

**Maidstone Play Area Policy**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service/Lead Director</b>	Dawn Hudd, Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Jason Taylor, Leisure Manager
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

**Executive Summary**

This report is a supporting document to the Maidstone Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Strategic Plan 2017 – 2027, which this Committee adopted on 4th July 2017.

It builds on the £1.8m investment on play areas improvements over the last two years which was based on a standard of most residents living within a 12 minute walk of a good quality play area.

This report describes how Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) will ensure that a quality environment continues to be provided for play and young people's social interaction in the future within the current financial climate.

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. To agree to the implementation of a £200,000 Parish Play Area Grants Scheme over a two year period, which will support Parish Councils in improving strategically important play areas that they own.
2. To agree that non-strategic play areas, belonging to MBC, will be retained as green space and that play equipment in these areas will not be replaced when it is beyond economical repair.

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Heritage Culture and Leisure Committee	31 October 2017

# Maidstone Play Area Policy

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report is a supporting document to the Maidstone Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Strategic Plan 2017 – 2027, which HCL Committee adopted on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2017.
- 1.2 This report describes how MBC will ensure that a quality environment continues to be provided for play and young people's social interaction in a challenging budget setting. It has been prepared in line with national guidance on play; it also links to the Maidstone Local Plan and the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.
- 1.3 The recommendations in this report support the £1.8 million of capital improvements that have already taken place over last two years which has seen 32 play areas replaced or improved in line with the 12 minute standard. This investment was agreed by the Cabinet Member for Communities and Leisure Services in May 2015.
- 1.4 There are 120 play areas across Maidstone Borough, 73 of which are owned by MBC. The remainder are owned by other organisations including Parish Councils, Kent County Council and Housing Associations.
- 1.5 Following the quality scoring of all play areas across the borough in 2011, it was identified that it would take up to forty years to replace all of MBC's play areas with the resources available at the time. Taking into account that the average useful life of a play area is 15-20 years, it was obvious that the situation was not sustainable and that the standard of play areas would continue to deteriorate. The pressure on council budgets has increased significantly since 2012 and the position is only likely to get harder in the future.
- 1.6 With this in mind a complete review of all of the play areas in the borough was carried out in 2012. This review looked not only at the standard of all play areas but also their distribution across the borough.
- 1.7 This review concluded that 51 out of 69 MBC play areas needed improvement, or would need work within 5 years to reach/maintain green or amber standard, as defined in the play scoring matrix. It also highlighted that there was no set standard for play provision across the borough and that there were some potential areas of over provision in the borough.
- 1.8 A number of options were considered and following consideration by scrutiny committee it was proposed that a borough wide strategic play provision standard, based on the 'majority of residents being a maximum of 12 minutes' walk from an amber or green play area', should be progressed. This has led to 32 of MBCs Strategic Play Areas being replaced or improved.

- 1.9 The identification of strategic play areas led to the implementation of a £1.8m Play Area Capital Improvement Programme, including a £200,000 allowance to fund a grant scheme to support Parish Councils who owned Play Areas which formed part of the borough wide Strategic Play Network.
  - 1.10 The Play Area Capital Improvement works are now nearing completion and a summary of that project will be presented to HCL Committee in the near future.
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## **2. MAIDSTONE PLAY POLICY**

- 2.1 This committee adopted the Maidstone Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Strategic Plan 2017 – 2027 in July this year, which sets out a route map for the short, medium and longer term development of Maidstone’s parks and open spaces.
- 2.2 To ensure all residents have sufficient access to greenspace the Council has adopted open space quantity standards. These indicate the minimum size for greenspace types and the area to be provided per thousand residents, as well as the maximum distance that any resident should have to travel to a greenspace. The standards were devised to ensure that adequate greenspaces are provided on new housing developments; but they have also been applied across the rest of the borough to help ensure that all residents have access to all types of open space.
- 2.3 Through considering all these factors alongside the location and size of planned housing developments, those areas of the borough where there is currently a deficit or over-provision (or will be in future) have been identified. These standards also include standards for play, but provision for quantity is only part of the picture, the quality and type of provision is also important.
- 2.4 With this in mind the Council has looked at the volume of play provision for all age groups across the borough in order to raise the overall quality and standard of play area facilities, including areas aimed at teenagers. This standard of provision will also be set alongside key objectives and targets.

### **Play Area Classifications**

- 2.5 It is important to understand the context within which play areas provide opportunities for local communities to explore parks and open spaces further. The Council’s play areas are ranked into the following three categories.

#### **2.5.1 Destination Play Areas**

These play areas are visited not only by the local community but by park users from outside the borough. They provide a much wider range of play activities to engage in, are located in heavily used open spaces and act as a brand for the Council. Park users identify with these areas for a family day out and are supported by other facilities such as car parking, toilets,

café/food facilities and good walking routes. Mote Park Main Play Area and Cobtree Manor Park Play Area are those which are ranked as destination Play Areas.

### 2.5.2 District Play Areas

These are larger locally placed play areas mainly used by their local communities and some passing visitors to the borough. They are characterised by a large number of play activities aimed at a wide age range and supported by a large footfall. Some of these areas also have other supporting facilities such as car parks, toilets and other sporting facilities (tennis courts, bowling greens and multi-use games areas). The play areas that are classified as District Play Areas are Clare Park, Parkwood, Penenden Heath, South Park, and Whatman Park

### 2.5.3 Local Neighbourhood Play Areas

These are play areas used by the immediate local community. They feature a limited range of dynamic play equipment such as slides, swings and climbing frames. These play areas are also found in local villages and parish areas. The majority of the 120 play areas across the borough are classed as Local Neighbourhood Play Areas, some examples are Shepway Green, Baring Heath, Albert Reed Gardens, Camden Street and Lime Trees at Staplehurst.

### **Strategically Important Play Areas owned by MBC**

- 2.6 To understand the distribution of play area provision for different age ranges in terms of quality, a mapping exercise was carried out in 2013 to identify the distribution of the three different categories of play areas across the borough. This showed areas of over and under provision across different areas and which areas suffered from a lack of quality.
- 2.7 A maximum walking time of 12 minutes from home from one of the three categories of play area, was considered reasonable and within easy reach for all age groups, with the large majority of households in the borough being within this range. Physical barriers such as the River Medway, main roads and railways were taken into account in the mapping process.
  - 2.7.1 In order to target resources where they can be most effective and ensure that the most used play areas are kept to a high standard a network of significant sites were designated as 'Strategically Important Play Areas' (SIPAs). This network of SIPA's is based on the "majority of residents in the borough being within 12 minutes' walk of a good quality play area". The reason that this is the majority and not all residents, is that in the more remote rural areas it would not be possible to provide all residents with easy access to a play area, but the network does cover most towns and villages.
  - 2.7.2 The map showing this network of SIPA's can be seen in Appendix I.
  - 2.7.3 There are 78 SIPA's across the borough comprising of the three different categories. These SIPA's have the following ownership: 41 MBC, 33 parish

councils, 3 trusts and one Kent County Council. If there was more than one play area in a location, the one chosen as being strategically important was the one that was most centrally located, accessible to the most people, provided the best facilities and in the best condition.

2.7.4 The table below shows the list of all of the SIPA's, where they are located and who they are maintained by. It also shows the play areas that were improved or replaces as part of the capital improvements carried out in the last 2 years.

ref no	Strategically Important Play Area Name	Servicing	Ward	Responsibility	Play Area Category	Improved 2016/17
1	Mote Park (Main)	Borough Wide	Shepway North	MBC	Destination	*
2	Cobtree Manor Park	Borough Wide	Boxley	Trust	Destination	
3	Whatman	River Walk	Bridge	MBC	District	*
4	Penenden Heath Play Area	Borough Wide	East	MBC	District	*
5	Clare Park	Fant and Bridge	Fant	MBC	District	*
6	Park Wood Recreation Ground	Park Wood	Park Wood	MBC	District	
7	South Park Play Area	East Tovil	High Street	MBC	District	*
8	Teston County Park	Teston	Barming	KCC	Local Neighbourhood	
9	Adisham Drive	Allington North	Allington	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
10	Braunstone Drive	Allington North	Allington	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
11	Corben Close	Allington South	Allington	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
12	Giddyhorne Lane	Allington South	Allington	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
13	Midley Close	Allington North	Allington	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
14	Timber Tops Play Area	Lordswood	Boxley	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
15	Weaving Heath	Grove Green	Boxley	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
16	Cornwallis Park	Tonbridge Road	Bridge	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
17	Groveswood Drive North	Grove Green	Detling & Thurnham	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
18	Foxden Drive	Downswood	Downswood & Otham	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
19	Mallards Way	Downswood	Downswood & Otham	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
20	Ashurst Road	Vinters Park	East	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
21	Camden Street	Town Centre	East	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
22	Foley Park	Town Centre North	East	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
23	Upper Fulling Pits	Vinters Park	East	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
24	Gatland Lane	Barming and Fant	Fant	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
25	Barming Heath	Heath and Barming	Heath	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
26	Nettlestead Village Hall	Nettlestead	Marden & Yalding	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
27	Arundel Street	Town Centre	North	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
28	Brookbank	Sandling	North	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
29	Chillington Street	Town Centre	North	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
30	Dickens Road	Ringlestone	North	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
31	St Francis Close	Penenden Heath	North	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
32	Lockham Farm Avenue	Park Wood	Park Wood	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
33	Queen Elizabeth Square	Park Wood	Park Wood	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
34	Stratford Drive	Park Wood	Park Wood	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
35	Mote Park (Natural Play)	Borough Wide	Shepway North	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
36	School Lane (Mote Park)	Shepway	Shepway North	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
37	Shepway Green	Shepway	Shepway North	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
38	Senacre Square	Senacre	Shepway South	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
39	Stevenswood	Shepway	Shepway South	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
40	Mangravet Recreation Ground	Mangravet	South	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
41	Bridge Mill Way	West Tovil	South	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*
42	Albert Reed Gardens	Tovil Green	South	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	
43	Lime Trees	Staplehurst	Staplehurst	MBC	Local Neighbourhood	*

44	South Street	Barming	Barming	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
45	Teston Village Green	Teston	Barming	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
46	Boughton Monchelsea Village Hall	Boughton Monchelsea	Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
47	Chart Sutton Play Area	Chart Sutton	Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
48	Bredhurst Village Hall Play Area	Bredhurst	Boxley	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
49	Cornwallis Avenue	Linton	Coxheath & Hunton	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
50	Coxheath Village Hall Play Area	Coxheath	Coxheath & Hunton	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
51	East Farleigh Play Area	East Farleigh	Coxheath & Hunton	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
52	Gallants Lane	Coxheath	Coxheath & Hunton	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
53	Hunton Play Area	Hunton	Coxheath & Hunton	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
54	West Farleigh Play Area	West Farleigh	Coxheath & Hunton	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
55	Stoneacre Play Area	Otham	Downswood & Otham	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
56	Glebe Field Play Area	Harrietsham	Harrietsham & Lenham	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
57	Ham Lane Play Area	Lenham	Harrietsham & Lenham	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
58	William Pit Youth Area	Lenham	Harrietsham & Lenham	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
59	Days Green Play Area	Headcorn	Headcorn	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
60	East Sutton Play Area	East Sutton	Headcorn	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
61	Kingswood Village Hall Play Area	Kingswood	Headcorn	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
62	Ulcombe Play Area	Ulcombe	Headcorn	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
63	Leeds Play Area	Leeds	Leeds	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
64	King George V Play Area	Loose	Loose	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
65	Collier Street Play Area	Collier Street	Marden & Yalding	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
66	Laddingford Play Area	Laddingford	Marden & Yalding	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
67	Marden Playing Fields	Marden	Marden & Yalding	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
68	School Villas, Nettlestead	Nettlestead	Marden & Yalding	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
69	The Kintons	Yalding	Marden & Yalding	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
70	Cardwell Play Area	Hollingbourne	North Downs	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
71	Stockbury Play Area	Stockbury	North Downs	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
72	Wormshill Play Area	Wormshill	North Downs	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
73	Surrenden Road Play Area	Staplehurst	Staplehurst	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
74	Langley Play Area	Langley	Sutton Valence & Langley	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
75	Sutton Valence Village Hall Play Area	Sutton Valence	Sutton Valence & Langley	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
76	Jubilee Playing Field	Staplehurst	Staplehurst	Parish	Local Neighbourhood	
77	Church Landway	Bearsted	Bearsted	Trust	Local Neighbourhood	
78	Collis Millennium Green	Town Centre South	High Street	Trust	Local Neighbourhood	

## 2.9 Strategically Important Play Areas Owned by Parish Councils

2.9.1 The 33 Parish owned play areas form an important part of the SIPA network providing play opportunities to residents in rural areas not covered by MBC provision. These areas also need to be maintained to an acceptable standard by the Parish Councils and as such are included when borough wide scoring of play areas is carried out.

2.9.2 To support the SIPA network outside the scope of MBC play areas £200,000 was made available as part of the £1.8m Play Area Improvements Programme for a Parish Play Area Grants Scheme over a two year period.

2.9.3 The grant will be:

- Available to all parish councils that have a SIPA.

- To a maximum of £10,000 per parish council, unless a compelling case can be made for a higher amount.
- Used only for capital improvements.
- Ideally match funded by the parish council or from other sources.

2.9.4 An application and scoring process will be set up and managed by MBC. If the grant scheme is approved then information regarding the process will be sent to all parish councils. The Kent Association of Local Councils will be consulted on the application and award process.

2.9.5 If this committee approve the Parish SIPA Grant Scheme it will be implemented from April 2018 and all schemes must be completed by the end of March 2020.

### **Non-Strategically Important Play Areas**

2.9.6 The play areas not considered to be part of the network of SIPA's are referred to as Non-Strategic Play Areas (NSPA).

2.9.7 Those MBC Play Areas considered NSPA, of which there are 20, will not in future be maintained or refurbished using MBC revenue or capital resources. The equipment in these play areas will be decommissioned over a period of time as it comes to the end of its useful life.

2.9.8 These play areas may however be refurbished if funding is available from other sources such as Section 106 Developer Contributions.

2.9.9 NSIPA's will be offered to the Parish Councils, Housing Trusts and other Community Groups to take over, and if no interested parties come forward, the play equipment will be removed when it is no longer serviceable and the land retained as green space.

2.9.10 There will be no financial resources available to support the transfer of these NSIPA's but MBC will be able to provide information on maintenance requirements, funding available, legislation relating to public play areas as well as assistance with play area inspections.

The table below shows all of NSIPA's belonging to MBC.

ref No.	MBC Owned Non - Strategic Play Area	Servicing	Ward	Play Area Category
1	Woolley Road	Senacre	Shepway South	Local Neighbourhood
2	Westmorland Close	Shepway South	Shepway South	Local Neighbourhood
3	Juniper Close	Allington	Allington	Local Neighbourhood
4	Franklin Drive	Grove Green	Boxley	Local Neighbourhood
5	Reinden Grove, Downswood	Downswood	Downswood	Local Neighbourhood
6	Riverhead Close	Allington	Allington	Local Neighbourhood
7	Somerset Road	Shepway	Sheepway North	Local Neighbourhood

8	Whitebeam Drive	Coxheath	Coxheath and Hunton	Local Neighbourhood
9	Keswick Drive	Allington	Allington	Local Neighbourhood
10	Cockpits	Marden	Marden and Yalding	Local Neighbourhood
11	Perverel Drive	Grove Green	Detling and Thurnham	Local Neighbourhood
12	Crownfields	Grove Green	Detling and Thurnham	Local Neighbourhood
13	Fairhurst Drive	Dean Street	Coxheath and Hunton	Local Neighbourhood
14	Bedgebury Cl	Vinters Park	East	Local Neighbourhood
15	Roseholme	Fant	Fant	Local Neighbourhood
16	Fountain Park	South	South	Local Neighbourhood
17	James Street	Town Centre	East	Local Neighbourhood
18	Shaw Close	Penenden Heath	East	Local Neighbourhood
19	Freshlands Road	Queens Rd	Heath	Local Neighbourhood
20	Shepherds Gate Drive	Grove Gn	Boxley	Local Neighbourhood

## Measuring Success

- 2.10 Following the completion of the Play Area Improvement Programme which targets improvements to MBC SIPA's, all play areas in the borough will be rescored against the same criteria used in 2011. This will enable an assessment to be made of the then current condition of all play areas across the borough. This will enable future resources to be targeted going forward in the areas where they will have the biggest impact.

## Future Considerations

- 2.11 Following the completion of the Play Area Improvement Programme which will be completed shortly, all MBC play areas will be in a good condition. However it is important that we remember that these play areas will need replacing in the future and that financial provision is made for this.
- 2.12 Most play areas will last for up to 20 years; based on the recent improvement project the average cost to replace each play area is around £40,000. Bearing in mind that this report proposes that MBC retain 42 Strategic Play areas, the ongoing continued cost to replace these factoring in deterioration will be in the region of £1,680,000, at current prices over the next 20 years. It is likely that no play areas will need replacing within the next 5 years so capital replacement budgets in the region of £100,000 per year will have to be put in place to reflect this from 2022.

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## 3 AVAILABLE OPTIONS

### 3.1 Funding Parish Play Areas

The implementation of a £200k Parish Play Area Grants Scheme over a two year period will contribute towards Parish Councils improving the SIPA's that they own. This in turn will ensure that the overall quality of the SIPA's across the borough is maintained.

Alternatively, the committee could decide not to fund work in SIPA's owned by Parish Councils and the Parish Councils could continue to wholly fund their SIPA's.

### 3.2 Non-strategic play areas owned by MBC

Agree that any non-strategic play areas belonging to MBC will be retained as green space and play equipment will not be replaced when it is beyond economical repair. It was inherent in the allocation of funding to strategic play areas that replacement of equipment in non-strategic play areas would not be funded.

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## **4 PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 To implement a £200k Parish Play Area Grants Scheme over a two year period. This will support Parish Councils in improving strategically important play areas that they own; this will enable and ensure that the quality of the SIPA's across the borough is maintained.

4.2 That equipment in any non-strategic play areas belonging to MBC will not be replaced when it is beyond economical repair, the equipment will be removed and the area retained as green space. With the decreasing resources available it is not possible to continue to maintain play areas which do not form part of the strategic network across the borough. It is better to have fewer good quality play areas that are accessible to most residents, than many poor quality play areas.

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## **5 RISK**

5.1 Unless MBC agree that any non-strategic play area equipment belonging to them will not be replaced when it is beyond economical repair each one will have to be dealt with on an individual basis which will create unnecessary work and time delays and result in the same outcome due to budget constraints.

5.2 There is a risk of injury to users if play area equipment is not kept in good condition or left open beyond its useful life. This in turn represents a reputational risk to the Council.

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## **6 CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

6.1 Following the 2012 Play Review and prior to the £1.8 million of capital improvement works taking place, an extensive consultation was carried

out.

- 6.2 This was advertised at all play areas and online. All parish and ward councillors were contacted as were community groups.
- 6.3 As a result of the consultation a number questions were raised regarding the choice of the particular SIPA's over other play area, and the walking distance from particular play areas. All of these were reviewed but the only adjustment that was made was that it was suggested that Peverel Drive Play Area be retained as a non-strategic play area. The equipment at this site has since been replaced using a S106 developer contribution.
- 6.4 A summary of the results of this consultation can be seen at [http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/54782/Play-Area-Strategy-Consultation-Results.pdf](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/54782/Play-Area-Strategy-Consultation-Results.pdf)
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## **7 NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 Following committee's approval of the Parish Play Area Grant Scheme, the relevant parishes and the Kent Association of Local Councils will be contacted with details of the Parish Play Area Grant Scheme.
- 7.2 Officers will produce a simple guide and application process for the Parish Play Area Grant Scheme.
- 7.3 On final completion of the Play Area Improvement Programme all play areas in the borough will be rescored on the same basis as in 2011.
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## **8 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Sign-off</b>
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	Providing a Safe and Clean Environment	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development.
<b>Risk Management</b>	The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development.
<b>Financial</b>	This project is funded in the current capital programme.	Section 151 Officer &

		Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	There will be no staffing implications.	Head of Environment & Street Scene.
<b>Legal</b>	The provision of play areas is not a statutory function, however they contribute to the wider community. Compliance with this policy will assist the Council in ensuring those play areas in commission are of a satisfactory standard which is essential as equipment which is not fit for purpose could be a contributory factor to injuries occurring which may then result in an increase in insurance claims being made against the Council.	Interim Deputy Head of Legal Partnership
<b>Equalities</b>	Having an agreed standard will ensure that all residents have access to good quality play areas.	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development.
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	No implications.	

## 9 REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Map showing the proposed network of Strategically Important Play Areas

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## 10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

The results of the play area consultation carried out prior to the capital works taking place can be seen at:

[http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/54782/Play-Area-Strategy-Consultation-Results.pdf](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/54782/Play-Area-Strategy-Consultation-Results.pdf)