MINUTES OF PLANNING FOR PLAY TASK GROUP

21 SEPTEMBER 2011

PRESENT:

Councillors Butlin (Chairman), Miss Lawrence, Lowe (substituting for Councillor Hazelton), Mrs New and Mrs O’Rourke.

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

14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 August 2011 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

15. MATTERS ARISING

The Task Group was informed that the Rugby Area Play Partnership had been concerned that play areas allocated on the proposed Gateway site and the Coton Park development were within 30 metres’ distance of electricity pylons. National Grid guidance states that play areas should be situated at least 30 metres away from pylons to prevent accidents.

The Forward Planning and Economic Development Manager reported that he was unaware that play areas were allocated within the 30 metre minimum distance on the proposed Gateway site. It was emphasised that this guidance did not apply to public open space.

With regard to the Coton Park development, electricity authorities had been satisfied with the location of the playing fields on the site at the time of consultation. The Consortium for the site were prepared to consider different layouts for play equipment at the development.

Officers would investigate the matter.

16. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors G Francis and Hazelton.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs New declared a general personal interest by virtue of being an employee of Warwickshire County Council.
18. PRESENTATION BY THE GREEN SPACES OFFICER – CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR THE DESIGN OF PLAY AREAS AND THE INSTALLATION OF PLAY PROVISION IN THE COMMUNITY

The Task Group considered a presentation from the Green Spaces Officer concerning an example of the design of a play area and the installation of play equipment at Caldecott Manor, Boughton Road, Rugby near to the Tesco store.

An indicative drawing of the site showing an octagonal area for play provision together with designs of the area used at stages of the design process are attached at Annex 1 to the minutes.

The three designs of the play area and provision show how improvements were made in consultation with the contractor to meet the needs of the community in line with the Council’s Play Strategy together with the current philosophy of the Council. Landscaping was incorporated to ensure the area was socially inclusive.

Once the play equipment was installed on an area, a 12 month inspection agreement would be established to deal with any snagging issues on the site. The Council then received a five year financial sum from the developer to take on the maintenance of the play area.

The Task Group was informed that the location and amount of play area was agreed at the planning stage of an application but not the type of play equipment to be installed. This was the responsibility of the Green Spaces team in consultation with the developer. It was agreed that the timing of the installation of play equipment and consultation process was crucial depending on the timescale of the build of a new development.

The Task Group considered that consultation with Members and between officers was key to effective play areas. Officers reported that a consultation process was already in place with Members. Consultation already existed between officers within the Council.

19. FEEDBACK FROM THE INFORMAL CONSULTATION OF USERS

The Scrutiny Officer informed the Task Group that the informal consultation of users of the Council’s play areas during the summer had been undertaken by the Play Ranger service at Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC). Unfortunately, due to staff annual leave at NNBC, the Community Sports and Recreation Manager had been unable to acquire the findings of the consultation for this meeting.

The findings would be reported to the Task Group’s next meeting on 24th October 2011.

Officers informed the Task Group that the Council’s Play Strategy was due to be revised in 2012. A full consultation process would be undertaken including feedback from users as well as other agencies.
20. PROGRESS REVIEW AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Task Group considered the progress review paper which was circulated with the agenda.

It was agreed that the proposed recommendation 1 of the Task Group relating to member training on planning guidance in play provision in housing developments be deleted. Discussions on allocation of land for play provision were undertaken prior to applications being considered at Planning Committee. It was therefore considered that this recommendation was irrelevant.

The Task Group considered that the three remaining recommendations be reversed in order as follows:

- A need for the vision for play in a development should be considered early in the planning process so that play areas are not just sited on the left-over land that has no other use
- There is a need for a mechanism to consult others during the planning process (e.g., ward members, residents, community and interest groups)
- Recreation or green spaces officers should be consulted on play provision during the planning process.

Officers advised that the two proposed recommendations relating to consultation already happened but it was acknowledged that this process needed to be audited and managed so that personal judgement and human error in the process were avoided.

The Task Group considered that, although Ward Members were consulted by e-mail on new planning applications in their area, this could be improved. There were IT issues relating to the availability of the Planning Portal system and Members’ access to their e-mail accounts. It was accepted that this needed addressing.

The Task Group considered how to satisfy the requirement for sustainability that the group had added to the one page strategy in July. It had become apparent that issues of sustainability were more appropriate to the design and equipping of play areas, which were beyond the scope of the review.

The Task Group considered it had undertaken appropriate consultation as part of its review. The Rugby Area Play Partnership played a valuable role as consultees on the refurbishment of play areas as well as having input in new play areas. The Task Group did not consider it necessary for its members to attend meetings of the Partnership as Councillor Miss Lawrence was this Council’s representative.

The Task Group considered the requirement of the one page strategy that the group “produce concise recommendations for incorporation in planning strategy and policy documents and feeding into the Play Strategy.” In fact, the policy was for Planning to follow the standards laid down in the Play Strategy and it would therefore not be helpful to add specifics relating to play in planning documents which might duplicate or contradict the Play Strategy. The Task Group supported the Play Strategy’s standards and did not consider it appropriate to attempt to make any recommendations to amend Strategy in advance of the wide consultation that would accompany the Strategy’s review.

The real issue was to ensure that systems were in place to ensure that planning officers observed the Play Strategy’s guidelines and consulted appropriately.
The Scrutiny Officer would submit to the 24 October meeting a draft report of the review together with suitably amended versions of the proposed recommendations to reflect the change in emphasis outlined above. These would be accompanied by a draft action plan to demonstrate how the recommendations would be put into effect and monitored.

The Task Group would need to have one more meeting after this to finalise the review report and action plan following consultation of the Portfolio Holder and the officers responsible for carrying out actions.

CHAIRMAN