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# BIRMINGHAM OUTDOOR PLAY FACILITIES POLICY 2020

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## **1. VISION FOR BIRMINGHAM'S PLAY PROVISION**

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**Birmingham will be an inspiring place where all children and young people can enjoy living, learning, developing and achieving, and where they can feel secure in a child and family friendly city, with its diverse communities and neighbourhoods.**

### **1.1 PLAY**

Play is the fundamental way that children enjoy their childhood. It is essential to their quality of life as children.

- Playing is fun: it is how children enjoy themselves.
- Play promotes children's development, learning, imagination, creativity and independence.
- Play can help to keep children healthy and active.
- Play allows children to experience and encounter boundaries, learning to assess and manage risk in their lives; both physical and social.
- Play helps children to understand the people and places in their lives; learn about their environment and develop their sense of community.
- Play allows children to find out about themselves, their abilities, their interests and the contribution they can make.
- Play can be therapeutic. It helps children to deal with difficult or painful circumstances such as emotional stress or medical treatment.

The term 'Play Areas' in this document refers to spaces where the Council approves and/or maintains spaces which include fixed play equipment/ 'formal play' provision. However for physical and mental health and wellbeing, children and families can benefit from a wide range of informal play opportunities and access to natural greenspace, which can be supported by well designed and maintained parks and open spaces integrated and linked to formal Play Areas

### **1.2 Children and Health Priorities for Birmingham City Council:**

#### **1.2.1 Children**

We as a City Council want to create a safe, secure city for our children to have fun, learn and grow in.

What this means for Birmingham

- Our children have the best start in life.
- Children are able to realise their full potential through great education and training.
- Our children are safe, feel safe, and are confident and proud of whom they are.
- Birmingham is a great place for our children to have fun and grow up in.

### 1.2.2 Health

We want Birmingham to be a great city to lead a healthy and active life. Birmingham City Council will help people become healthier by:

- encouraging young people to take part in more exercise through more opportunities to play outdoors ;
- reducing health inequalities between different groups of people in the city;
- providing play facilities in green open spaces to improve the mental wellbeing of people in Birmingham;
- helping health and social care professionals work more closely with the Parks Service to provide outdoor play facilities for those with the greatest need;

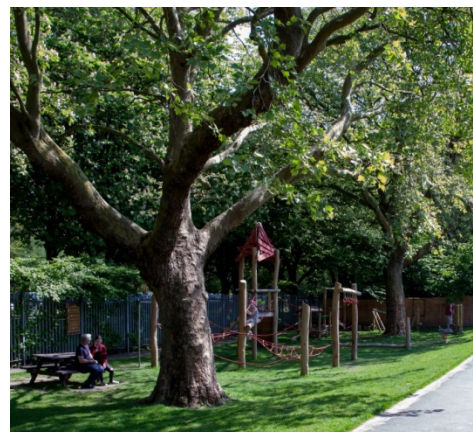
1.3 Our vision is that:

**“Every child has an equal right to play and enjoy childhood experiences through a range of challenging, formal and informal play opportunities in a safe environment wherever they are in Birmingham.”**

As play providers we will support this vision for play by adhering to Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that signatories shall:

1. *Recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and arts.”*
2. *Respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.*

Birmingham City Council will aim to provide and maintain a play area within 800m of every dwelling, subject to available land and financial resources.



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## 2. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

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Birmingham is a city of great diversity and its children come from many different backgrounds and experiences. This policy focuses on outdoor play facilities as experienced by all children age 0-13, and sport facilities for young people up to the age of 25 and complements the National Planning Policy Framework.

National planning policy emphasises the value to the health and well-being of communities that comes from providing access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity. It considers the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities to be provided in conjunction with new developments, and the protection of existing spaces and facilities from inappropriate development.

Planning policy for the protection and provision of open space is contained in the Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) adopted January 2017, particularly Policy TP9 Open space, playing fields and allotments. The policy seeks to ensure that new residential development delivers open space to meet need and sets out standards for the provision and accessibility of public open space and children's play facilities, specifically within 400m of all residents. For more information visit: [Adopted BDP 2031](#)

The Parks Service plays a pivotal role in ensuring the play and open space needs of children and the young are considered when determining planning applications that impact open space or create a need for new play provision. The Landscape Practice Group, on behalf of the Parks Service, is a consultee on all planning applications that impact open space and children's play provision.

It is not the intention of Birmingham City Council to be the sole provider of outdoor children's play facilities in the City and wherever possible developers will be required to make provision for children's play in areas of need to meet the 400m target. The design standards will meet those set out in this document and developers must put in place management arrangements to maintain the facilities for public use and to equivalent standards to those sites adopted by Birmingham City Council.

Where an off-site contribution for play is generated through a Town and Country Planning Act S106 Agreement there is a presumption that funding will be directed towards the improvement of an existing site with specific local needs. For further guidance the Supplementary Planning Document 'Provision of Public Open Space within Residential Development', SPD (and any subsequent revision) sets specific triggers for Junior and Infant play areas and their respective sizes and costs. (Note the costs are subject to revision following regular review of market costs)



*Birmingham Wildlife Conservation Park*

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### 3 UK LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR PLAY FACILITIES

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Current legislation and policy which impacts on the design and delivery of play facilities include:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Health and Safety At Work Act etc 1974
- The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 24
- The Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Disclosure and barring service

1. The Equality Act 2010: The requirement to provide accessible play features in all play areas for children with limited mobility and other disabilities in accordance with the spirit of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Equality Act 2010 replaced most of the Disability Discrimination Act however this still embodies many elements of the DDA Act 2004 which states that providers must take reasonable steps to remove or alter any features that make it impossible for disabled persons to access (see section 5. Inclusive Play).

2. British/European Standards - BS EN 1176 Parts 1 to 7, 10 and 11, and BS 7188:1998+A2:2009 where appropriate.

3. PD CEN-TR 16879-2016 Siting of Playground and other recreational facilities – advice on methods for positioning and separation. The BS recommends a risk/benefit analysis is undertaken for the siting of Outdoor Gym Areas and play facilities.

4. The Building Regulations 2010 and subsequent updates – although these do not directly apply to outdoor play facilities they set the standards and parameters required to make it possible for disabled persons to access a play area. Designers should pay due regard to these standards.

- i. Approved Document M4(1) Category 1: Access to and use of Buildings – Visitable Dwellings (2015 Edition incorporating 2016 amendments)
- ii. Approved Document K: Stairs ladders and Ramps (K1); Protection from Falling, Collision and Impact(K2) (2013 Edition)

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) set guidelines for the design of safe play areas.

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#### 4 PARKS SAFETY STANDARDS FOR PLAY

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1. **Post-installation safety inspections:** for the construction of new or refurbished play areas the following clause shall be written into the contract specification: *Prior to the final handover, the contractor shall arrange for a post installation inspection of the completed playground and equipment to be carried out by an inspector included on the Register of Play Inspectors International Ltd. For a list of registered inspectors, call 024 7669 3787 or go to [www.playinspectors.com](http://www.playinspectors.com). The contractor will also issue to the inspector a copy of the layout plan to facilitate the inspection. A copy of the full inspection report is to be submitted to the Contract Administrator.*
  
2. **Play Area Safety Inspections:**
  - i. All play areas managed by the Parks Service will be inspected regularly (in most heavily used sites this will be daily) for hazards and faults. Anything that is recorded as high risk or a danger to the health and well-being of the public will be rectified at the earliest opportunity and taken out of use while awaiting repair or removal. Other less serious faults will be monitored and repaired by Playground Services. Regular risk assessments will be carried out on programme in line with the normal Parks Service procedure.
  
  - ii. Play area risk assessments are undertaken annually by Playground Services staff. The health and safety advisor for Birmingham City Council carries out regular courses for service providers' operatives to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities when carrying out all inspections. The annual risk assessment will be used to determine the frequency of the regular inspections, whether daily, 3 times a week, weekly or other frequency depending on the condition of the individual site.
  
  - iii. A programme of ad-hoc inspections will be undertaken by Birmingham City Council's Safety Advisor reporting to Parks Management.
  
  - iv. Play areas will also be inspected by a BCC appointed inspector on a biennial programme. The inspector shall report against the following criteria:
    - Name and description of the Site
    - Location and Address
    - Play Value
    - Size and age suitability of play provision (Primary, Secondary or Tertiary)
    - Content and condition relating to
      - play equipment
      - fencing and gates
      - site furniture



- Safer surfacing: type and suitability i.e. external condition and dimensional requirements.
  - Suitability for inclusive use
  - Safety risk rating: High; Medium; Low
  - Urgent actions to mitigate risks to the public.
  - Recommendations for improvement or removal.
  - Date for review.
- v. BCC Playground Services will undertake any actions highlighted by the inspector or Birmingham City Council Safety Advisor within agreed timescales according to the severity of the risk and/or the impact of the positive upgrade opportunity. Any items reported to be high risk or dangerous will be actioned at the earliest opportunity and taken out of use immediately, while awaiting repair or removal.
3. **Birmingham City Council approved Outdoor Play Equipment suppliers:** Play products are appraised by the BCC Safety Advisor and Playground Services to determine that they meet the requirements of the Parks Service in respect of safety standards, quality of materials and robustness for unsupervised usage, resilience against specific anti-social behaviour issues and the availability /cost of spare parts. The designer, taking the above into account, will then select equipment from the approved range that suits the space and provides appropriate play value that meets the needs of the children living in the neighbourhood of the facility.
4. **Birmingham City Council Directorate officers to provide approval of the play area layout plan and equipment selection:** All designs from external providers and the Landscape Practice Group (LPG) are to be seen and approved by the District Parks Manager, the Safety Advisor and the Principal Landscape Architect , who will check for safety, ease of maintenance, design interest and play value prior to installation, which should be supervised by an appropriately qualified Council officer.
5. **Risk- Benefit Analysis:**
- i. Those involved in the design of play areas have duties under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that children and other users must not be exposed to risks to their health and safety.
  - ii. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to carry out a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to their employees and others, arising from their work activities.

- iii. The operator (Client officer) and creator (Designer) of the play space has a duty to assess the risks to children and implement appropriate risk control measures. This risk assessment should identify the hazard i.e. the potential to cause harm, assess the likelihood of that harm occurring, the potential severity and numbers affected.
- iv. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recognizes that the benefits of play should inform the risk assessment process, however children should be able to experience challenging play without an unacceptable risk of serious injury or death. This can be achieved by implementing sensible risk control measures including proper design, installation and maintenance. Where recognized standards exist i.e. BS EN 1176 these should be used although in some circumstances, where the standards do not strictly apply, e.g. natural play spaces) the general principles enshrined within them may be relevant to the risk assessment and may assist in identifying appropriate risk control.
- v. The principles of risk control apply to natural play spaces and equipment in the same way that they do to conventional playgrounds. The operators/creators and play equipment manufacturers will be required to specify maintenance requirements and make this available to safety inspectors.
- vi. A standard Design Risk-Benefit Assessment pro-forma has been developed for all play spaces designed to be operated by the Parks Service. These include the following criteria: Play equipment, Problem or hazard, Possible result or outcome of the hazard, Initial risks (Likelihood and Severity), Is risk apparent to children participating? Is risk controllable? Reasonable and practical steps available to avoid or reduce the risk, Residual risks (Likelihood and Severity), Benefit of allowing activity.
- vii. The designers must retain evidence that they have consulted the City's Health and Safety Advisor and the Playground Services Manager or their equivalent on the content of each risk-benefit analysis.



*Arrow Walk Park, Kings Norton*

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## 5. INCLUSIVE PLAY

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The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. In a series of changes between 2010 and 2012, the Equality Act 2010 (The Act) replaced the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Approximately 5% of children under the age of 16 have a disability in the UK.

The Act is in place to prevent anyone with a protected characteristic from being discriminated against, allowing people with limited mobility access to facilities.

It is therefore a requirement that inclusive equipment is installed within public parks and access to the facilities is provided for all. The definition of "inclusion" as it applies to children's play refers to a model where in special needs children spend most of their playing time with non-special needs children.

The Parks Service therefore aims to provide play areas that can be accessed by all and the Policy does not require the provision of exclusive special needs play areas within public parks or open spaces.

Inclusive design will be a mandatory consideration when providing a new play area or existing facility upgrade. The following is required:

- Provide a minimum of 2 pieces of equipment with a wide spectrum of use potential;
- In selected sites, provide inclusive equipment for children who have severe disabilities and need assistance;
- Consider the accessibility of every piece of equipment and in all aspects of the play area.

The designer should incorporate both soft and hard landscape elements that stimulate sensory responses from the children, not just the physical movement. Some equipment for example includes making sounds and musical notes. Planting can have colour and textural variation and the choice materials used can provide a variety of sensory experiences for visually impaired children.

The access gate into the play area must be a vividly different colour to the perimeter fence of the play area to assist visually impaired people.

Pathways: Firm pathways for wheelchairs, children with walking aids and visually impaired children are important and must be at least 1.2 metres wide.

Ramped access points onto raised platforms or multi-play units open up play experiences to more children and their families. All children appreciate the feeling of height, so incorporating a raised decked area with some accessible play features will provide this experience.

The access gate into the play area must be a vividly different colour to the perimeter fence of the play area to assist visually impaired people.

Special provision for severely disabled children may be appropriate in some locations; for example where there is supervision near a play centre or special school. The play area location and design in some instances may therefore be affected by its relationship to these centres. Clear vehicular access adjacent to the play area should also be considered. The provision and maintenance of specialist swings, lifts etc. for children and adults who have a disability are outside the remit of the Parks Service Outdoor Play Facilities Policy. However it is recognized that supervised play centres or special schools and day centres may be able to provide such facilities. It is therefore desirable that these specialist providers where they exist are signposted through the Parks Service's communications.



*Victoria Common, Northfield*

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## 6. EXISTING PLAY AREAS OBJECTIVES

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The Parks Service in 2018 held 256 public play facilities across the City in its portfolio. It works to improve the efficiency of its management and maintenance responsibilities within the legal framework for play provision against a back drop of diminishing resources. To keep the play areas clean, safe and fun for children to enjoy the following policy objectives have been developed for when resources become available:

- Ensure that all play areas are maintained in a safe and clean condition through a combined programme of regular safety inspections, frequent grounds maintenance visits according to need and biennial condition inspections and risk assessments. Where the inspector reports that a piece of equipment no longer meets current British and/or European standards but has been risk assessed as safe then seek to replace at earliest opportunity with modern equipment that is challenging and fun pertinent to the age group and take the opportunity to improve the setting where resources allow.
- Replace condemned and/or outdated play equipment with pieces of inclusive equipment where none or only one piece currently exists;
- Replace all existing surfacing with a sand-filled needle punch carpet system with impact absorption matting to current BS EN 1176 standard. This system has been tested on a number of existing sites and significantly reduces the levels of vandalism, shrinkage and the need for repairs and, in the case of play bark, topping up ;
- Review accessibility and ensure all play areas are accessible to all;
- Remove all dog grids at entrances to play areas – these inhibit access for some wheelchairs and pushchairs and are not an effective deterrent for irresponsible dog owners ;
- Replace all existing fixed hinge gates with self-closing gates;

### **Siting of other facilities adjacent to existing Play Areas**

Children accessing Parks' play facilities should be able to play in a clean and safe environment free from disturbance by noise and noxious emissions from machinery. Mobile canteens, ice-cream vans, vending machines and generators should therefore be sited a minimum of 20 metres off set distance from the boundary of a children's play area or alternative mitigation be provided such as planting.

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## 7. NEW PLAY AREAS OBJECTIVES

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Play areas should be designed to be bespoke, make use of natural elements where appropriate, provide a wide range of play experiences, be inclusive, meet community needs, provide for different age ranges, be challenging and exciting within acceptable safety limits, be well integrated into the park landscape with space to run around, be sustainable and well-maintained and be adaptable to changing circumstances. Below are listed key considerations for the Parks Service when considering the provision of a new play area:

- **Location:** A play area provided by the City Council should aim to be a maximum walking distance of 800 metres from all households. When assessing the need for a new play area in a particular location check whether there is another publicly accessible play area within a distance of 400m of the proposed site. If there is it may not be appropriate to build a new one in the chosen location; however have regard for physical barriers to access for residents, such as major roads, rivers, canals, railway lines, industrial areas etc. and the nature of the existing provision;
- **Size and content:** To provide different types of play provision for children in all age groups, as defined as primary, secondary and tertiary provision ( See definitions below). Seek approval from the City Council Client via the District Parks Manager and the Safety Advisor
- **Consultation:** via Ward Councillors, Friends' groups, local schools, residents and other organisations representing local stake-holders. The nature of the consultation will vary according to the particular situation and the impact of the development on the local community. Methods will include all or some of the following:
  - a presentation at a ward meeting;
  - a drop in session at a local community centre, library or school;
  - leafleting local residents who live nearby the proposed development;
  - distribution of questionnaires to be completed by local adults and children;
  - posting of notices within the open space inviting residents to respond to an on-line consultation on the City Council's "Be Heard" website.
  - Consultation via Planning Application notice.
- **Surveillance** - the site should have natural surveillance for the play area i.e. close enough to housing to be overlooked but not to cause a nuisance. As a standard a play area should not be sited within 30m of a dwelling.
- **Accessibility** - to be safely accessible by all potential users within the catchment area by cycleway or footpath with safe pedestrian crossings etc.

- Social factors - other social factors affecting children's safety should also be considered, such as ensuring the play area is not obscured by dense planting or located near busy roads or industrial sites that might expel potentially harmful fumes.

### Play Provision across the City

Birmingham City Council has developed its own definitions for different scales of play provision as follows and these definitions take precedence over other organisations' definitions when determining required standards for new provision by the Council or by private developers intending independently to deliver and manage play facilities within public open space.

- **Primary provision:** A major, versatile play area provided for children of all ages; consisting of at least 9 pieces of equipment in total, at least 4 pieces of equipment being for older children, seating and benches plus other associated facilities such as sports provision e.g. multi-use games area, skate facilities and/or outdoor gym equipment/parkour
- **Secondary provision:** A major, versatile play area provided for children of all ages; consisting of 7 pieces of equipment in total, at least 4 pieces of equipment being for older children, seating and benches.
- **Tertiary provision:** A minor play area aimed at pre-primary school age children and consisting of 5 pieces of equipment, bins and benches: are we aiming to remove these?

More recently the City has been exploring the opportunities for the provision of a **Destination Play Area** for which a number of key features would be required to classify a play area as a destination site. These features not only relate to the physical layout of the play space, how well it functions and is maintained, but also to its location, and its associated facilities as well. These features and requirements are listed below :

- Size of the Play Space
- Diversity and Interest of the Provision in a high quality and expansive park landscape
- Café & Public Amenities
- Good Transport Links
- Adequate Parking Facilities
- Proximity to other Local Attractions
- Robust Maintenance Regime

Play England definitions for play spaces provide a useful guide for auditing the level of provision in each Ward:-

Play provision is governed by size and accessibility

- TYPE A "DOOR-STEP" SPACES AND FACILITIES FOR PLAY AND INFORMAL RECREATION: A small space within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults.

- TYPE B “LOCAL” SPACES AND FACILITIES FOR PLAY AND INFORMAL RECREATION: A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.
- TYPE C “NEIGHBOURHOOD” SPACES AND FACILITIES FOR PLAY AND INFORMAL RECREATION: A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers.

The National Playing Fields Association (NFPA) divides play areas into three categories.

- LAP (Local Area for Play) toddlers and upwards consisting of a small, low key games area or open space within easy walking distance.
- LEAP (Local Equipped Area for Play) aimed at children up to 8 years consisting of a medium sized play area with a least 5 types of play equipment or range of activities, plus a small area for rest and relaxation, within reasonable proximity of housing or other facilities.
- NEAP (Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play) aimed at children up to 15 years, consisting of at least 8 types of equipment or range of activities. Usually includes multi-user games area, such as a kick about or sports field, accessible to most children within 15-20 minutes walking distance from their home. There is a particular emphasis on providing equipment that meets the needs of older children. Located with sufficient distance of housing developments and where enough space can be allocated for the targeted age range.

Other useful guidance documents:

- Play England “Quality in play guidance 2016”
- Play England “A guide to creating successful play spaces”
- Play England “Managing Risk in Play Provision”
- Wooley and Lowe “Exploring the Relationship between Design Approach and Play Value of Outdoor Play Spaces 2013”
- John, A and Wheway, R “Can Play Will Play: Disabled children and access to outdoor playgrounds”. London: National Playing Fields Association. (2004)



*Ley Hill Park , Northfield*



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## 8. OUTDOOR GYMS

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Outdoor Gym Areas (OGAs) provide play opportunities for older children and adults to exercise and play together. A European Standard (EN 16630) has been published to set safe parameters for the development of such facilities as follows:

- Location: The EN 16630 states '*Fitness equipment is not intended for installation in the immediate vicinity of children's playgrounds in accordance with the EN 1176 series. If installed in connection with playground equipment, on playgrounds or similar installations, they shall be separated from general playing activities by an appropriate distance, fencing or other structural measures.*' BCC requires fencing, furniture or landscaping to demarcate the separation of the OGA from the children's play area, as this allows safety inspections to be carried out for both facilities in one visit.
- Signage: The EN 16630 standard requires labelling on all equipment with information regarding exercise instructions, main equipment functions and safety information. BCC outdoor gym facilities are to also have a standard sign, see appendix.
- The EN 16630 states the outdoor gym equipment is intended for youths and adults or users having an overall height greater than 1400 mm to promote fitness by using the equipment to exercise.
- Surfacing: BCC requires a firm surface to be installed around the equipment; no gravel or loose surfacing is permitted as this becomes trapped in and damages the moving parts of the equipment. The recommended surfacing is either a sand-filled needle punch carpet system with impact absorption matting or grass grid matting with fire retardant properties.



*Chamberlain Gardens, Ladywood*

## TRIM-TRAILS

Trim trails can form part of the play area. They also have the potential to provide a link between separate facilities within a park or achieve play value in an otherwise narrow and limited location. It is recommended to install steel trim-trail equipment. However in special circumstances some Clients may require timber equipment or a mixture of steel and timber where there is adequate supervision or a site lends itself to the use of a more natural material, such as in a country park. The designer should record their decision in the project risk assessment, taking into account the history of vandalism and anti-social behaviour at a site.

Surfacing: although the low fall height suggests no safety surfacing would be required under this equipment, inevitably the surrounding surface will erode with regular public use. To overcome this, BCC recommends the installation of either a sand-filled needle punch carpet system with impact absorption matting or grass grid matting with fire retardant properties, around the trim-trail equipment. To avoid hollows forming beneath the equipment it must be on a solid surface with no loose chippings.



*Berryfields, Sutton Coldfield*

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## 9. SPORT AND COURTS PROVISION

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[Included in this section: Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGA's), Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs); Tennis courts;]



**Multi Use Games Areas:** these usually comprise a robust, steel, open access fenced area with built-in goal post units for various types of sports and games, such as football, basketball or tennis. ... MUGAs are often supplied as ready-made solutions by a number of manufacturers. They enclose an area of bitmac paving or under specific conditions an artificial grass surface. BCC has the following objectives relating to the provision of MUGAs in parks and open spaces:

- To support the Policy vision of Birmingham being a great city in which to lead a healthy and active life;
- Birmingham City Council will undertake an audit of existing sports court provision in parks and open spaces across the city to enable a clear framework to be implemented. This will run parallel to but not duplicate the Playing Pitch Strategy which looks at more formal sports provision;
- Increase public awareness of the sports and courts facilities in their area;
- As an installation of this size and nature will require Planning Permission, when considering the size of MUGA to be installed the designer will take into account the local demand for provision, the historical context ( has there been removal of previous facilities similar in nature and the reason), proximity of other similar facilities in the area, such as schools and community centres, the size of the open space, its topography, land drainage issues, proximity to neighbouring dwellings, hours of use and floodlighting, ease of access, run-off space and proximity to the highway and the presence of complimentary play provision.
- Other considerations include: size; height, style and colour of ball-stop fencing; sports provided for; spectator seating; surfacing; line-markings etc.

## ARTIFICIAL GRASS PITCHES



There are currently limited numbers of multi-sports artificial grass pitches (AGPs) located within public open spaces in the city. They are normally installed within a school grounds or within one of the City's Well-being Centres and maintained by the school or centre as appropriate and access restricted within supervised hours. This Policy does not recommend the installation of AGPs in a public open space. The carpet of an artificial pitch is vulnerable to vandalism or theft and

therefore significant consultation and assessment of the suitability of a site would be required if the Council were to install a new AGP facility in a public open space. Furthermore there are considerations around future maintenance that require income to be generated for this purpose or a budget will be required for a commuted period of 15 years at the outset of the project.

Depending on the target sport(s) the design of the carpet is critical. Certain sports require shock pads while others require a particular height of pile or surface dressing. Further guidance can be found in Sport England's Design Guidance Note "Artificial Surfaces for Outdoor Sport"

The preferred surface for casual open access facilities is a multi-sports carpet (not uniquely football, but allowing for hockey, tennis, cricket, basketball etc.) with an interlocking pile of needle-punch construction that is filled or dressed with sand or other material. The carpet surface ideally should be laid on a shock absorbing dynamic base of 15mm depth. The pad and artificial grass surface is laid on a 50mm permeable bitmac surface retained with pre-cast concrete edgings and the carpet stretched, folded over and nailed tight to a perimeter timber baton.

Where surfaces are required for competitive sport the installation of "3G" long-pile surfaces are becoming the standard, but these are outside the scope of this Policy. For design guidance in these instances it is recommended that reference is made to the individual National Governing Body guidance, available on line, for specific information on the preferred categories and to the City Council's Playing Pitch Strategy.

## NON-TURF PITCHES FOR CRICKET SQUARES (NTPs)

The installation of NTPs for Parks League Cricket allows for more regular bookings and reduced maintenance costs throughout the summer months. The ECB provide an approved list

of suppliers and these use a variety of systems. BCC's preferred system is the hard wearing needle punched carpet surface that is stretched over and folded between a double timber batten and nailed below ground level similar to the ImpactPlay surfacing system used in our play areas.

## TENNIS COURTS



BCC provides many tennis courts within its Parks and Open Spaces; however, there is a number of existing courts across Birmingham in need of upgrading. BCC have worked successfully with the Lawn Tennis Association LTA who have provided funding for court upgrades and encouragement for local tennis clubs to make better use of the facilities provided. Where needed, Council resources have been pooled with external funding to enhance tennis

facilities. Maintenance of existing courts requires the removal of moss accumulation and so blowing machines are not sufficient for this purpose.

Where new public courts are proposed these should be installed in locations adjacent to Leisure or Well-being centres where the use can be supervised and charges applied to create a revenue stream for on-going repairs and maintenance and replacement of equipment such as nets and posts. In normal circumstances though, BCC will look to upgrade existing facilities as resources become available. Work will include the following:

- Replacement of perimeter ball-stop fencing and access gates
- Removal of the existing damaged or deteriorated surface
- Removal/pruning of perimeter vegetation/trees/roots causing damage to the existing surface
- Regrading and ground preparation
- Resurfacing
- Installation of specialist spray surfacing
- White lining
- New nets
- Access improvements, including ramps if required.

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## 10. DETAIL PLAY AREA DESIGN GUIDANCE

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The City Council has provided new outdoor play areas over many years and has developed a suite of design solutions that provides a range of play opportunities for a variety of ages and abilities that are sufficiently robust to withstand the intensity of use, and sadly abuse, which can be expected within an open access environment. Below is set out a list of design considerations that designers of play areas within BCC's parks and open spaces are required to follow:

- **Location**

Initial design requires the assessment of the most suitable location of the playground.

Considerations must be:

- Access
- Existing dangers (e.g. roads/ water courses/potential falls/noxious emissions)
- Proximity to residential dwellings
- Neighbouring schools
- Existing facilities ( how far away is the nearest equivalent provision)
- Natural surveillance
- Drainage issues and topography
- Consultation with the Ward Members/local community/stakeholders

- **Fencing**

### *The need*

Fencing should be included on most sites. Historically this was to exclude dogs and to keep children safely supervised. The use of cast in-situ rubber play surfacing has largely negated the reason for dog exclusion but it should be assumed that fencing is still a requirement as it defines the play space and gives bona-fide users the confidence to ask troublemakers to leave.

### *Exceptions*

It may be desirable to omit the installation of a fence, where the designer is creating a "natural" play area within surrounding park land that is integral to the play space. The approval of the Play Policy Group (PPG) must be sought and should be the subject of Public Consultation where appropriate.

### *Style*

As a guide, where fencing is required, a 1000mm high, 16mm dia hoop-top fencing is adequate for most purposes. Some manufacturers have modified fence design to reduce the possibility of entrapment. Distance between vertical bars should not exceed 89mm. Fence design can be measured against Part K of The Building Regulations ballustrade design, but a more detailed entrapment assessment can be carried out using probes as described in BS EN 1176 Part 1; 1998.

### **Finish**

The base metal shall have been treated to prevent rusting preferably by hot-dip galvanising according to BS EN ISO 1461. A polyester powder coating finish shall then be applied in accordance with BS EN 13438:2013. Subsequent revisions to these standards would take precedence.

### **Gates**

Gates should be self-closing and constructed with a 1m clear opening to allow wheelchair access. ROSPA advice currently recommends two gated openings to an enclosed play area due to entrapment issues associated with bullying, but the PPG advise that one gate is desirable to assist parents or carers to keep track of the child's location. In all such cases, a note is to be made, in the Health and Safety File Risk Assessment, of the reason for not according with ROSPA advice, such as that cited above. When alternative products become available on the market these shall be tested and compared with the current supplier's specification. ( see Appendix iv)

### **Colour**

Colour shall be used with care throughout the design with due consideration of users with visual impairment. Use a contrasting colour for the gate against the main colour of the railings. Consultation may be appropriate.

### **Surfacing**

#### ***Play surfacing – sand-filled needle punch carpet system with impact absorption matting***

This surfacing is the preferred option and is recommended by the PPG. All new play areas should be surfaced with this. The surfacing provides a protective carpet which has the following benefits:

- Durable - hard wearing and resistant to cutting, burning and graffiti
- Attractive - stimulating shapes, patterns and features can be created from a palette of 12 vibrant colours
- Practical - non-slip, impact-absorbing and quick draining
- Versatile - can be fitted on flat ground, slopes or mounds and on top of concrete, grass or stone
- Low-maintenance - little ongoing maintenance is required

See approved company supply list below.

#### ***Play surfacing – Fire Retardant Grass Matting***

At specific sites which require a "natural" design solution the use of "FireSmart" grass matting may be permitted. Alternative grass mat systems are not permitted unless previously

tested by the PPG. The product is normally installed directly by the manufacturer to guarantee product authenticity. This 'FireSmart' product is fire resistant and provides the required impact absorption (check critical fall height (CFH) of the surfacing against the Free Fall Height (FFH) of the equipment to be installed). See approved company supply list below.

***Play surfacing – In-situ rubber (Wetpour)***

Cast-in-situ rubber play surfacing is only to be specified on existing play areas which are being extended or improved. Historically this has been the preferred option but over time shrinkage and fire damage has led to the need for expensive repairs. See approved company supply list.

- **Signboard**

There are currently two designs available as standard. Either the "Turtle" sign or the "Tree" sign may be used. The details can be obtained from The Landscape Practice Group: 0121 303 3555. In special circumstances a bespoke design for a site is acceptable. However the information on the sign must include the following:

WELCOME TO (NAME OF PLAY AREA).  
PLEASE REPORT ANY ACCIDENTS OR DEFECTS TO 0121 464 9728  
HELP US TO HELP YOU  
CHILDREN LESS THAN 8 YEARS OF AGE SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT  
NO DOGS NO SMOKING

- **Benches**

The location of benches within play areas should not facilitate climbing onto fences, bins and signs – allow minimum 1m from fences (ROSPA recommend 2m). These could be used to separate or create a barrier between the free fall space zones of individual items of play equipment.



- **Litter bins**

Should be fabricated from a non-flammable material and be covered. Litter bins must be located outside of the play area near to the entrance point.

- **Slides and Skate Ramps**

ROSPA have had reported to them incidences of children getting burnt on slides, and also skate ramps. Although this issue is not covered within playground equipment standards, it is recommended requirement of the PPG that slides are not installed so that they are south facing, and preferably not between south-south west and south-south east, to mitigate this kind of problem.



- **Exclusions**

The following items and materials have been assessed as unsuitable for children's play areas in parks and open spaces and must not be used:

- Enclosed slides;
- Fibreglass items;
- Plywood items;
- Roofs on climbing units;
- Certain types of equipment with sand or water are not generally accepted for use within City Council open access unsupervised play areas.
- No trees to be planted in fenced play areas
- All rope climbers to be nylon covered steel.
- Some of these restrictions may be waived in certain circumstances e.g. use of timber equipment in natural settings or sand in secure supervised sites. Large section timber equipment may be specified for an unsupervised open access site but agreement should be sought from the PPG beforehand.



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## 11. MAINTENANCE

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Play areas have 3 revenue costs:-

- Grounds maintenance (GM)– undertaken by GM Service Providers
- Inspections and minor repairs (R&M)– undertaken by Playground Services and the biennial inspector
- Cyclical replacement/Ad hoc Replacement of damaged or condemned equipment – undertaken by Playground Services

1. Grounds maintenance – is based on an annual risk assessment to establish how frequently the Service Provider should visit, carry out a visual inspection, report any faults or vandalism and clear play surfaces. Costs are provided by the Contract Management and Compliance Team via the POPI system – a separate process covered in a Parks Service Practice Guidance note.
2. Inspections and minor repairs: This budget covers employees/supplies & services/ongoing R&M parts and equipment, and is therefore the revenue implication excluding cyclical replacement of the play area or individual equipment.

The R&M expenditure is limited to the available annual budget and individual sites are evaluated and graded into 5 separate categories to establish the number of R&M visits per annum that should be allowed for when estimating commuted sums

Category A: Play area with heavy use or skate - park: 12 visits per annum

Category B: Play area with medium use: 9 visits per annum

Category C: Play area with low use: 6 visits per annum

Category D: Multi-use games area or tennis courts: 4 visits per annum

Category E: Outdoor Gym Areas: 6 visits per annum.

3. Where a developer has built a children's play area as part of their scheme and the site is transferred to the City Council, a Section 106 agreement contribution is usually secured for 15 years' maintenance and held in the Parks Commuted Sums Reserve (CSR) or the Section 106 reserves. The CSR has been established to provide an on-going maintenance resource for grounds maintenance operations and for minor repairs and replacement of equipment, fencing and safer-surfacing as these items fall into disrepair or wear out. The CSR and S106 Reserves are ring-fenced for this purpose and are drawn down at the end of each financial year to reimburse costs incurred throughout the year or are released in year to fund minor repairs projects.

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## 12. DECOMMISSIONING OF EXISTING PLAY AREAS

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All Play area assets suffer depreciation and eventually they will require replacement or removal. The biennial inspections will give a recommendation to remove the play area if the inspector deems the site unsafe. The decision whether to remove or replace an existing play area will also take into consideration the following factors where there is no recommendation from the inspector to remove it:

- **Age of equipment/ cost to replace:** if majority of the equipment is not safe due to age and wear consider the cost to replace it;
- **Number of pieces of equipment in need of replacement:** if more than 50 % of the play area's equipment is deemed unsafe then the remainder may not provide sufficient play value to retain it;
- **Popularity of use:** consider whether the play area had a low or high level of use( prior to its deterioration) to determine local need;
- **Vandalism occurrence:** level of cost of recurring maintenance due to damage;
- **Surfacing:** Is the surfacing still fit for purpose (HIC test)? What is the cost to replace if required?
- **Number of play facilities within the Ward/ local need:** are there other sites within 800m that would serve the local community?
- **Local Deprivation Indices:** Is there an underlying need for a play area in the locality due to social factors?
- **Availability of resources for fresh investment:** Check whether there are any potential Section 106 budgets available in the location or other funding opportunities.
- **Clawback:** Check how the original facility was funded and whether any "clawback" rules apply relating to extant funding agreements.

Within the overall cost of removing the equipment the following will also be required dependent upon the site conditions:

- make the surface safe/ remove hard standings/backfill holes
- remove redundant fencing/railings
- remove gates
- demolish and remove masonry walls and steps
- convert surface to grass with topsoil and seeding and grade into existing landform
- remove benches/ litter bins/cycle stands etc.
- allow for reuse of equipment and furniture where feasible – enquire prior to removal.

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## 13 APPENDICES

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### (i) APPROVED PLAY MUGA AND OGA EQUIPMENT SUPPLIERS

- **Hags**

[www.hags.co.uk](http://www.hags.co.uk) Waterfront Complex, Selby, North Yorkshire, YO8 8AP

Tel: 0845 260 1655

- **Wicksteed Leisure Limited**

[www.wicksteed.co.uk](http://www.wicksteed.co.uk) Digby Street, Kettering, Northamptonshire, NN16 8YJ

Tel: 01536 517028

- **Sutcliffe Play Limited**

[www.sutcliffeplay.co.uk](http://www.sutcliffeplay.co.uk) Waggon Lane, Upton. Pontefract, WF9 1JS

Tel: 01977 653200

- **Play & Leisure Limited**

[www.playandleisure.co.uk](http://www.playandleisure.co.uk) Units 7 & 8 Catheralls Industrial Estate, Pinfold Lane, Buckley, Flintshire, CH7 3PS. Tel: 01244 546797

### (ii) APPROVED AGP SUPPLIERS

**Durasport:** Product: Monofilament 18; [www.dura-sport.co.uk](http://www.dura-sport.co.uk)

**Tiger turf:** Product: Evo Pro from Tiger Turf; [www.tigerturf.com.uk](http://www.tigerturf.com.uk)

**Domo Sports:** Product: Domo sports grass Domo all round sand dressed;  
[www.domosportsgrass.com](http://www.domosportsgrass.com)

**Notts Sports:** Product: VHAF sand-filled needle-punched grass with Nottspad SP;  
[www.nottssport.com](http://www.nottssport.com)

### (iii) APPROVED SAFER SURFACING SUPPLIERS

**Dura- Sport Ltd** Sand-filled carpet: Product: Impact Play; Contact Dura- Sport Ltd, Unit C2 Chartwell Point, Wigston, Leicester, LE18 2FT. [www.dura-sport.co.uk](http://www.dura-sport.co.uk)

**PlaySmart UK** Grass matting: Product: FireSmart; Contact PlaySmart UK, Surfacing and Outdoor Play Solutions, 4 Birchy Cross Business Centre, Broad Lane, Tanworth-in-Arden, Solihull, West Midlands, B94 5DN. [www.playsmartuk.co.uk](http://www.playsmartuk.co.uk)

### (iv) APPROVED SELF-CLOSING GATE SUPPLIER

**Easy Gate Ltd.**, Watergate Farm, Longwaybank, Whatstandwell, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 5HU Tel: 01629 820985 Web: [easy-gate.co.uk](http://easy-gate.co.uk)

N.B. The inclusion of suppliers and products on the Policy approved lists will be reviewed every three years as a minimum. Amendments can be issued should changes in circumstances arise.