

NEWBIGGIN PLAY AREA STRATEGY



INTRODUCTION

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, s.19 gives the Newbiggin by the Sea Town Council the power to provide a wide range of recreational facilities.

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 and this ultimately benefits the community in which children and young people live.

When children are asked about what they think is important in their lives, playing and friends is usually at the top of the list.

Play England's Charter for Children's Play describes play as: 'what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons.'

Play has also frequently been described as 'what children and young people do when they are not being told what to do by adults'.

Research conducted by Play England shows that play has many benefits for children, families and the wider community, as well as improving health and quality of life. Recent research suggests that children's access to good play provision can:

- increase their self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect
- improve and maintain their physical and mental health
- give them the opportunity to mix with other children
- allow them to increase their confidence through developing new skills
- promote their imagination, independence and creativity
- offer opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds to play together
- provide opportunities for developing social skills and learning
- build resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving, and dealing with new and novel situations
- provide opportunities to learn about their environment and the wider community.

Evidence collated by Play England is also available that outlines wider benefits of play provision for families and communities, suggesting that:

- parents can feel more secure knowing that their children are happy, safe and enjoying themselves
- families benefit from healthier, happier children
- buildings and facilities used by play services are frequently seen as a focal point for communities
- it offers opportunities for social interaction for the wider community and supports the development of a greater sense of community spirit, promoting social cohesion
- public outside spaces have an important role in the everyday lives of children and young people, especially as a place for meeting friends
- parks and other green spaces are popular with adults taking young children out to play and for older children and young people to spend time together.

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This play area strategy will give focus to the needs of children and young people throughout Newbiggin by the Sea. This should bring about change, innovation and the further development of play in the town.

PURPOSE

2.1 *The purpose of this Play Area Strategy is to:*

- Effectively manage the play facilities in Newbiggin by the Sea
- Deliver a more even distribution of accessible play areas which offer a qualitative play experience across Newbiggin by the Sea.
- To ensure that children living in and visiting the town will experience a safe, stimulating, challenging and improved environment for play in the future.
- To find alternative ways of funding play area provision and attract additional resources.

BENEFITS

3.1 This strategy will deliver the following benefits to children and young people aged 3 – 17 years:

- More choice in better play provision and easily accessible within walking distance of residents.
- Users feeling safe in the local play environment.
- An enjoyable leisure experience in an improved local environment.
- Better access for the disabled and people from other disadvantaged sections of the community.
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CONTEXT

4.1 The Council has provided children's play equipment in Newbiggin by the Sea since 2012, taking responsibility for several play opportunities that were formerly administered by Wansbeck District Council until 2009 then Northumberland County Council until 2012. These play opportunities can be found in the town's parks and open spaces. Some of the opportunities are still under the administration of Northumberland County Council

4.2 Pressure on the future maintenance of these facilities comes from many factors and is increasing:

- Incomplete records from the former District Council/County Council of existing play equipment, installation dates and supplier details,
- The age of some of the equipment is so old that parts are increasingly difficult to get hold of.
- The Health and Safety Executive recommends safety surfacing be provided with an assurance of complying with BS7188 and EN1177; case law arising from playground accidents have suggested the courts recognise that the provision of suitable surfaces represents good practice, especially under new equipment.
- Potential devolution of further play areas from the Principal Authority.

4.3 Clearly major renovation has implications for the Council's spending decisions. Investment in relation to play equipment must be taken within the context of the overall Council budget. The possibility of attracting external funding through partnership working, or sponsorship, will be a significant factor in any future provision.

4.4 There are currently 8 sites with children's play equipment in the town. Under the responsibility of Newbiggin by the Sea Town Council:

- Attlee Terrace
- Spital Burn

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- Central Park
- Skate Park and adjacent Multi use Games Area

Under the responsibility of Northumberland County Council

- Spital Estate
- Moor Estate
- Multi use Games Area – Long Park
- Natural Play Area – Long Park
- Milburn Park Tennis Courts – no longer in use.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

5.1 Using this current guidance from Field in Trust's benchmark standards will help to ensure that the provision of outdoor sport, play and informal open space is of a sufficient size to enable effective use; is located in an accessible location and near dwellings; and of a quality to maintain longevity and to encourage its continued use.

5.2 Fields in Trust's identify 3 categories of play area:

- **Local Area for Play (LAP)** - aimed at very young children; a low-key games area. Aimed at 4 – 6-year olds and younger children form play activities close to home. Catchment area = 1 minutes walking time for an accompanied child or approximately 100m walking distance.
- **Local Equipment Area of Play (LEAP)** – aimed at children who can go out to play independently, a small play area with about 5 types of equipment. Aimed at 4 – 8-year olds. Consider needs of under 4s and slightly over 8s. Catchment area = 5 minutes walking time for an accompanied child, or approximately 400m walking distance.
- **Neighbourhood Equipment Play Area (NEAP)** – aimed at older children. delivering recreational benefits by using attenuation and storage areas for play and/or sports areas a larger play area with about 8 types of equipment. Aimed at 8 – 14 age group. Facilities for wheeled and ball play should be provided. Catchment area = 15 minutes walking time for either accompanied or unaccompanied children, which is about 1000m walking distance.
- These can be complemented by other facilities including Multi Use
 - Games Areas (MUGAs) and skateboard parks etc.
 - Open spaces can also provide dual use for Sustainable urban
 - Drainage Systems (SuDS), The NPFA categories relate to Newbiggin's play areas as detailed:

5.3: Using the Field in Trust formula, all the play areas within Newbiggin are a mix of LAP, LEAP and NEAP classifications.

SAFETY STANDARDS

6.1 A challenge is presented by ever more demanding safety standards for play equipment. The standard of any European country has been acceptable in the UK and in general this means EN 1176 applies. Test methods for surfacing are covered by BS 7188 and EN 1177

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974)

This is the major legislation covering playgrounds. There is a duty under Sections 3 and 4 to ensure the health and safety of users, so far as is reasonably practicable. The Health and Safety Executive looks for a systems approach to safety and for playgrounds to meet relevant standards or guidance. The HSE has a guidance note on EN1176

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Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)

Require a risk assessment of facilities, a safety policy for meeting the risks 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. There is a limited duty of care to trespassers.

Notices have limited applicability.

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (2002)

Covers the use of chemicals for cleaning playgrounds.

Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986

Covers pesticides for weed control.

Environmental Protection Act (1990)

Affects control and removal of litter (including dog fouling)

6.3 Play areas at present receive a weekly inspection by a competent person, inspections reports are signed and dated and retained for 21 years.

6.4 Play areas receive an annual inspection by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. Which is retained for 21 years.

6.5 Risk Assessments are in place for the play areas and are reviewed annually, copies of historical risk assessments are retained.

6.6 Adequate insurance provision is in place for all play opportunities and reviewed annually.

SHORT TERM MEASURES

- An audit of all existing play provision is to be carried out. The asset records for each play area needs to be updated, recording individual items of play equipment, manufacturer details, installation dates, maintenance guides and structural warranties.
- A review should be conducted of the weekly inspection process (are the inspection sheets that are provided adequate to record sufficient details)
- Plan a programme and timetable of repairs to existing equipment
- Ensure that the Principal Authority keep the play opportunities under their responsibility in a good state of repair.

LONG TERM MEASURES

There is a clear need to plan for replacement equipment to ensure that compliance is met within a realistic timescale through a policy of removal or replacement. There is a clear implication of increased costs based upon the need for a development programme of play area improvements linked to compliance with the European Safety Standards and this will be met through the planning of the Council's capital replacement programme.

7.1 The basis for future provision must be based on the premise of providing high quality play provision accessible across the town that can be funded adequately by the Council without putting

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an excessive burden on the Council's finances or the tax payer. A priority programme for capital works for new play equipment will be set based on the recording of information in the short term.

7.2 It is also proposed that a consultation be undertaken with residents/groups on the future play provision required. An independent audit of the current play provision and anticipated future needs in Newbiggin by the Sea may also be required to be undertaken by a specialist in leisure and recreation, bearing in mind one of the aims of the Town Council *'to encourage and support an increase in tourism'*

7.3 It is important to consider teenage provision separately, as not catering for the needs of young people between the ages of 13-17 years can give rise to problems. Less suitable places are found to congregate, such as street corners or children's play equipment. This can lead to the use and sometimes abuse of equipment not intended for them.

7.4 The Council has adequate provision for young people in this respect, most notably the Skate Park, and adjacent Multi-use games area.

FINANCE

8.1 The Council has already spent approximately £50,000 on the refurbishment and repair of Attlee Terrace between April 2015 and August 2017. It also provides an annual maintenance budget for day to day repairs for all the sites. It may be that an annual figure of (£10,000) per annum be allocated to the Capital Replacement budget for the next four years with the view that such monies could be used as match funding to attract external grants.

The Council spent £27,000 on the refurbishment and repair of Central Park in 2018 which included a grant of £7,500 was identified through Northumberland County Council's Housing Developer Fund for Newbiggin by the Sea in January 2018.

8.2 No maintenance was carried out on the play areas by either Wansbeck District Council or Northumberland County Council during their respective handover of responsibilities in 2009 and 2012.

8.3. Northumberland County Council is keen to see the development and improvement of children's play and outdoor sports and recreation facilities. In most of Northumberland, S106 money is collected based on individual agreements for precise amounts for a specifically agreed purpose.

8.4 Other funding through Central Government or the Big Lottery Fund is available on a periodic basis.

8.5 The development of recreational facilities could be identified as a priority in a Neighbourhood Plan.

8.6 Northumberland County Council suggests that further monies will not be available outside of the existing grant schemes and even these have recently been significantly reduced due to the current economic constraints.

8.7 Some local fund-raising or crowd fund raising could be undertaken by a pro-active local community group for one play area.

8.8 Ultimately, much of the re-development needs to be based around the assumption that the core funding will be through the Council itself, with other funding agencies approached on an 'as and when' basis if an appropriate funding stream becomes available.

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At the same time, encouragement should be given to local community groups to actively fund raise for their local play area, so it can be advanced in priority order.

Future Aims

9.1 Based on the information available about future play area provision, the Council should be aiming for:

- Safe playing environments for children of all age groups in Newbiggin by the Sea, where sites are clearly visible from public places and the problems of anti-social behaviour and other crimes are minimised.
- The needs of young people (age 13 – 17) are considered by providing separate areas for them to meet and facilities for ball games including multi use game areas.
- Young people to help shape the design of the facilities.
- More residents enjoying easy access to play areas across the town.
- Better access to play facilities for the disabled and people from other disadvantaged sections of the community.
- Attractive play areas where both children and adults want to stay.

Implementation

10.1 A comprehensive action plan over time will develop a range of actions to achieve each of the respective objectives of the strategy whilst demonstrating who will be responsible for the implementation of each of the actions, what the intended targets will be, and what the measures of success/expected outcomes will be.

10.2 Like all strategies, success depends on the ongoing monitoring and review to ensure the intended outcomes are achieved and that the strategy is regularly reviewed and adjusted in the light of changing developments and needs.

10.3 This strategy is intended as a 'living document'. This means that at key points in its life, the Council will review and evaluate its scope, effectiveness, outcomes and relevance to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

10.4 In order to achieve this, it is recommended that the Council create an Environmental and Recreation Committee (amalgamating the remit of the Environmental Working Group) and delegating authority to undertake the following:

- Produce and review an action plan to implement the actions contained in the Play Area Strategy.
- Assess applications for funding and develop schemes.
- Constantly review and revise the strategy and action plan and report its findings to the Council for action.
- Report on and celebrate its success.