

Petersfield Town Council

Play Area Strategy

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SUMMARY

Vision

1. To develop high quality play areas across Petersfield that are welcoming, safe, attractive and meet the needs of children and young people, to be provided within the budgets available to the Council.

Purpose

2. The purpose of this Play Area Strategy is to:-
 - Deliver an even distribution of play areas which offers a qualitative play experience across Petersfield.
 - Meet the needs of children/young people living in and visiting the town
 - Find alternative ways of funding play area provision and attract additional resources

Benefits

3. The Strategy will deliver the following benefits to children/accompanying adults and young people (13-17 age group) in Petersfield:-
 - More choice in better play provision within walking distance of home
 - Users feeling safe in the local play environment
 - An enjoyable leisure experience in an improved local environment
 - Easily accessible play areas for local residents to walk to
3. Better access for the disabled and people from other disadvantaged sections of the community

INTRODUCTION

1. The Council has provided children's play equipment in Petersfield for many years. These facilities can be found in the town's recreation grounds and open spaces.
2. The Council has recognised there is an issue with the quality and level of play area provision and officers were asked to devise a play area strategy which would review its play areas and set priorities and timetables for the development of them over the next few years. Clearly major renovation has implications for the Council's spending decisions. Investment in relation to play equipment has to be taken within the context of the overall Council Budget. In deciding how to respond, the possibility of attracting external funding through partnership working or sponsorship should be explored.
3. The purpose of this Strategy document is to:-
 - Set out the current position and identify gaps in provision
 - Examine current pressures and future trends
 - Consider the best ways forward including future funding arrangements

CURRENT POSITION

Existing Provision

1. There are currently 8 sites with children's play equipment in the town. These sites are identified in the Play Survey Document see appendix A
2. The current distribution of Council sites has evolved gradually over time. Some play areas have been planned by previous Councils with some new items added and a complete new play site at Paddock Way in 2007.
3. A Play Survey Assessment has also been undertaken see appendix B.
4. A report from SAS Playgrounds, who carry out the monthly inspections of equipment, on the current condition of the play equipment has also been undertaken see appendix C.

National Standards

1. The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) has produced minimum standards for the provision of children's play facilities. These standards are recognised as being a useful yardstick against which local authorities can judge the distribution and content of play areas.
2. The NPFA identify 3 categories of play area:-
 - **Local Area for Play (LAP)** – A low key games area. Aimed at 4-6 year olds and younger children for play activities close to home. Catchment area = 1 minutes walking time for an accompanied child or approximately 100m walking distance.
 - **Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP)** – A small play area with about 5 types of equipment. Aimed at 4-8 year olds. Consider needs of under 4's and slightly over 8's. Catchment Area = 5 minutes walking time for an accompanied child, or approximately 400m walking distance.
 - **Neighbourhood Equipped Play Area (NEAP)** – A larger play area with about 8 types of equipment. Aimed at 8-14 age group. Facilities for wheeled and ball play should be provided. Catchment Area = 15 minutes walking time for either accompanied or unaccompanied children which is about 1000m walking distance

PRESSURES AND TRENDS

Safety Standards

1. With the introduction of the European Safety Standards for Outdoor Playground Equipment (EN1176 and EN1177) in January 1999 came ever more demanding safety standards. The main difference between these standards and the previous British standards is primarily in relation to impact absorbing surfacing, the spacing between play structure and the height at which there is a need to provide barriers with guard rails to prevent falls.
2. Clarification in respect of the implementation of the new safety standards has been sought from RoSPA, a reputable independent safety advisory body. RoSPA stated that:

*"The new European standard was published on 1 January 1999 when existing standards were withdrawn. There are a number of areas where existing equipment may fail the new standard. **This does not mean that equipment has suddenly become dangerous or that remedial action is required.** The new Standard is not mandatory or retrospective"*

3. However even though the new European Standard is not mandatory or retrospective there is a clear need to plan for replacement equipment to ensure that compliance is met within a realistic time scale through a policy of removal or replacement. Therefore there is a clear implication of increased costs based upon the need for a developed programme of play area improvements linked to compliance with the new European Safety Standards.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

4. The Disability Discrimination Act introduced in 1995 gives disabled people rights in the areas of:-
 - Employment
 - Access to goods, facilities and services
 - Buying or renting land or property
5. As of October 2004 Part III of the Act requires that organisations may have to make 'reasonable adjustments' to the physical features within premises to overcome barriers to access. Within the definition of premises are not just buildings and indoor facilities but also high streets, parks and open spaces. Adjustments could relate to steps, seating, access points, paths and equipment

THE WAY AHEAD

1. The basis for future provision has to be based on the premise of providing high quality play provision accessible across the town that can be funded adequately by the Council without putting an excessive burden on the Council's finances and, by extension the tax-payer of Petersfield. Additionally the priorities for re-development should be determined by the tax-payers, the local Members and, as importantly, the young people themselves.
2. A public consultation event (a Play and Say Day?) needs to be planned and the views of the public taken into account in planning new and improved provision of play equipment.
3. It is proposed that the priority listing is carried out following the consultation event and be based on the preferences stated at the 'Play and Say Day' coupled with a fair geographical spread across the town to ensure all remaining play-areas are accessible to young people within a realistic walking distance. What also must be taken into account is the current condition of all of the play-areas.
4. It is suggested that the priority listing should be determined ultimately by the local community themselves. If a local group from any ward or area is willing and able to energise residents to fund-raise and help select the equipment required, then the play area they are involved with could be advanced up the priority listing.

Type of Provision

1. The provision of play equipment is huge and wide ranging. It is suggested that the following play providers be invited to attend the public consultation event to enable the public to highlight equipment they think would be suitable for the sites:
 - Wicksteeds
 - Hags
 - Park Leisure
 - Lappset
 - Monster
 - Proludic
 - SMP
 - Record

It is recommended that sites have a wide range of play equipment, not necessarily from one provider.

2. It is also important to consider teenage provision separately, as not catering for the needs of young people (13-17 age group) can give rise to problems. Less suitable places are found to congregate such as street corners or children's play equipment. This can lead to the use and sometimes abuse of equipment not intended for them. Nuisance/anti-social behavior has been identified as an area of concern in Petersfield and diversionary activities may help to reduce this problem.
3. The Council already has limited provision for young people in this respect, the skate park at Love Lane and basketball hoops at The Avenue and Bell Hill Recreation Ground and the BMX Track at Sheet Common.
4. A site could be sought for a multi user games area (MUGA) – The Avenue Playing Fields? It is suggested that this be part of the consultation event to ascertain what, if any, sites for the MUGA are suitable. Local Housing Associations could also be approached to ascertain the views of their residents.

FINANCING THE DEVELOPMENT

1. The Town Council currently has £15,000 in earmarked reserves, £5,000 in capital reserves and has placed a further £50,000 in the budget for 2010-2011
2. Investigation needs to be undertaken regarding Play Builder funding which was allocated to the Principal Authority (EHDC).
3. Other funding through either central government or the National Lottery is available on a periodic basis.
4. Members may like to consider sponsorship of items of play equipment at play sites. This would involve the erection of a small plaque to acknowledge the sponsor. Children and accompanying adults can spend a long time within a play area. In that sense they are a captive audience to companies/organisations who might wish to promote their name or products. This would bring added revenue that could be spent in supporting the aims of this Strategy. The Council would need to decide where it strikes the balance between subtle advertising of a sponsor's name and the louder form of product advertising that may not be suitable.
5. Developers of larger housing sites normally make a contribution towards local infrastructure improvements arising from the development. Contributions can include road improvements, public open space and educational facilities. It would be desirable to seek contributions arising from developers where gaps in play provision exist. Bids could also be made for current Section 106 funds for the provision of play equipment.
6. Some local fund-raising could be undertaken by a proactive local community group for one particular play-area though it would be unrealistic to expect a major contribution through this avenue.
7. Ultimately therefore much of the re-development needs to be based around the assumption that the core funding will be through the Council itself with other funding agencies approached on an 'as and when' basis if an appropriate funding stream becomes 'live'. At the same time, encouragement should be given to local community groups to actively fund-raise for their local play-area so it can be advanced up the priority order.

CONCLUSIONS

The Council should be aiming for:

- Safe playing environments for children of all age groups (toddlers & juniors) in Petersfield where sites are clearly visible from public places and the problems of anti-social behavior and other crimes are minimised.
- The needs of young people (age 13-17) are taken into account by providing separate areas for them to meet, preferably including some activities, away from the children's play areas. Young people also help to shape the design of the facilities.
- More residents enjoying easy access to play areas across the town.
- Better access to play facilities for the disabled and people from other disadvantaged sections of the community.
- Attractive play areas where both children and adults want to stay.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That a public consultation event be planned - A Play and Say Day
- That a priority list of sites be drawn up following the consultation day
- That equipment be chosen based on the preferences displayed at the consultation day
- That members give consideration whether to replace individual pieces of equipment on a number of sites or deal with each site in turn
- That members give consideration to improving sites by painting equipment
- That members give consideration to this document as a long term plan over the next 5 – 10 years and plan and budget accordingly