks).

This is rejected on the grounds that the capital investment needs to be spent promptly in order to avoid increased costs and the second phase will enable other site options to be considered.

3.2 Support the proposal: It is recommended that equipment at the following play areas are replaced through this Phase One programme:

- Chestnut Grove Play Area, Dinnington
- Rother Valley Country Park main play area (approved by Cabinet).
- Thrybergh Country Park Play area (approved by Cabinet)

3.3 This will enable these three sites to progress and allow further deliberations on the second phase. Sites in the north of the borough can be included in the second phase of the Children’s Playgrounds programme.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The Leader, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member of Social Inclusion, Councillor Sheppard and the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People, Councillor Cusworth have been consulted during the identification of the recommended sites. Ward Members of the respective site wards selected have been consulted. Consultation with users related to the Levelling Up programmes at Thrybergh and Rother Valley Country Parks prioritised play facilities, as reported to Cabinet in August 2023.

4.2

Further consultation on the detailed designs for each site is planned with residents, children and young people. This will include children and young people who are disabled.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 It is anticipated that the first of the new play areas will become operational over a three-year period from May 2025 with the final play areas being completed in March 2027.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (Jonathan Baggaley, Head of Finance and Karen Middlebrook, Head of Procurement)

6.1 Within the approved capital budget there is an allocation of £916,000 in respect of the Play Improvement Programme. This Council funding is supplemented by contributions from other sources, including CIL and Section 106. This report is to agree the priority sites for investment. The financial detail in respect of these sites will form part of the Council's governance arrangements as the projects are developed.

7. Legal Advice and Implications (Lesley Tattersall, Property Team Manager (acting))

7.1 The funding has already been allocated and approved and thus there are no further legal implications arising from this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications (Helen Rowe, HR Business Partner)

8.1 There are no direct Human Resources implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 Children having access to safe outdoor space is important for their physical and emotional wellbeing. It is therefore positive that steps are being undertaken to upkeep play areas. The closure of a play area for any significant period of time will have an impact on children who would usually access the resource however it is anticipated that this can be mitigated against with good communication from the outset with the community local to the play area, with the impact on children being temporary.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 An Equalities Impact Screening, Assessment and Action Plan has been completed for the proposed guidance and can be found at Appendix 1.

10.2 The Green Spaces service has a clear commitment to ensuring that high quality play provision is available for all children and young people across the

borough regardless of geography or economic means. The Green Spaces Strategy sets out the intention to ensure that every child in Rotherham will live within a five-minute walk of a play area and the Children’s Playgrounds Programme includes increasing accessible provision at each site which may include such things as British sign language panels or accessible swings. Whilst the intention to create an inclusive and accessible offer is clearly present, the ability to understand the current user base and the potential barriers and opportunities to further support existing and new users is not currently available to the service, which could provide barriers to inclusion. The Equalities Action Plan sets out a series of measures for improving equalities across play areas through three key areas:

- the delivery of the proposed Children’s Playgrounds Programme
- implementation of learnings and equalities considerations for future iterative improvements as funding becomes available.
- strategic development and understanding of audiences and their needs

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 A Carbon Impact Assessment has been completed for this programme and can be found at Appendix 2.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1. All play areas contained within this report are within Council ownership and therefore there are no implications for partners as part of this programme.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The potential for inflationary increases in the provision of equipment over the installation period. For this reason, a contingency fund has been identified which, if not required will be used to improve a further play area as part of the programme. This will increase the number of play areas from eight to nine.

14. Accountable Officers

Zoe Oxley, Head of Business Operations & Transformation
Jon Hinchliffe, Parks & Open Spaces Manager

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	Click here to enter a date.
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Named officer	Click here to enter a date.
Head of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Named officer	Click here to enter a date.

Report Author: Zoe Oxley, Head of Operations & Business Transformation

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