MINUTES OF PLANNING FOR PLAY TASK GROUP
15 AUGUST 2011

PRESENT:
Councillors Butlin, G Francis, Miss Lawrence, Mrs New, Mrs O'Rourke and Srivastava.

Rob Back (Forward Planning and Economic Development Manager), Colin Horton (Green Spaces Officer), Paul Ansell (Scrutiny Officer) and Claire Waleczek (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer (Team Leader)).

Mark Rose (Cala Homes) and Matt Hassall (James Blake Associates).

7. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2011 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

8. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Hazelton, Lowe and Chris Worman (Parks and Grounds Manager).

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs New declared a general personal interest by virtue of being a Warwickshire County Council employee.

10. PRESENTATION BY GATEWAY DEVELOPERS

The Task Group received a presentation from Matt Hassall, James Blake Associates and Mark Rose, Cala Homes concerning play provision in housing schemes such as the Gateway development.

A copy of the presentation is attached at Annex 1 to the minutes.

Further to the presentation, the following points were made.

• In the past, standards for play provision had resulted in the under-usage of generic play spaces which had been mainly railing controlled. A greater emphasis had been placed on the pieces of play equipment rather than opportunities to create stimulation for children for different sensory experiences.

• Risk taking was a fundamental part of play and a balance had to be struck between risk and the degree of safety at play areas.

• Concern was raised regarding the use of sand as a surface in play areas due to dog fouling. However, play areas in London had been dog warden controlled initially when they were first opened which had alleviated any problems.
• The presence of dogs in open play areas was considered a potential problem. Play areas were designed to discourage dog owners from using the more intimate play area and to encourage use of more open space. Planting in play areas helped to promote more localised play and discourage dogs.

• With regard to risk assessment of play provision, guidance from RoSPA was used in connection with the design and size of play equipment used. Once play provision was installed, the area was independently assessed.

• It was recognised that there needed to be flexibility at outline planning application stage for play provision. It was emphasised that Members should ensure that any vision for play in new housing developments be incorporated into a planning scheme at the reserved matters stage of the application. Appropriate communication with planning officers would help to ensure that aspirations and standards for play were fulfilled as part of the development process.

• It was suggested that sports and recreation officers be consulted as part of the planning process regarding play provision. New elements of play, such as pump and BMX tracks, could be considered for inclusion in new developments, as well as open play areas, depending on the availability of space and costs. These officers would be aware of requests from organisations and clubs for these new facilities.

• The Task Group considered that it would be beneficial to include planning guidance on play provision at new housing developments as part of Planning Committee members’ annual training on planning.

Mark Rose and Matt Hassall were thanked for their presentation.

11. SITE VISIT 25TH JULY 2011

The Task Group considered the site visit to key play areas in housing developments in the Borough and the planning notes for the visit which were circulated with the agenda.

The following conclusions were drawn from the site visit.

• The two areas allocated for play provision at Willans Green were unsuitable as they did not meet minimum distance standards. It was agreed that in future more consultation should take place as part of the planning process to ensure that suitable areas for play were allocated.

• There was no suitable area for play provision at Bilton Pavilions although it was noted at the time of the visit that children playing were using natural features at the fringes of the large open space for free play.

• No problems were observed at the play areas in Cawston and they appeared to be well used. There had been requests for goal posts to be installed at the NEAP at Cavendish Close, which officers would be happy to consider.

• The task group should seek to make recommendations on mechanisms to improve the assessment of play area provision at outline planning stage. In addition to the consultation of play and green spaces officers, consultees might include members, residents, and community and interest groups.
12. REVISED ONE PAGE STRATEGY

The Task Group considered and approved the revised one page strategy which was circulated with the agenda.

13. PLANNING FOR NEXT MEETING 21 SEPTEMBER 2011

The next meeting of the Task Group would consider:

(i) a presentation from Colin Horton, Green Spaces Officer, concerning the consultation process on the design of play areas and the installation of play provision in the community; and

(ii) the outcome of consultation from users of play provision.

CHAIRMAN
THE NEW PLAY STRATEGY FOR PUBLIC OPEN SPACES
Our Role

• Develop a unified green network of useable spaces

• Enhance biodiversity and ecological value by working with the unique conditions and promoting native planting

• Creating exciting and challenging opportunities to promote personal development through active play.

‘Open spaces, sport and recreation all underpin people’s quality of life. Well-designed and implemented planning policies for open space, sport and recreation are therefore fundamental to delivering broader Government objectives’
Previous Play Guidance

Play Spaces

- The first established widely excepted minimum quantity standard for open space was the ‘Six Acre Standard’
- Extensively adopted by Local Planning Authorities
- The interpretation often created underused, generic, railing controlled play spaces.
- Too much weight on the importance of equipment to the detriment of design and landscape.
Previous Play Guidance

Playground manufactures often designing spaces with a vested interest in providing equipment.

Unimaginative and prescriptive spaces
Definition of ‘Play’

What actually is ‘Play’?

- Not doing too much
- Doing lots
- Being contemplative
- Being alone
- Overcoming difficulties
- Being thwarted
- Being challenged
- Being social
- Using imagination
- Role Play
- Adventure
- Discovery

Discovery
"Playing allows children to develop a sense of well-being, develops their emotional responses and improves their interpersonal skills. It involves exploration and creativity, helping children think in a flexible manner, developing the creative process, language skills, and learning and problem solving skills. (DCSF: 2008a)"

Not the simple physical definitions purported by the NPFA (now FiT) such as running, jumping, sliding, swinging, rocking etc
National Play Strategy from the DCSF

- Creating playable open spaces, not individual cellular play spaces: Generic play areas of low value, high cost and high risk.

- Natural play landscapes are more attractive: Play is now recognised as being a vital part of learning through role play, imagination, discovery and adventure: Not to be limited to simplistic physical descriptions: Running, jumping, sliding, swinging etc as before.

- The concept of playable open spaces puts play as part of living, promoting community identity, cohesion and inclusiveness whilst saving space, maintenance costs and resources.

- Management expediency – low cost, easy maintenance, and low risk of injury and litigation. This ensures all parties win from natural play: LPA, Users and Residents.
Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time playing. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. Play provision should aim at managing the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from serious harm. The principles of safety management are applicable both to workplaces in general as well as to play provision. However, the balance between safety and benefits is likely to be different in the two environments. In play provision, exposure to some degree of risk may be of benefit because it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about risk and consequences in a controlled environment.

*BS EN 1176-1 Playground equipment and surfacing – Part 1: General safety requirements and test methods (BSI, 2008a)*
Design Solutions for Play

Emerging Government Guidance

- Creating **playable** spaces not play spaces.
- Creating landscapes for play and **learning**
- Designing **flexible** spaces suitable for many uses
- Large **savings** on maintenance
- Developing spaces where play is part of **living**
- Creating spaces that are more cohesive and **attractive**
- Management expediency – less risk of injury / **liability**
- Savings for local authorities in not having to defend **claims** by ambulance chasers
Design Solutions for Play
Design Solutions for Play

What opportunities we would like to create?

• A more exciting public realm through linked spaces
• Imaginative play opportunities
• Greater opportunities for socialising
• Developing physical challenges
• Spaces for relaxation
• Enhancing children’s self-esteem by providing mental challenge and managed risk within play
• Providing stimulation from a variety of sensory experiences.
The DCSF and Play England have prepared a new strategy for play provision that flies in the face of the former NPFA guidance – now Fields In Trust. Play provision should be about creating playable open space throughout the open space network instead of prescriptive play spaces. This saves money while adding value.
NEW PLAY STRATEGY