

Crime and Disorder Select Committee

Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision



**Final Report
April 2024**

Crime and Disorder Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
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Contents

Select Committee - Membership	4
Acknowledgements	4
Contact Officer	4
Foreword	5
Original Brief	6
1.0 Executive Summary	8
2.0 Introduction	13
3.0 Background	15
4.0 Findings	17
➤ Legislative Requirements	17
➤ Key Outdoor Play Bodies	17
➤ Play Value / Meaningful Play	19
➤ Existing Borough Offer	20
➤ Maintenance	24
➤ Creation of New Sites	26
➤ Confirmed Developments	30
➤ Accessibility / Inclusivity	35
➤ Other Council Experiences	37
➤ Future Options / Considerations	39
5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations	42
Appendix 1: Stockton-on-Tees Outdoor Play Provision – Updated RoSPA Assessments (Mar 24)	47
Appendix 2: Stockton-on-Tees Informal Sport Facilities – Distribution (Dec 23) ...	50
Appendix 3: Stockton-on-Tees Informal Sport Facilities – List (Dec 23)	51
Appendix 4: Stockton-on-Tees Play Areas – Distribution (Dec 23)	52
Appendix 5: Stockton-on-Tees Play Areas – List (Dec 23)	53
Appendix 6: Committee Site Visits (Dec 23)	56
Appendix 7: Ropner Park, Stockton – Developments (Mar 24)	61

Select Committee - Membership

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Councillor Paul Rowling (Vice-Chair)
Councillor John Coulson
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Councillor Barbara Inman
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Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank the following people for contributing to its work:

- Councillor Sally Ann Watson (Former Committee Member) – Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)
- Reuben Kench (Director of Community Services, Environment and Culture) – SBC
- Neil Mitchell (Head of Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure) – SBC
- Graham Clingan (Strategy and Greenspace Development Manager) – SBC
- Stephen Bowerbank (CFYA Asset Manager) – SBC
- Keith Jackson (Senior Care for Your Area Technician) – SBC
- Andie Mackay (Construction and Facility Services Manager) – SBC
- Chris Renahan (Assistant Director – Inclusive Growth and Development) – SBC
- Simon Grundy (Planning Services Manager) – SBC
- Antony Phillips (Place Development Manager) – SBC
- Iain Robinson (Assistant Director – Town Centre Development) – SBC
- Mike Smith (Programme Delivery Manager) – SBC
- Emma Zenaj (Strategic and Communication Lead) – Stockton Parent Carer Forum

Plus:

- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) for conducting updated assessments of the Borough's existing play sites during the course of this review.
- Other Local Authorities who provided information on their approach to the provision of outdoor play spaces.

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Foreword

On behalf of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee, we are pleased to present the final report and recommendations following our review of Outdoor Play Provision.

Pressures on Local Government services continue to be well documented. Whilst financial challenges surrounding statutory provision are gaining increasing attention, the resulting need to prioritise strained budgets on 'must do's' inevitably squeezes the available resources for services that are not legally required. Although the provision of outdoor play spaces falls into the non-statutory category, the Council has nevertheless developed a strong portfolio of play sites within the Borough.

In recent years, however, there has been a realisation that maintaining these areas to the desired standard is becoming difficult given the existing funding envelope. In addition, concerns about the growing unevenness in the distribution of play spaces, as well as issues raised around accessibility, have prompted this focused exploration of the current outdoor play offer. This review has sought to establish the key challenges associated with the topic and determine an appropriate way forward for the provision of outdoor play spaces.

As ever, we are grateful to those Council officers who gave their insight and expertise on this scrutiny topic, in particular representatives from the SBC Community Services, Environment and Culture directorate. We would also like to thank the Stockton Parent Carer Forum for its input into the review, a contribution which had a profound impact on the Committee's thinking. Funding constraints mean the Council's outdoor play offer is likely to look different in the future, but making this as accessible to as many as possible remains just as important as ensuring a quality, safe, geographically balanced, and sustainable range of play facilities.



Cllr Pauline Beall
Chair*
Crime and Disorder Select Committee



Cllr Paul Rowling
Vice-Chair
Crime and Disorder Select Committee

* Cllr Beall was Committee Chair until 3 April 2024; Cllr Rowling became Committee Chair on this date.

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review will contribute to the following Council Plan 2023-2026 key objectives (and associated 2023-2024 priorities):

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm

- Continue to develop and enhance provision and support for children and young people with additional needs or accessing alternative provision.
- Support people to live healthy lives and address health inequalities through a focus on early prevention, long-term conditions, substance misuse, smoking, obesity, physical activity and mental health.
- Work with our communities and partners to develop our approach to healthy places, in the context of regeneration plans and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

It is widely accepted that play is an essential part of every child's life and is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as social, emotional, intellectual and physical development. Play facilities are therefore seen as an essential element to allow people to live healthy lives and help ensure activity is established at an early age, thus reducing long-term health conditions.

Previous analysis has indicated that outdoor play provision is uneven across the Borough, with significant variations in the play value, age and accessibility of equipment and sites. Many older play areas are in decline and, as is being felt by Local Authorities up and down the country, there is insufficient budget to maintain all the current sites.

In terms of new sites, the majority of these are established through planning obligations and consequently increase provision in areas where new development is taking place. Conversely, there are limited opportunities to establish or improve play areas in existing residential areas. In either case, it should be noted that all sites are subject to challenge relating to accessibility and play value.

Play areas can be an emotive topic and have elicited a range of comments (both positive and negative) from the public with regards the existing offer. Like so many other Council-related activities, balancing public expectation with the realities of deepening Local Authority funding pressures is becoming an increasing challenge. There is a well-established need to maintain an effective portfolio of high-quality play area assets within the Borough's communities, but this must be sustainable, provide value-for-money, and be accessible to as many people as is feasibly possible.

The main aims for this review will be to:

- Examine the Borough's existing outdoor play offer in terms of play value and distribution, and identify locations where there is currently an imbalance in provision.
- Ascertain who is responsible for individual facilities and what the management / maintenance and sustainability requirements are now, and are likely to be in the future (including revenue costs).

- Consider accessibility / inclusivity factors in relation to play provision so practical and financial implications are understood and factored into decisions around existing and future plans.
- Contribute to future policy around play area provision, giving an appraisal of potential options.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

What is meant by the term 'outdoor play provision' – what does this encompass (what does it not)?

How is 'meaningful play' determined – what are its characteristics and how does / should this impact upon play provision?

Are there any legislative requirements around outdoor play provision?

What is the Borough's existing outdoor play offer – where are these sites located, what do they provide, what is their play value, and where are the identified gaps in provision?

How should the provision of major new play facilities planned for Stockton Waterfront influence decisions around the distribution and management of play provision elsewhere in the Borough, and will it have any impact on budgets to maintain existing facilities?

How are existing sites managed / maintained and what is the cost of this to the Council? How has this changed over time and what are the future projections based on the current offer?

What is the process around new play provision created as part of new developments? What are the responsibilities of developers and the Council, how does this change over time, and what are the implications of this?

What are the accessibility / inclusivity requirements around outdoor play sites? Has the Council been challenged regarding this and what is realistically achievable in the context of available space and financial constraints?

What feedback has been received from the public regarding outdoor play provision?

Can we learn anything from other Local Authorities who are likely to be wrestling with similar challenges regarding outdoor play provision?

What are the potential future options around outdoor play provision (including alternative funding possibilities)? How does / might this feed into key corporate policies such as Fairer Stockton-on-Tees / Powering Our Communities?

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

- Clear strategic guidance upon the development of new play facilities and priorities and rationalisation of existing play provision.
- Budgetary provision for maintenance of play provision is proportionate to the number of play areas that are retained.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Crime and Disorder Select Committee's scrutiny review of Outdoor Play Provision.
- 1.2 It is widely accepted that play is an essential part of every child's life and is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as social, emotional, intellectual and physical development. Play facilities are therefore seen as an essential element to allow people to live healthy lives and help ensure activity is established at an early age, thus reducing long-term health conditions. However, despite these recognised benefits, concerns have been increasing in recent years around the closure of play facilities across the country, as well as other issues such as declining quality, inequality of distribution and accessibility.
- 1.3 From a Stockton-on-Tees perspective, previous analysis has indicated that outdoor play provision is uneven across the Borough, with significant variations in the play value, age and accessibility of equipment and sites. Many older play areas are in decline and, as is being felt by Local Authorities up and down the country, there is insufficient budget to maintain all the current sites. In terms of new sites, the majority of these are established through planning obligations and consequently increase provision in areas where new development is taking place. Conversely, there are limited opportunities to establish or improve play areas in existing residential areas. In either case, it should be noted that all sites are subject to challenge relating to accessibility and play value.
- 1.4 Play areas can be an emotive topic and have elicited a range of comments (both positive and negative) from the public with regards the existing offer. Like so many other Council-related activities, balancing public expectation with the realities of deepening Local Authority funding pressures is becoming an increasing challenge. There is a well-established need to maintain an effective portfolio of high-quality play area assets within the Borough's communities, but this must be sustainable, provide value-for-money, and be accessible to as many people as is feasibly possible.
- 1.5 The main aims of this review comprised three key elements. Firstly, the Committee endeavoured to establish the distribution of the Borough's existing outdoor play offer and identify any areas where provision was lacking. The second strand focused on the key issue of responsibility for individual facilities and associated management / maintenance and sustainability requirements. Finally, accessibility / inclusivity factors in relation to play provision were to be considered so practical and financial implications could be understood and factored into decisions around existing and future plans.
- 1.6 The Committee found that there is no statutory obligation for Local Authorities to provide outdoor play spaces. However, there are legal requirements associated with the inspection and maintenance of such sites – responsibilities SBC is fully aware of. Regarding accessibility / inclusivity considerations, there is a need to be mindful of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which aims to ensure that all those who are disabled have the same access to public services (and by implication, public parks and playgrounds) as those who are not disabled.

- 1.7 A number of external bodies provide advice and guidance on designing, developing and installing play spaces – these include Play England (national children’s play charity for England), Association of Play Industries (API) (lead trade body in the play sector), and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) (help people recognise and reduce their risk of accidents, at home, on the road, at work and at leisure). The latter is used by SBC to carry out annual inspections of existing play areas and safety surfacing, assessments of life-expectancy of equipment / areas, post-installation inspections of new sites, and ‘play value’ assessments.
- 1.8 As of December 2023, the Borough had 49 publicly accessible play areas and 20 sites with informal sport facilities (some of these were located at the same sites). SBC owned and managed the vast majority of these, and also managed five sites on behalf of Town / Parish Councils (*note: any facilities not freely accessible to the public (e.g. those located within school grounds, sports centres, or locations such as RSPB Salthome) were not within scope of this review*).
- 1.9 The categorisation of play areas is based mainly on the quantity and size of play equipment, but also took into consideration the provision of other facilities and services. ‘Destination’ sites are larger play spaces within parks that serve a wide catchment area and provide good play value for a range of users from toddlers to teenagers. ‘Neighbourhood’ sites are mainly situated within larger green spaces of a community (with a more moderate quantity of equipment), whilst ‘doorstep’ sites are smaller facilities which are located on green space or self-contained zones within housing areas (many of which have been installed by housing developers).
- 1.10 Ongoing inspection and maintenance of the Borough’s outdoor play sites is a significant pressure area for SBC, involving a budget which has not been uplifted since before 2017. Indeed, there was a £60,000 shortfall in the annual budget allocation (£114,000) compared to the amount spent as of 14 September 2023 (£83,000) plus anticipated costs in relation to outstanding work still to complete (£92,000). If there is a desire to maintain the existing level of outdoor play provision across the Borough, a capital injection appeared necessary. Critically, the present budget is earmarked for maintenance only and is not a replacement fund – as such, the Borough has a large amount of valuable play equipment with no plan for the future.
- 1.11 Regarding ‘play value’ (determined by looking at the overall site, ambience, and suitability / value of equipment / features for the age groups for which the site is designed), SBC aims for a minimum rating of ‘good’ at each of its facilities – however, a raft of existing sites fell short of this when last assessed (2018). Recognising that a more up-to-date re-evaluation was required to provide an accurate picture of the current state and value of local facilities, RoSPA was recently commissioned by SBC to conduct an updated play value assessment of the Borough’s existing outdoor play spaces. The results of this showed that, of the 39 play sites assessed:
- Only four scored at least ‘good’ across all graded categories; nine sites were rated at least ‘average’ across all graded categories (*note: SBC officers advised that the ratings given are RoSPAs assessments and are not national averages – in practice, a site rated ‘average’ is probably above the national average*).

- Dependent upon usage and vandalism, seven had a (worst-case scenario) life expectancy of play equipment of 3-5 years plus; three sites were deemed to have 5-8 years plus.
 - A number of ‘neighbourhood’ play areas appeared to have surface issues.
- 1.12 The last significant investment in Stockton-on-Tees facilities was back in 2008 (though not all areas benefitted at that time), and since then, many sites had been provided or improved with section 106 contributions (funding from developers towards the costs of providing community and social infrastructure) as a result of housing developments. However, this had the potential for a higher density of smaller-space provision, and those areas of the Borough which had not seen new housing had therefore not gained in relation to additional / upgraded play facilities – a growing inequality of provision across the Borough has thus developed. As per the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA), forthcoming changes to planning obligations (the Infrastructure Levy (IL)) are due to be introduced – this would largely replace planning obligation except for ‘large and complex sites’, with the Council potentially losing its ability to use section 106 funding as it currently did.
- 1.13 In terms of the future creation of new play facilities, SBC planning advice indicated that larger scale developments were likely to justify a need for on-site provision due to the level of population increase across the site (indeed, policy direction indicates a preference for on-site provision). For smaller developments, however, there may be no requirement for open space to be provided, and it may be more appropriate for an off-site contribution (where necessary and justified). Where SBC was to assume responsibility for the maintenance of either on-site or off-site open space, the Council required a commuted revenue lump-sum for the equivalent of 25 years maintenance – however, whilst this covered grounds maintenance, cleansing, and maintenance of the equipment in the play area, it did not tend to cover the future renewal of the play area. Careful consideration is therefore required around whether SBC should be adopting future play sites from developers (particularly in terms of proximity to other existing provision), and the Committee urges a focus on supporting the current portfolio as far as possible before additional spaces are agreed (adding to the long-term financial burden associated with these areas).
- 1.14 The high-profile Stockton waterfront scheme, which includes a new ‘destination’ play area, is a significant development with regards this scrutiny topic. Whilst assurance was given that longer-term revenue requirements for this substantial addition to SBCs play offer would be picked up and included as part of the future MTFP budget-setting process, the Committee remain concerned that, since SBC was not in a position to maintain what it already had (with Local Authority funding likely to get even tighter), this would further compound financial challenges which may have potential implications for other existing provision across the Borough.

- 1.15 From an accessibility / inclusivity perspective, there is a significant cost attached to certain play equipment which is not necessarily compatible for all those with a similar need (e.g. wheelchair-users). SBC should be commended for its previous engagement with Stockton Parent Carer Forum to better facilitate access for all, and there is a clear need to continue this dialogue as the Council reflects on the findings of this review, and makes future decisions around the types of equipment sourced and, as importantly, the location of this (particularly given the comments received from the Forum's members in relation to the value of the smaller 'doorstep' sites).
- 1.16 Councils are adopting different approaches towards their outdoor play provision, ranging from increasing provision / consultation on proposed investment in facilities to rationalising / removing existing sites. For SBC, whilst there will be an understandable reluctance to compromise much valued resources for children / young people and their families across Stockton-on-Tees, it is clearly not sustainable to keep all existing play sites open, and difficult decisions will need to be made around removing / repurposing some sites. Allied to this, longer-term thinking about the maintenance and replacement requirements of the Borough's existing and planned future offer must ensue to ensure quality, safe, accessible, and geographically balanced provision that lasts.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

- 1) **SBC ensures both revenue and renewal considerations are an intrinsic part of any existing and future outdoor play space proposal within the Borough to maximise the long-term sustainability of such sites.**
- 2) **To encourage a greater sense of community ownership, consideration be given to approaching relevant Town / Parish Councils and the local business community within the vicinity of existing outdoor play spaces to potentially support the development / maintenance of a site.**
- 3) **Regarding future proposals by developers for new outdoor play spaces, SBC does not adopt any site installed by a developer which contravenes the key outcomes from this review.**
- 4) **SBC considers support of existing play areas before any additional outdoor play spaces are agreed / approved.**
- 5) **Regarding inequality of outdoor play provision across the Borough, SBC clarifies where it is deemed there is little / no provision and possible steps to address these inequalities (including, in exceptional cases, the provision of new play spaces).**

(continued overleaf...)

Recommendations (continued)

The Committee recommend that:

- 6) As part of a required rationalisation process in relation to the existing outdoor play offer:
 - a) Informed by the recent (March 2024) RoSPA assessments and an analysis of the distribution of existing outdoor play provision, proposals for the removal / repurposing of sites be developed with the aim of reducing pressure on the overall parks budget.**
 - b) Complementing sub-section a), SBC undertakes a piece of work around those sites requiring more urgent attention to ascertain costs of either removing the play area or raising it to an appropriate standard.**
 - c) Further detail be provided around the anticipated longer-term maintenance requirements of the new Stockton waterfront park and the impact that this may have on the available funds for maintaining other existing outdoor play spaces.**
 - d) With due regard to the SBC *Powering Our Future* initiative, appropriate consultation (particularly with Stockton Parent Carer Forum and SBC Ward Councillors) is conducted around any proposed changes to existing outdoor play provision.****
- 7) Reflecting the main outcomes from this review, SBC develops and publishes an outdoor play provision strategy which includes the following elements:
 - The Council's aims in relation to the provision of outdoor play spaces.**
 - The locations and assessments of existing and outdoor play provision, as well as any planned developments.**
 - The key challenges associated with providing these spaces.**
 - How the Council will seek to address these key challenges (including guiding principles).**
 - Timelines for action and who will be accountable.****
- 8) This final report be shared with the SBC Planning Committee for information only.**

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Crime and Disorder Select Committee's scrutiny review of Outdoor Play Provision.
- 2.2 The main aims of this review comprised three key elements. Firstly, the Committee endeavoured to establish the distribution of the Borough's existing outdoor play offer and identify any areas where provision was lacking. The second strand focused on the key issue of responsibility for individual facilities and associated management / maintenance and sustainability requirements. Finally, accessibility / inclusivity factors in relation to play provision were to be considered so practical and financial implications could be understood and factored into decisions around existing and future plans.
- 2.3 The Committee undertook several key lines of enquiry:
- What is meant by the term 'outdoor play provision' – what does this encompass (what does it not)?
 - How is 'meaningful play' determined – what are its characteristics and how does / should this impact upon play provision?
 - Are there any legislative requirements around outdoor play provision?
 - What is the Borough's existing outdoor play offer – where are these sites located, what do they provide, what is their play value, and where are the identified gaps in provision?
 - How should the provision of major new play facilities planned for Stockton Waterfront influence decisions around the distribution and management of play provision elsewhere in the Borough, and will it have any impact on budgets to maintain existing facilities?
 - How are existing sites managed / maintained and what is the cost of this to the Council? How has this changed over time and what are the future projections based on the current offer?
 - What is the process around new play provision created as part of new developments? What are the responsibilities of developers and the Council, how does this change over time, and what are the implications of this?
 - What are the accessibility / inclusivity requirements around outdoor play sites? Has the Council been challenged regarding this and what is realistically achievable in the context of available space and financial constraints?
 - What feedback has been received from the public regarding outdoor play provision?
 - Can we learn anything from other Local Authorities who are likely to be wrestling with similar challenges regarding outdoor play provision?

- What are the potential future options around outdoor play provision (including alternative funding possibilities)? How does / might this feed into key corporate policies such as Fairer Stockton-on-Tees / Powering Our Communities?
- 2.4 It was acknowledged that there were associated issues around vandalism and CCTV coverage, but these aspects would not be focused upon during this review, nor would any ongoing changes in related legislation.
- 2.5 Contributions were sought and subsequently received from a number of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) departments, including Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure, Community Services, Inclusive Growth and Development, and Town Centres Development. The Committee also considered key external bodies in relation to this scrutiny topic and reached out to other Local Authorities regarding their views / experiences around outdoor play provision. Stockton Parent Carer Forum provided vital input and Members visited several sites across the Borough to observe examples of the existing offer.

3.0 Background

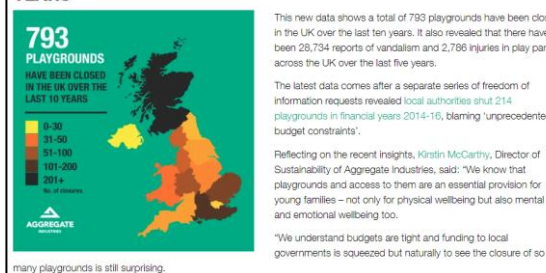
- 3.1 It is widely accepted that play is an essential part of every child's life and is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as social, emotional, intellectual and physical development. Play facilities are therefore seen as an essential element to allow people to live healthy lives and help ensure activity is established at an early age, thus reducing long-term health conditions.

'...it is important that councils can maintain their core leisure and green spaces so our residents can keep active, host community events, and enjoy top-quality, safe, children's play areas, all of which benefit the mental and physical health of people who use them.'

(Local Government Association (responding to Government pocket parks programme), Oct 19)

- 3.2 Despite these recognised benefits, concerns have been increasing in recent years around the closure of play facilities across the country, as well as other issues such as declining quality, inequality of distribution and accessibility.

793 PLAY PARKS HAVE BEEN CLOSED DOWN IN THE LAST TEN YEARS



England's playgrounds crumble as council budgets fall

Children suffering from 'shameful' failure to protect play with park budgets falling by £350m in 11 years

• **'The swings are missing': Children in Newcastle left with nowhere to play**



Some councils have been forced to cut back by more than 80% since 2011. Photograph: Richard Johnson/Alamy

Playgrounds around England are falling to pieces, missing large pieces of play equipment, or simply being locked up, as councils facing huge budget cuts struggle to maintain them. In some of the poorest parts of the country, family groups are warning that children face a summer spent indoors because of a lack of safe and free spaces to play.

The head of Play England has said that children's mental health will suffer as a result, and has called for radical change from what he called a "shameful" lack of protection for children and play in planning.

A Guardian analysis of the collective annual park budget around England - which includes local authority play provision - has found that it has fallen by more than £350m, adjusted for inflation, since 2011.

Laura Sharman 09 February 2022

Access to public play spaces is 'unfair and unequal' research finds

Campaigners have calls for councils to receive ring-fenced funding to ensure every child has access to a public playground after finding access to play is 'unfair and unequal' across the UK.

A freedom of information request by the Association of Play Industries (API) found some regions have almost five times the amount of free-access play provision than others.

The research found the West Midlands has the worst play provision in the UK playground, while in London there are 866 children per playground.

In Scotland, there are just 196 children per playground, while children in Wales twice the number of playgrounds than children in London.

Mark Hardy, chair of the API, said: 'We are lobbying the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Local Government (DLUHC) to provide local authorities with access to a national public playgrounds so that every child has a safe, local, high-quality place to play.'



Image: Olesia Bilkei / Shutterstock.com

William Eichler 03 May 2023

London councils struggle to keep playgrounds open

Local authorities in London are struggling to maintain their playgrounds due to a lack of funding, new survey reveals.

A poll of three-quarters of the capital's councils found that the majority (88%) say that children's play is a priority.

However, the London Play survey also found that a third of respondents believe the play facilities provided are not adequate for demand.

More than two thirds of respondents also warned that revenue for staff to manage and maintain play areas over the next three years is likely to either decrease or stay the same.



Image: 1000 Words / Shutterstock.com

[Aggregate Industries](#) (Mar 23): top left
[The Guardian](#) (Aug 23): top right
[LocalGov](#) (May 23): bottom right
[LocalGov](#) (Feb 22): bottom left

- 3.3 From a Stockton-on-Tees perspective, previous analysis has indicated that outdoor play provision is uneven across the Borough, with significant variations in the play value, age and accessibility of equipment and sites. Many older play areas are in decline and, as is being felt by Local Authorities up and down the country, there is insufficient budget to maintain all the current sites. In terms of new sites, the majority of these are established through planning obligations and consequently increase provision in areas where new development is taking place. Conversely, there are limited opportunities to establish or improve play areas in existing residential areas. In either case, it should be noted that all sites are subject to challenge relating to accessibility and play value.
- 3.4 Play areas can be an emotive topic and have elicited a range of comments (both positive and negative) from the public with regards the existing offer. Like so many other Council-related activities, balancing public expectation with the realities of deepening Local Authority funding pressures is becoming an increasing challenge. There is a well-established need to maintain an effective portfolio of high-quality play area assets within the Borough's communities, but this must be sustainable, provide value-for-money, and be accessible to as many people as is feasibly possible.

4.0 Findings

Legislative Requirements

- 4.1 Whilst there was no statutory obligation for Local Authorities to provide outdoor play spaces, there were legal requirements associated with the inspection and maintenance of outdoor play provision:
- [Health and Safety at Work Act 1974](#): There is a duty under section 3 and 4 to ensure the health and safety of users, so far as is reasonably practicable.
 - [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#): Require a risk assessment of facilities, a safety policy for meeting the risk, and appropriate training.
 - [Occupier's Liability Act 1957 \(Revised 1984\)](#): This Act requires that people can expect to be reasonably safe when using the playground. Greater care is required where children are concerned.
- 4.2 The British and European safety standard BS EN1176 and the Health & Safety Executive strongly recommend that all play areas be inspected annually by an independent qualified body such as RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents). BS EN1177 concerns a safety surfaces standard ('impact absorbing'). These standards and safety guidelines are not a legal requirement but are considered to be good professional working practice. SBC was aware of its responsibility in regard to maintaining and repairing play area equipment and playground facilities.
- 4.3 The [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#) aimed to ensure that all those who were disabled had the same access to public services (and by implication, public parks and playgrounds) as those who were not disabled. Successful play spaces should, as far as was reasonably possible, offer the same quality and extent of play experience to disabled children and young people as was available to those who were not disabled, whilst accepting that not all equipment could be completely accessible to everyone.

Key Outdoor Play Bodies

Play England (playengland.org.uk/)

- 4.4 Play England is the national children's play charity for England. Its vision is for England to be a country where everybody can fully enjoy their right to play throughout their childhood and teenage years, as set out in the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(Article 31\)](#) and the [Charter for Children's Play](#).
- 4.5 Advocating movement and physical activity, the stimulation of the five senses, provision of good places for social interaction, children being allowed to manipulate natural and fabricated materials, and, crucially, children being offered challenge (all guiding principles which SBC would endorse), Play England published the following 10 principles for designing successful play spaces which should ensure they:



- are 'bespoke'
- are well located
- make use of natural elements
- provide a wide range of play experiences
- are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
- meet community needs
- allow children of different ages to play together
- build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge
- are sustainable and appropriately maintained
- allow for change and evolution.

The organisation were previously more active in terms of officers on the ground, though now tended to focus on the provision of strategic advice.

Association of Play Industries (API) (api-play.org/)

4.6 The lead trade body in the play sector, API represents the interests of manufacturers, installers, designers and distributors of both outdoor and indoor play equipment and safer surfacing. It also promotes best practice and high-quality play provision within the play industry, and has campaigned on the following:

- **Equal Play:** API's latest campaign is based on new research which shows that children's access to public play areas is unequal and unfair. Some areas of the UK have almost five times the number of children per playground as others. Children's opportunities to play outdoors are a postcode lottery.
<https://www.api-play.org/news-events/equal-play-campaign/>

- **Nowhere to Play:** API's research uncovered an alarming decline in play provision with hundreds of playgrounds set to close. Local Authorities cited lack of budget to maintain, repair or replace equipment as reasons for the closures.

<https://www.api-play.org/news-events/nowhere-play-campaign/>



4.7 API is dedicated to inclusive play. Its members recognise that every child is unique, with their own individuality and strengths, but with one common thread that binds them all together – their innate desire to play. When it comes to playgrounds, all children look for exciting, diverse and stimulating play experiences that foster both individual exploration and group interaction. Its members strive to create play spaces which welcome and accommodate children of all abilities, so that all users can find something that brings them joy.
<https://www.api-play.org/inclusive-play/>

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) ([rospace.com/](https://www.rospace.com/))

- 4.8 RoSPA is a not-for-profit organisation that has worked for more than 100 years to help people recognise and reduce their risk of accidents, at home, on the road, at work and at leisure. Its goal is to enable everyone to live their lives to the full, safely.
- 4.9 RoSPAs Play Safety department provides advice and information on playground management and the safety of indoor and outdoor play areas. This includes guidance on inspections, maintenance, design, surfacing, fencing, and a code of good practice for play areas.
<https://www.rospace.com/policy/play-safety/advice>
- 4.10 RoSPA Play Safety offer a variety of playground inspections to suit requirements. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) commission RoSPA to carry out annual inspections of existing play areas and safety surfacing, assessments of life-expectancy of equipment / areas, post-installation inspections of new sites, and play value assessments.
<https://www.rospace.com/policy/play-safety/inspections>

Play Value / Meaningful Play

- 4.11 'Play value' relates to the quality and variety of the play experience, and RoSPA had developed an industry-standard methodology for assessing this. Three broad aspects of a site were looked at:
- The overall site (ignoring equipment, but including the landscape setting, site safety, etc.)
 - Ambience (visual appeal, condition, and layout)
 - Suitability and value of play equipment and features for the age groups for which the site is designed (toddlers, juniors, or teenagers)
- A detailed set of criteria was used with sites given overall ratings (*excellent, good, average, below average or poor*) for each of these three elements.
- 4.12 SBCs aim was for a minimum grading of 'good', and previous scores for each of the Borough's sites were provided to the Committee. However, it was noted that these assessments were quite dated (2018) and would need to be re-evaluated to provide an accurate picture of the current state and value of local facilities.
- 4.13 In November 2023, the Committee was informed a re-assessment of the Borough's existing sites was not yet scheduled – contact with RoSPA, either as part of or after this review, could be initiated, though (this was subsequently done in February 2024, with the results available at **Appendix 1**). Whilst wanting to get a fair and updated measure of standards across the Borough's facilities, Members pointed out that any official assessment of play value was not necessarily an indicator of popularity, and that even a simple space could be creatively used by children and young people, some of whom come from outside the local catchment area to access it.

Existing Borough Offer

- 4.14 As of December 2023, the Borough had 49 publicly accessible play areas, and 20 sites with informal sport facilities (some of these were located at the same sites). SBC owned and managed the vast majority of these sites, and also managed five sites on behalf of Town / Parish Councils (*note: any facilities not freely accessible to the public (such as those located within school grounds, sports centres or locations such as RSPB Salthome) were not within scope of this review*). Maps and lists of all play areas and informal sport facilities across the Borough (including planned developments) were shared with the Committee – see **Appendix 2-5**.

Informal Sports Facilities

- 4.15 There was a variety of informal sports provision across the Borough, mostly involving multi-use games areas (MUGAs) which were sometimes accompanied by outdoor gyms and / or skateparks. Kick walls and / or other surfaced games areas were also highlighted, as was one third-party MUGA in Billingham (Roscoe Road).



Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA): *John Whitehead Park, Billingham*

- 4.16 The site at Stillington had now been completed and was only awaiting lighting (it was, however, very muddy, so opening could be delayed), and the planned site at Kirklevington was a new additional MUGA. Despite having a lot of play area provision, Ingleby Barwick only had Romano Park as an informal sport facility.

Play Areas

- 4.17 The Council categorised play areas as follows (these classifications were based mainly on the quantity and size of play equipment, but also took into consideration the provision of other facilities and services):
- **'Destination' sites (4)**: As larger facilities within parks, these served a wide catchment area and had been invested in considerably by SBC in recent years. They offered a wide variety of equipment that provided good 'play value' for a range of users from toddlers to teenagers.



'Destination' Site: *Preston Park, Eaglescliffe*

- **'Neighbourhood' sites (18):** These were mainly situated within larger green spaces of a community, with a more moderate quantity of equipment (generally suitable for a range of users, which may include toddlers, juniors, and teenagers). They preferably have access to toilets and refreshments and were close to other facilities which add to the overall recreational value of the site (though this was not essential).



'Neighbourhood' Site: *Victoria Park, Thornaby*

- **'Doorstep' sites (27):** Smaller facilities which were located on green space or self-contained zones within housing areas, many of which had been installed by housing developers. They contain a small quantity of equipment which was not suitable for all age ranges (often being designed for younger children).



'Doorstep' Site: *Grangefield Park*

It was noted that there was variance even within these three categories (for example, one site within the Borough contains just a single slide).

- 4.18 Maps showing catchment zones for all existing / intended provision were also presented, though it was noted that these were only crude indicators as users can travel from outside these areas, particularly for the larger 'destination' sites like Preston Park and Wynyard Woodland Park. The Committee was also reminded that the maps did not indicate 'play value' which, as had been previously seen, varied from site-to-site across the Borough, something which may be a factor in how far young people and / or families were prepared to travel to use specific facilities. These graphics did, however, allow SBC to identify gaps in provision which may then feed into section 106 (s106) considerations (see paragraph 4.47).
- 4.19 The Committee queried whether the actual use of some of the current play sites was monitored in any way. Members noted several variables (e.g. weather, school holidays) which impacted upon play area usage, and officers confirmed that tracking this was a challenge due to multiple entries to an individual site and the limits on resources to carry out such a task. That said, there may be an opportunity to link-in with relevant community groups to establish play area 'traffic', though it was agreed that it would not be appropriate to ask SBC staff to sit and monitor the number of people using a particular site.
- 4.20 Highlighting the Council's previously stated desire for the Borough's play areas to receive a 'good' play value rating, the Committee referred to the shared play area lists that had shown a raft of sites falling short of this minimum aim when last assessed. Members commented that updated RoSPA assessments may assist in understanding the costs of improving any below-standard provision – this information may, in turn, play a factor in what the Committee recommended regarding future prioritisation of sites.
- 4.21 Noting that the Councillor role enabled them to get 'out and about' within their communities, Members were not surprised to see preconceptions about the state of facilities realised when analysing the play value scores, many of which were deemed 'average', 'below average' or 'poor'. Mindful, too, that the last tranche of significant investment was over 15 years ago, the Committee queried if the Council would be better served to focus on quality over quantity – SBC officers subsequently confirmed that they would welcome a future concentration on fewer sites that had an improved offer.

- 4.22 In terms of the 2018 play value assessment outcomes, SBC officers stated that a number of these should perhaps have been represented as 'not applicable' for certain age-ranges as some sites were not aiming to cater for all children and young people from toddler to teen. In response, Members observed that there were instances where all three categories were ranked 'poor', and also highlighted concerns that areas were being used by some young people despite them being targeted at much younger children, with associated problems arising such as bad behaviour / language which caused parents of toddlers / juniors to have a negative experience or even stay away from sites.
- 4.23 Focus was drawn onto those play sites owned by Town / Parish Councils (most of which were deemed to offer 'poor' play value), with Members keen to ascertain what pressure was put on these bodies to repair / replace equipment. SBC officers noted that some Town / Parish Councils had invested in recent years to strengthen their outdoor play offer, though did this out of their own budget which, like SBCs, was limited and stretched.
- 4.24 Emphasising the need to ensure value-for-money as part of any investment, Members pointed to problems with soft matting within certain play areas which did not appear to be overly durable despite the high cost. SBC officers gave assurance that value-for-money considerations were prioritised when designing a new play space (not just regarding the equipment itself, but also the maintenance of the overall facility).

Site Visits

- 4.25 Committee Members undertook visits to the following existing play area sites across the Borough in December 2023 (see **Appendix 6** for observations):
- Preston Park, Eaglescliffe ('Destination')
 - Simonside Grove, Ingleby Barwick ('Doorstep')
 - Windmill Park, Ingleby Barwick ('Neighbourhood')
 - South Thornaby, Thornaby ('Neighbourhood')
 - Victoria Park, Thornaby ('Neighbourhood')

Recent Developments

- 4.26 During the course of this review, developments in relation to the following existing 'destination' sites emerged:
- [Romano Park, Ingleby Barwick](https://www.stockton.gov.uk/article/12552/Dragon-Fort-feature-completes-impressive-upgrades-to-Romano-Park-in-Ingleby-Barwick) (Jan 24): Completion of improvement works, including a revamped play area with a unique, 'dragon fort' feature (which was the first of its kind).
<https://www.stockton.gov.uk/article/12552/Dragon-Fort-feature-completes-impressive-upgrades-to-Romano-Park-in-Ingleby-Barwick>
 - [Ropner Park, Stockton](#) (Mar 24): The new tower for the play area (see **Appendix 7**) had recently received planning consent, with the play area refurbishment now scheduled to commence in late-April 2024. The play area would be closed during this time and will take approximately two months to complete.

Maintenance

- 4.27 Emphasising that the ongoing inspection and maintenance of the Borough's outdoor play sites was a real pressure area for SBC, officers explained that checks and any required actions were undertaken to ensure that playground equipment remained safe and compliant with relevant standards. Whilst there were legislative requirements around the need to inspect (see paragraph 4.1), with potentially costly repercussions if this was not carried out, there was no defined legal standard in terms of how that was conducted – that said, the Council's insurers would expect that processes conformed with good practice. In essence, inspection and maintenance procedures were about managing risk.
- 4.28 The existing inspection regime comprised weekly / fortnightly checks on any signs of weathering and vandalism, and a quarterly check on the strength / stability of equipment (including rotting / corrosion of materials). Reactive inspections were undertaken in response to any calls or intelligence around faults, and an annual independent inspection also provided external scrutiny of local play provision.
- 4.29 Pressures on the existing inspection and maintenance budget associated with Stockton-on-Tees outdoor play spaces were outlined (current year up to 14 September 2023 – see graphic right). This had been exacerbated by increasing incidents of vandalism, and was an amount which had not been uplifted since before 2017 – a situation which contributed to ongoing challenges around this scrutiny topic.
- Budget Financial Pressures Today**

 - The Annual Budget allocation is £114,000.
 - Covers - Parks, Open Spaces, Cemeteries, and Allotments
 - Current Spend to date – £83,000
 - Outstanding Work to do - £92,000

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Big plans, bright future
- 4.30 Efforts were made to find alternative funds (e.g. underspends within the SBC directorate) and longer-lasting materials (e.g. use of bark instead of expensive soft matting), and removing any equipment or whole sites was a last resort given the current brief to keep areas open as long as they were safe. Critically, the present budget was earmarked for maintenance only and was not a replacement fund – as such, the Borough had a large amount of valuable play equipment with no plan for the future.
- 4.31 The Committee expressed deep concern over the absence of a replacement fund for the Borough's play area equipment which would inevitably deteriorate over time. The use of bark instead of soft matting / surfaces as a more cost-effective solution was also debated, with Members (who were mindful of the Committee's previous review on Tree Asset Management) asking whether SBC had the ability to produce its own bark for the Borough's outdoor play spaces. Officers stated that any attempt to generate chippings would require a sifting process as only soft bark could be used for play areas, and maintenance was still needed for this material to ensure it was kept at the right level (though it was much less costly than matting). The use of bark also provided potential challenges around accessibility, though Members countered that measures could surely be put in place to enable all users to access equipment (e.g. footpaths in between chippings).

- 4.32 Reference was made to the rising demand for statutory Council provision which inevitably had a knock-on effect regarding budgetary pressures for non-statutory services. The Committee also noted that Councillors in Stockton-on-Tees were fortunate to have access to a Ward budget which helped support improvements to their locality, a welcome resource which Members in other Local Authority areas did not have.
- 4.33 Two queries were raised in relation to play area insurance policies and the lifespan of the Borough's existing sites. For the former, officers stated that as long as SBC made facilities as safe as they could be, insurers would assume liability for claims against the Council. Regarding the latter, Members heard that this was difficult to estimate given each play space was different to others (though RoSPA did conduct life-expectancy evaluations). It was, however, noted that the last significant investment into outdoor play space (2008) reflected the focus on natural play (and therefore incorporated numerous wooden products), and that this was predominantly capital funding which did not include a maintenance element.
- 4.34 Mindful of the proposed developments in relation to Stockton waterfront (see paragraph 4.61), the Committee asked if play space planning included considerations around maintenance of any new sites intended for this zone. In response, it was confirmed that officers within the SBC Community Services, Environment and Culture directorate had provided views and calculations with regards play space proposals, and whilst this aspect had not always been factored-in in the past, confidence was expressed that longer-term thinking would feature strongly in the plans to revamp Stockton Town Centre. Members responded by urging any future commitment on capital spend to also consider ongoing revenue costs.
- 4.35 Attention returned to the financial pressures outlined in association with the inspection and maintenance of sites. Noting the £60,000 shortfall in the annual budget allocation (£114,000) compared to the current (as of 14 September 2023) amount spent (£83,000) plus anticipated costs in relation to outstanding work still to complete (£92,000), Members felt this demonstrated the justification for the Committee's review and also asked for a breakdown on how much of the £83,000 already spent pertained specifically to play areas. The percentage spend against the annual budget for the three previously completed financial years (though not including the current 2023-2024 year) was subsequently provided as follows:

Total Budget £114,000	Percentage spend over last 3 Years		
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Parks and Open Spaces	94%	94%	93%
Cemeteries	2%	2%	1%
Allotments	3%	3%	7%
Cemeteries (Other)	1%	1%	0%
	100%	100%	100%

- 4.36 Regarding inspection schedules, the Committee queried if the current SBC programme was a regulatory requirement or was something the Council chose to do. The legislative need to conduct inspections was reiterated, as was the flexibility in which these could be carried out (since there was not a legally

defined manner in which to do this). In terms of SBC, officers took a snapshot of an individual site's use – if this was a more popular facility, it would be inspected more frequently. However, it was also noted that the inspection and maintenance team comprised of only four technicians for the whole of the Borough, thus limiting the capacity for more regular oversight.

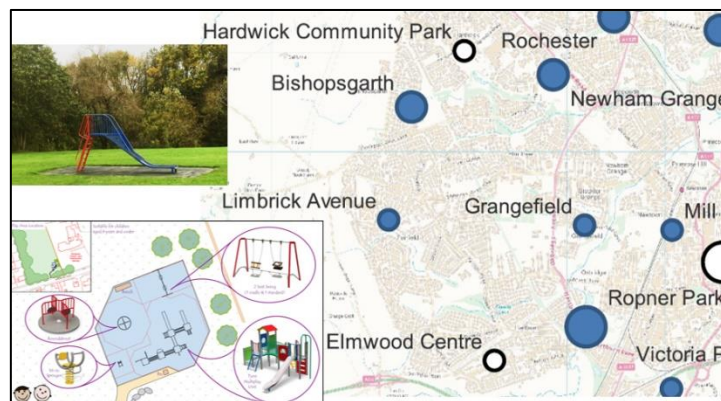
Creation of New Sites

Inequality of Existing Provision

4.37 Reasons for the growing inequality of outdoor play provision across the Borough were outlined. The last significant investment in Stockton-on-Tees facilities was through the then Government's Play Builder programme back in 2008 (though not all areas benefitted at that time), and since then, many sites had been provided or improved with section 106 money (contributions from developers towards the costs of providing community and social infrastructure – see paragraph 4.47) as a result of housing developments. However, this had the potential for a higher density of smaller-space provision, and those areas of the Borough which had not seen new housing had therefore not gained in relation to additional / upgraded play facilities.

4.38 The following examples of inequality of provision in both south Billingham and west Stockton were provided:

South Billingham (right):
The Bulgarth was currently the only play area in south Billingham, comprising just one piece of equipment.



West Stockton (left):
Currently the only play provision in Fairfield and Hartburn wards was this single slide at Limbrick Avenue. However, a small 'doorstep' play area was planned for the Elmwood Centre, Hartburn.

- 4.39 The introduction of new play areas, often with limited value, as part of housing developments was explored, with Members expressing concern that some of this may be happening against the advice of Council officers or built just so the Council could say it was using section 106 contributions. Officers acknowledged that there were play areas within the Borough that were not appropriate and in need of investment, and that a clear rationale needed to be made available, and properly assessed, for the future development of new and existing sites. There was also a planning issue at the heart of this, too, something which the Committee may wish to probe further as part of this review.
- 4.40 Specific attention was drawn to the existing situation at Norton Meadows (Stockton), with the Committee relaying concerns from local residents who were paying a management fee to a developer in relation to nearby play provision which was deemed by the wider community to be a public area and therefore accessible to anyone. Asked if there were similar examples elsewhere, SBC officers stated that they were not aware of other such issues within the Borough, and that individual planning conditions would need to be understood to determine any further action – officers subsequently confirmed that no issues had been raised regarding any other third-party-owned sites.
- 4.41 The Committee emphasised its awareness that, like within most Council services, money was tight and needed to be spent wisely. To this end, when considering future outdoor play provision plans, Members may need to move away from localism in the pursuit of what was best for the Borough as a whole.
- 4.42 Focus moved onto the environmental agenda, with Members questioning if this was considered as part of the planning for new play sites. Officers highlighted the SBC environmental strategy (one of the aims of which was to increase biodiversity and natural spaces), as well as the need to consider the play value of green spaces and how the environment could be used to enhance play (which in some cases could be more cost-effective than actual equipment). The inclusion of sensory equipment to promote accessibility was also probed, with the Committee informed that there was ongoing dialogue with the Stockton Parent Carer Forum regarding the development of facilities – that said, this was a challenging area given the wide range of accessibility needs.
- 4.43 The Committee asked if a larger capital commitment towards Stockton-on-Tees play spaces was now needed as part of a political agreement. In response, it was stated that if there was a desire to maintain the current level of outdoor play provision across the Borough, a capital injection would appear necessary. Recognising the existing financial situation which the Council was experiencing, the Committee Chair urged that Councillors refrained from requesting feasibility studies for new play areas while this review was being undertaken.

SBC Planning / Place Development

- 4.44 Policy SD5 of the existing [SBC Local Plan](#) (adopted 30 January 2019) sought to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment (which included green infrastructure networks and assets), whilst policy ENV6 required that green infrastructure should be integrated, where practicable, into new developments, but also allows for ‘appropriate contributions’ towards green infrastructure. In addition, the Council had two Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) which provided further guidance

on the provision ('Planning Obligations SPD') and quantity / quality / proximity ('Open Space, Recreation and Landscaping SPD') of open space.

- 4.45 Whilst the ultimate aim was to improve the provision of open space and recreation facilities in the Borough, developer decisions on building new rather than improving existing assets were effectively about the scale of a proposed development and the level of impact (population growth) this would have:
- Larger scale developments were likely to justify a need for on-site provision due to the level of population increase across the site (indeed, policy direction indicates a preference for on-site provision).
 - For smaller developments, however, there may be no requirement for open space to be provided and it may be more appropriate for an off-site contribution (where necessary and justified).

Where sites were situated on the periphery of settlements, existing open space and play areas may not be nearby or readily accessible.

- 4.46 In terms of facilities managed and funded by individual housing developments or residents under a service charge, the planning system did not seek to restrict or prevent the use of the facility for any resident. Privately maintained areas of public open space were not intended to be for the exclusive use for residents of an estate.

- 4.47 [Planning obligations](#) (also known as 'section 106' / 's106' agreements) must meet the tests set out under the [Community Infrastructure Levy \(CIL\) regulation \(122\)](#) which are:

- necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms
- directly related to the development
- fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development (the Open Space, Recreation and Landscaping SPD sets local standards for quantity, quality and proximity)

Contributions towards off-site provision must be identified and must also be fully costed schemes to be compliant with the tests set out in the CIL (*note: the Council was not able to ask for a generic figure derived from the calculator as a contribution and instead must highlight a particular scheme and the associated costs of the delivery of that scheme*).

- 4.48 Funding via s106 was generally only for capital projects, and revenue funding towards ongoing running costs was unlikely to be available. Where SBC was to assume responsibility for the maintenance of either on-site or off-site open space, the Council required a commuted revenue lump-sum for the equivalent of 25 years maintenance. All calculations were based on the approved landscaping scheme, and this sum was placed in an interest-bearing account, with the interest used solely for grounds maintenance.
- 4.49 Maintenance costs were generally only acceptable where it related to the maintenance of open space provision being secured. However, there was no legal requirement for a developer to ask the Council to adopt or maintain the open space, and they could instead choose to maintain it themselves – this was often funded through an additional service charge to a management company from the occupants of a development. Where long-term maintenance may be

delivered by a management company, a management plan was provided and agreed to ensure the open space was suitably maintained in perpetuity.

- 4.50 As per the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA), there would be forthcoming changes to planning obligations as the Infrastructure Levy (IL) was due to be introduced (this was mandatory, pre-set and non-negotiable). The IL will largely replace planning obligation except for 'large and complex sites', with the Council potentially losing its ability to use s106 funding as it currently did (SBC officers previously stated that this finance provides the Council with more control over the quality of provision to ensure better play value). A response to the technical guidance was still awaited by SBC, as was the associated secondary legislation.
- 4.51 SBC officers added that the Council's aim was for sustainable places within the Borough which contributed to the Public Health (health and wellbeing) agenda. It was also noted that there can be a significant time lag between the agreement and subsequent implementation of a developer's plan, and that views on the appropriateness of provision can be subjective as some prefer open spaces, some play areas, and others landscaped sites.
- 4.52 The Committee asked for clarity around the identification of responsibility for inspecting / maintaining new play area sites and was informed that arrangements were usually set out within a planning application. Planning conditions involving the maintenance of open space were usually included as part of any agreed development, with the failure to comply subject to enforcement measures. As part of the application process, developers were now asked for 'phasing plans' to demonstrate key timelines for implementation – however, the Council was reliant on the public to report any breaches of an agreed development in order to initiate potential enforcement action.

The screenshot shows the website for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. The header includes the council logo and name, along with links for 'Create a My Council account' and 'Sign in to My Council'. A navigation bar features four main categories: 'Our Council', 'Our People', 'Our Places', and 'Our Economy'. The breadcrumb trail indicates the current page is 'Home > Our Places > Planning and Building Control > Planning applications'. The main heading is 'Planning enforcement'. Below this, a sub-heading states: 'We can take enforcement action if we find there has been a breach of planning control.' A section titled 'When we will take enforcement action' explains that a breach occurs when a development is taken without the required planning permission or not carried out in accordance with imposed conditions. A 'Show all sections' button is present. Two expandable sections are visible: 'Examples of planning breaches' and 'Issues that we cannot investigate'. At the bottom, there is a section for 'Report a breach of planning control' with a note about using the public access service to check planning history, and a 'Submit a request for planning enforcement' button.

- 4.53 Members questioned the ramifications of developers going bust. Officers stated that this was a rare occurrence – however, should this happen, management companies were in place, with service charges paid by residents of a development then covering the ongoing maintenance of a site.

- 4.54 Regarding the decision to use a management company for maintenance of outdoor play provision, the Committee queried if there was any requirement for a developer to inform residents of such an arrangement. SBC officers noted that this was usually identified as part of conveyancing and that residents had the option for a vote if they were concerned about the upkeep of a play site within their estate (this was not something which involved the Council).
- 4.55 Referencing the 25-year lump-sum payment to the Council for transfer of maintenance responsibilities of a designated site, the Committee asked what elements these payments were expected to cover. Grounds maintenance, cleansing, and maintenance of the equipment in the play area was subsequently listed, though it was noted that the lump-sum did not tend to cover the future renewal of the play area.
- 4.56 Pointing to an apparent absence of understanding of the revenue costs associated with new outdoor play provision, Members asked if the Council had to go along with a developer's proposals or whether there was any scope to ask it to invest in one of the Borough's larger 'destination' sites (as opposed to installing yet another facility which may be of lesser play value and would add to ongoing maintenance requirements). SBC officers responded by reaffirming earlier advice – that much depends on the scale of a development and associated impacts, with a clear link between a development site and a 'destination' play / open space site needing to be established.
- 4.57 The Committee drew attention to the planned new play area in Kirklevington which was near an existing site – this appeared contradictory to the requirements of the Open Space, Recreation and Landscaping SPD in terms of proximity considerations. As had been observed during previous Committee reviews, the need for timely dialogue between Council services over issues which involved multiple SBC directorates / departments was again evident, and it was also suggested that the final report of this particular review should be shared with the SBC Planning Committee.
- 4.58 Members raised the issue of residents not knowing who to complain to about concerns around a third-party-owned play site – it was suggested that the respective local MP be approached should the management company not adequately address any identified problems in the first instance.

Confirmed Developments

- 4.59 Several 'doorstep' sites were intended across the Borough – these involved SBC plans for Hardwick Community Park, Stockton and the Elmwood Centre, Stockton. Third-party facilities at Yarm Back Lane, Stockton (x2), Allens West, Eaglescliffe, and Kirklevington were also scheduled – see **Appendix 4-5**.

SBC Town Centres Development

- 4.60 As a key department involved in the development of new facilities, particularly the new Stockton waterfront plans, the SBC Town Centres Development service was asked to provide input into this review.

- 4.61 The team was made up of a broad range of roles with the focus on overseeing and co-ordinating the development, design and delivery of capital projects, predominantly under the funding umbrellas of the Levelling-Up Fund, Towns Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and Future High Streets Fund, as well as town centre business engagement and market management. The management and delivery of the new Stockton waterfront scheme (see graphic below) required close liaison with the developers.



- 4.62 The inclusion of formal play space and equipment within the new Stockton waterfront park was established as a fundamental element of the space at concept stage and through the preliminary design process in 2021. The SBC Town Centres Development team relied upon the expertise and knowledge of colleagues within SBC Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure as plans for the urban park were in development, particularly in regard to play equipment. This collaboration, along with public consultation in summer 2022, led to a design brief for the play space being developed by Ryder Architects in October 2022.
- 4.63 Since then, officers from both SBC Town Centres Development and SBC Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure had attended workshops and meetings to refine the design of the park, and had featured on the appraisal panel for prospective play equipment providers as part of the initial procurement phase for play equipment. The interrelationship between Council teams extended to site visits and individual design meetings, as required, alongside the architect design team.
- 4.64 As part of the assessment process for Stockton waterfront play equipment providers, the sustainability and quality of materials was a key consideration with regards minimising maintenance liabilities and the need to replace equipment. Warranties and guarantees on equipment, along with spare parts, had also been sought as part of the procurement / design of play equipment and play areas to cover any issues or defects with equipment in the short-term. Furthermore, allowance for some maintenance and repair / replacement packages had been included within the initial costing for equipment, minimising revenue commitments for maintenance as far as possible in the early years of operation. Beyond this, longer-term revenue requirements would be picked up and included as part of the future Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) budget-

setting process, with detailed work undertaken already with colleagues across the Council to assess the revenue impact of the park in its entirety from its completion in early-2026 (*note: a request was subsequently made for further information on this detailed work, but specifics were not provided*).

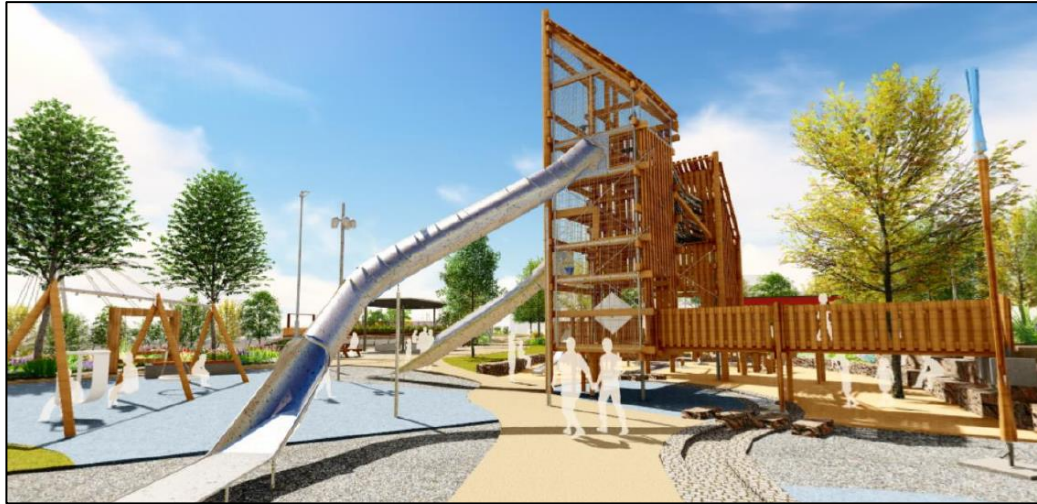
- 4.65 Further refinement to specific elements of equipment and play areas were still to be made, with additional input from SBC Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure colleagues intended. Given the Council was potentially oversubscribed in terms of equipment, identifying best 'play value' would be central to discussions.
- 4.66 Led by the SBC Town Centres Development team, in addition to the Stockton waterfront plans (with the intention of using naturally differing levels as part of the offer), new and improved play / informal sports provision had been delivered, or was under development, at:
- [Romano Park, Ingleby Barwick](#) (complete)
 - Installation of new bespoke play feature and new play equipment.
 - Repairs and replacement of some existing equipment and surfacing
 - Installation of accessible play equipment and sensory trail,
 - Clean and remarking of existing MUGA surface
 - [Victoria Park, Thornaby](#) (complete)
 - New play equipment and accessible elements throughout the park
 - [Snaiths Field, Yarm](#) (still in preliminary design stage)
 - Improvements to exiting play space, surfacing and equipment planned. Still in preliminary design stage

These three play facilities would be maintained within existing revenue budgets for play and open space.

- 4.67 The Committee began its questioning on the developments at Snaiths Field. It was reiterated that plans for this site revolved around building on what was already there (akin to what had happened at Romano Park), though Members were advised that fitness equipment aimed at adults was unlikely to feature since there was little evidence that this apparatus was well used – indeed, there was a desire to veer away from this type of provision due to the liabilities it carried and the vandalism it can attract (Members subsequently noted evidence of this at Kiora Hall, Roseworth).
- 4.68 Staying with the Snaiths Field offer, Members asked if maintenance of this particular site lay with Yarm Town Council (YTC). Officers confirmed that SBC had responsibility for inspecting and maintaining the play area on behalf of the Town Council, and would consult with the latter regarding developments. The Committee drew attention to other outdoor play facilities in Yarm which were not maintained by SBC and queried why this was the case – it was subsequently confirmed that Snaiths Field was owned by YTC which previously owned the play equipment within; Willey Flats was owned by SBC, however YTC agreed a 50-year lease on the land in 1995 – the conditions of that lease included maintenance obligations.

- 4.69 Broad enthusiasm was expressed by Members on the proposals for the Stockton waterfront development, though the need for adequate security of the site was also highlighted. Officers stated that SBC was very conscious there may be individuals who did not wish to use the space as it was envisaged, and that whilst some aspects of anti-social behaviour were hard to stop, the Council must be mindful of those who spoil good intent. It was also noted that making play spaces open and visible can help minimise inappropriate behaviours, and that CCTV can assist in identifying issues but requires adequate monitoring. Officers added that fencing around the waterfront park was being considered in order to manage risk.
- 4.70 In terms of the Stockton waterfront plans, the Committee reflected on the fact that this would, ultimately, add another significant resource to the Council's portfolio which would need to be maintained. Given SBC was not in a position to maintain what it already had, and that Local Authority funding was likely to get even tighter, this would represent a further challenge regarding decisions on existing provision across the Borough.
- 4.71 Continuing this theme, the Committee acknowledged the ongoing developments around the Stockton blueprint to make it a more attractive place – however, it was also stressed that establishing long-term revenue costs was a key consideration in ensuring sustainable provision. Responding to a subsequent query around the consultation exercise on the Stockton waterfront, SBC officers confirmed that feedback had indeed impacted upon the design of the play space and that it was hoped that this would ensure a positive visitor experience. After working on this for four years, there was confidence and excitement about the new development, and the introduction of risk / jeopardy in the play space remained important (particularly to teenagers), though did provide a challenge with regards modern regulations. Officers were asked if any visuals of the Stockton waterfront plans could be provided to the Committee following this meeting – these were subsequently shared (see graphics below).





- 4.72 Mindful of the anticipation around the scale and content of the Stockton waterfront plans, Members asked if larger play spaces were inherently more appealing to users and whether the Council had any evidence of this. SBC officers felt that much would depend on the perceived play value associated with an individual site, but it was known that young people (and adults for that matter) travelled from greater distances to use, for example, the skate park at Preston Park (even from outside the Borough). As had been discussed in previous evidence sessions for this review, resource limitations meant it was difficult to ascertain overall use for specific provision, and smaller offers may still have value for very young children or for those who were not as close to a larger 'destination' site.
- 4.73 When considering the appeal of larger play areas and the potential that this can lead to an overwhelming number of users, the Committee wondered whether this might be managed by considering the level of equipment in smaller nearby sites which could be tweaked to appeal to a broader range of ages (thereby relieving pressure on the 'destination' locations). For those larger play areas, SBC officers noted that the Council does try to make a space available and applicable to a spread of ages and needs.
- 4.74 Given the ongoing financial challenges faced by the Council, Members felt the Borough was in a fortunate position to have several sizeable play sites already in existence (with another imminent). As such, in order to safeguard these well used and much valued spaces, resources may need to focus on preserving the quality of such areas in the first instance, with smaller areas being addressed where and when funding and staffing allowed. The Committee did, however, also highlight the situation for those young children and / or their families who were unable to travel to larger sites – this would need careful consideration in terms of the overall future prioritisation of the Borough's outdoor play provision.
- 4.75 The issue of accessibility was raised, with the Committee acknowledging the significant cost attached to certain equipment which was not necessarily compatible for all those with a similar need (e.g. wheelchair-users). SBC officers agreed that sourcing appropriate resources was difficult, though noted innovative approaches that adapted spaces and promoted access for a wider range of users. The Council was aware of equipment options which could be used at different heights and also for the need for ramps / suitable surfacing to foster easier access.

Accessibility / Inclusivity

Scope UK ([scope.org.uk/](https://www.scope.org.uk/))

- 4.76 As the disability equality charity in England and Wales, Scope UK had previously highlighted that inaccessible playgrounds were stopping too many disabled children from having fun and friendship, all because playgrounds were not designed with their needs in mind. 49% of families with disabled children faced accessibility problems with their local playground, with 10% of parents of disabled children saying their child got hurt using inaccessible equipment. <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/lets-play-fair/>
- 4.77 Scope UK had therefore called for Local Authorities to work with families to create inclusive playgrounds, so that every disabled child can play. Over 31,236 people signed its [open letter](#) in England and Wales calling for Government to introduce a multi-million pound inclusive playgrounds fund, helping to make play fair. Scope UK delivered this to Government departments in England and Wales in November 2022.

Stockton Parent Carer Forum (stocktonparentcarerforum.co.uk/)

- 4.78 Most Local Authority areas included a designated group which provided a voice for parents and carers with special educational needs (SEN) children. Stockton Parent Carer Forum was the local entity, and had around 1,800 individuals listed on its database (a small amount given the total number across the Borough who had a child with SEN), received some funding to aid its activities, and was run entirely by volunteers (there were no paid roles). Its hub was based at Newtown Community Resource Centre, and if a family was struggling, the Forum was often the first port-of-call to assist them and help the breaking down of any barriers. From a strategic perspective, its role was to ensure consideration of the Forum's voice in the development of services / facilities.
- 4.79 Regarding outdoor play areas, the Forum began working with SBC around three-and-a-half years ago when public focus on the Borough's play offer had sharpened. Work with the Council was initiated in order to reflect views and influence plans, with issues around accessing the larger 'destination' sites and a lack of changing places / accessible toilets raised (the latter being a real area of concern, with families noting that the provision of a disabled toilet did not necessarily make a site accessible due to the complex needs of a child / young person). Visits were also undertaken to some of Stockton-on-Tees' existing play areas, as well as Daisy Chain park (an exclusive offer for SEN children), with the types of play / equipment that were more appropriate for the Forum's members, how play was different for children with SEN, and how equipment could be made more accessible, all explored.
- 4.80 A highlight for the Forum, and a good example of an accessible space, was the newly refurbished Victoria Park in Thornaby (an area visited by Members in December 2023 as part of the Committee's evidence-gathering for this review – see **Appendix 6**). Wynyard Woodland Park also had positive features in terms of layout and sensory experiences, and Tinkers Yard (Norton) was also liked. Whilst it was difficult to pinpoint what a 'perfect' park was for a child with SEN, allowing families to make their views heard was important. What was evident was that families were compelled to use some spaces outside the usual busy

times (as this was an easier situation to manage), and did travel within and outside the Borough (e.g. Thirsk, Northallerton, Picton) to use facilities that were more accessible for their child/ren.

- 4.81 Picking up on the positives in relation to Victoria Park, the Committee enquired as to what made the Forum's families warm to this site. The mix of provision for different age-ranges, risk and challenge, and sensory considerations were all subsequently praised. It was, however, stated that the toilet facilities at this site were run by Thornaby Town Council, and were only open when a representative was present.
- 4.82 The key issue of changing areas was discussed, with SBC officers noting that plans for Preston Park and the new Stockton waterfront park would both include such facilities. Members suggested that future developments for new / existing outdoor play spaces could / should incorporate or utilise other nearby offers like coffee shops (enabling toilets / changing places). Seeing a play area as part of an overall collection of facilities within a designated location (rather than in isolation) was a concept supported by the Committee, something which local enterprise may wish to get involved with through the opening of their own establishment or by possibly sponsoring a play space.
- 4.83 Referencing the notion that some play spaces were too busy / noisy for families with SEN children, Members asked if quieter areas would help. The Forum Co-Chair felt that decisions on whether and when to access play areas were taken on an individual basis depending on family circumstance / need, but that many looked for somewhere quieter / smaller during peak times (e.g. school holidays) – this may not be as inclusive a space, though. When thinking about accessibility, it was important to consider how SEN children and their families tended to be viewed by wider society, and the fact that it required a high degree of confidence to go into a public space if they had previously had a negative experience.
- 4.84 Reflecting on the perspectives of these families, the Committee commended the Forum for shining a light on the value of smaller provision which some may regard as less important compared to the larger, busier play spaces – indeed, this emphasised the significance of neighbourhood sites such as Victoria Park, Thornaby. That said, Members were still keen to know the extent to which so-called 'doorstep' provision was accessed – the Forum agreed to attempt to ascertain this for the Committee and subsequently provided responses from its members, a selection of which included:

I find the ones in housing estates the only ones we can go to as they're quiet. Bigger parks are far too busy to manage

I do think they should be more widely publicised though there are loads in Ingleby and some are quite well hidden!

They're a life line for us we struggle to access the bigger parks – my worry is if they make these little treasures better they will become inaccessible for us due to increased foot fall if that makes sense

... I don't drive so places like Preston park and ropner park are not just somewhere we can pop too often, although we would love too!

yes this is the part that is getting missed in consultation. Whilst the destination parks are great they are accessible to all for a variety of reasons. That's why the smaller ones are so important.

I see a massive purpose for these types of parks. They are often quieter so for our children they do help. They are also within walking distance for people who maybe don't have the transport to get to the bigger parks or just simply don't want to fight to get a parking space. They can be community building too, where you can meet other parents which allows a little less isolation.

They do have downsides in that gangs of older youths do tend to hang around and even break equipment. They are often not kept clean enough and broken glass can be an issue. But CCTV and timed lighting can be a help for this along with a scheduled care for your area maintenance program.

Although I'm only in Norton for me to get my 2 little ones to somewhere like ropner park it's 2 buses, which is a struggle in itself!

Also if one become unregulated or something upset them for example, it's not just a case of ok let's head home. It's then checking bus times, waiting for buses, buses being crowded, people staring, anxiety higher than my blood pressure and spending the rest of the night wondering why I bothered in the first place!

my worry is they will rip them all out as they don't see the value

- 4.85 The Forum was thanked for its previous input on play area provision and the Co-Chair was asked to reflect this back to families. For their part, the Forum expressed gratitude for being given the opportunity to be part of the Committee's work and to highlight the variety of challenges faced by its members, some of which impacted their ability to access spaces that others took for granted.

Other Council Experiences

- 4.86 SBC officers had contacted other Local Authorities for views / experiences around this scrutiny topic. Feedback was relayed which demonstrated the differing approaches to the provision of outdoor play areas, including:
- **Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council:** No consideration of rationalising spaces thus far, but, since 2018, any new play spaces that were required within new housing developments as part of the planning process would not be adopted (these would need to have a management company in place to maintain / inspect and repair). Any Section 106 off-site contribution raised from any new development would go to support existing play spaces for refurbishment or replacement.
 - **Wakefield Council:** Looking at a current proposal to remove five play areas, all of which were on tarmac surfacing, and three of which were of poor play value. The Council was looking at reducing its play area provision, not so much for financial reasons, but more around compliance and quality of what it was actually providing.

- [Leeds City Council](#): Increasing its provision, but also removed a couple of areas in consultation with ward members and residents. New provision was installed where there had never had a play area and the Council had obtained a commuted sum. Where possible, the Council liked to refurbish existing play areas before building new.

4.87 In addition, links to a selection of publications by several other Local Authorities were provided for the Committee's perusal. This included:

- [Brighton & Hove City Council](#)
 - [State of Play: current public play facilities across Brighton & Hove, describes the unavoidable impact of aging play equipment and makes suggestions to protect play provision across the city in the future](#)
- [Burnley Council](#)
 - [Burnley's Play Area Strategy 2017-2026](#)
- [Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council](#)
 - [Children's Play Areas / Playgrounds](#)
- [Newcastle City Council](#)
 - [Inclusive Play](#)
 - [Play Area Investment Plan](#)
- [Rochdale Borough Council](#)
 - [Play Area Strategy 2022-2031](#)
- [Walsall Council](#)
 - [Public consultation opens for proposed £1.6million investment in play facilities](#)



4.88 The decision of Barnsley not to adopt new play areas required within new housing developments as part of the planning process was discussed, with Members noting concerns that had previously surfaced around the use of management companies to maintain / inspect and repair a site (as well as other wider issues). SBC officers observed that this arrangement was not necessarily something that they would propose, though some spaces within the Borough did already involve management company oversight.

4.89 Continuing with this theme, it was suggested that the alternative situation of Councils assuming responsibility for future inspection / maintenance of a play area (requiring a 25-year lump-sum to cover maintenance) could be seen as a good deal for the developer who was able to pass long-term financial liabilities to a Local Authority. Shifting attitudes around play area expectations may lead to more sustainable provision, though ensuring the correct standard of any equipment was vital, irrespective of who was ultimately responsible for the provision of a specific play space.

Future Options / Considerations

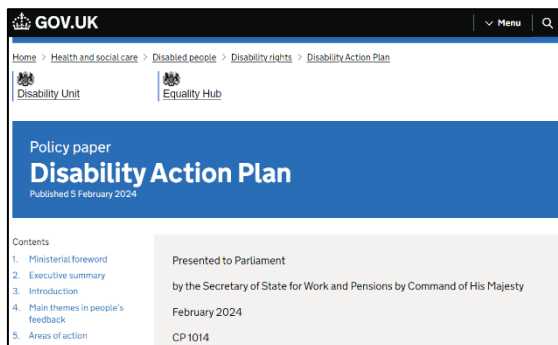
- 4.90 During the concluding session of the review's evidence-gathering phase, some suggested principles / discussion points were outlined regarding the possible future direction of travel regarding outdoor play provision across Stockton-on-Tees. Potential options included:
- Consider rationalisation of facilities while ensuring all communities had equitable access to play?
 - Encourage informal play or play outside of a formal setting?
 - Only develop / encourage new sites where there was a clear lack of provision and where SBC had a clear commitment of revenue for appropriate upkeep and renewal?
 - Focus resources on a smaller number of larger 'destination' sites which could cater for a wider demographic / catchment? This would allow SBC to invest its limited resources to ensure it meets a wider range of users and concentrate its revenue obligations.
 - Deliver / encourage 'doorstep' or 'neighbourhood' facilities only in areas where residents cannot easily access destination sites?
 - Should SBC continue to provide formal play provision in the Borough's rural country parks or should it prioritise urban, local provision?
 - Require officers to develop a strategy for play provision based on the guidance of scrutiny?
- 4.91 These potential options for the future provision of outdoor play spaces across the Borough were based on two overriding factors – firstly, SBCs current revenue budget did not allow it to maintain existing formal play parks to the standard it desired, and secondly, that the Borough had an unequal distribution of play facilities, and the Council should work to 'balance' provision to allow as many people as possible to benefit from play. Members were also reminded of the importance of informal play and the integration of the natural environment in terms of designing play spaces.
- 4.92 In related matters, the popularity / use of a site being enhanced by parking availability was raised. SBC officers noted that links with walking / cycling routes were also beneficial, and that whilst it would be challenging to address all inequalities which may / may not impact on play space use / access, factoring-in the ease of which people could get to / from sites should form part of a future strategic view of the Borough's offer.
- 4.93 The Committee further probed the definition of 'easy access' by pointing out the fact that some people did not have the ability to travel to larger 'destination' sites and therefore valued the provision of smaller play areas that were closer to their place of residence. SBC officers added that a focus on developing new / existing large-scale provision may be hindered by surrounding environmental restrictions, and that a balanced approach may well be needed to ensure the greatest access possible for the Borough's residents.
- 4.94 Members commented that the development of a Council play strategy, setting out principles for future decisions around outdoor provision, may be a useful outcome in determining any change to the existing offer. Given that revenue considerations were clearly critical, the Committee also expressed a need to see more detail around existing cost pressures of inspecting / maintaining current sites – this was subsequently provided (see paragraph 5.8).

SBC Powering Our Future

- 4.95 Considerations around future engagement / communications in relation to this scrutiny topic need to be set within the context of the Council's '[Powering Our Future](#)' initiative – 'a new way of working for the Council which will see us work with our partners and communities to put in place new and innovative approaches allowing us to not only save money but also reshape what we do for the better and in the best interests of our residents'. Powering Our Future sets an outcome-focused direction for the Council and was based around five key missions; Colleagues, Communities, Partnerships, Transformation and Regeneration.
- 4.96 Initial work within the 'Communities' strand had focused on developing baseline information to help SBC better understand its communities. The recent residents survey and community conversations had allowed SBC to ask:
- what is good about the place you live?
 - what would make it better?
 - what could you do where you live to make it better?
 - what do you need help with to make it better?
- 4.97 The responses were helping SBC to build an understanding of its communities and would allow the Council to further explore its communities' strengths and what 'works well'. This would help SBC to inform a future 'Vision for the Borough' that was developed with, and jointly owned, by communities.

Disability Action Plan

- 4.98 The [Disability Action Plan](#) (published on 5 February 2024) sets out the immediate actions the Government will take in 2024 to improve disabled people's everyday lives and lays the foundations for longer-term change, and includes measures looking at the accessibility of playgrounds.



- 4.99 The Department for Work and Pensions subsequently confirmed that the Disability Unit will create an online hub of information for local authorities on creating accessible playgrounds with a new families disabled people's experience panel helping to support the hub's development. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-06/13415/>

Funding

- 4.100 Given ongoing and well-established pressures on Local Authority budgets, the following potential funding streams were identified for consideration as part of any future outdoor play plans:

- **Fun & Active Playgrounds:** Playground Funding: Ultimate Guide To The Latest Government Initiatives & More
<https://fun-play.co.uk/playground-funding-ultimate-guide-to-government-initiatives/>
- **Association of Play Industries (API):** Funding solutions for playground projects should try to be as inventive as possible. Some of the most successful playground projects have used several sources of funding – from section 106 payments to council match-funding and community-led fundraisers. A list with links to relevant websites is available at:
<https://www.api-play.org/resources/funding/>
- **Local Government Association (LGA):** Identifying additional financing options for public sport and leisure services (including Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)).
<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/identifying-additional-financing-options-public-sport-and-leisure-services>

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

- 5.1 Previous Council analysis highlighted issues with existing and proposed outdoor play provision, particularly with regards to a developing unevenness in the distribution of facilities, and cost pressures around the maintenance of sites / replacement of equipment. This review has therefore looked to fully examine the current situation in relation to the Borough's outdoor play spaces, with specific emphasis on three main elements: distribution of sites, maintenance requirements / costs, and accessibility / inclusivity factors.
- 5.2 The benefits associated with outdoor play provision are long-established in terms of a child's social, emotional, intellectual and physical development. However, a challenge for SBC (as well as other Councils) is to ensure a high-quality play area offer which provides value-for-money and is, crucially, sustainable. The well documented pressures on Local Authority budgets have raised understandable questions about the ability to maintain existing facilities, let alone develop new ones.
- 5.3 There is no statutory obligation for Local Authorities to provide outdoor play spaces. However, there are legal requirements associated with the inspection and maintenance of such sites – responsibilities SBC is fully aware of. Regarding accessibility / inclusivity considerations, there is a need to be mindful of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which aims to ensure that all those who are disabled have the same access to public services (and by implication, public parks and playgrounds) as those who are not disabled.
- 5.4 A number of external bodies provide advice and guidance on designing, developing and installing play spaces – these include Play England (national children's play charity for England), Association of Play Industries (API) (lead trade body in the play sector), and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) (help people recognise and reduce their risk of accidents, at home, on the road, at work and at leisure). The latter is used by SBC to carry out annual inspections of existing play areas and safety surfacing, assessments of life-expectancy of equipment / areas, post-installation inspections of new sites, and 'play value' assessments.
- 5.5 As of December 2023, the Borough had 49 publicly accessible play areas and 20 sites with informal sport facilities (some of these were located at the same sites). SBC owned and managed the vast majority of these, and also managed five sites on behalf of Town / Parish Councils (*note: any facilities not freely accessible to the public (e.g. those located within school grounds, sports centres, or locations such as RSPB Salthome) were not within scope of this review*).
- 5.6 The categorisation of play areas is based mainly on the quantity and size of play equipment, but also took into consideration the provision of other facilities and services. 'Destination' sites are larger play spaces within parks that serve a wide catchment area and provide good play value for a range of users from toddlers to teenagers. 'Neighbourhood' sites are mainly situated within larger green spaces of a community (with a more moderate quantity of equipment), whilst 'doorstep' sites are smaller facilities which are located on green space or self-contained zones within housing areas (many of which have been installed by housing developers).

- 5.7 Ongoing inspection and maintenance of the Borough's outdoor play sites is a significant pressure area for SBC, involving a budget which has not been uplifted since before 2017. Indeed, there was a £60,000 shortfall in the annual budget allocation (£114,000) compared to the amount spent as of 14 September 2023 (£83,000) plus anticipated costs in relation to outstanding work still to complete (£92,000). If there is a desire to maintain the existing level of outdoor play provision across the Borough, a capital injection appeared necessary. Critically, the present budget is earmarked for maintenance only and is not a replacement fund – as such, the Borough has a large amount of valuable play equipment with no plan for the future.
- 5.8 Regarding 'play value' (determined by looking at the overall site, ambience, and suitability / value of equipment / features for the age groups for which the site is designed), SBC aims for a minimum rating of 'good' at each of its facilities – however, a raft of existing sites fell short of this when last assessed (2018). Recognising that a more up-to-date re-evaluation was required to provide an accurate picture of the current state and value of local facilities, RoSPA was recently commissioned by SBC to conduct an updated play value assessment of the Borough's existing outdoor play spaces. The results of this showed that, of the 39 play sites assessed:
- Only four scored at least 'good' across all graded categories; nine sites were rated at least 'average' across all graded categories (*note: SBC officers advised that the ratings given are RoSPAs assessments and are not national averages – in practice, a site rated 'average' is probably above the national average*).
 - Dependent upon usage and vandalism, seven had a (worst-case scenario) life expectancy of play equipment of 3-5 years plus; three sites were deemed to have 5-8 years plus.
 - A number of 'neighbourhood' play areas appeared to have surface issues.
- 5.9 The last significant investment in Stockton-on-Tees facilities was back in 2008 (though not all areas benefitted at that time), and since then, many sites had been provided or improved with section 106 contributions (funding from developers towards the costs of providing community and social infrastructure) as a result of housing developments. However, this had the potential for a higher density of smaller-space provision, and those areas of the Borough which had not seen new housing had therefore not gained in relation to additional / upgraded play facilities – a growing inequality of provision across the Borough has thus developed. As per the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA), forthcoming changes to planning obligations (the Infrastructure Levy (IL)) are due to be introduced – this would largely replace planning obligation except for 'large and complex sites', with the Council potentially losing its ability to use section 106 funding as it currently did.
- 5.10 In terms of the future creation of new play facilities, SBC planning advice indicated that larger scale developments were likely to justify a need for on-site provision due to the level of population increase across the site (indeed, policy direction indicates a preference for on-site provision). For smaller developments, however, there may be no requirement for open space to be provided, and it may be more appropriate for an off-site contribution (where necessary and justified). Where SBC was to assume responsibility for the maintenance of either on-site or off-site open space, the Council required a

commuted revenue lump-sum for the equivalent of 25 years maintenance – however, whilst this covered grounds maintenance, cleansing, and maintenance of the equipment in the play area, it did not tend to cover the future renewal of the play area. Careful consideration is therefore required around whether SBC should be adopting future play sites from developers (particularly in terms of proximity to other existing provision), and the Committee urges a focus on supporting the current portfolio as far as possible before additional spaces are agreed (adding to the long-term financial burden associated with these areas).

- 5.11 The high-profile Stockton waterfront scheme, which includes a new ‘destination’ play area, is a significant development with regards this scrutiny topic. Whilst assurance was given that longer-term revenue requirements for this substantial addition to SBCs play offer would be picked up and included as part of the future MTFP budget-setting process, the Committee remain concerned that, since SBC was not in a position to maintain what it already had (with Local Authority funding likely to get even tighter), this would further compound financial challenges which may have potential implications for other existing provision across the Borough.
- 5.12 From an accessibility / inclusivity perspective, there is a significant cost attached to certain play equipment which is not necessarily compatible for all those with a similar need (e.g. wheelchair-users). SBC should be commended for its previous engagement with Stockton Parent Carer Forum to better facilitate access for all, and there is a clear need to continue this dialogue as the Council reflects on the findings of this review, and makes future decisions around the types of equipment sourced and, as importantly, the location of this (particularly given the comments received from the Forum’s members in relation to the value of the smaller ‘doorstep’ sites).
- 5.13 Councils are adopting different approaches towards their outdoor play provision, ranging from increasing provision / consultation on proposed investment in facilities to rationalising / removing existing sites. For SBC, whilst there will be an understandable reluctance to compromise much valued resources for children / young people and their families across Stockton-on-Tees, it is clearly not sustainable to keep all existing play sites open, and difficult decisions will need to be made around removing / repurposing some sites. Allied to this, longer-term thinking about the maintenance and replacement requirements of the Borough’s existing and planned future offer must ensue to ensure quality, safe, accessible, and geographically balanced provision that lasts.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

- 1) **SBC ensures both revenue and renewal considerations are an intrinsic part of any existing and future outdoor play space proposal within the Borough to maximise the long-term sustainability of such sites.**
- 2) **To encourage a greater sense of community ownership, consideration be given to approaching relevant Town / Parish Councils and the local business community within the vicinity of existing outdoor play spaces to potentially support the development / maintenance of a site.**
- 3) **Regarding future proposals by developers for new outdoor play spaces, SBC does not adopt any site installed by a developer which contravenes the key outcomes from this review.**
- 4) **SBC considers support of existing play areas before any additional outdoor play spaces are agreed / approved.**
- 5) **Regarding inequality of outdoor play provision across the Borough, SBC clarifies where it is deemed there is little / no provision and possible steps to address these inequalities (including, in exceptional cases, the provision of new play spaces).**
- 6) **As part of a required rationalisation process in relation to the existing outdoor play offer:**
 - a) **Informed by the recent (March 2024) RoSPA assessments and an analysis of the distribution of existing outdoor play provision, proposals for the removal / repurposing of sites be developed with the aim of reducing pressure on the overall parks budget.**
 - b) **Complementing sub-section a), SBC undertakes a piece of work around those sites requiring more urgent attention to ascertain costs of either removing the play area or raising it to an appropriate standard.**
 - c) **Further detail be provided around the anticipated longer-term maintenance requirements of the new Stockton waterfront park and the impact that this may have on the available funds for maintaining other existing outdoor play spaces.**
 - d) **With due regard to the SBC *Powering Our Future* initiative, appropriate consultation (particularly with Stockton Parent Carer Forum and SBC Ward Councillors) is conducted around any proposed changes to existing outdoor play provision.**

(continued overleaf...)

Recommendations (continued)

The Committee recommend that:

- 7) Reflecting the main outcomes from this review, SBC develops and publishes an outdoor play provision strategy which includes the following elements:**
 - **The Council's aims in relation to the provision of outdoor play spaces.**
 - **The locations and assessments of existing and outdoor play provision, as well as any planned developments.**
 - **The key challenges associated with providing these spaces.**
 - **How the Council will seek to address these key challenges (including guiding principles).**
 - **Timelines for action and who will be accountable.**

- 8) This final report be shared with the SBC Planning Committee for information only.**

APPENDIX 1: Stockton-on-Tees Outdoor Play Provision – Updated RoSPA Assessments (Mar 24)

Site	Ward	P'code	Town/ Village	Designation	Owner	Site Assessment	Ambience	Toddler	Junior	Teen
Bishopsgarth	Bishopsgarth & Elm Tree	TS19 8EL	Stockton	Neighbourhood	SBC	Good	Good	Average	Below Average	Average
Bluehall Rec	Norton Central	TS20 2JS	Stockton	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Below Average	Average	Below Average
Bowesfield	Eaglescliffe East	TS18 3HD	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Poor	Below Average	Poor	Poor	Poor
Bullgarth	Billingham South	TS23 1ER	Billingham	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Good	Poor	N/A	N/A
Carlton Avenue	Billingham West	TS22 5HU	Billingham	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Good	Poor	Below Average	N/A
Cowpen Bewley W Park	Billingham East	TS23 3NF	Billingham	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Good	Below Average	Poor	N/A
Devonport	Stockton Town Centre	TS18 2LE	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Excellent	Average	Below Average	N/A
Earls Meadow	Ingleby Barwick South	TS17 0PL	Ingleby B'k	Doorstep	SBC	Average	Good	Poor	Poor	N/A
<i>Elmwood Centre (planned)</i>	<i>Hartburn</i>	<i>TS18 5EP</i>	<i>Stockton</i>	<i>Doorstep</i>	<i>SBC</i>			<i>Not applicable</i>		
Grangefield Park	Grangefield	TS18 4LY	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Average	Below Average	N/A
<i>Hardwick CP (planned)</i>	<i>Harwick & Salters Lane</i>	<i>TS19 8QE</i>	<i>Stockton</i>	<i>Doorstep</i>	<i>SBC</i>			<i>Not applicable</i>		
Harold Wilson	Village	TS17 0HG	Thornaby	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Average	Average	N/A
Hazeldean	Ingleby Barwick North	TS17 5NJ	Ingleby B'k	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Average	Below Average	N/A
High Grange	Billingham North	TS23 3UE	Billingham	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Below Average	Below Average	N/A
Hillbrook	Ingleby Barwick North	TS17 5BN	Ingleby B'k	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Average	Below Average	N/A
John Whitehead Park	Billingham Central	TS23 2DD	Billingham	Destination	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Good	Good
Leven Park	Yarm	TS15 9EY	Yarm	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Excellent	Average	Below Average	N/A
Limbrick Avenue	Fairfield	TS19 7PP	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Average	Below Average	Poor	Poor	N/A
Littleboy Park	Mandale & Victoria	TS17 7LD	Thornaby	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Below Average	N/A

APPENDIX 1: Stockton-on-Tees Outdoor Play Provision – Updated RoSPA Assessments (Mar 24)

(continued)

Site	Ward	P'code	Town/ Village	Designation	Owner	Site Assessment	Ambience	Toddler	Junior	Teen
Long Newton	Eaglescliffe West	TS21 1BZ	Long Newton	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Good	Poor	Poor	N/A
Mary Street	Mandale & Victoria	TS17 7EW	Thornaby	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Good	Poor	Poor	N/A
Mill Lane	Stockton Town Centre	TS18 1BL	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor	N/A
Newham Grange Park	Bishopsgarth & Elm Tree	TS19 8AA	Stockton	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Below Average	Below Average	Poor	N/A
Northshore	Stockton Town Centre	TS18 2SQ	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Excellent	Below Average	Poor	N/A
Port Clarence	Billingham South	TS2 1SH	Billingham	Neighbourhood	SBC	Good	Average	Poor	Average	Good
Preston Park	Eaglescliffe East	TS18 3RH	Eaglescliffe	Destination	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Good	N/A
Primrose Hill MUGA	Newtown		Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
Ragworth Comm Centre	Roseworth	TS19 0LN	Stockton	Neighbourhood	SBC	Below Average	Average	Poor	Poor	Poor
Rievaulx Avenue Skate Park	Billingham Central		Billingham	Doorstep	SBC					
Redbrook	Roseworth	TS19 9HJ	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Average	Average	N/A
Rochester Road	Roseworth	TS19 9DZ	Stockton	Neighbourhood	SBC	Average	Good	N/A	Below Average	Average
Romano Park	Ingleby Barwick South	TS17 0QP	Ingleby B'k	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	N/A
Romney Green	Billingham North	TS23 3GQ	Billingham	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Below Average	Poor	Poor	N/A
Ropner Park	Ropner	TS18 4DT	Stockton	Destination	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Average	Average	N/A
Simonside	Ingleby Barwick South	TS17 0PE	Ingleby B'k	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Average	Poor	Poor	N/A
South Thornaby	Stainsby Hill	TS17 9JG	Thornaby	Neighbourhood	SBC	Good	Good	Below Average	Average	N/A
<i>S'ton Waterfront (Planned)</i>	<i>Stockton Town Centre</i>	<i>TS18 3AD</i>	<i>Stockton</i>	<i>Destination</i>	<i>SBC</i>			<i>Not applicable</i>		
Thorpe Thewles	Northern Parishes	TS21 3JW	T Thewles	Doorstep	SBC	Below Average	Good	Below Average	Below Average	N/A
Tinkers Yard	Norton North	TS20 1NP	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Average	N/A

APPENDIX 1: Stockton-on-Tees Outdoor Play Provision – Updated RoSPA Assessments (Mar 24)

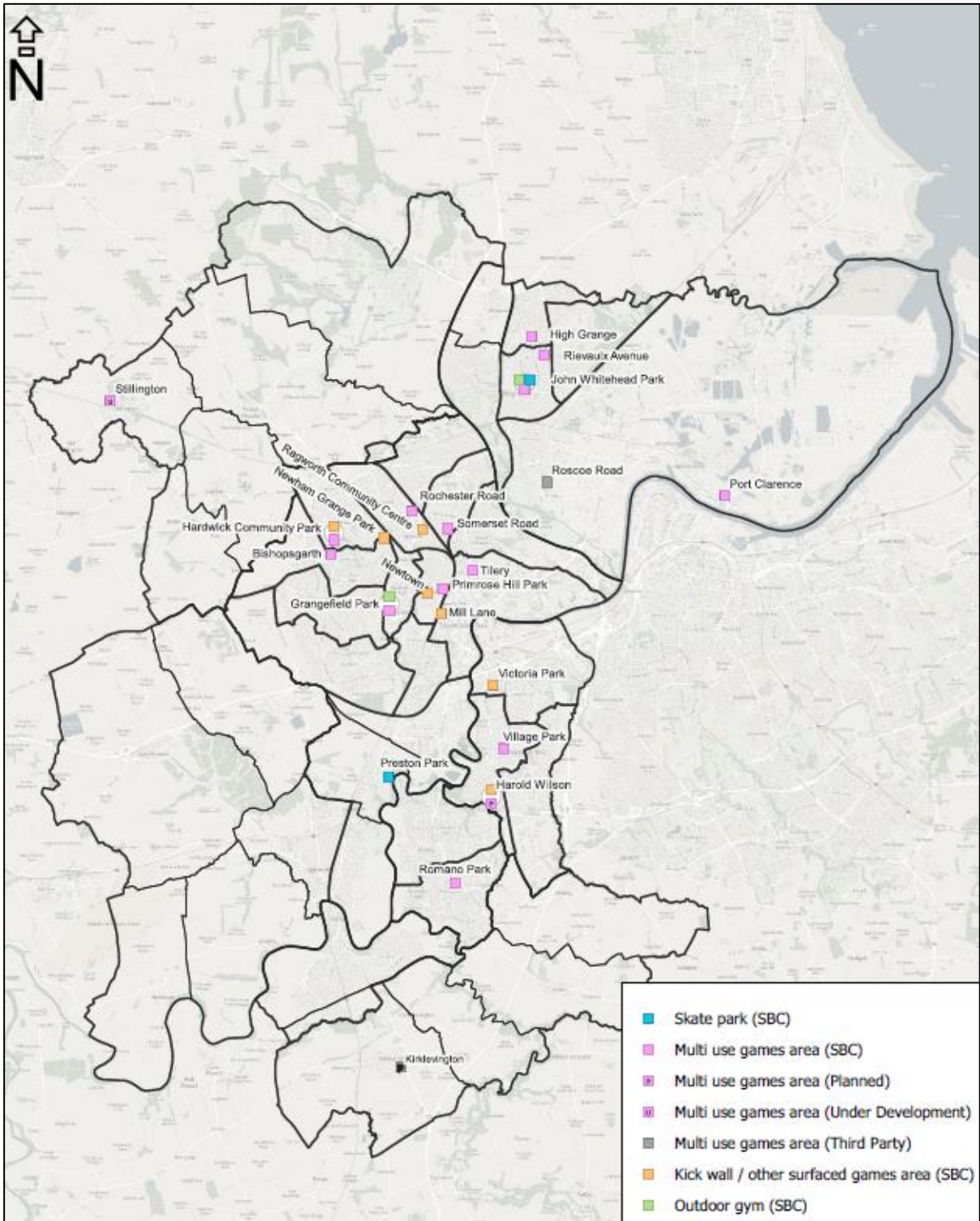
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Site	Ward	P'code	Town/ Village	Designation	Owner	Site Assessment	Ambience	Toddler	Junior	Teen
Victoria Park	Mandale & Victoria	TS17 6HJ	Thornaby	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Excellent	N/A
Village Park	Village	TS17 8JT	Thornaby	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Average	Average	Below Average
Windmill Park	Ingeby Barwick South	TS17 0JH	Ingeby B'k	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Average	Average	N/A
Wynyard Woodland Park	Northern Parishes	TS21 3JG	T Thewles	Destination	SBC	Good	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Below Average

RoSPA Play Value Assessments

- * The Play Value of each element of the site should be looked upon individually and assessed against the purpose that the operator has designated for the site (ie Toddler, Junior, Mixed, teenage etc).
- * The Operator should aim for a minimum rating of Good for; the Site Overall, Ambience, and for those age groups for which the site is designed for.
- * The assessments given are RoSPAs assessments and are not national averages. In practice a site rated "average" is probably above the national average

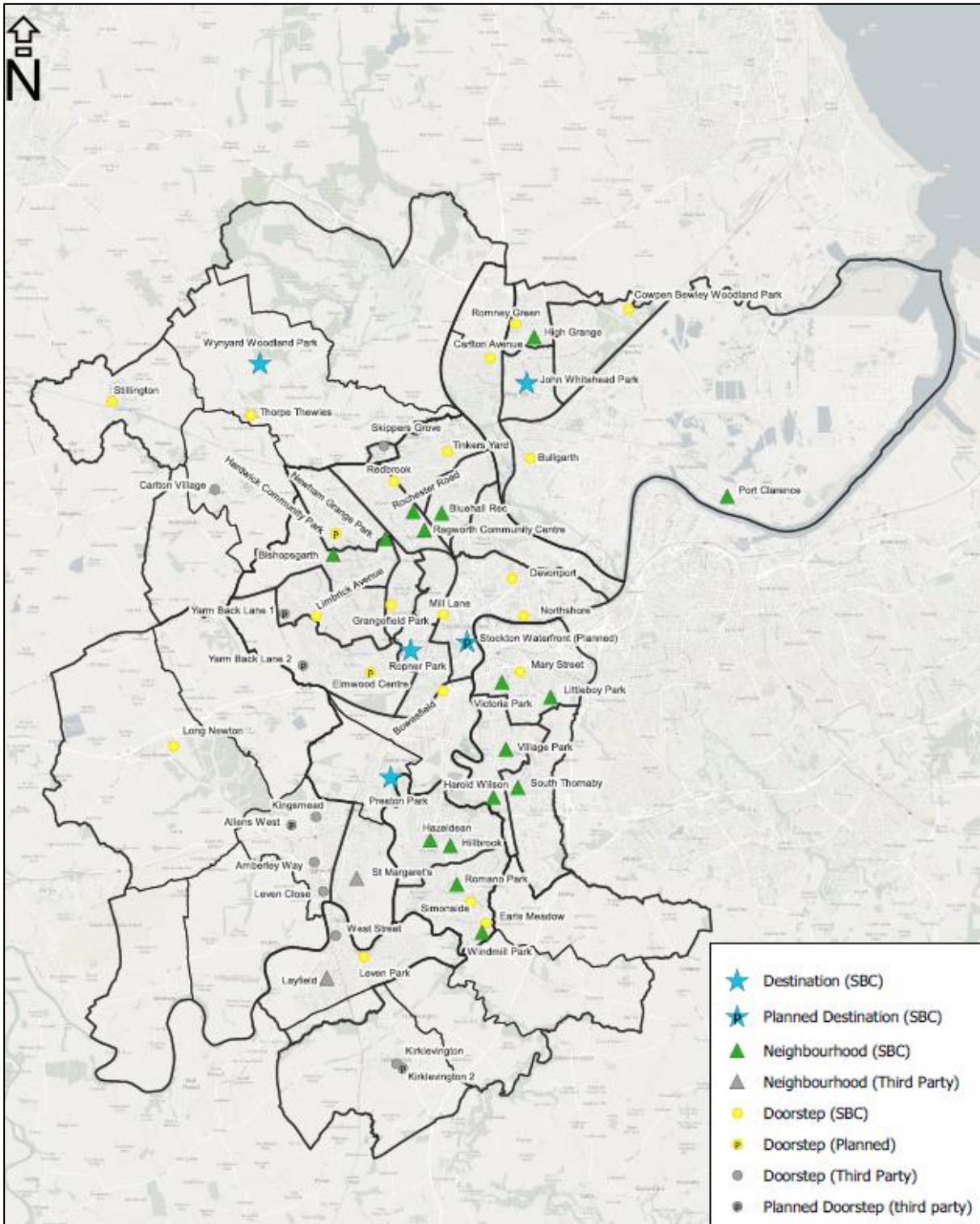
APPENDIX 2: Stockton-on-Tees Informal Sport Facilities – Distribution (Dec 23)



APPENDIX 3: Stockton-on-Tees Informal Sport Facilities – List (Dec 23)

Site	Town / Village	Type:				Owner	Ward	Postcode
		Skate park	Multi use games area	Kick wall / other surfaced games area	Outdoor gym			
Bishopsgarth	Stockton		✓			SBC	Bishopsgarth & Elm Tree	TS19 8EL
Grangefield Park	Stockton		✓		✓	SBC	Grangedfield	TS18 4LY
Hardwick Community Park	Stockton		✓			SBC	Hardwick	TS19 8RQ
Harold Wilson	Thornaby		Planned	✓		SBC	Village	TS17 0HG
High Grange	Billingham		✓			SBC	Billingham North	TS23 3UE
John Whitehead Park	Billingham	✓	✓		✓	SBC	Billingham Central	TS23 2DD
Kirklevington	Kirklevington		Planned			Third party	Yarm	TS15 9YZ
Mill Lane	Stockton			✓		SBC	Stockton Town Centre	TS18 1BL
Newham Grange Park	Stockton			✓		SBC	Bishopsgarth & Elm Tree	TS19 8AA
Newtown	Stockton			✓		SBC	Newtown	TS19 0AT
Port Clarence	Billingham		✓			SBC	Billingham South	TS2 1SH
Preston Park	Eaglescliffe	✓				SBC	Eaglescliffe East	TS18 3RH
Primrose Hill Park	Stockton		✓			SBC	Newtown	TS19 0GA
Ragworth Community Centre	Stockton			✓		SBC	Roseworth	TS19 0FB
Rievaulx Avenue	Billingham		✓			SBC	Billingham West	TS23 2BD
Rochester Road	Stockton		✓			SBC	Roseworth	TS19 9DZ
Romano Park	Ingleby Barwick		✓			SBC	Ingelbey Barwick South	TS17 0QP
Roscoe Road	Billingham		✓			Third party	Billingham South	TS23 1HP
Somerset Road	Stockton		✓			SBC	Norton Central	TS20 2ND
Stillington	Stillington		Under development			SBC	Northern Parishes	TS21 1JL
Tilery	Stockton		✓			SBC	Stockton Town Centre	TS20 2AU
Victoria Park	Thornaby			✓		SBC	Mandale & Victoria	TS17 6HJ
Village Park	Thornaby		✓			SBC	Village	TS17 8JT

APPENDIX 4: Stockton-on-Tees Play Areas – Distribution (Dec 23)



APPENDIX 5: Stockton-on-Tees Play Areas – List (Dec 23)

Site	Town/ Village	Designation	Owner	Play Value (2018 assessments)			Ward	P'code
				Toddler	Junior	Teen		
Amberley Way	Eaglescliffe	Doorstep	Eggle' & Eaglecliffe PC	Poor	Poor	N/A	Eaglescliffe	TS16 0NQ
Bishopsgarth	Stockton	Neighbourhood	SBC	Average	Average	Average	Bishopsgarth & Elm Tree	TS19 8EL
Bluehall Rec	Stockton	Neighbourhood	SBC	Average	Good	Good	Norton Central	TS20 2JS
Bowesfield	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Poor	Poor	Poor	Eaglescliffe East	TS18 3HD
Bullgarth	Billingham	Doorstep	SBC	Poor	Poor	N/A	Billingham South	TS23 1ER
Carlton Avenue	Billingham	Doorstep	SBC	Poor	Below Average	Poor	Billingham West	TS22 5HU
Carlton Village	Carlton	Doorstep	Carlton PC	Not available			Northern Parishes	TS21 1QD
Cowpen Bewley W Park	Billingham	Doorstep	SBC	Average	Below Average	Average	Billingham East	TS23 3NF
Devonport	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Improvements made since 2018			Stockton Town Centre	TS18 2LE
Earls Meadow	Ingleby B'k	Doorstep	SBC	Below Average	Poor	Poor	Ingleby Barwick South	TS17 0PL
<i>Elmwood Centre (planned)</i>	<i>Stockton</i>	<i>Doorstep</i>	<i>SBC</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>			<i>Hartburn</i>	<i>TS18 5EP</i>
Grangefield Park	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Good	Below Average	Below Average	Grangefield	TS18 4LY
<i>Hardwick CP (planned)</i>	<i>Stockton</i>	<i>Doorstep</i>	<i>SBC</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>			<i>Harwick & Salters Lane</i>	<i>TS19 8QE</i>
Harold Wilson	Thornaby	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent (2023)	Good (2023)	N/A	Village	TS17 0HG
Hazeldean	Ingleby B'k	Neighbourhood	SBC	Average	Average	Below Average	Ingleby Barwick North	TS17 5NJ
High Grange	Billingham	Neighbourhood	SBC	Below Average	Below Average	Below Average	Billingham North	TS23 3UE
Hillbrook	Ingleby B'k	Neighbourhood	SBC	Below Average	Average	Below Average	Ingleby Barwick North	TS17 5BN
John Whitehead Park	Billingham	Destination	SBC	Good	Excellent	Excellent	Billingham Central	TS23 2DD
Kirklevington	Kirklevington	Doorstep	Kirklevington & C L PC	Improvements made since 2018			Yarm	TS15 9LQ
<i>Kirklevington 2 (planned)</i>	<i>Kirklevington</i>	<i>Doorstep</i>	<i>TBC</i>	<i>Not available</i>			<i>Yarm</i>	<i>TS15 9YZ</i>
Kingsmead	Eaglescliffe	Doorstep	Eggle' & Eaglecliffe PC	Poor	Poor	Poor	Eaglescliffe West	TS16 0SD

APPENDIX 5: Stockton-on-Tees Play Areas – List (Dec 23)

(continued)

Leven Close	Eaglescliffe	Doorstep	Eggle' & Eaglecliffe PC	Poor	Poor	Poor	Eaglescliffe West	TS16 0JT
Leven Park	Yarm	Doorstep	SBC	Average	Average	Average	Yarm	TS15 9EY
Limbrick Avenue	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Poor	Poor	poor	Fairfield	TS19 7PP
Littleboy Park	Thornaby	Neighbourhood	SBC	Good	Average	N/A	Mandale & Victoria	TS17 7LD
Long Newton	Long Newton	Doorstep	SBC	Poor	Poor	Below Average	Eaglescliffe West	TS21 1BZ
Mary Street	Thornaby	Doorstep	SBC	N/A	Poor	Poor	Mandale & Victoria	TS17 7EW
Mill Lane	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Below Average	Poor	Poor	Stockton Town Centre	TS18 1BL
Newham Grange Park	Stockton	Neighbourhood	SBC	Average	Below Average	Below Average	Bishopsgarth & Elm Tree	TS19 8AA
Northshore	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Not available			Stockton Town Centre	TS18 2SQ
Norton Meadows	Stockton	Doorstep	Developer	Not available			Norton West	TS21 3NB
Port Clarence	Billingham	Neighbourhood	SBC	Poor	Average	Good	Billingham South	TS2 1SH
Preston Park	Eaglescliffe	Destination	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Eaglescliffe East	TS18 3RH
Ragworth Comm Centre	Stockton	Neighbourhood	SBC	Poor	Poor	Poor	Roseworth	TS19 0LN
Redbrook	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Below Average	Below Average	Below Average	Roseworth	TS19 9HJ
Rochester Road	Stockton	Neighbourhood	SBC	N/A	Below Average	Average	Roseworth	TS19 9DZ
Romano Park	Ingleby B'k	Neighbourhood	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Ingleby Barwick South	TS17 0QP
Romney Green	Billingham	Doorstep	SBC	Not available			Billingham North	TS23 3GQ
Ropner Park	Stockton	Destination	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Ropner	TS18 4DT
Simonside	Ingleby B'k	Doorstep	SBC	Below Average	Poor	Poor	Ingleby Barwick South	TS17 0PE
Skippers Grove	Stockton	Doorstep	Developer	Not available			Roseworth	TS21 3NB
South Thornaby	Thornaby	Neighbourhood	SBC	Poor	Below Average	Below Average	Stainsby Hill	TS17 9JG
Stillington	Stillington	Doorstep	SBC	Below Average	Poor	Poor	Northern Parishes	TS21 1LF
<i>S'ton Waterfront (Planned)</i>	<i>Stockton</i>	<i>Destination</i>	<i>SBC</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>			<i>Stockton Town Centre</i>	<i>TS18 3AD</i>
St Margaret's	Eaglescliffe	Neighbourhood	Eggle' & Eaglecliffe PC	Not available			Eaglescliffe East	TS16 9EG

APPENDIX 5: Stockton-on-Tees Play Areas – List (Dec 23)

(continued)

Thorpe Thewles	T Thewles	Doorstep	SBC	Below Average	Below Average	Poor	Northern Parishes	TS21 3JW
Tinkers Yard	Stockton	Doorstep	SBC	Constructed since 2018			Norton North	TS20 1NP
Victoria Park	Thornaby	Neighbourhood	SBC	Good (2023)	Good (2023)	Average (2023)	Mandale & Victoria	TS17 6HJ
Village Park	Thornaby	Neighbourhood	SBC	Average	Average	Average	Village	TS17 8JT
West Street	Yarm	Doorstep	Yarm TC	Poor	Poor	N/A	Yarm	TS15 9DB
Windmill Park	Ingleby B'k	Neighbourhood	SBC	Below Average	Average	Below Average	Ingeby Barwick South	TS17 0JH
Layfield	Yarm	Neighbourhood	Yarm TC	Poor	Below Average	Average	Yarm	TS15 9DN
Wynyard Woodland Park	T Thewles	Destination	SBC	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Northern Parishes	TS21 3JG

APPENDIX 6: Committee Site Visits (Dec 23)

Preston Park (Destination)



Observations / Comments

- A couple of pieces of equipment currently out of commission (need replacing).
- Zip line removed as it had gone rotten, and high-rope climbing frame / walkway / slide structure is now 10 years-old (potentially moving towards the end of its life-span). However, existing focus is only on maintaining equipment, not replacing it (which costs significantly more).
- Not enough funding available for redevelopment of play site (even though plans are in place) – allocated monies for Preston Park is for the main building, not the park area.
- Difficult to achieve inclusivity here.
- Bark regularly topped-up but has to be raked every day – in this regard, it may be better to have a different type of ground surface (pulverised / crumb tyres an option, but concerns have been raised about potential risks to health regarding such material). SBC trialling carpet over existing soft surface.
- Integration with landscape was a key part of planning for the Preston Park outdoor play space.
- More high value equipment for teenagers within the play area, though this increases maintenance challenges and safety considerations. As such, more regular maintenance is required at this site (by two officers on a daily basis).



Simonside Grove, Ingleby Barwick (Doorstep)



Observations / Comments

- Sense of tokenism about this site – very little play value provided by the developer.
- Use could be very low given its proximity to residents' houses (a number of which will likely have personal play equipment within their own garden spaces) and nearby Windmill Park.
- Potential to convert this land into a shared community facility (e.g. orchard / garden) to benefit the environment and the local population.



Windmill Park, Ingleby Barwick (Neighbourhood)



Observations / Comments

- Next to a school that was involved in the park's development (which is now 12 years-old).
- Maintenance requirements not overly burdensome (general wear and tear), despite high usage – zip line does not cause maintenance problems.
- Aimed more at younger children (older children tend to navigate towards nearby Romano Park) – less vandalism occurs.
- No access to WiFi (which can encourage young people to gather) – this is only available at Wynyard Woodland Park.
- Park uses slopes / environment to create value.
- Simonside Grove (above) predates this park – there would be even less relevance for Simonside if this had already existed, given their proximity to one another.



South Thornaby (Neighbourhood)



Observations / Comments

- Located in centre of community – spread across three designated zones with different types of equipment in each (aimed at different age-groups).
- Well positioned given the nearby proximity of a community centre.
- Issues with vandalism / anti-social behaviour – some equipment removed.
- Surface recently re-painted.
- Value of some equipment questionable (quite bland) – Council does get involved in terms of choices made but developers sometimes are unwilling to engage.



Victoria Park (Neighbourhood)



Observations / Comments

- Previous issues with vandalism at this site (some shards of glass evident during the visit).
- Recently developed as part of Town Deal.
- Location of play space (surrounded by housing) gives it a good community feel.
- Variety of equipment for all ages.
- Roundabout is wheelchair-friendly – demonstration of what is possible regarding accessibility.



APPENDIX 7: Ropner Park, Stockton – Developments (Mar 24)

