

Report to: Place and Economic Development Committee, 13th March 2023

Report of: Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities

Subject: DEVELOPMENT OF A WORCESTER PLAY PLAN – UPDATE REPORT

1. Recommendation

That the Committee -

- 1.1 Notes the contents of this report, and in particular the work undertaken to date to plan for and consult on future play provision for Worcester.**
- 1.2 Notes the extension of the 'The Future of Play in Worcester' consultation period to 19th March 2023.**
- 1.3 Notes that a further report will be presented to this Committee in June 2023 presenting the finalised Worcester Play Plan together with an action plan for implementation.**

2. Background

- 2.1 In [March 2022](#) this Committee approved a report that included funding of £40,000 in order to appoint a specialist contractor to undertake a consultation and engagement exercise in respect of future outdoor play space provision across the City, and from that consultation develop a Worcester 'Play Plan'.
- 2.2 Committee were informed by way of the March 2022 report, that the provision of children's play areas across Worcester stood at 4.18ha compared to recommended provision of 5.12ha, whilst provision of youth play space across Worcester was 0.74ha compared to a recommended provision of 5.12ha.
- 2.3 In addition, it was confirmed within the report that the Council did not have a strategic plan which would be able to guide future investment decisions around outdoor play provision. It was agreed by the Committee that any future strategy for outdoor play should aim to enhance and not reduce the play provision already available across the city.
- 2.4 Following a procurement exercise and in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee, an architect and urban design consortium led by [Harper Perry Ltd](#) were appointed to undertake this work on the Council's behalf and commenced their commission during November 2022.

3. Information

- 3.1 An internal project group is supporting this piece of work which is jointly sponsored by the Corporate Director - Operations, Homes and Communities and Corporate Director - Planning and Governance).

The project group is represented by Community Services (including Community Engagement, Community Safety and Leisure, Health and Wellbeing), Environmental Operations, Property Services, Planning and Communications.

- 3.2 Regular project group meetings are held with colleagues from Harper Perry present and the following an initial series of scoping meetings, a consultation strategy was developed that was subsequently signed off by the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee. The consultation has taken various forms including an online consultation portal, and in-person engagement events at a number of locations across the city.
- 3.3 The consultation has been supported by a communications strategy that has included press releases, social media, a short video, direct mailings to community stakeholders, and a direct mailing to all schools. The consultation has been promoted on posters around the city including in community centres and at play areas, with a QR code enabling people to quickly access the consultation page on the website.

The Future of Play in Worcester – Online Consultation

- 3.4 The online consultation was launched on 9th January and can be found at: www.worcester/voiceit. The format is an interactive map which is launched as an app, hosted by a provider "Placechangers". It is accessible from any modern computing or mobile device.
- 3.5 To date, 345 people have entered responses. The greatest number of responses have been received against the "Worcester area" tab, which allows people to leave free text comments about the whole city or answer a series of questions. The second and third most commented areas are "Pump Track" and "Pitmaston Park". In terms of number of responses, this is then followed by Gheluvelt and Cripplegate Parks, Waverly Street, Worcester Woods and then a series of the smaller local play areas. A mix of free text comments and question answers have been provided for all of these sites. A considerable number of sites have received no specific feedback at all, however.
- 3.6 All of the public responses can be viewed by going into the app and selecting a site and the viewing the comments there, either viewed as a map or as a menu list of sites. Detailed question responses and personal information is not available for public view but has been collected and stored privately, supported by a clear data protection privacy notice.
- 3.7 The depth of the feedback collected through this online tool is very good. People have left detailed and carefully considered responses. They have provided examples of play areas that they consider are good quality (including some outside of Worcester) and given specific reasons why they consider play provision needs improving, and how.
- 3.8 The online survey responses are being collated and analysed so that they can be presented in full detail to Members in the June report. This will inform the action plan for implementation of the Worcester Play Plan. Some common and overarching themes to the feedback which have emerged already are:
 - Considerable room for improvement and investment
 - Perception that Worcester provision has fallen behind other neighbouring areas
 - Some people travelling out of the city for better play

- People want destination play and neighbourhood/doorstep play spaces
- Desire for more variety in play equipment
- Desire more natural play spaces
- Desire for more spaces for wheels (bikes, skateboards)
- Desire for more social spaces which feel safe
- Desire for more outdoor fitness equipment
- Not enough provision for teenagers
- Not enough provision for children with disabilities
- Not enough toilets
- Not enough seating for adults or children
- Maintenance issues can be a deterrent to use
- Think about surveillance and safety
- Think about gender differentials
- Think about age differentials
- Different levels of provision in different parts of the city
- Well-equipped play areas are prized and popular
- Having an interactive map of play areas in the city is a valuable tool.

In Person Consultation & Engagement Events

- 3.9 As part of Harper Perry's commission an all-Members' briefing session was undertaken on 8th November, and this included a workshop session where Members were invited to offer comments on the type and level of play provision within their wards including any ideas, they had for improvements to existing play areas or for the development of new play areas. In addition, all ward members have been offered a ward-specific feedback discussion with Council officers who are supporting the consultation.
- 3.10 The following in-person events and sessions have been run by the Harper Perry team with support from Council officers. In total this has meant direct engagement with an estimated (minimum) number of 300 people (parents, carers, teenagers, children):
- Tudor Way Children's Centre (Dines Green) – January 24th
 - Perdiswell Young Peoples Leisure Club – January 24th
 - Perdiswell Leisure Centre – Friday 3rd February
 - The Hive – Saturday 4th February
 - The Guildhall – Saturday 4th February
 - Cripplegate Park, Ghelevult Park, Cromwell Crescent Park, Grasshopper Park – 20th - 24th February
- 3.11 In addition, the Community Engagement Team engaged over 100 people during week commencing 20th – 24th February at 4 parks across the city, encouraging parents and young people to complete the online consultation whilst also completing a small number of surveys on site.
- 3.12 Similar themes to the feedback picked up in the online consultation have been secured through the in-person events. This feedback has been informing the drafting of a Worcester Play Plan. The feedback will be available for inspection in hard copy at the Committee meeting.

Consultation extension

- 3.13 Despite an extensive in-person and online campaign, the number of consultation responses remains lower than hoped, bearing in mind the size of the population of children and young people in the city (now informed by Census 2021 data). As noted earlier, some areas of the city have received considerably more feedback than others.
- 3.14 Disappointingly the appetite has been very low from schools helping engage their communities in the consultation and so this will be promoted again through more communications.
- 3.15 Similarly, a targeted mailing will be made to community groups in the city which support people with particular needs or disabilities, although there is evidence from the online consultation responses that some people who have special access requirements have engaged and given detailed feedback.
- 3.16 For all of these reasons, it is proposed to extend the consultation until just before the start of the Council pre-election period (when it is customary for consultations to cease).

Draft Worcester Play Plan Report

- 3.17 Harper Perry have discussed their approach to developing a draft Worcester Play Plan, providing a visual and spatial document which can be used to inform investment decisions over a 5–10-year period. The Plan is informed by best practice, theories of play and the consultation feedback. It sets design concepts alongside examples of what could work in Worcester. It recognises the need for a nuanced approach to meet a range of needs and it capitalises on the virtues of Worcester being a compact city which people are able and willing to travel around in order to have different play experiences.
- 3.18 It will centre around 3 approaches to play, namely:
- **'Doorstep' Play** – a landscaped space including engaging play features for young children (generally up to 5 years old) that are close to their homes, and places for parents and carers to sit and talk.
 - **'Neighbourhood' Play** – a site providing for a large residential area, catering for up to 14-year-olds, offering a wider range of play equipment with and places to for parents and carers to meet up for up to a couple of hours.
 - **'Destination' Play** – typically larger playgrounds attracting larger numbers, set in a location that may require a drive to reach, and where families and their children would tend to spend half a day or more enjoying arranging to visit with other friends and their families. These larger sites need to cater for the widest range of ages, interests and needs and provide supporting facilities to ensure a comfortable visit.
- 3.19 As outlined within the recommendations of this report, a further report will be presented to this Committee in June 2023 that will seek approval of a Draft Worcester Play Plan as well as an action plan for implementation.

The action plan will need to show how the Council intends to work with stakeholders, organise its activity and limited resources to ensure that specific and measurable improvements can be made in play areas across the city, with a governance process to identify that further Member decisions (and in some cases, further consultation) may be needed to support particularly significant investments or changes.

- 3.20 An 'all Member' briefing session will be held during mid-May 2023 where Harper Perry (accompanied by officers) will present the Draft Worcester Play Plan and provide ample opportunity for question and answers. It is hoped that this session will enable Members of this Committee to be fully informed of all relevant matters and key implications ahead of its June 2023 meeting.

Ward(s): All
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Background Papers: March 2022 Place and Economic Development Committee Report – Proposal to Develop a Worcester City Strategic Play Area Development Plan
[Strategic Play Area Development Plan.pdf \(worcester.gov.uk\)](#)
Worcester Play Consultation
[Have your say on the future of outdoor play in Worcester - Worcester City Council](#)