

Housing, Health and Communities Committee Meeting

Meeting Date	20 January 2026
Report Title	Play Area Review
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure
Lead Officer	Robert Lucas – Greenspace Technical Officer
Classification	Open/Restricted Appendix
Recommendations	1. To note the outcome of the play area review. 2. To remove 2 play facilities at: 1. Elm Grove, Sittingbourne 2. Lionfield, Faversham 3. To engage with relevant the relevant Town or Parish Council or other appropriate local organisation to offer and seek to transfer the following 14 play areas: 1. Batteries Close Play Area, Lynsted and Kingsdown 2. Colonels Lane (Horselees Road) Play Area, Boughton-Under-Blean 3. Stangate Drive Play Area, Iwade 4. Woodpecker Drive (Village Park) Play Area Iwade 5. Recreation Ground Play Area, Iwade 6. Colson Drive (Alefe Way) Play Area, Iwade 7. Mansfield Drive Play Area, Iwade 8. Homefield Drive Play Area, Upchurch 9. Rooks View Play Area, Bobbing 10. Randle Way Play Area, Bapchild 11. Anne Boleyn Play Area, Eastchurch 12. Village Hall Play Area, Warden Bay 13. The Spinney Play Area, Leysdown 14. Leysdown Coastal Park Play Area, Leysdown Should any, or all, of the Town or Parish Councils decline the opportunity for transfer play areas 1,2,3,5,7,9,10 and 11 could be considered for closure based on the strategy below.

	4. On completion of the above, review the list of remaining 15 potential removals to see what might be possible and engage with Ward Cllrs and the community. 5. To ask officers to pursue funding options to upgrade the recommended play areas which would then allow removal of further sites as detailed in tables at 3.10.
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1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 A report to the Housing, Health and Communities Committee on 3 July 2025 identified the need for a play area review before a new Play Strategy could be developed and in association, consider potential savings as part of the Council's medium term financial planning.
- 1.2 This report and accompanying appendices set out the detailed work undertaken to review the play area provision in the borough and formulation of the recommendations, with some being considered for improvement, closure or transfer of the asset. This is very much an initial look and will require further engagement with committee.

2 Background, Context and Proposals

- 2.1 The Open Space and Play Area Strategies are being developed by the Council to provide a sound body of evidence for supporting open space policies within the Local Plan. They also identify key opportunities and plan for delivery of improvements to existing open space and provide clear standards for provision in terms of quality and quantity. Furthermore, they will make policy decisions on the type of play provision and intended audiences.
- 2.2 Play areas cover equipped provision for children and teenagers and includes skate parks and multi-use games areas. They are normally associated with other amenity space and provide immense value by supporting children's physical health through activity, developing critical social and emotional skills like cooperation and resilience and promote well-being and creativity. They also act as vital community hubs, strengthening social connections for both children and families.
- 2.3 To develop the Play Strategy, review current facilities and consider potential savings through the reduction in sites as part of the medium-term financial planning, Members agreed the criteria for review at the meeting of the Housing, Health and Communities Committee on the 3 July 2025.
- 2.4 In determining how to review the service provision, Members agreed the work should take account of:
 - The Council's RAG rating which takes into consideration age, identified defects, maintenance costs, health & safety, play value and proximity to others.

- National benchmarking data/standards (Fields in Trust).
 - Population density, health, crime and social deprivation analysis.
- 2.5 To capture the information and visualise the findings, consultants Knight, Kavenagh & Page (KKP) have extended their current work on the Open Spaces and Play Strategies to assist with producing the full review report and findings as provided in Appendix I.
- 2.6 The review report:
- Combines accessibility analysis and quality/value scores of each site with the Councils own RAG assessment.
 - Using the above data, identifies sites that could be considered surplus to requirements, but with recommendations on the potential upgrade of certain sites to justify potential removal of others.
 - Presents a scoring matrix, based on a series of Indices of Multiple Deprivation to demonstrate potential impact.
 - Identifies sites with their calculated score against the criteria to provide rational to consider removal. Outcomes are presented as three analysis areas, Faversham Sheppey and Sittingbourne.
- 2.7 A total of 149 play locations have been identified in Swale and these are owned by several different authorities and organisations, the Council has responsibility for 110 of these locations, Parish Councils, housing associations and housing management companies are responsible for the balance. While taking account of all public provision, any decisions can only be implemented to Council owned facilities.

Analysis area	Number
Faversham	38
Sheppey	54
Sittingbourne	57
Swale	149

- 2.8 National Quantity Standards
- Fields in Trust (FIT) guidance suggests a quantity standard of 0.25 hectares per 1,000 population for designated playing space per authority.
- The draft 2025 Swale Open Space Strategy calculates that the current standard across the Authority is currently 0.06 hectares per 1,000 population, as calculated below.

Analysis area	Number	Total hectares (ha)	Current provision (ha per 1,000 population)
Faversham	38	2.07	0.05
Sheppey	54	3.12	0.07
Sittingbourne	57	2.98	0.06
Swale	149	8.17	0.06

This is significantly below the FIT standard. However, it is often recognised that children and young people can and do use the space surrounding the defined designated area for play. This is especially the case for amenity greenspace surrounding a play area. This is illustrated in Table below, and demonstrates that, when accounting for amenity green space, all three analysis areas meet the suggested FIT standard of 0.25 hectares per 1,000 population.

Analysis area	Total hectares (ha)	Current provision (ha per 1,000 population)
Faversham	10.61	0.32
Sheppey	15.71	0.37
Sittingbourne	23.19	0.38
Swale	49.51	0.36

2.9 Consultants KKP used a 3-stage assessment methodology to identify play areas appropriate for consideration. These stages were:

- Undertake an initial mapping exercising utilising the Fields in Trust (FIT) guidance identifying sites within catchment of others.
- Identify sites using the quality scoring matrix to demonstrate the potential impact of removal. Sites are ranked according to various social and health factors.
- Identify sites recommended for removing, upgrading or improvement or those that could be considered for asset transfer.

2.10 Summary of outcomes and proposals for each of the analysis areas is identified in the tables below. These include the recommendations taken from the KKP analysis.

Faversham Analysis Area Proposals

Id	Site name	Option	Description	Rational
145.1/ 145.2	KGV The Mount Faversham play area/basketball court	Upgrade/improve quality	It is recommended that this site be upgraded to a NEAP and the quality improved from average to good. There is space to the west of the current site to increase the offer.	If this play site is expanded, it would absorb the loss of surrounding play sites through a larger catchment area. The quality of the site needs to be improved to offset the potential loss of certain sites.
118.1	Hazebrouck Road play area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	Should site 145.1 be upgraded to a NEAP, the increased catchment from the upgrade would cover the loss of these sites.
169	Lower Road Play Area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	
159.1	Lionfield basketball court ¹	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	
313.1	Sumpter Way play areas	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	
104	Finch Close Play Area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	The catchment from site 97.1 covers this site, resulting in it being surplus to demand.
120	Hilton Close Play Area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	
360.1	Windermere play areas	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	
97.1	Faversham Recreation Ground play areas	Improve quality	Site 97.1 rates average. For sites 104, 120, 360.1 to be removed, it is recommended to upgrade 97.1 to good. This includes improving the quality of equipment and surfaces.	Improving the quality of site 97.1 with better equipment will mitigate the closure of sites 104, 120 and 360.1.
22.1	Batteries Close play area	Management transfer	Seek to transfer the management of this site to another organisation. Possible option could be Teynham Parish Council.	These sites are currently managed by SBC. It is recommended that the management of these sites be offered to another organisation, such as a Parish Council.
62	Horselees Road Play Area	Management transfer	Seek to transfer the management of this site to another organisation. Possible option could be Boughton-under-Blean Parish Council.	Whilst this could potentially create financial savings for SBC, it would also provide the Parish Council the opportunity to precept for improvements they may be better placed to undertake.

¹ Current play equipment removed with only the basketball court remaining.

Sittingbourne Analysis Area Proposals

Id	Site name	Option	Description	Rational
293.1	Sittingbourne Recreation Ground play area	Upgrade /improve quality	Play site needs to be upgraded to a NEAP and the quality of the existing play equipment to be upgraded to good. It is currently rated as average.	Site is currently a LEAP. If this was expanded, it would make several surrounding sites, such as Manor Grove (although this has recently been upgraded), Anselm Close and Chilton Avenue play areas surplus to requirement. The site currently has a RAG rating of average. It is recommended that this is upgraded to good.
290.1	Stangate Drive play area	Transfer	Seek to transfer the management of this site to another organisation. Possible option could be Iwade Parish Council.	This site is currently managed by SBC. It is recommended that the management of these sites be offered to another organisation, such as a local Parish Council. Whilst this could potentially create financial savings for SBC, it would also provide the Parish Council the opportunity to precept for improvements they may be better placed to undertake.
346.1	Iwade Village Park play area	Transfer		
274.1	Red Admiral Crescent (Iwade Recreation Ground) play area	Transfer		
6	Alefe Way play area	Transfer		
175.1	Mansfield Drive Play Areas	Transfer		
141.1	Kemsley Recreation Ground	Improve quality	Improve the quality of the site from average to good. This will be through upgrading the quality of equipment and surfaces.	Site rated average through the Council's RAG rating. If surrounding sites are to be removed, it is recommended this is upgraded.
189.1	Milton Creek Country Park	Improve quality	Improve the quality of the site from average to good. This will be through upgrading the quality of equipment and surfaces.	Site rated average through the Council's RAG rating. If surrounding sites are to be removed, it is recommended this is upgraded to good.
77.1	Diligent Drive play area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	The catchment from sites 141 .1 covers this site, resulting in it being surplus.
89.1	Eleanor Drive Play Area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	The catchment from sites 141 .1 covers this site, resulting in it being surplus.

Id	Site name	Option	Description	Rational
251.1	Recreation Way play area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	The catchment from sites 290.1, 175.1 and 346.1 covers this site, resulting in it being surplus.
269.1	Samuel Drive play areas	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	The catchment from sites 290.1, 175.1 and 346.1 covers this site, resulting in it being surplus.
235.1	Premier Way play area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	The catchment from sites 290.1, 175.1 and 346.1 covers this site, resulting in it being surplus.
173.1	Manor Grove play area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	The catchment from site 293.1 (if it is upgraded to a NEAP) covers this site, resulting in it being surplus.
13.1	Anselm Close play area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	The catchment from site 293.1 (if it is upgraded to a NEAP) covers this site, resulting in it being surplus.
58.1	Chilton Avenue play area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	The catchment from site 293.1 (if it is upgraded to a NEAP) covers this site, resulting in it being surplus.
124.1	Homefield Drive play area	Transfer	Seek to transfer the management of this site to another organisation. Possible option could be Upchurch Parish Council	This site is currently managed by SBC. It is recommended that the management of these sites be offered to another organisation, such as a local Parish Council. Whilst this could potentially create financial savings for SBC, it would also provide the Parish Council the opportunity to precept for improvements they may be better placed to undertake.
262.1	Rook View play area	Transfer	Seek to transfer the management of this site to another organisation. Possible option could be Bobbing Parish Council.	
247.1	Randle Way play area	Transfer	Seek to transfer the management of this site to another organisation. Possible option could be Bapchild Parish Council	

Id	Site name	Option	Description	Rational
90	Elm Grove	Remove	Site is currently closed due to quality issues. It is recommended that this is removed permanently.	The catchment from site 255.1 covers this site, resulting in it being surplus.

Sheppey Analysis Area Proposals

Id	Site name	Option	Description	Rational
347.1	Vincent Gardens play area	Remove	Option for site to be removed.	The catchment from sites 103.2 and 27.1 covers this site, resulting in it being surplus to demand, although it should be noted this play area has recently benefited from an upgrade including new play units.
27.1	Beachfields Park	Improve quality	Improve the quality of the site, based on current RAG rating.	Key site in the resort of Sheerness which supports day trippers and local residents. Site needs to be upgraded based on the current RAG rating.
11.1	Anne Boleyn Close play area	Transfer	Seek to transfer the management of this site to another organisation. Possible option could be Eastchurch Parish Council	This site is currently managed by SBC. It is recommended that the management of these sites be offered to another organisation, such as a local Parish Council. Whilst this could potentially create financial savings for SBC, it would also provide the Parish Council the opportunity to precept for improvements they may be better placed to undertake.
157	Village Hall Play Area/Linear Park outdoor gym/Linear Park zip wire	Transfer	Seek to transfer the management of this site to another organisation. Possible option could be Warden Bay Parish Council	
333.1	The Spinney play area	Transfer	Seek to transfer the management of this site to another organisation. Possible option could be Leysdown Parish Council	
154	Leysdown Coastal Park Play/MUGA/Fitness gym/	Transfer	Seek to transfer the management of this site to another organisation. Possible option could be Leysdown Parish Council	

- 2.11 The review proposes to:
- Seek transfer of 14 play areas.
 - Upgrade 6 play areas to facilitate the removal of 17 of the play areas below.
 - Remove 17 play areas.
- 2.12 Transfer:
- The Council can seek to transfer the 14 suggested play areas to Parish Councils, with some already having expressed interest in some of the facilities. Clearly negotiation will be required, and transfer cannot be guaranteed. Once we have a consensus from the Parish Councils, we can re-evaluate those play areas not transferred against the KKP evaluation model to identify additional play areas for closure.
- 2.13 Upgrade:
- There is currently Section 106 funding allocated within the Play Improvement Programme to improve and upgrade the Sumpter Way and Lower Road play areas which KKP have identified for closure, however due to the descriptions within the Section 106 agreement these funds could be used to upgrade the play facilities at King George V Playing Field (The Mount) in Faversham. There is no allocated funding for the other 5 sites (Faversham Recreation Ground, Sittingbourne Recreation Ground, Kemsley Recreation Ground, Milton Creek Country Park and Beachfields) identified for upgrading. As a result, it is estimated that a further £575,000 of capital investment would be required to bring these up to the additional standards needed to facilitate other removals.
- 2.14 Remove
- If funds are not available to improve and upgrade sites to facilitate some of the proposed removals, this leaves potentially 11 removal sites. There are 3 proposed sites (Recreation Way, Samuel Drive and Premier Way, Kemsley) that are by the criteria within the catchment of other play areas in Iwade and surplus. However practically they are separated by a major road (A249) and it is unfeasible to expect the community would be served by the retained play areas. It has also been estimated that £69,500 would be required to remove these 11 play facilities for which there is currently no allocated funding. Two sites at Elm Grove, Sittingbourne which has not operated for years and the remaining limited equipment at Lionfield, Faversham could be removed with little impact either to the community or financially.
- 2.15 Generally the review shows that the borough is well provisioned with play facilities with few gaps. There are some sites surplus to need, but decisions to reduce the number of facilities are reliant and outweighed upon either significant capital investment to improve remaining facilities or budget to remove and reinstate.
- 2.16 Should recommended transfers and removals be undertaken, reduced inspection requirements would ensure that current resources would be able better able to

achieve weekly inspection targets, plausibly be deployed to undertake more maintenance tasks and reduce revenue expenditure.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 To note the outcome of the play area review.
- 3.2 To remove 2 play facilities at:
 - 1. Elm Grove, Sittingbourne
 - 2. Lionfield, Faversham
- 3.3 To offer and seek to transfer 14 play areas to Town or Parish Councils or other appropriate local organisations:
 - 1. Batteries Close Play Area, Lynsted and Kingsdown
 - 2. Colonels Lane (Horselees Road) Play Area, Boughton-Under-Blean
 - 3. Stangate Drive Play Area, Iwade
 - 4. Woodpecker Drive (Village Park) Play Area Iwade
 - 5. Recreation Ground Play Area, Iwade
 - 6. Colson Drive (Alefe Way) Play Area, Iwade
 - 7. Mansfield Drive Play Area, Iwade
 - 8. Homefield Drive Play Area, Upchurch
 - 9. Rooks View Play Area, Bobbing
 - 10. Randle Way Play Area, Bapchild
 - 11. Anne Boleyn Play Area, Eastchurch
 - 12. Village Hall Play Area, Warden Bay
 - 13. The Spinney Play Area, Leysdown
 - 14. Leysdown Coastal Park Play Area, Leysdown

Should any, or all, of the Town or Parish Councils decline the opportunity for transfer play areas 1,2,3,5,7,9,10 and 11 could be considered for closure based on the strategy below.

- 3.4 On completion of the above, review the list of remaining 15 potential removals to see what might be possible and engage with Ward Cllrs and the community.
- 3.5 To ask officers to pursue funding options to upgrade the recommended play areas which would then allow removal of further sites as detailed in tables at 3.10.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 To fully implement the proposals as identified in the review could limit access to facilities for some of the community as shown by the example in Kemsley. It would also require significant additional funds to improve existing facilities to meet the required standard and to remove and reinstate any proposed removed facilities. Budget is not currently available.

- 4.2 Proceed with more closures that would take us below the national guidelines as it is not a statutory function. Removal of 25% of play areas, totalling 20 would save around £44,000.00 per annum, although an estimated one-off capital requirement of £5,500.00 per play area closed would be required to remove the equipment and return the site to the environment. Removal of 50% of play areas totalling 40 would save around £88,000.00 per annum (plus the option to reduce staffing allowing an additional saving of around £19,300.00 per annum), although an estimated one-off capital requirement of £5,500.00 per play area closed would be required to remove the equipment and return the site to the environment.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 There has been no formal consultation yet with the Parish or Town Councils in regards to the transfer of identified sites, but several Parish Councils have already expressed interest in taking responsibility for some of the Council owned play facilities on the list and if the recommendations are agreed, further work will take place to complete transfers.
- 5.2 There was previous consultation with Ward Members on the 2 play areas identified for removal and officers will liaise with Ward Members on the play areas shown in 3.10 that could be removed if others are upgraded and for those that are proposed for transfer.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Community: To enable our residents to live, work and enjoy their leisure time safely in our borough and to support community resilience. Environment: To provide a cleaner, healthier, more sustainable, and enjoyable environment and to prepare our borough for the challenges ahead.
Financial, Resource and Property	This review will ensure that the Council is providing appropriate, cost-effective services, making best use of its resources and property. By reviewing and contributing to the new strategy, the authority will stand a better chance of being successful with external grants and developer contributions to assist delivery of the service. If the recommendations are agreed, with a reduced number of play areas it is estimated revenue expenditure will reduce by an indicative £68,323.25 (£30,747.50 via play area transfer and £37,575.75 via play area removals as per appendix 2) and

	Inspection Officers will be better able to meet the inspection targets. It is estimated that £575,000 of capital investment, outside the already mentioned Section 106 funds, would be required to bring remaining sites up to suitable standards to meet the criteria for removing others. It is estimated that £69,500 will be required to physically remove and reinstate the play areas that are on the longer list of 15 for possible removal.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The review and strategy will underpin key sections of the Local Plan relating to Play. This is a required element of the Local Plan process, providing a robust evidence base for decisions. It will therefore assist in the Planning Inspectorate process. By providing a robust strategy that is compliant with National Planning Policy Framework, the Council will be better placed to defend any challenges which may be presented by developers and or to secure further funds for our existing sites. Transferring the play areas to Town or Parish Councils with the necessary agreements would require Legal input. A timescale for completing any asset transfers ahead of 31st March 2026 is unviable. As such, the Council will need to manage the play areas until the transfers are completed.
Crime and Disorder	The provision and good management of a broad range of play areas and facilities for young people can make a positive contribution to managing issues of crime and disorder by providing diversionary activities and encouraging community cohesion. Inevitably however these public sites do suffer from vandalism, and it is therefore vital that we consider suitable equipment and continue with our existing good inspection regime.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	The review and strategy will guide and influence the future provision, location and management of valuable open space facilities and promote sensitive quality management. This will ensure facilities are within reasonable sustainable distances for the community. It also has a role through association to adjacent open spaces in supporting sustainable urban drainage and carbon reduction through the provision of grassland and planting.
Health and Wellbeing	By providing and supporting a broad range of appropriate quality play areas and facilities across Swale, there will be greater opportunities for supporting children's physical health through activity, developing critical social and emotional skills to promote well-being and creativity.

	Play areas also act as vital community hubs, strengthening social connections for both children and families.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	This review and its recommendations will ensure the Council will be better able to maintain and inspect its own facilities to agreed standards, the Council will ensure their facilities are safe and fit for purpose. Without review and a strategy that is compliant, the Borough will be at risk of not having the Local Plan agreed, missing funding opportunities, losing challenges to planning applications by developers, and not providing high quality facilities for its residents.
Equality and Diversity	To try to ensure fair, targeted provision to the whole community the review analysis uses a matrix score with data sets that include population density, indices of multiple deprivation, crime and obesity levels. Issues of equal opportunity are addressed through applications for any changes to existing or new developments, ensuring that all open space and such facilities are compliant and fit for purpose for all users including those with additional requirements.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified.
Local Government Reorganisation	In reviewing the play area provision in Swale and how it is delivered there is the option to encourage Parish Council's to transfer and take responsibility for play areas in their communities which in turn would keep decisions about improvements at a local level. This report highlights 14 play areas that could provide this opportunity.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Play Site Review – Knight, Kavanagh and Page Ltd
- Exempt Appendix 2: Play Area Savings figures

8 Background Papers

- [Housing Health and Communities 3 July 2025 – Play Strategy Update](#)