



Report to: Place and Economic Development Committee, 14th March 2022

Report of: Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities

Subject: PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP A WORCESTER CITY STRATEGIC PLAY AREA DEVELOPMENT PLAN

1. Recommendation

That the Committee -

- 1.1 Notes the contents of this report and in particular the current available information on identified needs for outdoor play provision, funding opportunities and constraints;**
- 1.2 Approves the engagement of a specialist contractor to undertake a detailed consultation exercise around future outdoor play space provision across the city and from that consultation, develop proposals for a Strategic Play Area Development Plan to be brought back to Committee in October 2022 for approval;**
- 1.3 Delegates authority to the Corporate Director - Operations, Homes and Communities - in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Place and Economic Development Committee to procure and appoint a suitable contractor as set out in 1.2 above;**
- 1.4 Recommends to Policy and Resources Committee the allocation of £40,000 for this work; and**
- 1.5 Concurrent with the work set out above, supports the identification of potential city centre locations for investment in youth play provision, with detailed proposals to be brought back to Members for consideration.**

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council's approach to investment in outdoor play area provision for children and young people has been considered by Members previously on numerous occasions, including when reviewing investment into the city's main parks, the approval of a rolling maintenance plan for sites across the city, the development of a list of potential sites for specific s106 funding allocations, and specific allocations proposed by Members in the annual budget setting process.**
- 2.2 However, it has been recognised that the Council does not, at the present time, have a strategic plan which guides the Council's investment decisions around outdoor play area provision and may also act as a reference point for other organisations in the city which have the capacity to provide and maintain play areas, as well as potential funders.**

Members have requested that consideration be given to the development of a strategic plan and it should be noted that play provision is an agreed priority in the newly revised Worcester City Plan 2022 – 2027 as well as the previous iteration.

- 2.3 As a result, an officer working group was convened last year to pull together all the current sources of information and understand opportunities and challenges presented in the delivery of outdoor play area provision in the city. The officer working group brings in expertise from Property Services, Youth Engagement, Environmental Operations (Parks/Projects), Planning Policy and Leisure. The group is overseen by the Corporate Director - Operations, Homes & Communities working with the Corporate Director - Planning and Governance.
- 2.4 Set out below are the findings from the working group and recommendations for the development of a Strategic Play Area Development Plan.

The Open Space Assessment

- 2.5 As part of the review of the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) which began in 2019, the District Councils in South Worcestershire, including Worcester City Council commissioned an [Open Space Assessment](#) (OSA) to be undertaken. The assessment was updated in 2021 to support the ongoing review of the SWDP up until 2041.
- 2.6 Members will be aware that the SWDP is planning for future development and the infrastructure (including play provision) that should support that development. Therefore, the OSA has been commissioned against that brief, although it is still useful and relevant to provide a baseline, fairly high-level needs assessment of what currently exists in the city.
- 2.7 The OSA provides an audit of different typologies of open space and recreational facilities in terms of identifying any surpluses, shortfalls or deficiencies. The assessment then recommends quantity and accessibility standards for new open space provision (as well as an assessment of the quality of open space) required in any future planning strategies.
- 2.8 For the purposes of the OSA, children's play space was classed as areas of play that cater for the needs of children up to and around 12 years of age, whilst youth play space was the provision of informal recreation opportunities for 13 to 17 year olds.
- 2.9 An embedded link to the OSA has been provided within this report (para 2.5) and as can be seen from the table below (*Table 18 of the OSA*) the provision of children's play areas across Worcester falls short of the required provision of 5.12 hectares, with 4.18 hectares provided. This leaves a deficit of 0.94 hectares.
- 2.10 For youth play areas the situation is significantly poorer, with a total of 0.74 hectares of provision against a target of 5.12, meaning a shortfall of over 4 hectares.
- 2.11 It should be noted that the OSA did not include a small number of play areas within the City, that officers have calculated to be 0.15 hectares in total and therefore do not in any way change the conclusions of the report. These sites will of course be considered in ongoing conversations about future provision.

Typology	Existing (ha)	Existing (ha/1000)	Required provision (ha)	Standard/Required Provision (ha/1000)	Supply (ha)	Supply (ha/1000)
Play (Child)	4.18	0.04	5.12	0.05 (within 600m or 13mins walk time)	-0.94	-0.01
Play (Youth)	0.74	0.01	5.12	0.05 (within 720m or 15 mins walk time)	-4.38	-0.04

- 2.12 The OSA further comments (*Table 22*) that there are relatively large gaps in access to children’s play space in the northern and western areas of Worcester, whilst provision of youth play space is more sporadic with large gaps in access.
- 2.13 **Appendix 1** of this report provides total children’s & youth play space provision by Ward. **Appendix 2** provides a map of play space provision categorised as toddler, junior or youth. **Appendix 3** provides a map of Worcester City Council owned play areas and those owned by other organisations and broken down and categorised further into children or youth.
- 2.14 It should be noted that this is not a unique situation and is one faced by many areas throughout the country, particularly in respect of youth play and recreation provision.

Maintenance and Development of Existing Play Areas

- 2.15 In October 2021 a full inspection report was provided to the Council on all play equipment it owns and maintained play areas. Safety of play equipment is imperative, and it was pleasing to note that of 347 physical assets (i.e. a swing or a roundabout) 81% were classed as ‘good’ or ‘as new’ with a further 14% being classed as average. 5% of assets were classed as in ‘poor’ condition and were immediately prioritised for repair or replacement.
- 2.16 It was also interesting to note that of the 347 assets, 86% have an end-of-life date of Summer 2027 onwards. The replacement of play equipment also presents an opportunity to think about the type and nature of play areas the Council wishes to provide, particularly where there may be overprovision of a certain type of play area within one Ward or community.
- 2.17 The officer working group has identified specific locations where it is evident that small levels of additional investment can produce useful additions to the overall offer in the city, for example, basketball hoops.

User Feedback and Consultation

- 2.18 At the present time there is a good deal of local knowledge and feedback given to officers and Members about outdoor play provision in different wards. However, the Council has not in recent years undertaken a systematic exercise to gather feedback from users of outdoor play spaces, whether they be children and young people or their families and carers nor whether they have any individuals needs or preferences according to their gender, disability and ethnicity for example.

Nor has the Council convened a strategic discussion with local organisations (including parish councils, housing associations and community groups) to understand which local assets are well used and where provision is lacking, although some of this was addressed through the OSA work.

- 2.19 It is recognised that a detailed and meaningful consultation with different groups of individuals, community groups and with the Council’s elected Members, would provide the Council with a rich dataset that could inform the next generation of investment into outdoor play provision in the city.
- 2.20 In the meantime however, specific feedback on unmet needs is available. One of the consistent pieces of feedback that officers receive is the desire of young people to have a city centre space to call their own. This has in the main been raised following engagement undertaken with young people who use Cathedral Square for skateboarding, but it has broadened out in a wider conversation with young people who have engaged with officers. The challenge is to identify city centre sites that may lend themselves to having a skate park or parkour park as well as other types of designated space - all of it aimed at young people who wish to socialise in areas where they feel safe, with a good degree of informal surveillance and access to the city centre.

Funding opportunities and constraints - Specific allocations in the 2022/2023

Budget

- 2.21 As part of budget setting for 2022/2023 the Council has approved capital allocations for a number of play related proposals which if delivered would contribute to bridging the deficit in play area provision. These are outlined below.

Responsible Committee	Proposal	Approved Allocation (£000's)	Notes
Policy & Economic Development (PED)	BMX Pump Track	60	Provision of a new BMX and skate park in the St. Peters area.
PED	Land off Cotswold Way	100 (in total)	To bring an unused strip of land into use for the local community with play facilities and environmental enhancements.
PED	Power Park Play Equipment	12	Proposal received from St Peter’s Parish Council for additional play equipment.
Communities	Cricket pitch	10	To deliver an artificial cricket wicket at a suitable location in the city for bookable informal cricket (i.e. tape ball)

2.22 It should be noted that these proposals which have had capital allocations approved against them, will now require a further detailed report to be brought to the relevant Committee for approval.

Developer contributions

- 2.23 Local open space enhancements, including outdoor play provision, can to an extent be funded by Developer contributions made under Section 106 agreements when planning permission is granted for a new development in that local area. There are a number of constraints to this, however.
- 2.24 It should be noted that S106 contributions are only required on planning applications for over 10 dwellings, and any request for a contribution has to meet the following tests, it must be:
- a) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
 - b) directly related to the development; and
 - c) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.
- 2.25 These restrictions and limitations affect how and where we are able to allocate funds; and delivery is reliant on planning applications being submitted, approved and ultimately built out in a particular area to enable funds to be collected.
- 2.26 Public open space, including play area provision is one of the most popular forms of planning obligation. As part of the annual Infrastructure Funding Statement which this Committee oversees, the Council collates a list of potential sites for open space contributions. Ward Members have worked with Planning Policy officers in developing this list, which is kept under review and referred to when potential developments come forward. This list provides a useful information source and planning tool but for the reasons above it should be noted that reliance on s106 funding alone is not sufficient to provide investment in outdoor play area provision across the city.

3. Preferred Option

- 3.1 The report sets out the range of considerations that apply to investing in and delivering good levels of play provision for children and young people and notes the planned projects underway.
- 3.2 Although in themselves, the planned projects will meet a local need, there will remain areas of the city in which additional or different play space may be required, in order to meet general need as a result of density of population for example, or indeed specific need as a result of a certain type of play space being identified for example for a particular group.
- 3.3 The preferred option is therefore to produce a Strategic Play Area Development Plan. The aims of this Plan would include:
- To plan out the provision of high-quality play and outdoor youth facilities sufficient to meet the needs and aspirations of children, young people and their families and carers, taking account of equality, diversity and inclusion.
 - To ensure that such provision is effectively planned and co-ordinated, well designed and that appropriate budgets are available to enable implementation and sustainability.

- To ensure that all provision is planned with the active involvement and engagement of users as well as potential providers including local community organisations.
 - To provide an evidence base from which future funding bids may be launched.
- 3.4 It is the view of officers that in order to develop a Strategic Play Area Development Plan, it would be essential to undertake an engagement and consultation exercise by a specialist contractor with sufficient experience and knowledge of play space assessments and planning. This contractor would undertake stakeholder workshops and consultation with users and community groups, and this would include an opportunity for all Councillors to feed in their local knowledge and experience.
- 3.5 As well as oversight from the Committee and involvement of Ward Members, there will also be an opportunity for the Children and Young People's Champion to raise the profile of this project and the consultation. A proposed Strategic Play Area Development Plan would then be brought to Committee for approval; it is anticipated this would be in October. The Plan would provide the Council with a framework for assessing what high quality outdoor play provisions looks like, what needs should be met and prioritised for investment. The Plan would aim to enhance, and not reduce, current levels of provision.
- 3.6 Alongside this work, the preferred option is to progress site feasibility for city centre youth play provision. This work presents a number of challenges including site availability and costings; given the need has been identified through a variety of sources already it is proposed that work is progressed while the wider Strategic Play Area Development Plan is produced. The specific design and commissioning of one or more sites would be subject to further Member approval and would have the opportunity then to be informed by the outcome of the consultation and engagement exercise.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Given the OSA has identified a deficit in play area provision within the City, the option to meet that deficit by relying on s.106 projects or waiting for other external funding opportunities to present themselves is not considered appropriate.
- 4.2 It is recognised that this area of work is quite specialist in its nature and as a relatively small Council we do not have the in-house capability to undertake such a project successfully without technical specialist support. The option therefore to deliver the project through our own staff has been discounted.
- 4.3 There is an option of not progressing a city centre site for youth play provision, and waiting to see what the overall consultation process produces. This is not recommended because of the lead-in times to produce feasibility work and costings and the available data which already highlights the need and preferences of young people in this regard.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

This report seeks approval for £40,000 in order to engage a specialist contractor to undertake a consultation and engagement exercise that will support the development of a Strategic Play Area Development Plan.

There are currently four identifiable reserves with a play element which have anticipated balances as at 31 March 2022 as follows:

	£
Play Areas	78,967
LA Park Improvements Grant	16,060
Grant commitment – football related	28,250
Leisure development	31,203

Further assessment is needed to ensure that these funds are not committed to other projects but there is no projected release for known spending at this time.

Future reports are likely to recommend provision of a capital allocation to support the design and delivery of future play areas to ensure there is sufficient provision in place across the City. These requests can be dealt with at any time by this Committee and recommendations for supplementary estimates made to Council and do not need to wait for the 2023/24 budget setting process.

It is also worth reiterating that those projects listed earlier within this report already have funding allocated to them either through capital allocations already approved by the Council or through agreed Section 106 funding. Additional reports are needed to committee to assess the revenue impact of proposed capital spend once the detailed business case has been developed.

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

There are no legal and governance implications associated with this report.

5.3 Risk Implications

It is important that the Council proactively seeks to identify opportunities for new and enhanced play area provision to meet the current deficit that the OSA has identified.

This will mitigate the risk of waiting for new play areas to come forward through the planning process for example where the Council does not have direct control over delivery timeline of sites and often where such provision has a restrictive cost envelope.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

The OSA has identified a deficit of play area provision for both children and young people.

The City Plan 2022 – 2027 '*Stronger and Connected Communities*' strategic aim aspires to achieve the outcome of '*increasing opportunities for young people to play*'

The Worcester City Plan also aspires to achieve the outcome of '*increasing physical activity for all age groups*' within the '*Healthy and Active City*' strategic aim.

The Council agreed a Motion in 2020 to ensure the needs of children and young people were factored into the Council's future decisions and to support this, the Council agreed to create a Member Champion for Children and Young People.

5.5 Equality Implications

There are significant equality diversity and inclusion implications arising out of this work. These include, but are not limited to, considerations around different age groups, genders, different types of disabilities and different ethnic and cultural considerations. Children and young people and their families and carers will be consulted so that their individual needs and preferences can be considered in the emerging Plan. This will include for example consideration of the accessibility and design of play facilities, general setting and amenity and co-location with other facilities, whether special provision should be made at a number of sites or whether users would prefer a greater concentration of specialist provision being focussed on a smaller number of sites.

Equality Impact Assessments will inform the work leading to the production of a Plan.

5.6 Human Resources Implications

There are no HR implications associated with this report.

5.7 Health and Safety Implications

There are no health & safety implications associated with this report; all existing equipment is inspected and maintained to the required standards of safety.

5.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

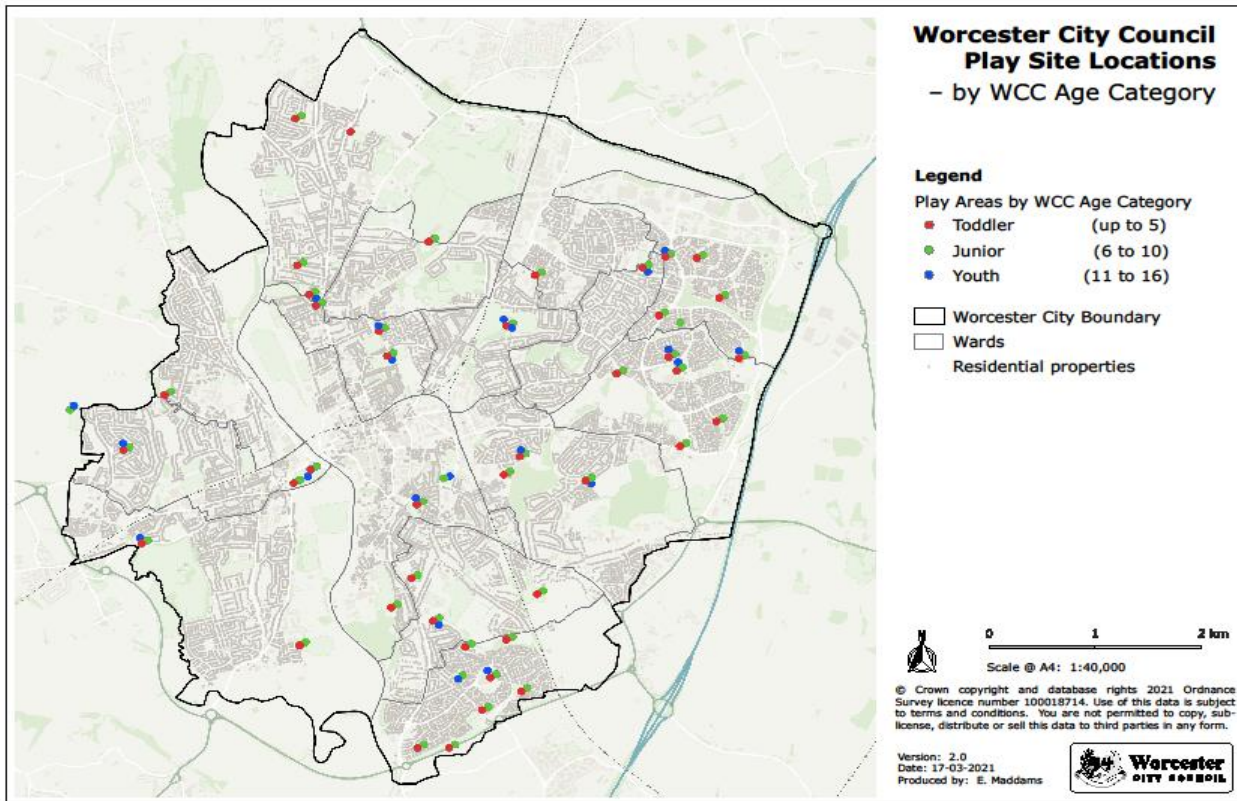
Identifying opportunities for additional play area provision that has taken into account local knowledge and feedback will ensure that where implemented they will be well used, used for their intended purpose and bring together families and friends to enjoy spending time at them.

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Background Papers: N/A

Appendix 1 – Total Children’s & Youth Play Space Provision by Ward

Ward	Open Space Assessment Child	Worcester Total Provision Child	Open Space Assessment Required Child	Difference - Total Provision less Required	Open Space Assessment Youth	Worcester Total Provision Youth	Open Space Assessment Required Youth	Difference - Total Provision less Required	Open Space Assessment Grand Total	Worcester Total Provision Grand Total	Open Space Assessment Required Grand Total	Difference - Total Provision less Required
Arboretum	0.18	0.18	0.32	-0.14	0.06	0.07	0.32	-0.26	0.24	0.24	0.64	-0.40
Battenhall	0.44	0.46	0.27	0.19	0.01	0.04	0.27	-0.23	0.45	0.50	0.54	-0.04
Bedwardine	0.09	0.09	0.42	-0.33	0.00	0.00	0.42	-0.42	0.09	0.09	0.84	-0.75
Cathedral	0.45	0.58	0.58	-0.00	0.07	0.04	0.58	-0.54	0.52	0.62	1.16	-0.54
Claines	0.22	0.25	0.41	-0.16	0.18	0.18	0.41	-0.23	0.40	0.42	0.82	-0.40
Gorse Hill	0.03	0.03	0.29	-0.26	0.00	0.02	0.29	-0.27	0.03	0.05	0.58	-0.53
Nunnery	0.45	0.44	0.40	0.04	0.06	0.07	0.40	-0.33	0.51	0.51	0.80	-0.29
Rainbow Hill	0.09	0.06	0.26	-0.20	0.13	0.13	0.26	-0.13	0.22	0.19	0.52	-0.33
St Clements	0.02	0.00	0.30	-0.30	0.00	0.00	0.30	-0.30	0.02	0.00	0.60	-0.60
St John	0.77	0.79	0.45	0.34	0.06	0.17	0.45	-0.28	0.83	0.96	0.90	0.05
St Peters	0.57	0.55	0.28	0.27	0.08	0.11	0.28	-0.17	0.65	0.66	0.56	0.10
St Stephen	0	0.00	0.27	-0.27	0.00	0.00	0.27	-0.27	0.00	0.00	0.54	-0.54
Warndon	0.08	0.29	0.29	0.00	0.08	0.08	0.29	-0.21	0.16	0.37	0.58	-0.21
Warndon Parish North	0.36	0.35	0.27	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.27	-0.27	0.36	0.35	0.54	-0.19
Warndon Parish South	0.43	0.37	0.31	0.06	0.01	0.01	0.31	-0.30	0.44	0.39	0.62	-0.24
Grand Total	4.18	4.43	5.12	-0.70	0.74	0.91	5.12	-4.21	4.92	5.33	10.24	-4.91

Appendix 2



Appendix 3

