

# An overview of the approach to developing a Playful Green Spaces Plan

Date:

Report of: Chief Officer Climate Energy and Green Space

Report to: Scrutiny Board Environment, Housing and Communities

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

## Brief summary

When undertaking research on the council's approach to assessing play sufficiency, a young person in the city said that "play makes life amazing". Emerging from that strategy was a priority to improve access to nature based play environments. Leeds has 4000 ha of parks and greenspaces and this report to scrutiny board provides an overview of how we will develop a Playful Green Spaces Plan that seeks to remove barriers to access and provide opportunities for young people of all ages and abilities to play.

## Recommendations

- a) For Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board to support and endorse the development plans and outlined consultation process for the creation of a Playful Green Spaces Plan.
- b) For Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board to provide feedback of the process outlined in the report and to suggest areas for continued data gathering and research.
- c) Note the contents of the report and future development of a Playful Green Spaces Plan.

## What is this report about?

- 1 The importance of play is set out in the Play Sufficiency report to Executive Board. This report provides an update on the subsequent development plans for a Playful Green Spaces Plan that will focus on ensuring our green spaces enable playfulness and that barriers to young people accessing them are removed, supporting Leeds to be a Child Friendly City and the best city for children and young people to grow up in.

- 2 This report sets out timescales and plans for the next 18 months for the creation of a Playful Green Spaces Plan , recognising play sufficiency priorities, supporting Leeds Quality Parks assessments, as well as the Leeds Health and Well Being Strategy and the Best City Plan.
- 3 Recognising the importance of play in the lives of children and young people, families, and communities and how the service will deliver the best play opportunities in our Green Spaces across the city will be at the heart of the plan.

### ***What is play and why does it matter?***

- 4 A significant proportion of the population in Leeds are children and young people with an average of 18% of the population are age 0-14 years, and in some wards this increased up to 27% therefore it is imperative that we are meeting the play needs of children in our green spaces.
- 5 *Play encompasses children's behaviour which is self-directed. They have the freedom to choose how and when they play, without agenda, set goals or reward. Play is the way children interact with (and make sense of) the world: it is an innate desire to explore, socialise and have fun and involves a process of observing, testing, imitating, and enjoying the environment they are in and people they are with.*
- 6 *Children have a right to play- Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) creates a specific right for all children to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.*
- 7 *Out of the 2007 Play Strategy came the [Leeds Commitment to Play](#), which outlined aims to increase opportunity for children to play; create time and space to play; ensure the recognition and understanding of children's play. Within this, was a call for a citywide Play Partnership. Play Sufficiency is responding to these recommendations and supports the aims previously agreed by the Executive Board in 2019.*
- 8 *Research at a national and global level has proven that play is fundamental to the healthy development of a child. It is the framework through which they learn and strengthens children's mental health. Through play, children become able to:*
  - *build and sustain relationships with people and place*
  - *challenge the limits of their physical selves and environments*
  - *problem solve effectively*

*Most importantly, having sufficient opportunities for play is a key indicator of a happy child: play is pleasure – it contributes to quality of life and sense of well-being.*

**Table 1: Play sufficiency, a population health priority: benefits and consequences of play**

Benefits of playing:	Consequences of not playing:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Pleasure &amp; enjoyment</li> <li>+ Peer &amp; place attachments</li> <li>+ Physical activity</li> <li>+ Emotion regulation</li> <li>+ Coping mechanisms</li> <li>+ Motivation</li> <li>+ Self esteem</li> <li>+ Growth mindset</li> <li>+ Autonomy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Depression</li> <li>o Isolation &amp; detachment</li> <li>o Inactivity</li> <li>o Frustration / anger</li> <li>o Inability to cope (anxiety)</li> <li>o Lack of motivation</li> <li>o Low self esteem</li> <li>o Fixed mindset</li> <li>o Dependency</li> </ul>
= Resilience & Wellbeing	= Vulnerability & Poor Health

- 9 The Playful Green Spaces Plan will support the delivery of the following Play Sufficiency Priorities endorsed at Executive Board in December 2023;
- o **Priority 1:** Facilitate the cross-service endorsement of Play Sufficiency and embed key principles within Leeds City Council departments.
  - o **Priority 3:** Grow a play workforce of adults whose work directly and indirectly impacts upon children and their play.
  - o **Priority 5:** Enable sufficient time, space, design and attitudes to play for children with protected characteristics.
  - o **Priority 7:** Improve the variety of spaces available for play for all age groups within close proximity of children’s homes (including informal and designated spaces).
  - o **Priority 8:** Improve access to nature-based play environments.
  - o **Priority 9:** Improve the perception of teenagers and improving their opportunities to play and hang out.
- 10 The Playful Green Spaces Plan will ensure the delivery, systems and monitoring of the following within Parks and Green Spaces Strategy goals;
- o To have child friendly parks and green spaces.
  - o To have a wide range of good quality play facilities for children of all ages and abilities across the city.
  - o To ensure there is good provision for teenagers in our parks and green spaces.
  - o For there to be clear information available on the internet about facilities for children and teenagers in our parks and green spaces.
  - o For our green spaces to feel safe and welcoming for girls and women.
- 11 The Green Spaces Service are key providers of opportunities for children to play. The service manages and looks after over 4000 hectares of green spaces, 7 major parks, 200 grass football pitches, 156 nature conservation sites, 63 community parks, 170 playgrounds, 24 skate parks, 2 zoos and 1 farm. All of which are locations for children and families to enjoy.
- 12 There are however many examples of playful spaces that do not include fixed playground equipment in parks for example; den building in woodlands, mazes through long grass, stepping stones, dry river beds or rain channels.



- 13 The development of the plan will cover the following themes creating principles, frameworks and processes within the appropriate areas;
- Agreed definition of play and play opportunities for children and young people across the city within our green spaces.
  - Quality standard/measure and process for the development of new and improved play opportunities for fixed play and the broader offer of nature-based play in parks and green spaces. This will include design principles for the creation of playful spaces.
  - Consultation framework for all playground improvements and new playgrounds.
  - A measure of playfulness within Leeds Quality Parks assessments
  - Accessibility and inclusion for all, including safety of women and girls
  - Information available for play opportunities across the city in Green Spaces
- 14 As part of developing the plan, data held by the service on playground condition will be reviewed. In terms of fixed assets such as playgrounds, MUGAs skate parks etc there are 298 site sites that could be used as a playful space for young people and families. This constitutes 8261 fixed assets that require regular inspection both independently and using inhouse resource. It is anticipated that these sites as a whole have circa 8 years on average in terms of remaining effective use.
- 15 The plan will include playgrounds and play in the broadest sense but will also provide an opportunity to look at location, volume and functionality of existing fixed play provision. The first phase of the plan's development will include a series of focus groups across a range of localities that are designed to determine what barriers exist to greenspaces being used by young people. This will involve engaging young people and parents to better understand

perceptions of risk. These focus groups will also be used to shape a consultation and engagement framework that sets out a new and improved approach to consultation when seeking to enhance the playfulness of the city's green spaces.

- 16 Consideration will also be given to how the service reprocures its playground equipment supplier to ensure that it meets our developing needs. Whilst the existing procurement arrangement is with a single supplier, it does not limit options and it is feasible to be contractually compliant and access the whole of the market when needed. Any future arrangement will seek to maintain that level of flexibility. Furthermore, the service now has an established in house design resource meaning there are enhanced options for a broadening on the fixed play options.

### **What impact will this proposal have?**

- 17 The proposed development of the plan will co-ordinate and combine strategic objectives for play in the city providing clear standards and processes for the development and improvement of playfulness in green spaces across the city.

### **How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?**

Health and Wellbeing       Inclusive Growth       Zero Carbon

- 18 Providing the best play opportunities for all children and young people supports all three pillars of the Best City Ambition through supporting a child friendly city where children will have the best start, a mentally healthy city for everyone, strong, engaged, and well-connected communities with safe, sustainable, places that protect and promote health and wellbeing and a city where everybody can be more active more often.
- 19 Having thriving and animated green spaces supports inclusive growth in our economy that works for everyone.
- 20 Creating green spaces sustainable for future climates where biodiversity, increased tree cover and environmentally considered equipment will enhance natural play environments for children's play in our green spaces.

### **What consultation and engagement has taken place?**

Wards affected: ALL

Have ward members been consulted?       Yes       No

- 21 The Playful Green Spaces Plan will have a consultation period where ward members are consulted, and children and young people are involved in the process. In addition, the service will seek to identify a contact list of key stakeholders in terms of both locality, interest and specifically to ensure that EDI groups are represented and provided a voice. Furthermore, the service have an extensive mailing list of both individuals and organisations with an interest in inclusive play who already provided valuable feedback in terms of major redevelopments and moving forward will have the opportunity to comment on strategic direction.
- 22 Consultation on all local play projects within our parks and green spaces involves the engagement and involvement of local ward members and children and young people. Part of the plan will be to consider the services approach to play consultation with a view to refreshing methodologies, audiences with the objective of maximising inclusivity and playfulness of the whole space looking beyond the boundaries of the fixed play area.

23 The service has already embarked upon an extensive review and consultation on community park design and layout with a view to succinctly capturing feedback and action planning within a plan on a page. This evidence base will feed into the plan's consultation process.

### **What are the resource implications?**

24 The development and creation of the Playful Green Spaces Plan will focus resources and systems for children's play in green spaces across the city ensuring children have the best play opportunities across the city.

25 The budget limitations of playground equipment in terms of capital, maintenance and inspections means that all solution cannot be fixed play centric. Furthermore, to do so would restrict the level of playfulness within greenspaces unnecessarily. Therefore, a focus of the plan will be the need to develop natural playful environments for all children that look at the greenspaces holistically and removes barriers to accessing these spaces for playfulness.

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

26 Play is inherently risky and indeed is essential in terms of young people's growth and development. Furthermore, fixed play will always have a central role in greenspace design and development. Consequently, the absence of a playfulness plan would be that parks and greenspaces are negatively used by young people which could lead to an increase in antisocial behaviour.

27 If the city's play offer is limited and contained only within the limitation of the curtilage of the city's fixed play spaces then play in the city will be limited. The aim of this plan is to ensure that the authority's officers provide a voice and influence for as many people and groups as possible on how greenspaces can be improved in terms of playfulness via a coordinated and collection of voices.

### **What are the legal implications?**

28 As the plan emerges it will include the involvement of stakeholders this will include the legal department. We do not expect any significant legal implications with the development of the plan.

### **Options, timescales and measuring success**

The following milestones set out the timeframe and process for the development of the Playful Green Spaces Plan.

- Data collection and research - September to December 2024
- Development of draft plan – January – April 2025
- Consultation phase with stakeholders, elected members and children and young people – June – August 2025
- Develop final draft – September – October 2025
- Executive Board – November – December 2025

### **What other options were considered?**

29 Due to the significant role Green Spaces plays in providing playful spaces in communities across Leeds it is prudent to keep up to date with strategy, policy and new opportunities to ensure we provide the best play spaces for children and young people across the city.

### **How will success be measured?**

30 The creation, approval and implementation of a Playful Green Spaces Plan will be a success measure.

**What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

31 The timetable above outlines the time scales for implementation will be delivered by the Greenspace team including the Parks Technical Manager responsible for the development of the plan and Chief Officer for Climate Energy and Greenspace responsible for the services overall strategic direction.

**Appendices**

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**Background papers**

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