

Play Area Provision

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment and Public Realm
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All Wards

Executive Summary

Following the adoption of Maidstone's Play Area Policy in October 2017, this report provides an update on the Parish Grant Scheme and decommissioning of non-strategically important play areas.

Nine applications were received for the £200,000 Parish Grant Scheme, leaving £113,500 of the fund remaining. It is proposed that a second round of the funding is launched to enable the remaining Parish Councils with Strategically Important Play Areas (SIPAs) further time to apply.

Given the Committee previously requested further consideration of the non-strategically important play areas (NSPAs) prior to their decommissioning, the report also outlines the process for this.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the outcome of the Strategically Important Play Area (SIPA) Parish Grant Scheme is noted;
2. That a second round of funding, based on the previous criteria, for the remaining budget is agreed;
3. That a proactive approach to contacting Ward Members and Parish Councils for areas with non-strategically Important Play Areas (NSPAs) is supported, in order to seek opportunities for further investment, third party management of the sites or consideration of their decommissioning.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee	2 October 2018

Play Area Provision

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In October 2017, the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee agreed the Maidstone Play Area Policy which designated 78 of the 120 play areas in the Borough as 'Strategically Important'. (sites listed in Appendix 1). This designation was based on the 'majority of residents' being within a 12 minute walk of a destination, district or local neighbourhood play area. This calculation took into account physical barriers such as the River Medway, main roads or railways.
- 1.2 The Play Area Policy sat alongside a substantial capital investment programme of £1.8 million. This budget had already been allocated to improve or replace 32 play areas owned by Maidstone Borough Council, which were within the 12 minute standard.
- 1.3 The outcome of the new Policy was to agree a £200,000 Parish Grant Scheme to support improvements at Strategically Important Play Areas owned or operated by Parish Councils, and to determine the future of non-strategically important play areas.
- 1.4 The Committee determined that further consideration should be made, on an individual basis, to the usage and funding opportunities before any non-strategically important play areas were decommissioned. This would also enable other bodies, such as parish councils, housing trusts or community groups to consider taking them on and seek external investment.
- 1.5 This report has been produced to provide the Committee with an update on the Strategically Important Play Area (SIPA) Parish Grant Scheme and to set out the process for the decommissioning of non-Strategically Important Play Areas.

Strategically Important Play Area Parish Grant Scheme

- 1.6 In May 2018, draft guidance and application form for the scheme was sent out to the 29 Parish Councils who owned or operated Strategically Important Play Areas for informal consultation. This sought their views on the four key criteria for the fund:
 - **Strategically Important Play Areas (SIPAs)** – funding was not available for play areas which had not been determined as SIPAs.
 - **Capital Investment** – funding was not available for maintenance or revenue costs to operate the play area.
 - **Match Funding** – ideally the Council sought match funding from the Parish Council or other sources to ensure maximum benefit is delivered to local residents through investment in the SIPAs.

- **Funding Amount** – it was expected that the maximum grant per Parish Council will be £10,000, however higher awards would be considered for exceptional schemes with significant match funding / 3rd party contributions, funding permitting
- 1.7 The Parishes who responded supported the draft criteria and requested a 12 week deadline for applications to fit with their meeting cycles.
- 1.8 On 8 June 2018, the application and guidance was published and sent out to the 29 Parish Councils. The deadline for applications was 5pm on 31 August 2018.
- 1.9 Nine applications were submitted for the funding totalling £86,500, with match funding of over £143,000. Therefore the scheme is generating over £230,000 of improvements to Strategically Important Play Areas.
- 1.10 Applications were received from the following Parish Councils:
- Barming
 - Bredhurst
 - Broomfield and Kingswood
 - Hunton
 - Leeds
 - Otham
 - Sutton Valence
 - Ulcombe
 - Wormshill
- 1.11 The work proposed ranged from additional equipment to complete refurbishment and new boundary fencing. The match funding included donations, fund raising, local and county councillor contributions, parish contributions, volunteer time and in one case S106 funding. All proposals were evaluated by the Parks and Open Spaces Team following the criteria set out in the application process.
- 1.12 Following consultation with the Chair of Heritage, Culture and Leisure, the Team have approved the funding to all nine applications. This leaves £113,500 in the capital programme for Parish SIPAs.

Decommissioning of Non-Strategically Important Play Areas

- 1.13 There are 20 MBC play areas which have been identified as non-strategically important and therefore would be considered for decommissioning when the equipment comes to the end of its usable life. These NSPAs are listed in Appendix 2.
- 1.14 The Play Area Policy presented to the Committee in October 2017, proposed that NSPAs could be handed over to Parish Councils, Housing Associations or community groups to enable them to be retained for local community use. This has recently been the case with Franklin Drive, which the Committee approved its transfer to Boxley Parish Council who had secured external funding to refurbish the site.

- 1.15 At the current time, none of the 20 NSPAs are in a position where they are ready to be decommissioned. However it is understood that the Committee is concerned that opportunities to transfer or reconsider the future of any NSPAs will be missed if the sites are not reviewed before they have started to decline.
- 1.16 Therefore it is proposed that Ward Members and Parish Councils of the NSPAs are contacted to ensure they have the opportunity to consider alternative management arrangements for the site or request the Committee consider the future of their NSPA. The sites will need to be considered by the Committee in order of priority based on the life-expectancy of the site or the opportunity to transfer it to a third party.
- 1.17 The transfer of NSPAs to a third party would need to be approved by the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee and would standardly be a 99 year lease, with the land being retained as a public play area or green open space. Any changes to the open space would need to be approved by Maidstone Borough Council as per the lease arrangements.
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2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The Committee could agree that a second round of funding should be carried out based on the existing criteria and within the remaining budget. This would enable the eligible Parish Councils who did not apply for funding additional time to submit a bid for support. As the key objective for the Council was to ensure a network of strategically important play areas across the Borough, it is important that the Council encourages investment in the Parish owned or operated SIPAs.
- 2.2 The Committee could decide that the criteria for the Parish Grant Scheme should be amended and that a second round of funding is then carried out. The criteria previously required the applications to be for capital investment in SIPAs only, with an expectation of match funding and £10,000 limit. The reason for this was to ensure the funding could be equally shared across the eligible Parish Councils and would lever in additional investment in the SIPAs. However the Committee could decide to allow the fund to cover specified maintenance on the SIPA, withdraw the need for match funding or enable funding for multiple SIPAs within a Parish.
- 2.3 Alternatively the Committee could decide that the Parish Councils should not be given another opportunity for the funding and the budget underspend for this should be reinvested elsewhere in the Council, to be decided by Policy and Resources Committee.
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3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee agree for a second round of funding to be carried out based on the existing criteria and within the remaining budget. This will maximise the benefit of the Council's investment and support the original objective to maintain a network of SIPAs across the

Borough offering the majority of local residents a good quality play area for all age ranges within walking distance of their home.

- 3.2 By changing the criteria, it is unlikely that this would have a significant impact on the amount or value of the applications received. However there is a risk that should all eligible Parishes apply due to the time extension, it would be more difficult to evaluate and determine how the funding should be allocated.
- 3.3 There is also a risk that the funding would have less direct benefit on the quality of the SIPA without match funding or capital investment in equipment.

4. RISK

- 4.1 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. That consideration is shown in this report at 3.2 and 3.3. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 The Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee considered the Play Area Policy in October 2017 and supported the launch of the SIPA Parish Grant Scheme. This report provides the Committee with an update on the Parish Grant Scheme.
- 5.2 The Committee also requested that prior to the decommissioning of any non-strategically important play areas, they are consulted and the usage and other funding opportunities considered. This report also provides an update on this process.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 If the recommendations are approved, the Parks and Open Spaces Team will launch a second round of the SIPA Parish Grant Scheme within the next 2 weeks. All remaining eligible Parish Councils will be contacted and encouraged to submit an application for funding.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
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Impact on Corporate Priorities	We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council's overall achievement of its aims as set out in section 3 [preferred alternative].	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Risk Management	Already covered in the risk section – if your risk section is more than just a paragraph in this box then you can state 'refer to paragraph ... of the report'	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Financial	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Legal	No specific comments other than, if the Council is to dispose of play areas to parishes, there is a process to go through for disposal of public open space. This committee has responsibility for declaring open space surplus. The intention to dispose must be advertised locally for two weeks and any representations taken into account before a final decision is made, Policy and Resources Committee also agreed a policy for such disposals on 25 June 2017 – link: https://meetings.maidstone.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=577&MIId=2802	Principal Solicitor, Contentious and Corporate Governance
Privacy and Data Protection		
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment. A full Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out prior to the decision to decommission any non-strategically important play areas	[Policy & Information Manager]
Crime and Disorder		
Procurement		

8. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix 1: List of Parish owned or operated Strategically Important Play Areas
 - Appendix 2: List of non-strategically important play areas
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None