

## **Executive summary**

### *Purpose and time-scale*

This play area strategy covers a 10 year time period (2014-2024). The aim is to give an evidence base for the Waverley Borough Council's infrastructure delivery plan, investment in play facilities and policies around play. Strategy development is an iterative process and this strategy should be updated after 5 years, when it would be sensible to reassess equipment lifecycles and the number and quality of playgrounds, including those managed by residents' associations and management companies.

### *Methodology*

The methodology sets out how the findings, recommendations and action plan have been reached. The majority of data has been taken from an annual inspection, play value assessment, accessibility assessment and end of life estimate undertaken by RoSPA in April 2013. The findings section shows that the quality of the borough's play spaces range from 'excellent' to 'below average', although the inspections assessed play provision for all ages, which may not be appropriate at all sites. Four of Waverley's play sites are assessed as being fully accessible, while the majority (48) are assessed as 'partially accessible for people with disabilities'. It is recommended that improvements in access to and within sites, and the accessibility of play features are incorporated when developing plans to replace equipment or refurbish whole sites. There is specific information about accessibility on pages 14-14, 21 and in appendices C, D and E. The action plan (from page 35) has been prioritised using a combination of the estimated end of life of equipment, play value, accessibility.

### *Introduction*

The 2011 census figures show the population of Waverley has risen by 5.2% since 2001 (to 121572) and that the number of children and young people under 15 has increased to 18.4% of the population. Play provision is part of the necessary infrastructure for healthy communities; the rationale for this statement is considered in the first section of this strategy.

There is a large body of research that highlights the benefits of open space and physical activity for children and adults alike in reducing health inequalities and improving mental as well as physical health<sup>1</sup>. Outdoor activity has been shown to benefit children who find it difficult to concentrate indoors<sup>2</sup>, to benefit mental health and general physical health and thereby contribute to Surrey Health and Wellbeing Board's priorities. The research complements the physical activity guidelines for children and adults produced by the Department of Health. There is also evidence that the more children play outside, the more

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<sup>1</sup> Marmot, M. (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post 2010*. The Marmot Review - Policy objective E: 'Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities'.

<sup>2</sup> See 'Sowing the seeds – reconnecting London's children with nature', Tim Gill, 2012;

likely they are to do so as adults<sup>3</sup> – and therefore go on to encourage their own children to play outside.

The borough of Waverley has large areas of accessible outdoor space, in addition to informal and formal play spaces, which are a huge asset for the community. The provision of facilities and programmes that encourage all members of the community to use this asset will bring long-term health benefits. Investment in good quality open spaces, play equipment, outdoor gym equipment, trim trails, healthy walks programmes, forest schools and pond dipping each encourage different members of the community to take advantage of the borough's outdoor assets for the benefit of their own health.

Making improvements to play space and sports pitches to meet the needs of a growing population of children and young people is one of the four key areas of infrastructure development required to meet the growing needs of the Borough<sup>4</sup>. This strategy aims to offer a target that balances the need for designated play areas and informal open space for children and young people, with the wealth of open space there is for residents and visitors to Waverley to enjoy and the need for more housing and associated infrastructure in the Borough.

### *Standards*

The standards section of this strategy discusses standards that are widely used for play space planning and the standards that should be used for designing new play space, using the headings of quality, quantity and accessibility. Waverley has approximately 0.06Ha per 1000 population of equipped play space and 0.73Ha per 1000 population of informal play space. The accepted method for defining the amount and quality of play space in relation to areas of population has been the former National Playing Fields Association's 'six acre standard'. The NPFA is now known as the Fields in Trust and has revised its recommended standard as 'Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play' (2008), which recommends that there should be 0.8 ha of children's play space for every 1000 people. This target is broken down into 0.25ha/1000 of equipped play space and 0.55ha/1000 of informal play space.

When compared with that standard, the borough of Waverley has a shortfall of designated (or equipped) play space of 0.19ha/1000 people (or 23.17 hectares), balanced with a surplus of informal play space of 0.18ha/1000 people. However, current national planning guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework encourages local authorities to establish their own targets for quantities of play space and sports provision.

Waverley is a primarily rural borough with some quite densely populated areas. On average there is 0.06ha of equipped play space for every 1000 people. The focus of new resources should be in areas where play provision neither meets the average level of play provision in the borough nor the standard for informal play space. Seven wards fall below the Waverley

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<sup>3</sup> Layard and Dunn (2009) 'A Good Childhood: Searching for values in a competitive age' – quoted in 'Natural Childhood', Moss/National Trust (2012)

<sup>4</sup> identified in the Council's Corporate Plan (2012-2015) and Infrastructure Development Plan (March 2012)

average for both equipped play provision and the Fields in trust standard for informal play space. These are: Cranleigh East, Farnham Bourne, Farnham Moor Park, Farnham Shortheath and Boundstone, Godalming Binscombe, Godalming Charterhouse, Milford.

Other wards also have significantly less than average equipped play provision, but more informal play space these include: Chiddingfold and Dunsfold, Ewhurst, Farnham Hale & Heath End, Farnham Rowledge & Wrecclesham, Farnham Weybourne & Badshot Lea, Godalming Holloway, Haslemere East & Grayswood and Witley.

The standards section also considers quality and reviews different aspects of designing a play area, stressing the importance of trying to achieve design that is appropriate to its environment.

### *Recommendations and actions*

The recommendation in this strategy is to work towards achieving a total of 0.8ha of equipped or informal play space for every 1000 people, acknowledging the need to balance rural provision with that in more densely populated areas. This target aims to balance the large quantity of accessible open space in the Borough with the need for equipped play areas.

The main recommendations (on pages 22-32) include:

1. Recognising the major contribution to play provision made by parish councils, and also residents' associations and management companies, in addition to the Borough Council, in maintaining and developing play provision.
2. Ensuring all those responsible for play provision have access to information about contractors, standards, specifications and clear information about funding.
3. Rationalising play provision in communities, so that different communities benefit from a variety of play opportunities, which are tailored to local needs.
4. Making the most of opportunities provided by new development by ensuring play is included as an infrastructure need and that new play provision complements any that already exists within the neighbourhood and is prioritised in areas that most need it.

The section makes specific recommendations about play provision in the different communities across Waverley. The Borough Council's investment in play areas in the past 10 years, along with the investments made by many of the parishes into their play areas, has yielded benefits, as shown by the play value assessments. However, investment needs to be continued to maintain all play provision at a good standard.

The action plan (pages 35-49) takes all the findings together to offer a cohesive set of actions to deal with equipment nearing the end of its life, play value, accessibility and the principle of offering diverse play provision in any given community.

## Parishes

Parish councils and Haslemere Town Council manage almost one fifth of the play areas in the borough (15 of the total 74). Four areas are managed by residents' associations or management committees. There are three villages where both Borough and Parish provide play areas (these being Elstead, Ewhurst and Witley) but the majority of play provision in villages is provided by parish councils.

The majority of playgrounds which are in greatest need of refurbishing in the next 5 years are those managed by parish councils. The Borough Council could make more provision for supporting parishes in their endeavours to maintain play areas that are suited to their communities, through:

1. ensuring there is funding available to villages for play provision, as part of the infrastructure requirement for new development
2. providing advice about procurement, specification and design where appropriate. Appendices C and D provide some guidance.

## New Developments

The Council's current planning guidance is that for new developments of between 15 and 49 homes, a Local area for play (or LAP)<sup>5</sup> should be provided and that for those of above 50 dwellings, a locally equipped area for play (LEAP)<sup>6</sup> should be planned into the development. The principle of providing progressive play opportunities for new developments remains important. In using LAP and LEAP definitions, plans for new developments should follow the current Fields in Trust guidance and 'design for play' principles, aiming for a total play provision of 0.8ha per 1000 people which fits the environment and offers opportunities for challenge:

*The selection of sites for children's play environments should be an integral part of the design process for all new housing developments. The pattern and landscape of streets, paths, open spaces, the gradient of footpaths, the size of steps, the height of handrails and other factors must all be considered from a child's perspective<sup>7</sup>. Safe access to and from the designated play space should be incorporated into the design.*

Plans for infrastructure should include contributions for expanding local play areas, where play provision cannot be provided on the site (see page 10 of the strategy for more detail). As play is accepted as an important aspect of community infrastructure, the development, inspection and maintenance of play areas installed as part of planning conditions and not passed on to the Borough Council or parish councils to manage, needs to be secured via legal agreements or appropriate commuted sums.

<sup>5</sup> A **local area for play** (LAP) is a small area of open space, specifically designated and primarily laid out for very young children to play close to where they live (ie within 1 minute walking time).

<sup>6</sup> A **Locally equipped area for play (LEAP)** is an area of open space specifically designated and laid out with features including equipment for children who are beginning to go out and play independently close to where they live, usually within 5 minutes walking time.

<sup>7</sup> Fields in Trust, "Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play" 2009, Ch. 6 - The Design of Outdoor play and sports facilities" para 6.1.6