A meeting of the Planning for Play Task Group will be held at 5.30pm on Monday 24 October 2011 in Committee Room 1 at the Town Hall, Rugby.

Councillor P Butlin
Chairman

A G E N D A

PART 1 – PUBLIC BUSINESS

1. Minutes – to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2011.

2. Apologies - to receive apologies for absence form the meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive declarations of:

(a) personal interests as defined by the Council’s Code of Conduct for Councillors;

(b) prejudicial interests as defined by the Council’s Code of Conduct for Councillors; and

(c) notice under Section 106 Local Government Finance Act 1992 – non-payment of Community Charge or Council Tax.

Note: Members are reminded that they should declare the existence and nature of their personal interests at the commencement of the meeting (or as soon as the interest becomes apparent). If that interest is a prejudicial interest the Member must withdraw from the room unless one of the exceptions applies.

Membership of Warwickshire County Council or any Parish Council is classed as a personal interest under the Code of Conduct. A Member does not need to declare this interest unless the Member chooses to speak on a matter relating to their membership. If the Member does not wish to speak on the matter, the Member may still vote on the matter without making a declaration.
4. Feedback from the informal consultation of users – Play Development Officer, Vicky Norman, to report at the meeting.


6. Date of final meeting (if required) – please bring your diary to the meeting.

**PART 2 – EXEMPT INFORMATION**

There is no business involving exempt information to be transacted.

**Membership of the Task Group:**

Councillors Butlin (Chairman), G Francis, Hazleton, Miss Lawrence, Mrs New, Mrs O’Rourke and Srivastava.

*If you have any general queries with regard to this agenda please contact Claire Waleczek, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer (Team Leader) (01788 533524 or e-mail claire.waleczek@rugby.gov.uk). Any specific queries concerning reports should be directed to the listed contact officer.*

*If you wish to attend the meeting and have any special requirements for access please contact the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer named above.*
PLANNING FOR PLAY

A review of the provision of land for play in new housing developments

Draft report to the Planning for Play Task Group
24 October 2011
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**TASK GROUP MEMBERSHIP**

The task group consisted of the following members:

Councillor Peter Butlin (Chairman)  
Councillor Graham Francis  
Councillor Robin Hazelton  
Councillor Miss Kathryn Lawrence  
Councillor Mrs Noreen New  
Councillor Ramesh Srivastava  
Councillor Ian Lowe substituted for Councillor Hazelton

Councillor Miss Lawrence also acted as a liaison point with the Rugby Play Partnership

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

Please contact:

Paul Ansell    Claire Waleczek  
Scrutiny Officer    Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer  
tel: 01788 533591    tel: 01788 533524  
email: paul.ansell@rugby.gov.uk    email: claire.waleczek@rugby.gov.uk

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Group thanks the following for their contribution to this review:

**Rugby Borough Council**

Rob Back    Forward Planning and Economic Development Manager  
Colin Horton    Green Spaces Officer  
Caroline Johnson    Community Sports and Recreation Manager  
Steve Parkes    Principal Planning Officer  
Anna Rose    Head of Planning and Culture  
Chris Worman    Parks and Grounds Manager

**External**

Matt Hassall    James Blake Associates  
Mark Rose    Cala Homes
CHAIRMAN’S FOREWORD

To be added
1. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of this the Task Group proposes the following specific recommendations:

**IMPROVEMENTS THAT COULD BE MADE QUICKLY AND AT LOW COST**

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**MODIFICATIONS OF EXISTING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

**SIGNIFICANT PROPOSALS WHICH WILL REQUIRE COMMITMENT OF TIME OR FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

*Note: Recommendations are listed in order of priority within each category.*
2. OBJECTIVES

2.1 Background

The council's former Play Development Officer submitted a proposal for the review to the February 2011 overview and scrutiny work programme workshop. This proposal was for a review of the principal planning policy, design and location considerations towards the allocation of public open spaces and play provision for new housing developments. The proposal had been developed in conjunction with the Rugby Area Play Partnership and was made in the light of perceived shortcomings in provision at Bilton Pavilions and Coton Park.

A draft one page strategy for the review was agreed by the Customer and Partnerships Committee on 23 June 2011. This narrowed the scope of the review from open space provision in general to the provision of land for play in new housing developments.

2.2 The One Page Strategy

The ‘one page strategy’ is the name given to the scoping document for the review. It defines the task and the improvements being aimed for and how these are going to be achieved. The review’s one page strategy, finalised by the task group in July 2011, is as follows:

What is the broad topic area?

Provision of land for play in new housing developments in terms of quantity, location, suitability and timing.

What is the specific topic area?

There have been instances of housing developments having inappropriate land allocated for play. The purpose of the review is to find out why this has happened and how it can be prevented in future.

What is the ambition of the review?

Provision of high quality play provision in all new housing developments which meets the needs of local residents.

How well do we perform at the moment?

Past developments show varying levels of performance. There are some very good examples and some which are considered to be very poor in terms of play provision. This could be linked to differing governmental planning agendas over the years.
Who shall we consult about the current service and about how we can improve it?

The Play Partnership; a developer; residents’ groups; users of current play areas. Task group members will visit developments to see examples of good and less good provision.

What other help do we need?

Officers from Planning, Recreation and Parks & Open Spaces will need to attend certain meetings. As a result of restructuring and existing workloads in these areas, there is limited officer capacity to support the review. The task group’s work programme should be designed so that attendance is selective rather than requiring blanket attendance at every meeting.

How long should it take?

To be complete by December 2011 to feed into the revised Play Strategy which is due to be published early in 2012.

What will be the outcome?

The task group will produce concise recommendations for incorporation in planning strategy and policy documents and feeding into the Play Strategy.

2.3 Alignment with the Corporate Strategy

The review relates to the following corporate priorities:

Priority 3: Enable our residents, visitors and enterprises to enjoy, achieve and prosper.
Priority 4: Enable and sustain an environment which our residents can take pride in and which impress our visitors.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Fact-finding

In order to develop the evidence base for the review, the Panel considered a wide range of data and information. This included:

- Planning documentation
- Discussion with officers involved in planning and in the provision and maintenance of play areas.
- Informal consultation of users
- Site visits
- Discussion with a developer
3.2 Background papers

The task group papers for this review can be found online at www.rugby.gov.uk, clicking on agendas, reports and minutes near the foot of the page and then selecting all committees. The minutes provide an account of discussions that went beyond the scope of this report but which provided useful contextual information.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Legislation and National Guidance

National guidance on play areas and other open space is prescriptive. Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17) requires local planning authorities to undertake an assessment of needs and opportunities for, amongst other things, open space. In compliance with this, the Rugby Open Space Audit was published in August 2008.

4.2 Quantity

In arriving at a quantity standard, the consultant carrying out the open space audit carried out a local consultation which asked the question:

“For the part of the district where you live, please tell us what you think about the provision of the following accessible open spaces.”

Answers were given for a range of different sports and leisure activities. In relation to play, the answers were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A lot more needed</th>
<th>Slightly more needed</th>
<th>It is about right</th>
<th>There is more than enough</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s play areas under eights</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s play areas 8-12 year olds</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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</table>

The audit applied a quantity space standard of 0.5m² per person for equipped play areas in both rural and urban areas, but this should be seen in the context of far greater provision per head of population also needing to be made for other types of provision where play could take place such as parks and gardens, recreation grounds, amenity green space, and natural green space. This review is limited to the provision of land for equipped play areas.
4.3 Distance

Paragraph 5.9 of the companion guide to PPG17 advises that distance thresholds to visit facilities or open spaces cannot be drawn up in a hard and fast manner, but that they are affected by a range of factors:

- Age of the users
- Weather
- Topography
- Traffic and other personal safety issues
- Quality of the facility

Regional Planning guidance suggests a 300m target and a 600m maximum distance to children’s play areas.

The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA\(^1\)) applies standards to three categories of play area: Local Area for Play, Local Equipped Area for Play, and Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (LAP, LEAP and NEAP). The classifications show the minimum requirements for each category based upon size, play opportunities and buffer distances etc. As they reflected what was seen as good practice at their time of drafting, some aspects of the minimal requirements such as fencing of play areas are no longer deemed best practice, but their guidance on minimum size, play opportunities and buffer distances remain widely used. The Rugby Borough Play Strategy adopts this standard, and the local planning authority has regard to the Strategy though historically the provision of LAPs has been discouraged in view of their small size, the difficulty in satisfactorily locating them in housing developments taking account of amenity considerations, and maintenance costs.

These standards express the location not in terms of maximum distance from users but in terms of walking time for users. At the same time, the standards also state minimum distance of play equipment from dwellings in order to avoid disturbance to neighbours. This in turn needs to be balanced with the desirability of proximity to housing and footpaths for informal supervision to ensure users of the play areas feel safe and secure, and to reduce the risk of ASB.

**NPFA Play Area Standards**

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<tr>
<th>LAP – Local Area for Play</th>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>One minute walking time from home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target age group</td>
<td>Four to six-year-olds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Low-key games, French cricket or play with small toys.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

\(^1\) Since 2009 operating as Fields in Trust, or FIT
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<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Equipment should be small-scale and appropriate for younger children; seating and dog fencing.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Activity zone (to avoid disturbance to neighbours) at least 5m from the nearest residential property.</td>
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**LEAP – Local Equipped Area for Play**

- **Location**: Five minutes walking time from home.
- **Target age group**: Four to eight years. Consideration should also be given to very young children and unaccompanied eight to ten-year-olds.
- **Purpose**: LEAPS should cater for a large range of play activity, including informal ball games.
- **Equipment**: At least five types of play equipment. Should also have seating for accompanying adults and be fenced to exclude dogs.
- **Area**: Activity zone (to avoid disturbance to neighbours) at least 20m from the nearest residential property.

**NEAP – Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play**

- **Location**: Within 15 minutes walking time from home.
- **Target age group**: Unaccompanied and unsupervised 8 to 14-year-olds.
- **Purpose**: To provide challenging and stimulating play opportunities.
- **Equipment**: A minimum of eight types of play equipment, kickabout area and facilities for skateboarding, bicycles or similar activities. Seating for adults and for teenagers to use as a meeting place. The area should also be fenced to exclude dogs.
- **Area**: Activity zone approximately 1000m². Buffer zone at least 30m from the activity zone to the nearest residential property.

### 4.4 Rugby Borough Play Strategy

The review’s one page strategy states that the review will produce recommendations for incorporation in planning strategy and policy documents and feeding into the Play Strategy. During the course of the review, it has become evident that, in fact, the Play Strategy is at the pinnacle of the policy process and the planning practice follows the strategy. The Play Strategy review is due to take place early in 2012, and this will be the subject of extensive consultation. It would be inappropriate for the review to put forward recommendations in advance of this.
More important, any shortcomings in play provision in new developments appear to be the result of uneven application of the standards rather than shortcomings in the standards themselves.

This became evident during the task group’s visits to the Willans Green, Cawston and Bilton Pavilions developments.

4.5 Site visits

At Willans Green – a medium sized brownfield development – the land reserved for play was a choice between two plots of land, neither of which was capable of meeting the minimum buffer distance, or play provision standards. A plot of land in Gladstone Street by the allotments seemed to be an example of a left-over piece of land being allocated for play rather than having play provision properly integrated into the scheme design.

At Bilton Pavilions, the only piece of land allocated within the development was unsuitable in terms of minimum distance from houses and also because of the slope to one side of the site. A good sized area was available on the floodplain alongside Bilton Road but this had a different problem of increased walking distance from the majority of dwellings in the development. Being a floodplain imposes restrictions on the possibilities for the site and effects maintenance, and is also in close proximity to a busy road. However the site does have good informal supervision from houses and pathways while also having good buffer distances and size. It was understood that Bilton Pavilions was an unusual case owing to the need to achieve a high level of affordable housing, and the low priority given to land for play had not been the result of an error or omission.

Cawston, on the other hand, showed examples of play areas in use and a site for a future NEAP, all of which had been well incorporated into the development’s design. The two LEAPs visited meet the minimum requirements and are in reasonable locations. The proposed NEAP is very well located, exceeds minimum requirements and offers great opportunity. This is clearly easier to achieve in a large green field site.

4.6 Integration of play provision into scheme design

Matt Hassall of James Blake Associates and Mark Rose of Cala Homes – one of the housing developers of the Gateway Site – discussed provision of play in major developments with the task group. This revealed the importance of flexibility regarding play provision at the outline planning stage. Councillors needed to ensure that their vision for play in new housing developments was incorporated into a planning scheme at the reserved matters stage of the application. The discussion illustrated the ambitious provision that developers were prepared and able to build into schemes, in this case using a landscape architect who understood and supported the objective of promoting personal development through play.
4.7 Liaison with officers and councillors

The task group received a presentation from the Green Spaces Officer using the scheme at Caldecott Manor scheme off Boughton Road as a case study. This illustrated that an area of land of a suitable size, shape and location had been agreed with the Parks and Grounds team during the planning application process, and the detailed design had been developed with that team through an iterative process.

The task group attempted to identify the reasons why this did not always happen so satisfactorily. There is an apparent need to ensure that the necessary liaison between operational officers within and between the relevant sections/departments of the Council occurs in respect of the provision of land for play. Consultation on planning applications did occur routinely through the emailing of notifications of new applications to ward members, but members highlighted the difficulties they had in keeping track of applications in their wards, partly because of IT faults in the Planning Portal and councillors’ email system.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The task group has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence:

5.1 The standards contained in the Play Strategy are fundamentally sound and the task group does not wish to recommend amendments.

5.2 There is evidence of land for play sometimes not having been satisfactorily designed into new housing developments at an early stage. This has been the result not of defects in planning policy documentation but of giving insufficient consideration to the application of Play Strategy standards.

5.3 It is recognised, however, that provision for play is only one of a range of planning and other considerations to be balanced in assessing the merits of housing developments and may well be compromised, particularly on constrained sites.

5.4 Systems should be put in place to ensure compliance with the Play Strategy’s space and distance guidelines wherever possible.

5.5 Consultation with appropriate officers and ward members takes place, but there appear to have been occasions when ward members have – for whatever reason – not engaged with consultation process.

5.6 There is a need to ensure that existing consultation processes are operating effectively between officers and between officers and members. There is also a need to ensure that consultations are responded to in a timely manner to ensure that any views are made known and taken into account.
5.6 Any systems put in place should be designed not to place an undue burden on officers or members.
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