

PLAY AREA STRATEGY 2009 – 2015



CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

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SUMMARY

Vision

- 1. To develop high quality play areas across Chesham that are welcoming, safe, attractive and meet the needs of children and young people, to be provided within the budgets available to the Council.**

Purpose

2. The purpose of this Play Area Strategy is to:-
 - Deliver a more even distribution of play areas which offers a qualitative play experience across Chesham
 - Meet the needs of children/young people living in and visiting the town
 - Find alternative ways of funding play area provision and attract additional resources

Benefits

3. The Strategy will deliver the following benefits to children/accompanying adults and young people (13-17 age group) in Chesham:-
 - More choice in better play provision within walking distance of home
 - Users feeling safe in the local play environment
 - An enjoyable leisure experience in an improved local environment
 - Easily accessible play areas for local residents to walk to
 - Better access for the disabled and people from other disadvantaged sections of the community

INTRODUCTION

1. The Council has provided children's play equipment in Chesham for many years. These facilities can be found in the town's parks and open spaces. In some cases the Council has inherited these facilities from Chiltern District Council. In others they are the direct result of the Council's investment.
2. Pressures on the future maintenance of these facilities come from a number of quarters and are increasing. In recent years British & European Safety Standards have required investment to be made in safety surfacing and led to the removal or closure of items of equipment. The toddlers' climbing frame in Lowndes Park, inoperable for a year, is an obvious example. The Council has tried to repair these items where possible but most of the equipment is so old that parts are increasingly difficult to get hold of.
3. There is clear evidence that the residents of Chesham value highly the provision of children's play facilities. However it is also evident that many of these residents have expressed some disappointment that the style of play areas in Chesham has changed little over the last 25 years and the equipment is very run-down. The implications are that like for like replacement, owing to wear and tear, may not be greeted with public satisfaction. Stringent safety standards and cost, however, can make the provision of more interesting and adventurous items of equipment difficult to achieve.
4. The Council itself has recognised there is a serious issue with the quality and level of play area provision and at its Recreation and the Arts Committee of the 2nd June 2008, officers were asked to devise a play area strategy which would review its play areas and set priorities and timetables for the development of them over the next few years (*Minute no. 11*). Clearly major renovation has implications for the Council's spending decisions. Investment in relation to play equipment has to be taken within the context of the overall Council Budget. In deciding how to respond, the possibility of attracting external funding through partnership working or sponsorship should be explored.
5. The purpose of this Strategy document is to:-
 - Set out the current position and identify gaps in provision
 - Examine current pressures and future trends
 - Consider the best ways forward including future funding arrangements

CURRENT POSITION

Existing Provision

1. There are currently 12 sites with children's play equipment in the town. These sites are identified on a map in **Appendix 1** and are:
 1. Co-op Field
 2. Marston Field
 3. Windsor Road Recreation Ground*
 4. Batchelors Way
 5. Nashleigh Hill Recreation Ground
 6. Codmore Field
 7. Gordon Road
 8. Woodland View
 9. Bois Hill
 10. Hodds Wood
 11. Moor Road
 12. Lowndes Park

*owned by Chiltern District Council but maintained by this Council.

2. The current distribution of Council sites has evolved gradually over time. Some play areas have been planned by previous Councils, but others taken on when Chiltern District Council transferred its housing stock to a Housing Association which was not prepared to take on the maintenance.
3. The quality of the play provision was criticised within the PPG 17 Open Spaces and Recreation Strategy commissioned by Chiltern District Council in 2005 and is highlighted in **Appendix 2**.
4. The Council's 2005 five yearly, door-to-door Residents' Survey also asked how often play-areas (excluding Lowndes Park) were visited and how good the facilities were. The survey elicited 2,134 responses, representing a 27% response rate. It was evident that visitors to play areas/recreation grounds have decreased significantly since the previous survey in 2000 with a corresponding increase in the 'never' visited category. As in 2000, Gordon Road (4% visited), Woodland View (6% visited) and Hodds Wood Road (7% visited) remained the least visited play areas. The most visited play area was Moor Road in Waterside with 38% visiting [59% in 2000] and 63% [41% in 2000] indicating they had 'never' visited.
5. This fall-off in visits is almost certainly due to the declining quality of the equipment. When asked about the facilities, over a quarter of respondents gave a 'poor' rating to the facilities in Co-op Field (30%), Gordon Road (27%), Nashleigh Hill (27%), Hodds Wood Road (26%), Marston Field (26%) and Woodland View* (26%) respectively. All play areas were rated by 49-59% as 'satisfactory'. Overall, those that had lived in Chesham over 20 years gave the lowest satisfaction ratings for the play areas/recreation grounds.

(*survey undertaken before new equipment installed 2007.)

7. In the recent consultation 'Play and Say' Day held in February 2009, only 5% of respondents said they were satisfied with the equipment with a third (33%) saying it was not fit for purpose.
8. This general dissatisfaction was re-enforced by a play-area survey undertaken by the Chesham Youth Council in the spring of 2008 where young people were interviewed directly and were of the overwhelming view that equipment needed upgrading at all sites.
9. In light of the poor quality of the general equipment, the Council committed itself to setting up a Working Party consisting of Members and officers (with input from the police) to begin the process of setting priorities for renovating our play-areas over a number of years while also deciding whether one or more of our smaller areas should be closed as provision is rationalised.
10. Following presentations from various play companies, the Play-Area Working Party recommended to Council that Proludic Play be chosen as the preferred company to work with the Council over a number of years. This was duly confirmed by the Council's Recreation and the Arts Committee on the 16th October 2008 (*Minute no. 41*).

National Standards

1. The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) has produced minimum standards for the provision of children's play facilities. These standards are recognised as being a useful yardstick against which local authorities can judge the distribution and content of play areas.
2. The NPFA identify 3 categories of play area:-
 - **Local Area for Play (LAP)** – *A low key games area. Aimed at 4-6 year olds and younger children for play activities close to home. Catchment area = 1 minutes walking time for an accompanied child or approximately 100m walking distance.*
 - **Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP)** – *A small play area with about 5 types of equipment. Aimed at 4-8 year olds. Consider needs of under 4's and slightly over 8's. Catchment Area = 5 minutes walking time for an accompanied child, or approximately 400m walking distance.*
 - **Neighbourhood Equipped Play Area (NEAP)** – *A larger play area with about 8 types of equipment. Aimed at 8-14 age group. Facilities for wheeled and ball play should be provided. Catchment Area = 15 minutes walking time for either accompanied or unaccompanied children which is about 1000m walking distance*
3. Using the NPFA criteria as its basis, the Open Spaces and Recreation Strategy concluded that *'There are an insufficient number of large equipped*

play facilities and some areas are without adequate further provision. Consideration needs to be given to the development of provision within the general principles of a quantitative standard.'

PRESSURES AND TRENDS

Safety Standards

1. A challenge is presented by ever more demanding safety standards. In recent years this has resulted in the removal of roundabouts and swings that are made up of a combination of cradle seats for toddlers and flat seats for older children. In the case of roundabouts the problem was the lack of a mechanism to regulate the speed. In the case of the swings it is now a requirement that toddler and junior equipment is separated. Unfortunately lack of space at some locations will not allow for replacement of the same range of facilities without extending the size of the total play area.
2. With the introduction of the European Safety Standards for Outdoor Playground Equipment (EN1176 and EN1177) in January 1999 came ever more demanding safety standards. The main difference between these standards and the previous British standards is primarily in relation to impact absorbing surfacing, the spacing between play structure and the height at which there is a need to provide barriers with guard rails to prevent falls.
3. Clarification in respect of the implementation of the new safety standards has been sought from RoSPA, a reputable independent safety advisory body. RoSPA stated that:

*“The new European standard was published on 1 January 1999 when existing standards were withdrawn. There are a number of areas where existing equipment may fail the new standard. **This does not mean that equipment has suddenly become dangerous or that remedial action is required.** The new Standard is not mandatory or retrospective”*

4. However even though the new European Standard is not mandatory or retrospective there is a clear need to plan for replacement equipment to ensure that compliance is met within a realistic time scale through a policy of removal or replacement. Therefore there is a clear implication of increased costs based upon the need for a developed programme of play area improvements linked to compliance with the new European Safety Standards.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

5. The Disability Discrimination Act introduced in 1995 gives disabled people rights in the areas of:-
 - Employment
 - Access to goods, facilities and services
 - Buying or renting land or property
6. As of October 2004 Part III of the Act requires that organisations may have to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to the physical features within premises to overcome barriers to access. Within the definition of premises are not just buildings and indoor facilities but also high streets, parks and open spaces. Adjustments could relate to steps, seating, access points, paths and

equipment. As such, the introduction of the Act could well impact on play provision within Chesham. In such instances the Disability Rights Commission recommends the undertaking of an access audit in respect of facilities and equipment to identify any reasonable adjustments required prior to the introduction of Part III of the Act.

7. Sites such as Lowndes Park already have accessibility issues (inadequate paths, etc.) which are highlighted in the Lowndes Park Conservation and Development Management Plan and the tackling of which was an integral part of the unsuccessful 'Parks for People' lottery bid. The paths themselves are still proposed to be upgraded but this will take some time as monies are located. Therefore, while access between pieces of equipment at Lowndes Park is wheelchair accessible through the installation of grasscreting matting of the appropriate width, it would be advantageous to develop a fully integrated, disabled-friendly major destination site within town which is on a flat location and has parking nearby suitable for those with a range of disabilities. The sites in Windsor Road and Moor Road would appear the most obvious location for this.

THE WAY AHEAD

1. The basis for future provision has to be based on the premise of providing high quality play provision accessible across the town that can be funded adequately by the Council without putting an excessive burden on the Council's finances and, by extension the tax-payer of Chesham. Additionally the priorities for re-development should be determined by the tax-payers, the local Members and, as importantly, the young people themselves.
2. Already a successful consultation day has taken place, held on a Saturday in February 2009 at the Town Hall. The Council also produced an on-line survey form on its web site and advertised this widely through its door-to-door newsletter and the local paper. The results of the survey undertaken on the 'Play and Say Day', coupled with the in-house survey, are **listed in appendix 3**. Unsurprisingly the most used play-area and the one that was deemed as requiring the urgent attention was **Lowndes Park**. The high usage of the facility compared with other facilities also accorded with the 2005 Residents' Survey. Accordingly the Council agreed to make this the first priority and to be scheduled for 2009/10.
3. It is proposed the priority listing following from Lowndes Park be based on the preferences stated at the 'Play and Say Day' coupled with a fair geographical spread across the town to ensure all remaining play-areas are accessible to young people within a realistic walking distance. Also taken into account is the current condition of all of the play-areas which is why Codmore Field/Botley Road, despite being the second most used facility has been slightly downgraded in the list. The site, while not in the best of conditions, is in a less degraded state than others.
 1. Moor Road - Waterside - South
 2. Marston Field - Ridgeway - North
 3. Codmore Field/Botley Road - Townsend - East
 4. Co-op Field - Asheridge Vale - North
 5. Nashleigh Hill Recreation Ground - Newtown - central
 6. Gordon Road – Waterside - South
 7. Windsor Road – Ridgeway - North
 8. Woodland View - Waterside - South
4. It is also proposed that the play-areas at Hodds Wood Road, Bois Moor Road and Batchelor's Way will not be renovated and will be ultimately closed unless there is overwhelming evidence that the local community can prove regular and widespread usage. It should also be highlighted to residents in close proximity to these sites that closure is being recommended because of plans to build bigger and better play-areas within walking distance and should not be closed until such play-areas have been installed.
5. ***This is a proposed order but should be determined ultimately by the local communities themselves. If a local group from any ward or area is willing and able to energise residents to fund-raise and help select the equipment required, then the play area they are involved with should be***

advanced up the priority listing. To this end, it is suggested that the representatives of all local groups involving young people (as well as those people who have already expressed a view on the consultation) are written to, to express this and to highlight that they still have an opportunity to influence the priorities for re-development.

Type of Provision

1. The provision that is offered by Proludic is aimed predominantly at the age range between 4-13 years. For a Town Council, this is not unusual and it is where the biggest demand is. Proludic are proposing two main 'destination parks' in town (in the region of £60-80,000 each) as well as Lowndes Park along with the renovation and development of six others. The 'Destination Parks' will have set areas for toddlers, juniors and older teenagers whereas the other sites will be for the 4-13 years only.
2. It is also important to consider teenage provision separately, as not catering for the needs of young people (13-17 age group) can give rise to problems. Less suitable places are found to congregate such as street corners or children's play equipment. This can lead to the use and sometimes abuse of equipment not intended for them. Nuisance/anti-social behaviour has been identified as one of the main areas of concern in the District Council's Crime & Disorder Strategy and great reliance is given to diversionary activities.
3. The Council already has limited provision for young people in this respect, most notably the skatepark, youth shelter and multi-games area in Lowndes Park. However there is also a multi-games area and youth shelter in Marston Field.
4. A site is also sought for the multi-sports goal previously sited at Woodland View play-area but removed due to complaints on noise disturbance from nearby residents. Officers are of the view that three sites would be suitable but each would have their own problems.
 - a. The Moor
(Planning Officers have suggested that siting such a facility on Common land would require Secretary of State's approval. Also residents have previously been sensitive to youths gathering on The Moor).
 - b. Codmore Field/Botley Road
(No sense of demand/support from local residents for teenage equipment but rather a possible desire to see the old tennis court area renovated)
 - c. Batchelors Way
(Area may be too small and cause disturbance to residents)
5. **It is suggested that the Council directly approach community and resident groups across town to ascertain what, if any, sites for the multi-sports goal are suitable and, if desired by a community group, it works with the Council and other partners such as Paradigm Housing, to consult with all residents.**

FINANCING THE DEVELOPMENT

1. The Council's Policy and Resources Committee of the 15th December 2008 decided that a figure of £40,000 per annum be allocated to the Renewals and Repairs budget for the next few years with the view that such monies could be used as match funding to attract external grants.
2. In the financial year 2008/09, **£50,000** was awarded from the Government's Play Builder fund towards the development of Lowndes Park which allowed for renovation work totalling £53,000 plus VAT to commence in June 2009 and resulting in the unused £37,000 being rolled over to 2009/10.
3. Other funding options are somewhat constrained but monies may be available through the Landfill Tax Credit System as the Park is within 10 miles of an active landfill site. The Council has previously secured monies from Veolia Trust (and, in its previous guise, as Onyx Trust) both for the redevelopment of Meades Water Gardens and the skatepark and junior play equipment within Lowndes Park.
4. Other funding through either central government or the National Lottery is available on a periodic basis but at the moment the major funding is the aforementioned Play Builder scheme and it is unlikely other streams will be rolled out additionally to this major initiative within the near future.
5. Other Councils have used sponsorship in other areas such as the provision of floral displays on roundabouts and some of the flower tubs in the town centres. This involves the erection of a small plaque to acknowledge the sponsor. Items of play equipment could be sponsored in a similar way. Children and accompanying adults can spend a long time within a play area. In that sense they are a captive audience to companies/organisations who might wish to promote their name or products. This would bring added revenue that could be spent in supporting the aims of this Strategy. The Council would need to decide where it strikes the balance between subtle advertising of a sponsor's name and the louder form of product advertising that we see on our streets today.
6. Developers of larger housing sites normally make a contribution towards local infrastructure improvements arising from the development. Contributions can include road improvements, public open space and educational facilities. It would be desirable to seek contributions arising from developers where gaps in play provision exist. However Section 106 contributions tend to be forthcoming only for large scale developments and it is unlikely major housing development will occur in Chesham within the next 10 years.
7. Neither principal authority has suggested any further monies will be available through them other than through the Play Builder scheme that they have been jointly charged with administrating.

8. Some local fund-raising could be undertaken by a proactive local community group for one particular play-area though it would be unrealistic to expect a major contribution through this avenue.
9. Ultimately therefore much of the re-development needs to be based around the assumption that the core funding will be through the Council itself with other funding agencies approached on an 'as and when' basis if an appropriate funding stream becomes 'live'. At the same time, encouragement should be given to local community groups to actively fund-raise for their local play-area so it can be advanced up the priority order.

CONCLUSIONS

A picture is beginning to emerge of what play area provision could look like in Chesham in the years ahead. The Council should be aiming for:

- A new and more equitable distribution of play areas across the town.
- Safe playing environments for children of all age groups (toddlers & juniors) in Chesham where sites are clearly visible from public places and the problems of anti-social behaviour and other crimes are minimised.
- The needs of young people (age 13-17) are taken into account by providing separate areas for them to meet, preferably including some activities, away from the children's play areas. Young people also help to shape the design of the facilities.
- More residents enjoying easy access to play areas across the town.
- Better access to play facilities for the disabled and people from other disadvantaged sections of the community.
- Attractive play areas where both children and adults want to stay.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Following the renovation of Lowndes Park, the play-areas be renovated, subject to finance, in the order listed above but with the Council determining on the timetable for development at both Moor Road and Marston Field as the first priority dependent on costs, funding and the requirements for a site catering for disabilities at Moor Road. The designs and cost being proposed by Proludic in consultation with local residents.**
2. **That the priority listing be altered to reflect local need if a community group comes forward to progress a particular play-area.**
3. **That the play-areas at Hodds Wood Road, Bois Moor Road and Batchelor's Way be not renovated and ultimately closed unless there is overwhelming evidence that the local community can prove regular and widespread usage.**
4. **That the Council directly approach community and resident groups across town to ascertain what, if any, sites for the multi-sports goal are suitable and, if desired by a community group, it works with the Council and partners such as Paradigm Housing, to consult with all other residents to confirm the appropriateness of such a site.**
5. **Consideration be given to the current provision to the 13-17 years age group and the future of the skatepark and that the Council work with the Youth Council and the users to ascertain this.**

- 8.15 The Meades Lane open space, Latimer Road open space and Captain's Wood are of indifferent, indifferent to poor and poor quality respectively. Each of these sites has weaknesses in respect of welcoming issues, perception of safety and security, buildings etc. (bollards/barriers, fencing), information provision, path provision and access for all. Seating is a further issue at Captain's Wood and the open space at Latimer Road.
- 8.16 The quality of local amenity spaces in Chesham ranges from indifferent to poor. These sites have variable weaknesses across the range of issues covered by the evaluations.
- 8.17 Chesham Cemetery is of indifferent to good quality and the Parish Church Churchyard is of good quality. The main concern in respect of both of these sites is access for all.
- 8.18 Taking account of the current arrangement of public open space and the need for further open space, provision of public open space in Chesham does not meet the quantitative standard. The existing provision has serious quality issues.

Equipped Children's Play Areas

- 8.19 Chesham is served by a NEAP level equipped play facility at Lowndes Park, Medium LEAPs at Marston Playing Field, Nashleigh Hill Recreation Ground and Codmore Playing Field and small LEAPs and smaller provision at Dellfield Recreation Ground, Pond Park Recreation Ground, Batchelors Way open space, Chesham Open Air Swimming Pool, Woodland View, Hodds Wood Road, Bois Moor Road and Gordon Road.
- 8.20 There are an insufficient number of large equipped play facilities and some areas are without adequate further provision. Consideration needs to be given to the development of provision within the general principles of the quantitative standard.
- 8.21 This would require a number of NEAP+ level facilities to be developed across the built area where there are sites which can accommodate this level of provision. As with further distinct open space, there will also be a need for additional provision to take account of the catchment areas of the larger open spaces and to provide facilities at a very local level in particular areas. There needs to be a radical review of provision in the south leading to the provision of fewer better facilities. However, as always, this would need to be subject to public consultation and land availability.
- 8.22 The Lowndes Park play facility is of good quality although unduly dispersed. The medium sized LEAPs are of indifferent quality. Other smaller facilities range from indifferent to very poor quality. Some weaknesses relate to the level and range of provision, although there are a range of further weaknesses across the range of issues covered by the evaluations. Some facilities are located on areas which are too small to accommodate equipped play provision or children's play generally.

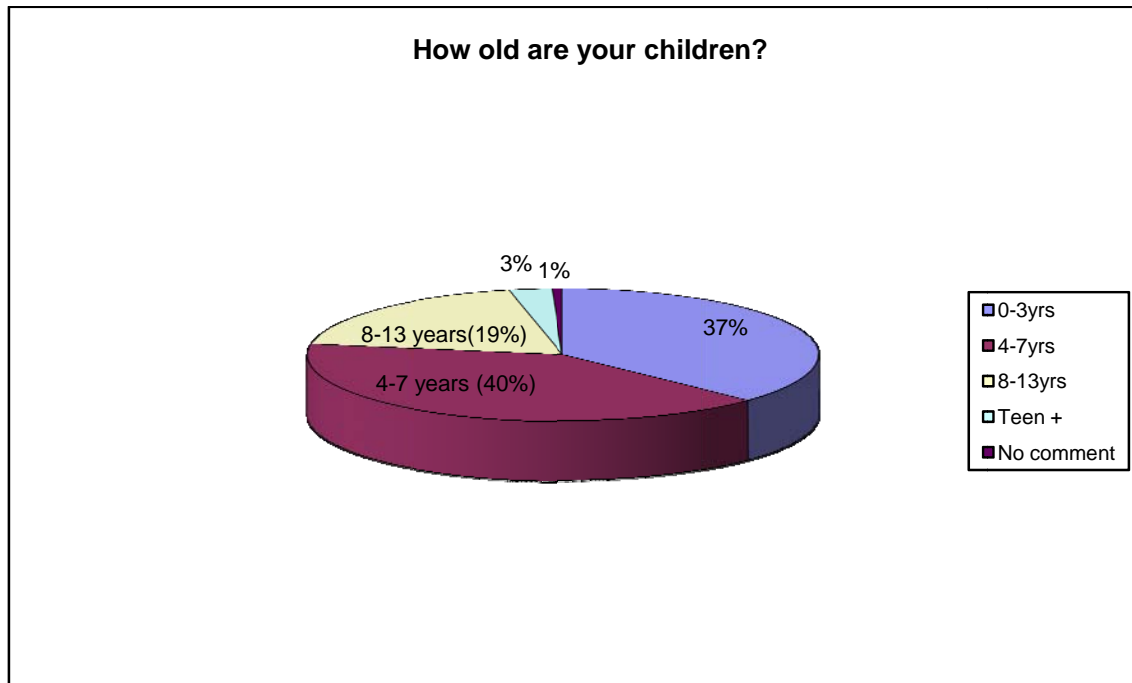
Youth Facilities on Public Open Space Sites

- 8.23 There is a valuable group of youth facilities in Lowndes Park in a key location. This includes a quite large skateboard facility. There are also youth facilities at Marston Playing Field. There is a MUGA adjacent to Chesham Open Air Pool.

Chesham Consultation results

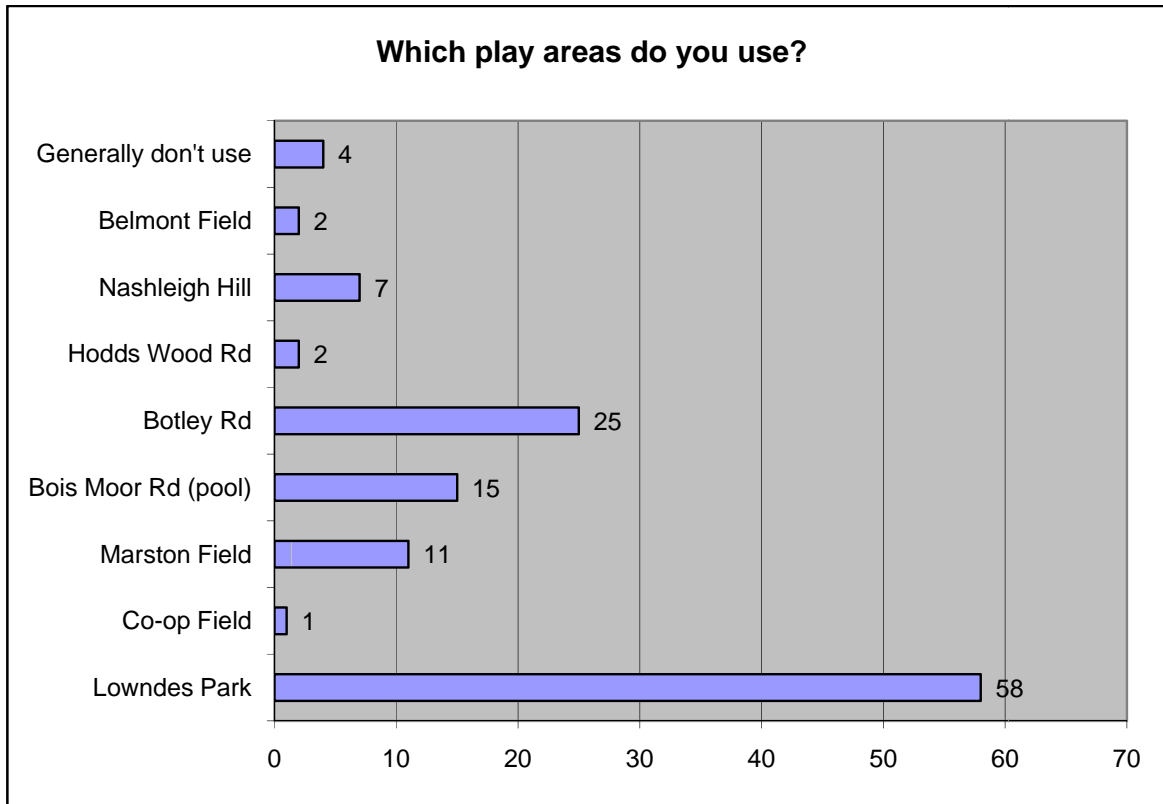
1. How old are your children?

0 - 3 years	55
4 -7	60
8 - 13	28
Teen +	4
No comment	1



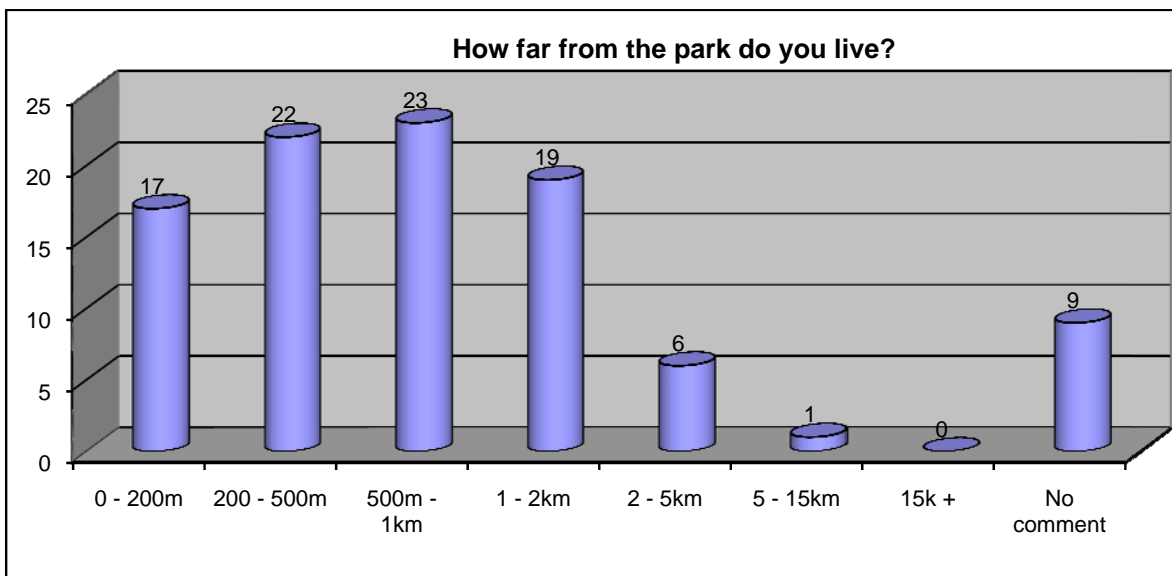
2. Which play areas do you use?

Lowndes Park	58
Co-op Field	1
Marston Field	11
Bois Moor Road/Pool	15
Botley Road	25
Hodds Wood Road	2
Nashleigh Hill	7
Belmont Field	2
Generally don't use	4



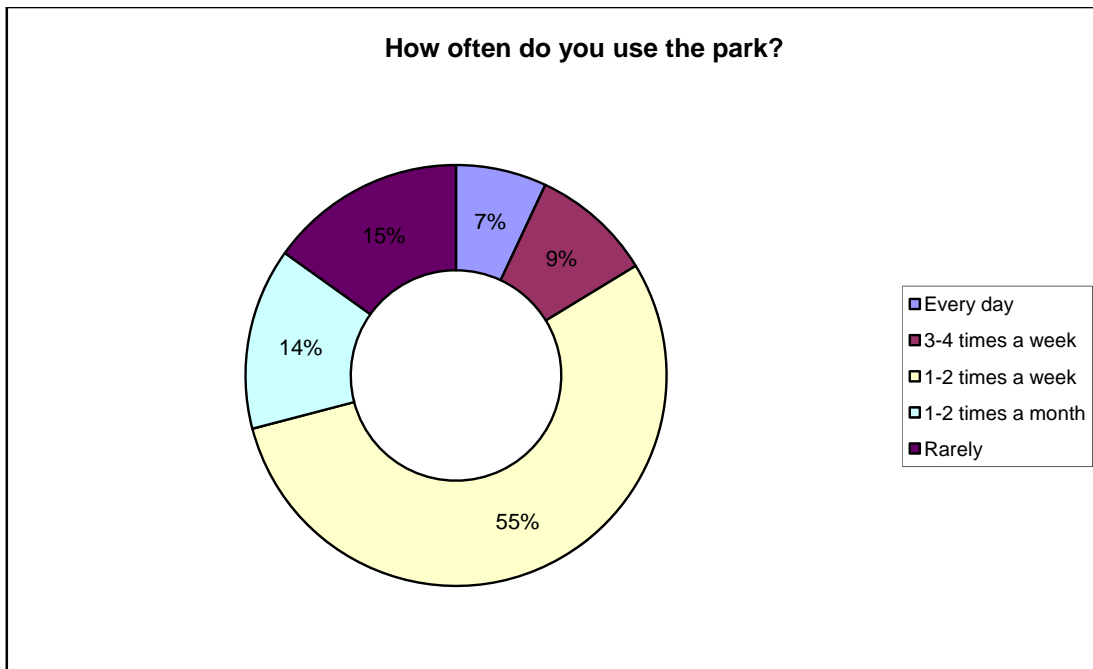
3. How far away do you live?

0 – 200 m	17
200 – 500 m	22
500 m – 1 km	23
1 – 2 km	19
2 – 5 km	6
5 – 15 km	1
15 km +	0
No comment	9



4. How often do you use the play area?

Every day	6
3 – 4 times a week	8
1 – 2 times a week	47
1 – 2 times a month	12
Rarely	13

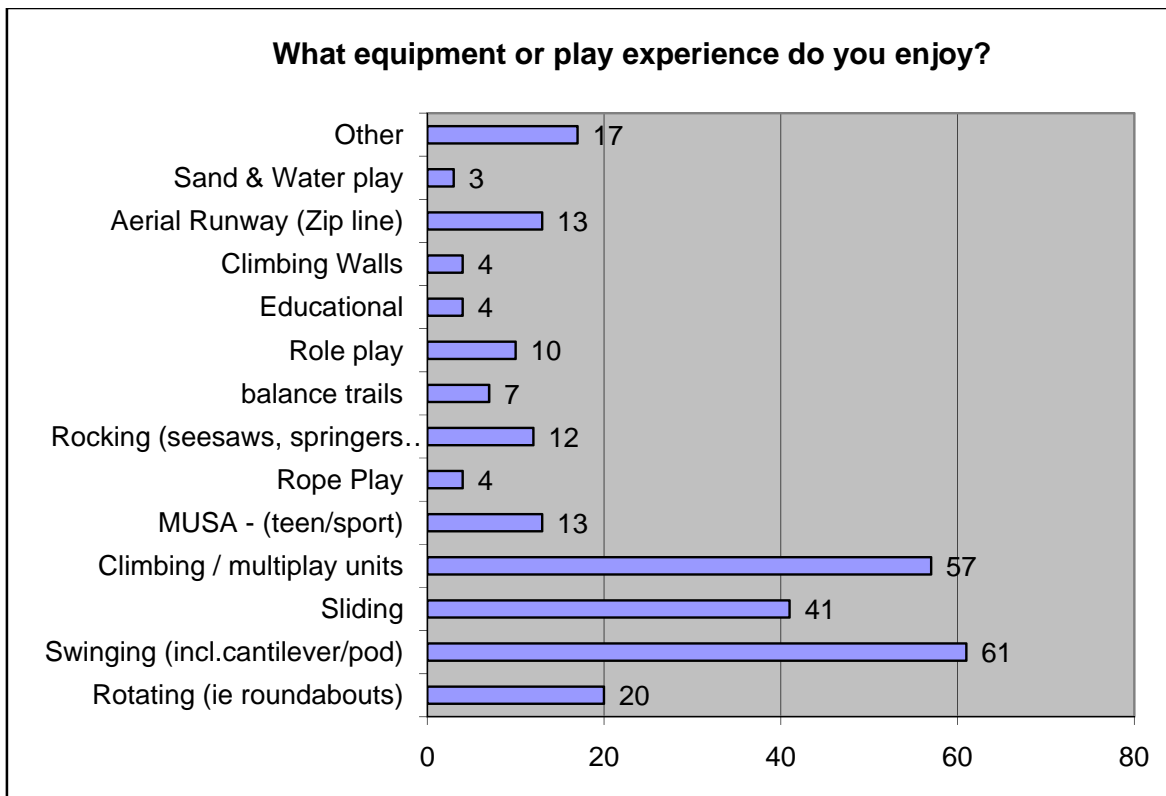


5. & 6. These are very site specific and will also be subject to EN compliance.

We recommend you consider the answers to questions 7 and 8 plus the technical/professional advice given by your Proludic Play Consultant when deciding if the retention or replacement of an item is the more appropriate action.

7. What equipment or play experience do you enjoy?

Rotating (i.e. roundabouts)	20
Swinging	61
Sliding	41
Climbing/multi-play units	57
MUSA (teen/sport)	13
Rope play	4
Rocking (see saws, springers, etc)	12
Balance trails	7
Role play	10
Educational	4
Climbing walls	4
Aerial Runway (zip line)	13
Sand and water play	3
Other	17



8. What do you think of the town's existing play provision?

Satisfied	4
Improvements required	24
Disappointed (so rarely use)	11
Very poor (not fit for purpose)	25
More provision required	2
MUSA (Teen) provision required	5
No comment	6

