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## **KELSO PLAY PARKS PETITION**

**Report by Service Director Assets & Infrastructure**

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### **AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**24 October 2019**

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#### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report summarises the content and context of a petition received by the Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 6 August 2019. The petition, titled 'Save Kelso's Playparks', inclusive of the accompanying change.org submission, received a total of 492 signatures from the Borders Area.**

#### **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Scottish Borders Council proposed a Play Facilities Strategy as context for the substantial Capital investment of £5.036m in play facilities over a 10 year investment programme which was approved by Scottish Borders Council on 31 May 2018. The Council had agreed to review the distribution of play equipment provision across play parks in the Borders, which can 1) inform decision making around future investment in communities and 2) guide the rationalisation of obsolete play facilities which are deemed no longer fit for purpose, ensuring a cost neutral impact on established budgets within the service.
- 2.2 In conjunction with the strategic investment across the region, at Scottish Borders Council on 31 May 2018 members agreed to;
- Changes to the scheme of delegation to give authority to the Service Director Assets and Infrastructure to *"after consultation with local Members, the Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Legal Officer, declare play parks obsolete or those surplus to community requirements and arrange for the removal of equipment and disposal, if appropriate."*

Following approval, a report was taken to Cheviot Area Partnership on 19 June 2019.

- 2.3 In this context, officers have undertaken an appraisal of the wider network of play equipment aimed at responding to the issue of low play value, which SBC has within its play facilities assets. The evaluation has been undertaken to ensure that SBC retains and develops a network of valued, well equipped spaces for local communities. In the Scottish Borders currently the quantity of play provision is high per head of population, but the quality is very low (compared to national benchmarking). This diminishes the wider benefits of these facilities to communities. This programme of investment will address the challenge of balancing quantity against quality, ensuring optimal provision of play facilities across the Scottish Borders.

- 2.4 Low value play facilities, where there is a recognised need (i.e. they are the only play park in the locality) will be identified as priorities for potential future investment (subject to a future paper).
- 2.5 As no additional revenue resources are being provided to support the long term management and maintenance of the new play parks being created, the removal of obsolete facilities is essential to ensure there is a cost neutral impact on established budgets with the service. No play facility will be decommissioned until the appropriate investment in new facilities in that locality have been completed. Any sites of decommissioned play parks would be reviewed for future use; options such as local food growing, informal play or community use could be considered.
- 2.6 In the Kelso context, the following play parks were recommended for decommissioning:

PLAY PARK	PLAY VALUE	FIT SCORE	ALTERNATIVE LOCATION NEARBY
Kelso Berry Moss Court	L	14	Kelso Sydenham Court (B)
Kelso High Croft	L	13	Kelso Croft Park
Kelso Meadow Court	L	16	Kelso Croft Park
Kelso Orchard Park	M	20	Kelso Croft Park
Kelso Rosewood Gardens	L	16	Kelso Shedden Park
Kelso Springwood Rise	L	16	Kelso Wallaceneuk
Kelso Spylaw Park	L	15	Kelso Wallaceneuk
Kelso Sydenham Court (A)	L	14	Kelso Sydenham Court (B)
Kelso Woodside Gardens	L	14	Kelso Shedden Park

- 2.7 Details of the planned disinvestment along with an explanation about the reasons behind the need to decommission play parks were taken to all five Area Partnerships in early 2019. Following this a consultation was undertaken, inviting feedback via email or telephone. The responses to this are outlined in section 4 below.

### 3 PETITION

- 3.1 Of the 492 signatures received, 107 respondents included comments. Of these, 18% cited concerns about children's health and wellbeing, 13% cited concerns about proximity of nearest play facilities on offer and 2% cited concerns about road safety. The remaining 77% of comments comprised general objections to the proposal in principle.

### 4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Within the 72 responses received during the consultation process, 207 individual unsupportive comments were received, broken down geographically as follows;
- Berwickshire - 17%
  - Cheviot - 23%
  - Eildon - 23%
  - Teviot & Liddesdale - 22%
  - Tweeddale - 15%

4.2 The main concerns raised in these responses were across 4 broad themes:

Concerned about children’s health and wellbeing, independence and opportunity for social interaction	17%
Concerned about need for parks or safe and quiet spaces closer to home and/or distance to alternatives (9% regarding travel and times; 7% regarding dependency on cars/public transport; 5% regarding road safety)	14%
Concerned that the parks were currently well used	12%
Concerned that sites will become unsightly if left unmaintained	5%

A further 18 specific comments ranging from 3% to 0.5% of total were received, those being:

Lack of parking at alternative or new, need to invest in these smaller parks, currently in good condition/not obsolete, children not able to go to alternative or new on own, lack of maintenance currently so no cost so why close, increased carbon emissions from vehicle use/effect on climate change, lack of consultation, lack of toilets at new, parks provided through Developer Contribution/Planning Condition, new facilities don’t cater for age of children using the smaller parks, poor condition of equipment at alternatives, only facility in village, new housing planned so a short-sighted vision, big new parks are only for special visits, having more parks per head of population should be seen as a good thing, too few facilities as it is, a slap in the face to a community currently working with the council to mitigate the effect of cuts, and reduced choice.

4.3 A further 2 respondents put forward 3 supportive comments, those being:

Play park is hardly used, selling off the land to residents would reduce maintenance costs, and parents would like to take on the play park concerned.

Several queries for further information and/or discussion were also included.

## 5 FINANCE

5.1 The Parks and Environment Service have a revenue spend of approximately £100,000 per annum for maintaining play facilities.

5.2 In order to maintain the new play facilities approved at Council on 31 May 2018, it was highlighted, a reduction in a significant number of existing low value facilities would be required to ensure the revenue impact on the service was cost neutral.

5.3 The annual cost of maintaining the full programme of new play facilities is estimated at £30k, and low value parks to this value will be declared obsolete and decommissioned, once the appropriate investment in that locality has been completed.

5.4 A replacement fund has been created for the new facilities, to allow for replacement at the end of their useful life. The existing play facilities do not have such a fund, therefore, no budget exists, to refurbish or replace them in the future.

## 6 COMMENTARY

6.1 The response to the Consultation, and the petition, is summarised above at 4.2. Comments regarding the concerns raised during consultation and from the petition are noted below;

Concerns raised	Commentary
<i>Concerned about children's health and wellbeing, independence and opportunity for social interaction</i>	The removal of equipment will not preclude use of these space for recreation – once they are made safe they remain available to children and communities for informal recreation, community food growing/community gardening or other such community based usage. The Council may also consider the disposal of the asset.
<i>Concerned about need for parks or safe and quiet spaces closer to home and/or distance to alternatives (including travel times; dependency on cars/public transport; road safety)</i>	See above point – these spaces remain available to communities for local, informal use, therefore removing the need to travel for incidental play.
<i>Concerned that the parks were currently well used</i>	The Councils observed usage pattern is low or high. Low is defined as the area is never usually observed as in use when maintenance is taking place, and observations during maintenance suggest that play equipment is not frequently used. High is defined as the area is always in use when maintenance is taking place, and observations during maintenance suggest the equipment is very frequently used. According to officers observations from regular inspections these sites are deemed Low Usage.
<i>Concerned that sites will become unsightly if left unmaintained</i>	Sites will be cleared of all equipment and made available for alternative uses, mitigating any visual impact. The Council will continue to maintain the areas as fit for use.

**Approved by:**

**Martin Joyce**  
**Service Director Assets & Infrastructure**    **Signature .....**

**Author(s)**

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Jason Hedley	Chief Officer Roads

**Background Papers:**

Capital Programme 2018/19 – Investment in Play Areas and Outdoor Spaces - Report by Service Director Assets & Infrastructure. Scottish Borders Council, 31 May 2018

Public Play Facilities Strategy – Cheviot - Report by Service Director Assets & Infrastructure. Cheviot Area Partnership, 19 June 2019

**Previous Minute Reference:**

Scottish Borders Council, 31 May 2018, Item 9 -

<https://scottishborders.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=132&MId=3726&Ver=4>

Cheviot Area Partnership, 19 June, 2019, Item 3 -

<https://scottishborders.moderngov.co.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=23290>

**Note** – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Craig Blackie can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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