



Huntingdonshire District Council

Final Report

Private & Confidential

September 2025



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1. Executive Summary

This report presents Huntingdonshire District Council's 2025 Play Sufficiency Assessment, providing a district-wide evaluation of access, quality, safety, and inclusivity of children's play spaces. It draws on extensive consultation, data analysis, and benchmarking to present an evidence-based assessment of current service provision and future opportunities. The findings demonstrate clear areas of strength to consolidate, as well as pressing issues that demand targeted action.

This evidence points to a dual imperative: to build on Huntingdonshire District Council's strong legacy of play provision while identifying practical pathways for continuous improvement. The recommended actions form part of a cohesive strategy to support sustainable development, enhance resident wellbeing, and ensure value for money in the stewardship of public spaces.

1.1 Key Findings and Strategic Implications

- **Safety and Quality:** Health and Safety inspections carried out by Handsam identified a small number of sites where surfacing, signage, or individual equipment components may require attention. In most cases, remedial works are already underway or planned as part of ongoing maintenance schedules. These reports should be consulted alongside the council's internal H&S reports before being actioned. Where continued investment is not feasible due to low usage or recurring vandalism, alternative options (such as rationalisation or redesign) may be appropriate.
- **Patterns of Use:** While many sites were well-used, a number of smaller or less accessible locations were observed with limited or no users at the time of assessment. Usage patterns often reflect factors such as visibility, proximity to housing, and site features, rather than quality alone. The Current Provision Report provides a detailed breakdown.
- **Accessibility and Inclusion:** Some sites offer inclusive play features. Many older sites were designed before contemporary accessibility standards were introduced, and retrofitting is not always straightforward. Nonetheless, there is a clear opportunity to prioritise accessible, multi-generational design in future upgrades and new developments.
- **Equity Across Localities:** There are natural variations in provision across a large and predominantly rural district. Some communities, particularly in growth areas or historic estates, rely on older sites that may benefit from targeted improvement. Addressing these

imbalances is key to ensuring all residents enjoy safe, inclusive, and engaging places to play.

- **Provision for Older Children:** While some traditional youth facilities such as multi-use games areas were underused during assessment visits, consultation suggests demand for more adventurous, flexible, and socially oriented spaces. This presents an opportunity to reimagine provision in partnership with young people.

1.2 Action Planning

This report proposes a phased five-year capital delivery programme that balances current needs with long-term aspirations.

- Phase 1 focuses on immediate safety works and high-need sites, such as a full site reviews at Yaxley and youth provision in Ramsey.
- Phase 2 targets inclusive upgrades in Amber-rated areas such as Godmanchester and St Ives (where appropriate).
- Phase 3 consolidates earlier gains through retrofitting and innovation pilots.

These projects are supported by four cross-cutting reforms:

- A governance and compliance review
- The integration of inclusive design standards
- Youth-led co-design processes
- An equity-based investment framework

2. Introduction

This report provides Huntingdonshire District Council with an independent assessment of local play needs, challenges, and opportunities. Drawing on data, stakeholder feedback, and benchmarking, it offers a rounded view of current provision and future potential. The analysis recognises both the Council's achievements and the constraints of managing a large, diverse portfolio across a rural and historic district. The purpose is to establish a clear, evidence-based baseline to guide strategic, proportionate, and sustainable decision-making. Rather than suggesting uniform solutions, the report highlights tailored approaches aligned to local context, community priorities, and available resources.

As part of the consultation, respondents referenced a number of play areas not managed by HDC. These have been retained to give a holistic view of the wider play landscape, but are identified below:

- Judith's Field
- Butcher Drive
- Millfields Park
- Warboys Park
- Roman's Edge
- Alconbury
- Crescent
- Dunnock Way

The maintenance and planning of these parks does not fall within the remit of Huntingdonshire District Council. However, they should be considered within council-wide strategic planning through collaboration with the relevant authorities where possible, in order to provide the best possible landscape of play provision for the communities served by HDC.

3. Community Profile

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of demographic and economic data across the Huntingdonshire District, contributing to a wider assessment of outdoor play opportunities in the region. Understanding the district's population characteristics is essential for the evaluation of current and future demand for play opportunities across open spaces and ensuring inclusive, accessible provision for all children and young people.

The intention is to build further upon the previous engagement work delivered by HDC through the development of their 'Healthy Open Spaces Strategy'¹. This strategy involved a community questionnaire as part of the consultation process in which barriers to outdoor play were explored. Through additional consultation Premier Advisory Group has explored the trends identified by the District Council.

This report explores key demographic indicators, including population size, growth trends, and population projections, offering insight into how Huntingdonshire's community is evolving. Birth rates are examined to anticipate future needs, while economic activity levels provide context on employment patterns and household incomes, which all influence access to play and recreational facilities. The report investigates ethnic diversity within the district to support culturally inclusive play strategies and assesses data on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to ensure play provision meets the requirements of children with additional needs.

Where available, the analysis utilises Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) and ward-level data to provide a detailed local perspective. This is complemented by district-level data and, where necessary, local authority-held statistics. Any relevant internal council data sources will be reviewed to ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of play opportunities across Huntingdonshire.

3.1 Population and Birth Rates

According to the 2021 Census data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Huntingdonshire's population increased by 6.7%, adding approximately 11,300 new residents since 2011, bringing the total to around 180,800 in 2021. This growth is slightly higher than the overall increase for England,

¹ Huntingdonshire District Council (2020) *HDC Healthy Open Spaces Strategy*. Available at: <https://democracy.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s111005/Appendix%202%20-%20HDC%20Healthy%20Open%20Spaces%20Strategy%20and%2010%20Year%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

which was 6.6% during the same period. In terms of total population ranking among local authorities, Huntingdonshire maintained its position, ranking 150th out of 309 areas in England, consistent with it standing a decade ago.

Surrounding areas experienced varying rates of population growth between 2011 and 2021:

- Bedford: 17.7% increase
- Peterborough: 17.5% increase
- Fenland: 7.6% increase
- East Cambridgeshire: 4.6% increase

Regarding specific age groups, Huntingdonshire saw a 4.4% decrease in children aged under 5 years, equating to approximately 440 fewer children. Additionally, there was a 12.5% reduction in individuals aged 15 to 24 years, a decline of about 2,470 people. Conversely, the population aged 65 and over increased, reflecting national trends of an ageing population.

3.1.1 Population of children aged 0 -14

Table 1a outlines the estimated number of children to be resident in Huntingdonshire, as per ONS estimates for 2022, aligned with the following age groups:

- Under 2 years
- 2 years
- 3-4 years

Table 1b outlines the estimated number of children to be resident in Huntingdonshire, as per ONS estimates for 2022, aligned with the following age groups:

- 5-7 years
- 8-11 years
- 12-14 years

Source: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/wardlevelmidyearpopulationestimatesexperimental>

Table 1a - Approximate number of children aged 0 – 4 years resident in Huntingdonshire as of mid-2022 (source: ONS September 2023)

Ward	0–1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3–4-year-olds
Alconbury	47	33	69
Brampton	250	137	260
Buckden	59	31	59
Fenstanton	92	38	84
Godmanchester & Hemingford Abbots	262	117	266
Great Paxton	51	28	61
Great Staughton	45	24	63
Hemingford Grey & Houghton	154	82	140
Holywell-cum-Needlingworth	118	74	150
Huntingdon East	93	50	131
Huntingdon North	270	147	343
Kimbolton	48	27	53
Ramsey	240	108	270
St Ives East	160	95	129
St Ives South	130	64	150
St Ives West	53	29	54
St Neots East	124	93	164
St Neots Eatons	193	107	200
St Neots Eynesbury	265	120	239
St Neots Priory Park & Little Paxton	188	111	215
Sawtry	127	69	140
Somersham	76	34	70
Stilton, Folksworth & Washingley	86	35	143
The Stukeleys	234	112	197
Warboys	187	97	194
Yaxley	224	120	297
Totals	3776	1982	4141

The table above presents the population of children aged 0-4 years across the wards in Huntingdonshire. The data shows that 3–4-year-olds form the largest group, with a total of 4,141 children, followed by 0-1-year-olds with 3,776 children, and finally, 2-year-olds with 1,982 children.

Certain wards may require additional childcare provision for 0–1-year-olds. Huntingdon North has the highest number in this age group, with 270 children, followed closely by St Neots Eynesbury (265 children) and Godmanchester & Hemingford Abbots (262 children).

The statistics suggest that 2-year-olds may require increased childcare provision. The ward with the lowest number of 2-year-olds is Great Staughton, with 24 children, while the highest is in Huntingdon

North, with 147 children. This indicates that 3–4-year-olds may already have more available childcare provision compared to the 2-year-old population. However, Yaxley and The Stukeleys also show a significant need for additional childcare services in this age group. Other wards with relatively low numbers of 2-year-olds include Kimbolton (27 children) and Buckden (31 children).

For 3–4-year-olds, Huntingdon North again has the largest population, with 343 children, followed by Yaxley (297 children) and Ramsey (270 children). In contrast, the wards with the smallest number of 3-4-year-olds include Kimbolton (53 children) and Buckden (59 children).

These figures highlight varying levels of demand for play provision across Huntingdonshire. Areas such as Huntingdon North, St Neots Eynesbury, and Yaxley may result in less participation, particularly for 0–1-year-olds and 2-year-olds, while demand remains high for 3–4-year-olds in several other wards.

Table 1b - Approximate number of children aged 5 – 14 years resident in Huntingdonshire as of mid-2022 (source: ONS September 2023)

Ward	5–7-year-olds	8–11-year-olds	12–14-year-olds
Alconbury	99	136	114
Brampton	402	539	383
Buckden	120	135	113
Fenstanton	160	212	156
Godmanchester & Hemingford Abbots	356	537	353
Great Paxton	100	136	116
Great Staughton	89	135	95
Hemingford Grey & Houghton	225	329	214
Holywell-cum-Needlingworth	202	256	230
Huntingdon East	209	311	240
Huntingdon North	485	683	513
Kimbolton	85	131	138
Ramsey	366	542	363
St Ives East	207	341	244
St Ives South	226	336	285
St Ives West	85	141	101
St Neots East	269	367	233
St Neots Eatons	360	492	363
St Neots Eynesbury	441	481	349
St Neots Priory Park & Little Paxton	336	539	433
Sawtry	216	341	231

Somersham	116	168	104
Stilton, Folksworth & Washingley	184	280	217
The Stukeleys	295	335	220
Warboys	243	337	227
Yaxley	450	536	409
Totals	6326	8776	6444

The table above presents the population of children aged 5–14 years across Huntingdonshire. The largest group is 8–11-year-olds (8,776 children), followed by 12–14-year-olds (6,444 children) and 5–7-year-olds (6,326 children).

Certain wards, particularly Huntingdon North, Yaxley, and St Neots Priory Park & Little Paxton, have significantly higher numbers of children across all three age groups, indicating a greater need for educational and childcare resources. In contrast, smaller wards such as Great Staughton, St Ives West, and Kimbolton have lower child populations, potentially requiring fewer services.

The distribution of children across age groups suggests a continued demand for primary and secondary education, as well as youth and recreational services, particularly in high-population areas. Strategic planning will be essential to ensure adequate provision of resources to meet the needs of children and families across Huntingdonshire.

3.1.2 Population Projections and Migration

Table 2 below shows a five-year population projection for children aged 0-14.

Source: [Population projections for local authorities: Table 2 - Office for National Statistics](#)

Table 2 – Population projections in Huntingdonshire between 2026-2030 (Source ONS Via Nomis 2023)

Age	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
0-4	9,237	9,217	9,192	9,171	9,155
5-9	9,854	9,732	9,615	9,575	9,527
10-14	10,764	10,541	10,372	10,189	10,034
Total	29,855	29,491	29,179	28,936	28,715

The 5-9-year-old age group is forecasted to decline steadily from 9,854 in 2026 to 9,527 in 2030—a reduction of 327 children. The 10-14-year-old age group will also see a gradual decrease, dropping from 10,764 in 2026 to 10,034 in 2030, a loss of 730 young residents.

The 0-4 age group is expected to remain relatively stable, with only a modest decline of 82 children between 2026 and 2030. However, the decreasing numbers of primary and lower secondary-aged children could impact future demand for play provision.

Overall, the data suggests that while early years childcare demand will likely stay consistent, the need for services catering to older children (5-14 years) may decrease in the coming years.

Table 3 below shows the number of observations made of people who moved to Huntingdonshire when arriving in the UK.

Source: [Year of arrival in UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

Table 3 – Arrival of residents in Huntingdonshire

Time arrived in the UK	Number of observations
Arrived 2011 to 2013	2161
Arrived 2014 to 2016	2735
Arrived 2017 to 2019	3355
Arrived 2020 to 2021	1328

The latest ONS Census data shows the number of new arrivals in Huntingdonshire between 2011 and 2021. Over this period, a total of 9,579 residents moved to the district from outside the UK.

- Between 2011 and 2013, 2,161 people arrived.
- From 2014 to 2016, arrivals increased to 2,735.
- The highest number of arrivals occurred between 2017 and 2019, with 3,355 new residents.
- During 2020 and 2021, arrivals declined to 1,328, likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on international movement.

This data highlights fluctuating migration trends, with a peak in arrivals before 2020, followed by a decline during the pandemic. Future monitoring will be essential to determine whether migration levels return to pre-pandemic trends or continue to shift due to economic and policy factors.

3.1.3 Birth Rates

Table 4 demonstrates the number of live birth rates recorded across Huntingdonshire over the past 5 years.

Source: [Nomis - Query Tool - Live births in England and Wales : birth rates down to local authority areas](#)

Table 4 - Birth rates in Huntingdonshire between 2019-2023 (Source: ONS via Nomis 2023)

Date	Live Births
2019	1,867
2020	1,783
2021	1,890
2022	1,707
2023	1,714

Huntingdonshire's population dynamics reveal notable trends among children and young people. As of the 2021 Census, the district experienced a 6.7% population increase since 2011, reaching approximately 180,800 residents. Despite this overall growth, certain age groups have seen declines. Notably, the number of residents aged 15 to 24 years decreased by 12.5% (approximately 2,470 individuals), and children under 5 years old saw a 4.4% reduction (about 440 children). These shifts suggest a trend where younger populations are either relocating or fewer young families are settling in the area. Looking ahead, Huntingdonshire's population is projected to grow by 9.9% by 2031, adding approximately 17,945 individuals. However, forecasts suggest a 3.5% decrease (around 725 individuals) in the 5-14 age group during this period

The above table shows how birth rates have been declining since 2019, however, It is important to consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Huntingdonshire's live birth rates. During the pandemic, birth rates across the UK declined to levels last seen in 2003, reflecting significant social and economic disruptions. The sharp decline in 2020 and 2021 may have been influenced by uncertainties surrounding employment, healthcare, and financial stability, discouraging some families from having children.

Table 5 - Residents in Huntingdonshire who moved to Enfield from inside or outside the UK in 2021

Migrant indicator	Observation
Does not apply	1752
Address one year ago is the same as the address of enumeration	160514
Address one year ago is student term-time or boarding school address in the UK	376
Migrant from within the UK: Address one year ago was in the UK	16926
Migrant from outside the UK: Address one year ago was outside the UK	1264

As of 2021, there were approximately 16,926 residents who had moved into Huntingdonshire from other areas in the UK within the past year, and 1,264 residents who had migrated from outside the UK.

When comparing this information to previous ONS data for 2017-2019, which showed 3,355 international arrivals, the data suggests a significant decline of 2,091 migrants between 2019 and 2021. This represents the largest decrease observed in recent years, likely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit, both of which contributed to restrictions on international movement and economic uncertainty. Conversely, internal migration trends show 16,926 people relocated to Huntingdonshire from other parts of the UK in the past year. While internal migration had remained relatively stable in previous years, this suggests a potential increase in domestic relocation, possibly driven by changing housing preferences post-pandemic.

It is important to note that the latest 2021 data does not specify outflows, meaning the number of people who moved out of Huntingdonshire during this period remains unknown. As a result, net migration figures may be slightly overstated, and further monitoring will be required to assess long-term migration trends in the district.

3.1.4 Ethnicity

The below tables show ethnic breakdown of the population from the 2021 census.

Table 6: Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Total per person	Percentage
White	167,116	92.4%
Asian	5,745	3.2%
Mixed	4,057	2.2%
Black	2,646	1.5%
Other	1,268	0.7%

According to the latest census, the population in Huntingdonshire is predominantly white (92.4%), with non-white minorities representing the remaining 7.6% of the population. Asian people were the largest minority group in Huntingdonshire accounting for 3.2% of the population.

In 2021, the ethnic composition was predominantly White at 92.4%, a slight decrease from 94.8% in 2011. The "Mixed or Multiple" ethnic groups category saw an increase from 1.5% to 2.2% over the

same period. The "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" group rose from 2.5% to 3.2%, and the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" group increased from 1.0% to 1.5%.

The following uses the latest census to provide a breakdown of ethnicity by age group in Huntingdonshire. In UK census data, CC stands for "confidentiality controlled" meaning the actual number is very small (typically fewer than 3-5 people) and is hidden to protect individual privacy. It is not missing, just redacted on purpose.

Ethnicity	Age 0-4	Age 5-11	Age 12-16	Age 17-18
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Bangladeshi	CC	CC	CC	CC
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Chinese	CC	CC	CC	CC
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Indian	125	195	85	CC
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Pakistani	85	180	140	30
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Other Asian	65	115	90	35
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African	130	175	125	35
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Caribbean	CC	CC	CC	CC

Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Other	CC	CC	CC	CC
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	205	275	140	55
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	130	185	CC	25
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean	130	200	125	35
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: Other Mixed	185	210	115	35
White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	7,625	12,040	8,385	3,080
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	CC	CC	CC	CC
White: Irish	CC	CC	CC	CC
White: Roma	CC	CC	CC	CC
White: Other White	720	910	545	165
Other ethnic group: Arab	CC	CC	CC	CC

Any other	90	CC	CC	CC
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3.2

Economic Activity

3.2.1 Employment

Table 7 shows the frequency of adults who were 'economically active' (which implies they are in employment) last year.

Source: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157208/report.aspx#defs>

Table 7 – Incidence of employment and unemployment in Huntingdonshire (NOMIS 2025 using ONS data from October 2023-September 2024).

Area	Economically Active	In Employment	Employees	Self Employed	Unemployed
Huntingdonshire (numbers)	97,900	94,300	82,000	12,300	2,800
Huntingdonshire (%)	86.7%	83.6%	73.6%	10.0%	2.8%
East of England (%)	79.3%	76.7%	66.8%	9.8%	3.2%
Great Britain (%)	78.4%	75.5%	66.0%	9.2%	3.7%

Compared to the broader region, Huntingdonshire's high employment rate suggests a generally prosperous economy with strong job availability. The lower unemployment rate could mean that more families have stable income sources, but the cost of living and work schedules may still influence the accessibility of play opportunities.

3.2.2 Families living in low-income households

Table 8 shows the number and Percentage of Children (aged under 16) living in Relative low income in Huntingdonshire, East of England, and the United Kingdom over the past eight years.

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-to-2023>

Table 8 - The number and Percentage of Children (aged under 16) living in Relative low income (DWP using ONS data from 2016-2023)

Area	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
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Huntingdons hire Number	3,608	3,522	3,920	3,902	4,095	3,694	3,724	3,477
Huntingdons hire (%)	11.1%	10.8%	12.1%	12.1%	12.8%	11.4%	11.4%	10.4%
East of England Number	161,406	163,658	181,027	181,375	186,542	168,581	170,404	166,146
East of England (%)	14.0%	14.1%	15.4%	15.4%	15.7%	14.2%	14.4%	13.8%
United Kingdom Number	1,985,890	2,099,684	2,248,520	2,293,551	2,455,064	2,384,106	2,473,462	2,480,507
United Kingdom %	16.2%	16.9%	18.0%	18.2%	19.3%	18.7%	20.1%	20.1%

Huntingdonshire has consistently maintained a lower percentage of children in low-income households compared to both regional and national figures, indicating a relatively better economic standing. However, there was a peak in 2020, likely linked to economic pressures from the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a decline in recent years.

Despite its relatively lower rates, Huntingdonshire still has pockets of deprivation, particularly in areas such as Huntingdon North, Yaxley, and The Stukeleys, where a higher proportion of families face financial hardship. These areas may require targeted interventions to support access to affordable or free play provisions.

Lower-income households may struggle with financial barriers to accessing play, particularly in areas with fewer free recreational facilities. Families with limited resources may face challenges in affording transport, entry fees, or equipment necessary for participation in structured play activities. Ensuring sufficient free and inclusive play opportunities in deprived areas is essential to prevent economic disparities from limiting children's access to play.

3.2.3 English Indices of Deprivation 2019

See Appendix A for the full table list of Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) rank and decile.

The centre of Huntingdonshire is the most deprived. LSOAs Huntingdonshire 008A & 008B (Huntingdon North) have the most deprivation present in the district in the local IMD deciles. The most deprived wards are Yaxley, The Stukeleys, and Warboys. 10 out of 106 of the LSOAs in

Huntingdonshire are in the 3 most deprived deciles for IDACI. There are 11 LSOAs that are particularly deprived in the IDACI domain.

Other areas with moderate deprivation, such as Huntingdonshire 008E, 022C, and 022D, fall within IMD deciles 3 and 4, indicating slightly improved economic conditions but still higher-than-average levels of deprivation. These areas, while better off than the most deprived parts of the district, may still struggle with access to well-maintained and safe play facilities, particularly for children from lower-income households.

Conversely, some parts of Huntingdonshire rank among the least deprived areas in the country, with LSOAs such as Huntingdonshire 020D, 007A, and 006D ranking within the top 10% nationally in both IMD and IDACI. These areas are characterised by higher incomes, better infrastructure, and increased access to recreational spaces, ensuring more opportunities for children to engage in play.

The disparities in deprivation levels across Huntingdonshire directly influence access to play opportunities. In highly deprived areas, limited financial resources, higher unemployment, and lack of safe, free play spaces can restrict children's ability to engage in play, impacting their physical, social, and cognitive development. Additionally, families in these areas may lack the means to travel to well-equipped play facilities located in more affluent parts of the district.

In contrast, children in wealthier areas benefit from a greater availability of safe, high-quality play spaces, with better access to structured recreational activities, clubs, and sports facilities. These inequalities underscore the need for targeted investment in deprived areas to ensure all children, regardless of economic background, can access play opportunities. Efforts to bridge these gaps could include expanding free play areas, investing in community play programmes, and ensuring transport accessibility to existing recreational facilities. Addressing these disparities is essential for promoting inclusive play and supporting children's overall well-being.

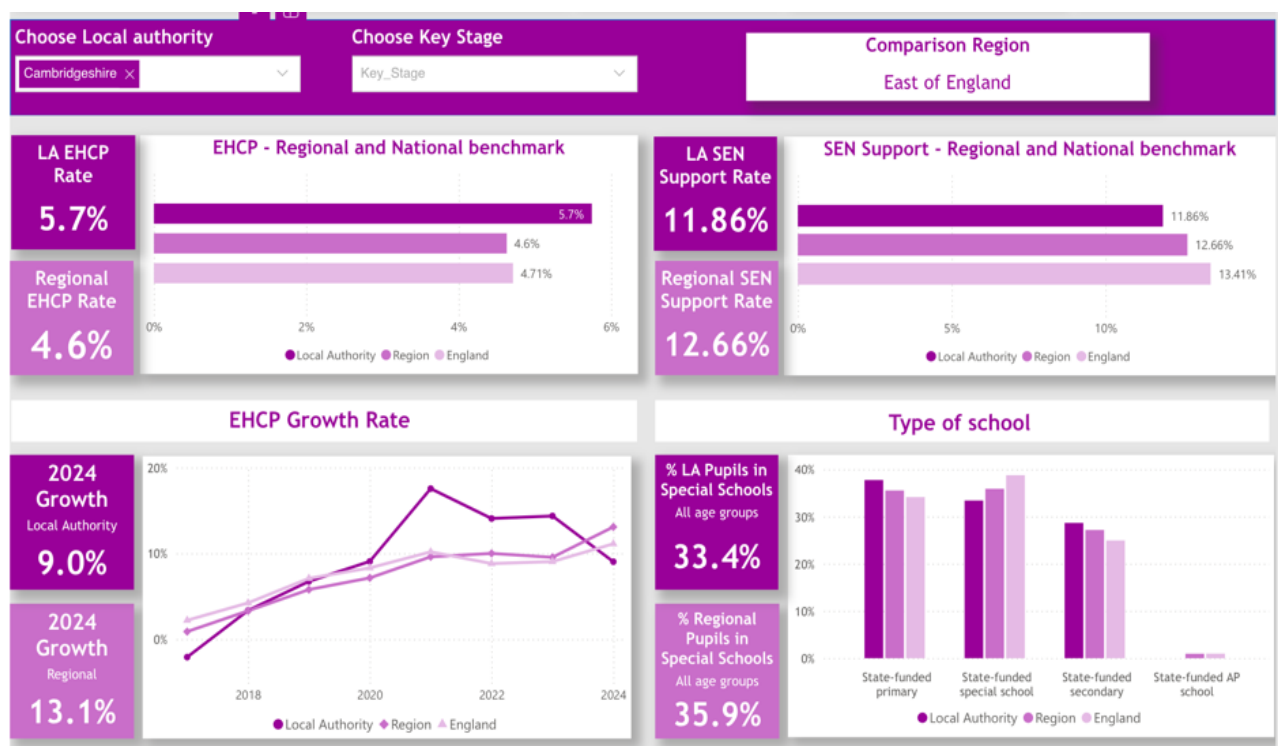
3.3 SEND Designation and ECHP Rates

In 2024, the EHCP rate in Cambridgeshire was 5.7%. This rate is higher than the English average and regional rate of 4.71% and 4.6% respectively. This high EHCP rate represents a potential area of challenge. The EHCP rate for state-funded secondary schools was 1.6%, higher than the regional average (1.3%) and equal to the national average.

Cambridgeshire's SEN Support Rate (11.86%) ranks lower than the regional (12.66%) and national (13.41%) rates. In state-funded secondary schools, the SEN support rate was 4.07%, considerably lower than the national average of 18.32% and slightly below the regional rate of 5.22%. This large gap may indicate significant under-identification, meaning students are struggling without proper support. Alternatively, this may result from strong mainstream education and effective early support. Further investigation is required to see whether lower SEN support rate is due to better early intervention strategies or if students with needs are not being recognised or supported adequately.

The top primary needs in Cambridgeshire at Autistic Spectrum Order, Social Emotional and Mental Health, and Speech, Language and Communication needs.

Image 1: Data from Public Alchemy



4. Consultation

The purpose of the consultation was to understand how current play provision meets the needs of children and families in Huntingdonshire, and to identify areas where improvements or further development may be required.

To build a comprehensive and inclusive picture, input was sought from a wide cross-section of the community. Surveys were carried out with children under the age of five, and with pupils across Key Stages 1 to 4. The views of parents and carers were gathered alongside those of childcare providers, local stakeholders, and representatives from town and parish councils. In addition to the survey responses, focus groups with parents and interviews with childcare providers offered further qualitative insight into local needs and experiences.

On behalf of HDC, PAG conducted a comprehensive data collection exercise between 2nd April and 16th June 2025. The primary objective was to gather views from a wide range of stakeholders to inform the development of local policy and service planning.

4.1 Surveys

This section highlights the key responses from each survey, for the detailed breakdown of responses to each survey, please see the consultation report and supporting annexes.

4.1.1 Under 5s

Responses from parents, carers, and childcare professionals on behalf of children under the age of five indicate that this age group engages in play across a broad range of environments. Indoor spaces, gardens, playgrounds, and grassy open areas were most frequently cited, with woodland and nature-based settings also proving popular. Levels of happiness with outdoor play opportunities were generally high, with the majority of respondents describing their children as either “happy” or “very happy” when playing outside. Parks such as Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Priory Park, Judith’s Field (not run by HDC), and Butcher Drive (not run by HDC) were most commonly identified as favourites, valued both for their variety of equipment and their proximity to home.

Safety was generally perceived positively, though a minority raised concerns about certain sites. Satisfaction with playground quality was mixed: while some families praised facilities as “great,” others rated them “okay” or “not very good,” highlighting issues of maintenance and suitability.

Swings and slides were the most consistently popular equipment, with additional interest in climbing frames and sensory play items. Conversely, large climbing structures and spinner equipment were considered inappropriate or unsafe for very young children. Parents and carers expressed a clear desire for more toddler-friendly and inclusive play facilities, improved cleanliness, and greater provision of supporting amenities such as toilets, bins, and seating.

4.1.2 Key Stage 1

The Key Stage 1 survey, with the largest response rate across cohorts, revealed a strong preference for structured play environments such as playgrounds with equipment, complemented by use of gardens, grassy areas, and community or leisure spaces. Frequency of park use tended to be concentrated at weekends, with relatively few children visiting on a daily basis. Popular sites included the “Pirate Park” in Ramsey (an HDC site), alongside other parks such as Millfields Park, Warboys Park, Judith’s Field, and new estate play areas in Romans’ Edge and Alconbury, which fall outside HDC’s direct management.

Accessibility was generally high, with most children able to reach parks on foot or by bicycle. Safety perceptions were also largely positive, though a small number of respondents raised concerns around antisocial behaviour and the presence of older youths. Children’s enjoyment was strongly associated with the variety and quality of equipment, open spaces for informal games, and opportunities for social interaction. Swings, climbing frames, and slides were most frequently highlighted, though many children expressed a desire for more adventurous or age-appropriate features. Dissatisfaction tended to centre on outdated equipment, overcrowding, or poorly maintained sites. Suggestions for improvement included the installation of larger climbing frames, splash or paddling pools, and facilities catering specifically for older children, supported by better upkeep and proximity to residential areas.

4.1.3 Key Stage 2

Key Stage 2 respondents reported a strong reliance on homes and gardens for daily play, with playgrounds, grassy areas, and school grounds also regularly used. Park visits were less frequent after school, with many children indicating that they rarely used parks during the week. Favourite sites included the “Pirate Park” in Ramsey (HDC), alongside others such as Godley Green, Judith’s Field, Millfields Park, and Warboys Park, which are managed by other organisations. Accessibility remained a critical determinant of use; while most children could walk or cycle to local parks, a significant

minority relied on adult transport, limiting independent play. Safety was perceived positively overall, though some children reported feeling unsafe due to dogs, vandalism, or antisocial behaviour. Swings, climbing frames, zip lines, trampolines, and sports-oriented equipment were valued most highly. Improvement suggestions centred on greater provision for older children, more adventurous and varied equipment, and investment in neglected or outdated sites. These responses highlight both the continued importance of well-maintained facilities and the need for greater age-appropriate variety across the district.

4.1.4 Key Stage 3 and 4

Responses from older children and young people demonstrated a noticeable decline in the use of formal play spaces. Most reported preferring to spend time at home, at friends' houses, in grassy areas, or in nearby streets, although some still used traditional playgrounds. Parks were generally not visited on a daily basis, with the majority attending only a few times a week, if at all. Favourite sites included Millfields, Priory Park, Riverside Park, and Henbrook Park (not HDC), although some respondents indicated that no suitable or safe facilities were available in their area.

Access was feasible for most via walking or cycling, though reliance on adult transport remained a barrier for some. The features that appealed most to this age group were open spaces for social interaction, youth shelters, and exercise facilities, with swings, zip wires, monkey bars, and obstacle courses also mentioned. The overall perception of local provision was that it remained designed primarily for younger children, with limited age-appropriate features. KS3/4 respondents consistently highlighted a need for more modern, inclusive, and stimulating equipment, alongside improvements in cleanliness, lighting, and maintenance. Dissatisfaction with the lack of facilities for teenagers emerged as a strong and consistent theme.

4.1.5 Town and Parish Councils

45 councils identified themselves on the survey, outlining 93 play areas. However, many did not complete the survey so only 57 parks or play areas were represented. The majority of provision was aimed at younger children, particularly those aged 4–7, with very limited equipment for teenagers. Swings, slides, and climbing frames were the most common features, while specialist provision, such as BMX tracks or accessible equipment, was rare.

Usage was reported as generally high, with most parks being used daily or several times a week. However, concerns were raised regarding maintenance, with many councils identifying ageing or

broken equipment and the significant financial burden of repairs and replacements. Only 14 per cent of councils reported having accessible or inclusive facilities for children with additional needs. While some councils have plans for upgrades or expansion over the next five years, funding constraints were identified as the principal barrier to improvement. Councils consistently called for greater support in developing inclusive provision, particularly for teenagers and children with disabilities, alongside recognition of the broader social role of play areas within community life.

4.1.6 Stakeholders

Although the stakeholder survey achieved only six responses, it nonetheless provides valuable perspectives from local professionals and community representatives. Respondents included play providers, education staff, and community workers. Several noted slight increases in park usage in recent years, likely linked to post-pandemic behavioural shifts.

Stakeholders advocated for greater variety in play provision, including equipment for older children and teenagers, sensory features, and facilities such as outdoor gyms or table tennis. Coneygeare Park and Godmanchester's Riverside Park were identified as particularly popular, though the latter was viewed as limited in its offer for older children. While most expressed general satisfaction with current provision, the need for more inclusive, multigenerational, and geographically well-distributed facilities was highlighted as an ongoing priority.

4.1.7 Childcare Providers

Eight childcare providers contributed to the survey, supplemented by three follow-up interviews. Respondents comprised primarily childminders, with additional representation from nursery staff. While some felt that provision was broadly adequate, others highlighted clear disparities across the district, with certain areas significantly underserved.

Providers emphasised concerns about accessibility for children with special educational needs and disabilities, describing some play areas as unsuitable or inaccessible. Maintenance issues, including broken or outdated equipment, were reported, with climbing frames, seesaws, and roundabouts often singled out. Popular features remained swings, slides, and climbing equipment, with some emphasis on sensory play. Specific parks, including Priory Park, Stukeley Meadows, and Slepe Park, were criticised for this, while Hinchingsbrooke Park was praised for its inclusivity.

Childcare providers advocated for improvements including inclusive swings, in-ground trampolines, shaded areas, and clearer maintenance responsibilities. The need for age-appropriate provision, particularly to separate younger children from older groups congregating inappropriately, was also underlined.

4.1.8 Parents and Carers

Despite extensive engagement efforts, only eight parents and carers responded to the survey, making this the least represented group. Those who did respond reported relatively frequent use of parks, with several families visiting multiple times each week. Safety was generally viewed positively, though concerns were raised regarding poor lighting, antisocial behaviour, and the presence of dogs.

Parents valued swings, slides, climbing frames, and imaginative structures, though small or ineffective equipment such as bouncy rides and spinning seats were often criticised. Levels of satisfaction with local provision were moderate, with most describing themselves as “satisfied” rather than enthusiastic. Common barriers to more frequent use included the absence of toilets and changing facilities, maintenance, and a lack of suitable equipment for mid-age children (particularly around seven years old).

Suggested improvements focused on the introduction of toilets, cafés or refreshment options, more varied and challenging equipment for older children, and better promotion of underutilised play areas. Parents consistently stressed the importance of inclusive design, improved facilities, and safer environments. Notably, six of the eight respondents expressed a willingness to participate in further consultation, demonstrating an appetite for continued dialogue.

4.2 Focus groups

In order to gather detailed findings relating to parental views of local play opportunities, PAG organised 7 focus group sessions. These sessions were planned to target a range of parents geographically across Huntingdonshire. Efforts to raise engagement and target parents who may be willing to contribute included Facebook group marketing, direct emails to local parent organisations, local charities, community groups and contact with schools.

Despite email reminders before the session (2 days before, 2 hours before and 10 minutes before) turnout was minimal. Across the events, only 2 of the 9 parents who signed up showed up to discuss outdoor play. The attended sessions were the evening session and the Huntingdon targeted session.

Attendees were enthusiastic to contribute and intended topics were covered, despite low turnout. The conversations which took place with these parents were also further supported by the parent/carers survey, as outlined in the previous section. Key themes were identified throughout discussion; these are summarised below.

- Limited provision for older children and teenagers – both sessions highlighted a gap in play opportunities for older children, 10+ and teenagers.
- Insufficient facilities – toilets, seating, shade and refreshments were consistently flagged throughout both sessions.
- Safety and accessibility – poor lighting at specific parks was an area of concern through both sessions.
- Quality and maintenance – generally, parks were described as well-maintained, however both sessions identified equipment could be seen as uninteresting for older children.
- Frequently mentioned parks:
 - Hinchbrook Park – described as well-maintained and seemingly a popular choice for parents.
 - Hill Rise Park – identified as an area which does not always feel safe due to lighting.
 - Somersham Park – well-maintained but lacks facilities such as toilets and refreshments.
 - Coneygar Park – a popular choice for young children however does not feel safe later in the day due to lighting.
 - Great High Ground – popular for young children; however, lacks sufficient seating to cater for the number of users.
 - Riverside Parks, St Neots – equipment often soiled by birds, the rocket park was identified as poorly lit.

4.3 Interviews

Three childcare provider interviews were scheduled to provide further insight into play opportunities in Huntingdonshire. These interviews supported the survey responses from childminders, allowing interviewees to expand further on their previous contributions and share deeper insights from their experiences.

Questions were open and allowed interviewees to discuss topics they felt were particularly poignant.

4.3.1 Contextual questions

Through the initial questions, PAG ensured awareness of the location of the childcare providers, to ensure understanding of relevant parks. The interviewees were based across the district, specifically the following areas:

- Huntingdon: supporting children across Huntingdon, St Ives, Ramsey and Godmanchester
- St Neots: supporting the St Neots area
- St Ives: supporting St Ives and surrounding villages.

All the childminders interviewed cater to under 5s, with one also supporting a range from 5 to 8. Two of the providers access the outdoor play areas every day, with one making use of them on a weekly basis.

4.3.2 Local landscape of play

Given the geographical spread of the childminders, as expected a range of parks were identified as regularly used. Some of the named parks which are regularly used and maintained by HDC included:

- Hinchbrooke park
- Priory Park
- Riverside Park
- Loves Farm play areas
- Coneygeare park.

For the most part, these parks were preferred due to their geographical location. Given the challenge of supporting multiple children at once, the location is especially critical for the childminders. For example, the childminder based in St Ives expressed that whilst Hinchbrooke is a lovely park, the challenge to get there using public transport means they cannot visit often. One of the interviews also expressed a preference for the above parks because of the open spaces and the amount of greenery.

The interviews covered specific features which interviewees found particularly interesting for the children they care for. Examples included:

- Wooden materials for equipment over metal

- Swings
- Climbing frames
- Large green spaces
- Equipment which allows for multiple activities at once
- Spinning toys.

When asked about safety, specific parks were referred to as potential concerns. The examples provided by the community and the reasoning are included below:

- Priory Park: described as not suitable for the smaller age groups.
- Hill Rise Park: some stakeholders stated that they think the equipment is often vandalised or unsafe, and had concerns that uneven surfaces and broken glass in the forestry can present a risk to young children.
- Coneygeare Park: play equipment is not enclosed which presents a risk for childminders caring for multiple children. There is also uneven flooring which is difficult for small children.
- Hinchingsbrooke Park: stakeholders stated that they feel risks are present due to proximity to dog training classes. There is a concern that this information is not publicised which means shared spaces are sometimes avoided due to uncertainty.

Through the interviews, childminders outlined their experiences with local outdoor play areas and the age range they cater for. There was some reference here to older children being ‘bored’ as a result of the tailoring of equipment at play spaces to young children. In particular, one childminder raised that this had led to older children using spaces intended for young children. Whilst acknowledging this is through no fault of their own, this can present some safety risks. One childminder shared their experience of verbal abuse from older children when using play spaces for young children.

4.3.3 Accessibility and barriers

Regarding accessibility, all of those interviewed raised concerns. Whilst there was praise regarding clear, safe pathways to access the majority of parks, the parks themselves were described as inaccessible to children with SEND. Those interviewed expressed unhappiness with what was available, with no play equipment allowing these children to play independently. Concerns of this nature were rooted in children with SEND expected to observe other children play, rather than being able to engage in play themselves. Where wheelchair equipment was present, one interviewee said

this was not enclosed, therefore restricting their ability to use this due to supporting multiple children at one time. In contrast, Hinchingsbrooke Park was praised for the opportunity for inclusive play. Comments on the roundabouts demonstrated some opportunity for children of varying abilities to engage in shared play.

Barriers to accessing parks were highlighted as safety, as well as difficulty travelling and parking to certain parks. Whilst one childminder outlined that they are able to travel with their van, they were aware that this was a privilege that others would not have access to. Travel restrictions were said to require rigorous planning to navigate public transport. Safety concerns were largely due to a lack of fencing surrounding play areas and uneven flooring. Coneygeare was used as an example of a play area with particularly challenging flooring, whereas Riverside Park was described as the ideal flooring type for safe play.

Speaking from their experiences at the play areas as childminders, unique challenges were identified. These included a lack of shade and benches, as well as limited pieces of equipment which is challenging for those attending the park with more than one child.

4.3.4 Quality and suitability

Feedback on the quality of outdoor play areas was positive. One interviewee commented that the parks they attend are maintained quite well, often engaging directly with maintenance staff when at the parks. They also reported broken equipment had been replaced quickly. The challenges relating to grounding, which is outdated were shared by multiple interviewees, with one childminder expressing concern around the lack of risk assessment.

Use of the parks was reported to be enjoyable for the children. Some responses confirmed that they are able to engage with a range of play types with the children they support, including imaginative and physical play. Great High Ground (the “pirate boat park”) was named as an excellent example of this. Childminders reported high use of the open spaces to encourage a range of play, as opposed to select pieces of equipment.

When asked about the facilities available at parks across Huntingdonshire, the providers expressed concerns regarding the lack of toilets and benches. These issues were consistently discussed in all three interviews. One interviewee identified that whilst there are toilets at Riverside Park, they have experienced repeated issues accessing these due to the doors being locked.

4.3.5 Improvements and aspirations

Specific equipment was suggested by interviewees when asked which features or designs, they would welcome. This included:

- Flat roundabouts – wide enough for wheelchair users
- In-ground trampolines
- Additional climbing activities for younger children.

Aspirations to improve the play spaces for childminders specifically included various recommendations relating to safety and facilities. Regarding safety, suggestions included a focus on using wooden equipment instead of metal as this cannot be used when weather conditions vary. Fencing in of equipment and even, grass surfaces were reinforced as important to interviewees, as well as facilities to eat such as benches.

Further suggestions related to communication and signage, as outlined below.

- Reports of uncertainty as to who was responsible for maintaining certain parks due to some lack of signage means that some respondents were unsure where to report damaged or dangerous equipment.
- Communication relating to the use of shared spaces was requested, for example Hinchbrook Park's dog training classes to ensure young children can use the space when these are not taking place. Furthermore, information relating to pond dipping activities was requested.

5. Current Provision Assessment

To assess the quality and perception of current provision across Huntingdonshire, PAG employed the following approach:

- Use of consultation methods – surveys, focus groups and interviews – to understand local perception (this is outlined in the previous section)
- Geographic mapping to identify the location of existing parks and where provision is dispersed²
- In person observations of mapped parks to understand the level of use and accessibility.

This section outlined the relevant findings, as well as a thematic Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of provision maintained by HDC. The findings below are organised by village, with key findings from observation assessments outlined.

5.1 Godmanchester

Observations across three local parks revealed generally low levels of use, with no children present at Stokes Drive and Roman Way, and only light to moderate use at Wigmore Farm (1–9 children). This may have been influenced by factors such as weather or time of day. While all sites were walkable from nearby homes and accessible via pedestrian routes, none offered a fully inclusive play experience. Wigmore Farm was the most accessible, with some inclusive features in the infant zone and good manoeuvrability, though overall provision remained limited. Roman Way included fixed sensory and imaginative elements, but these were not practically usable for children with mobility impairments.

The sites were clean, well maintained, and fully fenced with secure gates, supporting supervision and safeguarding. However, no intergenerational or adult-oriented fitness features were present. Shade and shelter were limited, with only natural tree cover at Stokes Drive and Wigmore Farm offering partial protection. Overall, while the parks were safe and in good condition, improvements in inclusivity, variety, and family-friendly amenities would better support community use.

5.1.1 Key Outliers and Strategic Observations

²[HDC PSA - RAG - Google My Maps](#)

Site	Positive Outliers	Issues / Gaps
Wigmore Farm	Good internal surfacing, wide age range, some inclusive features	Junior zone lacks accessible equipment, no formal shelter or shade
Roman Way	Clean site, sensory play attempts, secure fencing	No seating, no bin, heavy ladder-based access limits inclusive play
Stokes Drive	Compact, tidy, good fencing	Woodchip surfacing and no accessible play equipment, no defined play zones, or diversity

Across all three sites, there was a noticeable shortfall in inclusive provision. While physical entry and internal movement were often possible, equipment design did not support equitable play for disabled children. Creative, sensory, and fantasy play were notably underrepresented across the sites. While some equipment encouraged physical engagement and solitary activity, there was limited provision for children with varied cognitive or social development needs.

5.1.2 Site-Specific Observations (Condensed Highlights)

Site	Strengths	Gaps
Wigmore Farm	Two-tiered layout with age zoning; wide range of challenge; ample internal space and surfacing	No structured sensory provision; limited accessible equipment in junior zone; no shade or shelter
Roman Way	Secure fencing, sensory elements (e.g. themed climbing frame), clean environment	No seating, inaccessible to children with mobility issues, sensory play unreachable without ladder access
Stokes Drive	Compact layout, group swing, shade from trees, soft surfacing	No accessible equipment, woodchip limits mobility, minimal equipment variety, no sensory or imaginative play

Across the three Godmanchester play areas (Stokes Drive, Roman Way, Wigmore Farm), observed family engagement was low at the time of visits. No families were seen using the sites for shared activities, although weather and time of day may have influenced this. That said, key design elements to support intergenerational or family play were generally absent.

5.2 Huntingdon

Observations across 22 sites showed uneven levels of use. Thirteen sites, including small estate parks such as Sapley Fields, Meadow Gardens, and Garner Court, as well as more adult-oriented or ambiguous spaces like the Wetland Area and MUGA Sallowbush, had no children present at the time of visit. In contrast, Hinchingsbrooke Play Area, Oxmoor Lane, and Woodland Play Area demonstrated clear community uptake, with 10–29 children observed. These higher-use sites tended to cater for a wider age range, supporting both younger children and teens, whereas many others were limited to KS1/KS2 provision and lacked opportunities for intergenerational play.

Inclusivity could be improved in these parks, with no park offering a fully inclusive experience. Fourteen had no accessible equipment, and where inclusive features existed, they were sometimes limited or unusable. For example, Hinchingsbrooke Sensory Park included a wheelchair swing that was locked at the time of the visit – although the key for this is available on request, there was no observed instructions on where the key could be obtained, suggestion to advertise this more explicitly, Thames Road had damaged sensory boards, and Oxmoor Lane offered step-free circulation but no dedicated inclusive pieces. Seating was generally available but often restricted to a single bench. Overall, while some sites demonstrated strong community engagement, the majority showed low to no use, and provision for inclusivity and broad age ranges was limited

5.2.1 Key Outliers and Strategic Observations

Site	Positive Outliers	Issues / Gaps
Oxmoor Lane	Best all-round accessibility and surfacing	No specialist inclusive equipment
Devoke Close	Good surfacing and cleanliness	Graffiti, limited shade, only partial equipment access

Hinchingbrooke Play Area	High usage and broad age appeal	Insecure gates, poor path infrastructure
Hinchingbrooke Sensory	Wheelchair swing exists	Locked and unusable; no fencing
Sapley Fields	Large open space	No paths to equipment, vandalism, inaccessibility
Meadow Gardens	Local use evident	No pathways or inclusive play options
Stukeley Meadows	Generally tidy, some seating	Dangerous flooring condition, trip hazards
Mayfield Crescent	Soft surface present	Equipment and layout unsuitable for SEND access
Riverside Park	Good site condition	No inclusive play options despite good access

Across the observed sites, physical play was almost universally supported, with most parks offering equipment such as swings, slides, and climbing frames. In contrast, opportunities for fantasy and imaginative play were limited and tended to appear only in themed locations such as Whaddons and Thames Road. Creative or sensory-focused play was often tokenistic, with features either underdeveloped or entirely absent.

Thames Road stood out as an outlier, providing a stronger mix of play types through fantasy elements, cooperative play structures, and toddler-friendly design, though these benefits were offset by notable access limitations.

5.2.2 Site-Specific Observations (Condensed Highlights)

Site	Strengths	Gaps
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Oxmoor Lane	Strong layout, group swing, age variety, partial sensory access	Incomplete pathway paving, “coolest” feature (floor trampoline) is inaccessible
Thames Road	Sensory boards, themed, group play options, suitable challenge	No path access to play area, limited for older children
Hinchingbrooke Play Area	High use, wide age appeal	Rope-secured gate, inaccessible slide, poor layout
Hinchingbrooke Sensory Park	Themed, well-designed for early years	Locked inclusive swing, no fencing, aging equipment
Devoke Close	Good surface, climbing frame with cubbyholes	Graffiti, no true inclusive value
Woodland Play Area	Distinct zones, sensory and climbing	No fencing, steep play features
Riverside Park	Themed (train/nautical), interactive features	Excludes children with disabilities
Bevan Close	Local use, partial surfacing	Only three pieces of non-inclusive equipment, no bins
Garner Court	Sheltered bench, internal bins	Littering, inaccessible equipment
Sapley Fields	Large space, soft surfacing	Equipment unclear in purpose, vandalised, poor access

Across the observed sites, family engagement varied significantly:

- High family use and visible interaction were noted at Hinchingbrooke Play Area, Riverside Park, and Devoke Close. At these locations, parents were seen actively supporting

children's play, supervising use of higher-risk equipment (e.g., zip lines, large climbing frames), and engaging in shared experiences like picnics or group games.

- Moderate engagement was present in sites such as Oxmoor Lane and Thames Road, though these lacked designated family zones or picnic tables, limiting potential for prolonged stays.
- Very low engagement was observed in smaller estate parks (e.g., Bevan Close, Meadow Gardens, The Whaddons) where the play offer was minimal or narrowly age focused.

Children were most visibly engaged at Hinchingsbrooke, Riverside, Oxmoor Lane, and Thames Road, where a balance of moderate challenge, social equipment such as group swings and climbing frames, and visually stimulating environments encouraged active play. Memorable features included the floor trampoline and spinning seats at Oxmoor Lane, insect-themed sensory play and roundabout at Hinchingsbrooke Sensory Park, nautical and train-themed structures at Riverside Park, and the distinctive climbing “dog” sculpture at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.

However, there is scope to improve the quality and inclusivity of provision. This includes addressing inaccessible or broken access routes (e.g., Mayfield Crescent, Sapley, the Hinchingsbrooke slide), locked inclusive equipment such as the ramp swing at Hinchingsbrooke Sensory Park, and surface degradation, notably cracking at Stukeley Meadows and muddy or worn approaches at other sites. Vandalism was also observed at locations including Sapley Fields and Devoke Close. Additionally, safety concerns arose at sites with unfenced proximity to water or roads, such as the Wetlands and Hinchingsbrooke Play Area.

5.3 Ramsey

At the time of observation, Between 1–9 children were observed. While not heavily populated, the site showed signs of regular engagement across multiple pieces of equipment. While the park in Ramsey offered relatively good space and manoeuvrability, most equipment did not provide equitable access for children with more complex mobility or sensory needs.

The park was clean and well-maintained, with no evidence of litter or vandalism at the time of visit. A single bench was provided, which may be sufficient given the park's size, but no structured shade or shelter was available.

5.3.1 Key Outliers and Strategic Observations

Site	Positive Outliers	Issues / Gaps
Signal Road	Clean, well-maintained, wide age appeal up to KS2, good fencing	Limited accessible equipment, no shade or family seating, partial path access

One key sensory opportunity was observed: the pirate ship includes interactive sensory components such as tactile toys or auditory panels.

Despite the park's compact size, play zones were implicitly grouped by activity type — e.g., climbing, swinging, and imaginative play each had a defined area. This supported a logical and functional flow. The pirate ship supports cooperative play, with space for group interaction and shared use — this was the strongest feature in terms of social engagement. Other equipment such as group swings and a seesaw offer further opportunity for parallel and cooperative play, though solitary play was also prevalent.

5.3.2 Site-Specific Observations (Condensed Highlights)

Site	Strengths	Gaps
Signal Road	Inclusive pirate ship with ramp and sensory play; logical layout; wide range of challenge	Only one accessible feature; limited sensory play overall; three pieces of equipment lack path access

Observed family presence at Signal Road Play Area was moderate, with 1–9 children using the site during the visit. Children were seen interacting actively with the play equipment — particularly the pirate ship — suggesting high engagement, although formal support for family play and supervision was limited. Children were observed engaging with a wide range of equipment, especially the pirate ship. Swings, the seesaw, and climbing items were also in use, suggesting broad appeal.

5.4 Sawtry

At the time of observation, the park saw moderate use, with 1–9 children present. Some children engaged with equipment such as the zip wire, while others played independently on grassy areas, indicating partial utilisation of the formal play offer. Young people aged 11+ were present but used the space informally rather than through targeted features.

Accessibility was limited by uneven grassy paths that did not lead directly to equipment, hilly terrain, and natural surfacing that is neither level nor DDA-compliant, creating barriers for mobility aids or pushchairs. Some equipment, like the group swing, could support children with limited mobility if accompanied, but there were no continuous accessible pathways linking features. The park is centrally located and easy to access on foot or by car, though the absence of formal entrances, signage, or accessible surfacing reduces usability for visitors unfamiliar with the site.

Inclusive play is minimal, with little sensory provision. The hilly terrain creates exclusionary zones and elevates risk from falls, while elevated equipment and slope gradients limit independent access. Maintenance was positive: the site was litter-free, bins were provided, and no vandalism was observed.

5.4.1 Key Outliers and Strategic Observations

Site	Positive Outliers	Issues / Gaps
Rowel I Way	Wide age coverage; group swing and zip wire support engagement across multiple age groups	No formal fencing or shelter; limited accessible paths; safety risks due to uneven surfaces and hill placement; inadequate seating for families

While some equipment (e.g. group swing) may be accessible with assistance, there are no direct paths or accessible surfaces linking the play items — especially those placed on sloped terrain. The park includes equipment theoretically usable by children with disabilities, but lack of level access and uneven surfacing severely limits usability.

Some sensory equipment was observed (likely touch-based or themed components). Equipment was varied in function (swings, slide, zip wire), but not formally zoned. Play types were dispersed across a natural slope, affecting flow and accessibility. The play area offered a wide challenge spectrum, from toddler-appropriate swings to a high zip wire — suitable for KS2 and older users.

Creative, sensory, and imaginative play were all underrepresented, limiting the site's alignment with broad developmental and inclusive standards.

5.4.2 Site-Specific Observations (Condensed Highlights)

Site	Strengths	Gaps
Rowell Way	Wide age appeal; group swing and zip wire in use; open green setting; informal sensory elements	No structured shade, shelter, or seating; steep terrain limits accessibility; sensory play is minimal and not inclusive; paths do not connect to equipment

Observed family engagement at Rowell Way was moderate, with a small number of children (1–9) using the play area at the time of the visit. However, the site’s overall design does not actively support intergenerational play or sustained family use.

There was no dedicated space for shared family activity. While the park’s grassy layout theoretically allows for picnics or informal gatherings, this potential was not supported by features such as picnic tables, shaded zones, or clustered seating. Only one bench was available — which could be insufficient given the scale and catchment of the site.

The zip wire appeared to be the most popular and distinctive element.

5.5 St Ives

Hill Rise Play Area saw moderate use (1–9 children), while Hill Rise Skate Park had high use (10–19 children). Crescent and Dunnock Way (not HDC) were unoccupied during observation, suggesting potential issues with appeal or suitability. Hill Rise Play Area served toddlers through KS2, and Hill Rise Skate Park accommodated KS1 through young adults. Crescent and Dunnock Way focused on younger children, with limited older-child or inclusive provision.

Only Hill Rise Skate Park attracted teenagers and young adults, though it was not designed for inclusive youth or family use. Internal surfacing was generally smooth at Hill Rise Play Area and Crescent, but external access was limited. Dunnock Way’s stairs-only entry restricted access, while the Skate Park had ramped access but limited shade and some graffiti.

Hill Rise Play Area had one partially accessible item and open space for manoeuvrability. Surfaces were mostly soft, but Crescent and Dunnock Way had inconsistencies limiting accessibility.

5.5.1 Key Outliers and Strategic Observations

Site	Positive Outliers	Issues / Gaps
Hill Rise Play Area	Moderate use, some spatial inclusivity	No inclusive equipment; no shade or dedicated seating
Hill Rise Skate Park	Highest use observed; appeals to teenagers; shaded bench available	No fencing; limited suitability for younger users; minor maintenance issues
Crescent (not HDC)	Secure fencing; internal soft surfacing	No accessible entry path; no seating; no inclusive equipment; cleanliness issues
Dunnock Way (not HDC)	Bench provision; residentially located	No proper fencing; access via stairs; inaccessible layout; no inclusive features

Hill Rise Skate Park featured a low ramp that may be more accessible to younger or less mobile children. While some movement space was available, meaningful engagement for disabled children was minimal, limiting alignment with Equality Act 2010 and PSA duties.

5.5.2 Site-Specific Observations (Condensed Highlights)

Site	Strengths	Gaps
Hill Rise Play Area	Open space; some sensory equipment; good internal surfacing	Limited inclusive equipment; no shelter; only minimal social play encouragement
Hill Rise Skate Park	High usage across age groups; accessible low ramp; shaded shelter present	No fencing; informal layout; not inclusive for non-skating children or disabled users

Crescent	Soft surfacing internally; secure fencing; tidy layout	No inclusive features; no seating; no sensory or imaginative elements; poor external access
Dunnock Way	Distinct zones for different age groups; benches available	Below-street entry; no accessible pathways; no shelter; no accessible equipment

- Observed family engagement varied by site:
 - Hill Rise Play Area showed moderate engagement (1–9 children observed), but family interaction was largely supervisory rather than interactive. The adjacent open space provided some informal potential for shared activity.
 - Hill Rise Skate Park had the highest observed use (10–19 children and young people). It functioned more as a youth space than a family play area, with limited appropriateness for younger children or co-play.
 - Crescent and Dunnock Way had no children present during observation. Both sites lacked features to attract or support family-based use.
- Hill Rise Skate Park stood out as the most dynamic space, supporting extended engagement for older children and teens. However, its value for younger children and family groups was limited.

5.6 St Neots

Observations across the district revealed a wide range of usage patterns. Riverside Park, both adjacent to the car park and café and along River Road, experienced high use, with 20–29 children present, reflecting strong community engagement. Moderate use was seen at sites such as Henbrook Linear Park, Great High Ground, and the BMX/skate park, particularly among older children. In contrast, many local estate parks, including Weston Court, Maule Close, Furrowfields, and Top Birches, had no children present during observation, likely reflecting limited equipment or hyperlocal design.

Larger central parks, such as Riverside, Priory Park, and Great High Ground, catered to a broad age range from early years to KS4 and beyond, while smaller neighbourhood sites typically served only toddlers and KS1, restricting their wider appeal. Most sites lacked equipment specifically designed for disabled users, with only occasional features, such as bucket swings or wide entry climbing zones, present; these were sometimes unsupported by inclusive layouts or continuous surfacing. The

majority of parks were located within residential areas and easily walkable. Overall maintenance was generally good, with minimal litter or vandalism observed, though shading and seating were inconsistently available across sites.

5.6.1 Key Outliers and Strategic Observations

Site	Positive Outliers	Issues / Gaps
Riverside Park (car park side)	High engagement; varied age use; location near café supports family use	No inclusive pathways; limited accessible equipment
Hennrook Linear Park	Spatially accessible; includes partial inclusive features	No designated sensory/fantasy play
Great High Ground	Broad challenge range; inclusive social seating zone	Surface (sand) may impact full accessibility
BMX/Skate Park	Strong youth use; tiered ramps; shaded seating	Not designed for children with disabilities or very young children
Priory Park Spinney	Naturalistic location and spatial interest	Steep access, uneven surfaces, and no clear pathways – inaccessible for many users
Weston Court / Maule Close	Safe, clean, hyperlocal provision	No shade/shelter or inclusive features; usage extremely low or absent

Social play design across the observed sites was inconsistent. Larger parks, such as Great High Ground, Riverside Park, and Woodridge, facilitated group play through shared equipment like large boats, swings, and sand features. Skate and MUGA facilities, including BMX parks and Kester Way, also supported social interaction for older users, though these spaces were neither fully inclusive nor accessible to all.

In contrast, smaller estate parks offered little intentional support for social play. Equipment was typically single-user, and no sites included structured games or communication boards to encourage interaction across different abilities. Opportunities for creative and imaginative play were similarly limited, with notable exceptions at Top Birches, which used a train theme to stimulate imaginative engagement, and Woodridge, where zip lines and fantasy-inspired climbing units provided potential for creative play.

5.6.2 Site-Specific Observations (Condensed Highlights)

Site	Strengths	Gaps
Riverside Park (River Road)	Broad age range, large user numbers, grouped play zones	Elevated features: adult support needed; no sensory elements
Great High Ground	High challenge range, group swing, shelter, inclusive layout	Sand and surface transitions may limit access for some; no dedicated inclusive equipment
Hennrook Linear Park	Safe surfacing, swings with bordered seating, clean	No sensory zones; limited shade; basic equipment only
Bowlins Loves Farm	Painted games on ground, inclusive open layout, central location	No equipment; minimal challenge or sensory play
Top Birches – Loves Farm	Train-themed play, accessible to some children with disabilities	No clear surfacing or structured pathways; minimal shade or challenge
Woodridge – Loves Farm	Range of equipment, group swing, some social zones	Woodchip surfacing, limited accessible play equipment, no clear inclusivity

Maule Close / Hull Way / Furrowfields	Basic safety; hyperlocal provision	No sensory, inclusive, or imaginative equipment; limited challenge or appeal beyond toddlers
Kester Way MUGA	Youth provision, social shelter	No inclusive gym or basketball design; low play value for younger or disabled users
Priory Spinney	Natural environment, age-spanning layout	Steep, inaccessible terrain; no surfacing; wooden-only equipment not suited to disabled users

5.7 Yaxley

Observations at Crocus Way and Shackleton Way showed these sites catered to a broad age range, from toddlers through KS3, with a mix of play equipment to support varied play experiences. In contrast, Scott Drive focused exclusively on early years, primarily serving babies and toddlers. Across all three sites, there was little evidence of intergenerational or teenage-oriented design, and no youth or adult fitness elements were present. No children were present at the time of observation across all three sites. While this could reflect temporary conditions (e.g., time of day, weather), it may also indicate limited community uptake, particularly for smaller or estate-based parks.

None of the parks met expectations for inclusive design, with equipment lacking sensory or physical accessibility features. Scott Drive did provide spacing between equipment that would allow movement with assistive devices, but offered no meaningful play opportunities for children with disabilities. All three sites were clean and litter-free at the time of visit, reflecting positively on local maintenance and potentially supporting family confidence in using these spaces.

5.7.1 Key Outliers and Strategic Observations

Site	Positive Outliers	Issues / Gaps
Scott Drive	High-quality surfacing, clear design for toddlers	No inclusive play features, no shelter

Crocus Way	Clean site, secure fencing	No path from road, inaccessible to wheelchairs, no seating
Shackleton Way	Wide age range catered for, good internal space	No inclusive equipment, informal-only shade, no sensory features

Across all three sites, inclusive design was a significant gap. Children using mobility aids could enter some of the spaces but had no meaningful opportunities to engage in play.

5.7.2 Site-Specific Observations (Condensed Highlights)

Site	Strengths	Gaps
Shackleton Way	Spacious, clear zoning by equipment type, some scope for social interaction via swing/climb	No inclusive equipment, limited sensory value, “coolest” feature (zip wire) inaccessible
Scott Drive	Clean, soft surface, compact design for younger children, small interactive feature (noughts and crosses)	No shelter, minimal sensory or inclusive provision, limited range of play types
Crocus Way	Soft surfacing within play zone, tidy site	No direct access path, missing swings, no inclusive or sensory features, no seating or shade

Across the three Yaxley sites observed (Crocus Way, Scott Drive, Shackleton Way), family engagement was consistently low at the time of visit. No families were observed using the spaces for shared activities, and equipment design generally did not encourage family-based interaction.

5.8 SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
87% of sites feature safe surfacing; most are clean and well-maintained (92%).	Over 50% of sites lack accessible pathways; many still rely on grass-only or uneven surfaces.

Several large flagship sites (e.g. Riverside, Hinchingsbrooke) successfully attract broad age ranges.	Inclusive equipment is rare – only 17 sites fully accessible; sensory elements present at just 9 sites.
Provision for toddlers and KS1 is strong and widespread.	Limited provision for older children/teenagers; family-friendly features (shade, seating) often absent.
Many sites encourage social play through design (group swings, climbing).	Inconsistent inclusivity across villages, with rural/estate-based sites underused or inaccessible.
Opportunities	Threats
Target investment in under-served villages (e.g. Yaxley, Sawtry, Crescent, Dunnock Way) to address accessibility gaps.	Risk of long-term underuse of inaccessible or poorly equipped sites, leading to wasted assets.
Expand inclusive design (ramps, sensory zones, universally accessible equipment) to meet Equality Act and PSA standards.	Over-reliance on a handful of popular parks could create overcrowding and uneven community provision.
Develop intergenerational and youth-focused features (e.g. fitness zones, shaded family areas).	Disengagement of older children may push them into spaces designed for younger children, reducing safety and appeal.
Engage communities to co-design improvements, building ownership and better alignment with needs.	Ongoing maintenance or safety concerns (e.g. vandalism, broken equipment) risk undermining trust in provision.

6. Gap Analysis

This Gap Analysis Report forms part of HDC's 2025 Play Sufficiency Assessment. Its purpose is to identify where play provision across the district falls short in terms of access, quality, safety, inclusivity, and overall sufficiency. The findings draw on site audits, community engagement, and geospatial analysis to support evidence-led planning and future investment.

A total of 38 sites were assessed through professional Health and Safety audits, and additional sites were explored through surveys, interviews, and focus groups with children, parents, carers, and stakeholders. It should be noted that these Health and Safety audits were carried out by Handsam, an education and play compliance firm, whose standards and frameworks differ to those used by HDC's current auditors. The results of this additional check should be understood as an additional, independent, and supplementary analysis, and not as an overwrite of internal health and safety checks.

According to this external analysis, while many parks are well-used and well-loved, the analysis reveals various challenges and opportunities across the district.

Key findings include:

- **Uneven Access in Specific Areas:** Some communities, particularly in rural villages and recently developed housing areas, experience limited access to walkable, local play provision. In many cases, this reflects historical development patterns or local preferences regarding maintenance responsibilities.
- **Maintenance and Equipment Condition:** Audit observations identified a small number of sites where issues such as worn surfacing, missing signage, or ageing equipment were noted. These issues are already known to the Council and are being managed through routine inspection schedules and planned upgrades. In some lower-use areas, alternative approaches such as consolidation may represent better long-term value.
- **Inclusive Play Opportunities:** While many play areas were designed before current inclusive design standards, there is an opportunity to improve access and usability over time. Just under a third of assessed sites currently include features specifically designed for children with disabilities, and HDC continues to incorporate accessible elements where feasible as part of wider refurbishment efforts.

- **Provision for Older Children:** Equipment for teenagers is comparatively limited in many parks, where early years provision has historically been prioritised. Feedback from young people points to a growing demand for more adventurous, sociable, and age-appropriate play opportunities.
- **Supporting Amenities:** The lack of toilets, benches, lighting, and shaded areas at some sites can limit dwell time, particularly for families with very young children, disabled users, or intergenerational groups. Addressing these supporting features could help broaden appeal and accessibility at key strategic sites.
- **Community Feedback and High-Use Sites:** Comments were received on sites such as Hill Rise Park, Priory Park, and Riverside Park. These are among the district's busiest locations, and feedback largely reflects the impact of high footfall and ageing infrastructure. These sites are already prioritised for investment and form part of ongoing improvement planning.

Complete findings are presented in a comprehensive Gap Analysis Table, including RAG ratings, one based on audit results. These feed directly into the Strategic Improvement Plan, which sets out prioritised actions to address sufficiency gaps and raise the overall quality and equity of play in Huntingdonshire.

6.1 Consultation and stakeholder engagement

6.1.1 Surveys

Overall, the survey findings underscore a pattern of uneven distribution, age-based drop-off in engagement, and accessibility barriers that contribute to play insufficiency in specific localities. The strong preferences for certain types of equipment and natural spaces, alongside reports of disrepair or lack of inclusion, present clear areas for strategic investment.

Survey insights have been cross-referenced with geographic data, focus group findings, and health and safety evaluations to prioritise areas and populations for intervention. The resulting Gap Analysis Table will highlight where need is greatest and inform a pipeline of strategic investments.

6.1.2 Interviews

Interviews confirm and deepen findings from other data sources, particularly in areas such as inclusivity, age-appropriateness, infrastructure quality, and geographic equity. The lived experience

shared by childminders reflects significant systemic gaps, even in well-used spaces, and shows that a park's presence alone is insufficient without functionality, safety, and design that serves all users.

6.1.3 Focus groups

The parent and carer focus groups reinforce many of the issues identified in other data strands while offering unique insight into lived experience. They make clear that sufficiency cannot be measured solely by proximity or quantity of parks. Instead, play spaces must be designed and maintained with specific attention to infrastructure, inclusivity, age range, gender, and daily usability. Their reflections will be integrated into the overall gap analysis synthesis and used to inform the strategic improvement plan, ensuring that the voices of those most involved in children's daily lives are central to the shaping of future provision.

6.2 Health and safety evaluations

As part of the broader assessment of play sufficiency across Huntingdonshire, independent Health and Safety (H&S) audits have been undertaken for a representative sample of play areas by Handsam Ltd. These detailed site inspections evaluate compliance against EN 1176 playground safety standards and general best practice, identifying potential hazards, infrastructure deterioration, and recommended actions for improvement.

The audits provide a crucial technical layer of data that complements the observational, qualitative, and usage data gathered through community engagement and mapping. Each audited site receives a physical condition score and itemised action plan, prioritising necessary repairs, refurbishments, and site management improvements.

6.3 Park Gap Analysis Table

Each park entry includes location, audit score (where available), a summary of current physical condition, insights gathered from surveys, interviews, and focus groups (where applicable), identified issues from the H&S audit, recommended actions, and a rating based on the audit score and the nature of issues identified in the Handsam site assessments. This provides an objective technical safety and compliance rating. The RAG ratings are:

- **Green** — high-performing site with full or near-full compliance. No significant safety or maintenance issues. Score of or above 93% according to Handsam.

- **Amber** — generally compliant but with minor to moderate issues (e.g. wear, missing signage, surface wear). Score of 85-92.99% according to Handsam.
- **Red** — Site has significant safety concerns or multiple compliance failures. Urgent action needed. Score below 85% according to Handsam.

This table should be read in conjunction with the Strategic Improvement Plan in the following section, which translates these findings into recommended actions, proposed timescales, and resource planning. The parks identified as Red represent high-priority cases where safety, usability, or sufficiency are significantly compromised. Amber sites require investment to prevent further deterioration or to enhance underperforming but valued spaces. Green sites are broadly compliant but may still benefit from routine enhancements or inclusive design upgrades.

It should be noted that this table is based on the observations and H&S reports made during the project. Some of these issues have been addressed at the time of project completion. Where relevant, this has been noted. The original RAG and H&S scores are still presented to give an accurate representation on the data collected.

Park Name	Location	Audit Score (%)	Condition Summary	Community Insight	Identified Issues from H&S	Recommended Actions	H&S RAG
Bawlings	St Neots	95.81%	Structurally sound; limited safety concerns		Missing installation certificate; gate closure too slow; raised manhole cover	Obtain installation certificate; adjust gate closure mechanism; cordon off area around raised manhole	Amber
Bevan Close	Huntingdon	73.44%	Poor overall condition; multiple areas fenced off. It should be noted that this park has since been improved.		Equipment fenced off; missing installation certificate; trip hazards from ongoing works; no warning signs at substation; missing D bolt load indicators. It should be noted that	Repair or remove out-of-use equipment; provide certificate; install Chapter 8 barriers; add substation signage; mark D bolts. It should be noted that this	Red

					this park has since been improved.	park has since been improved.	
Crocus Way	Yaxley	61.58%	The full site needs a full refurbishment		Missing installation certificate; missing manufacturer's plates on equipment	Obtain installation certificate; affix manufacturer's plates	Red
Furrowfields	St Neots	90.17%	Generally good condition with no major hazards		Missing installation certificate; wooden borders need maintenance; flaking paint; missing manufacturer's plates	Provide installation certificate; maintain wooden posts; repaint surfaces; affix missing ID plates	Amber
Grassland Area	Huntingdon	96.53%	Very good condition; minor		BBQs showing signs of age	Consider replacing BBQ units	Amber

			aesthetic concern noted				
Great High Ground	St Neots	94.16%	Good condition; no physical issues noted		Missing installation certificate	Obtain original installation certificate	Green
Henbrook Linear Park	St Neots	90.79%	Generally functional; minor safety concerns		No installation certificate; damaged seesaw spring; worn rocker handles; worn swing seats; minor surfacing damage	Provide certificate; repair or replace damaged equipment; monitor surfacing	Amber
Hill Rise Park	St Ives	86.12%	Functioning but with multiple safety issues	Negative reception; concerns on play quality; vandalism; unsafe	Broken fencing; loose gate stop; missing fixings; uneven surfacing; equipment	Replace fencing; fix gate and surface; add plates; monitor and repair	Amber

					wear; missing documentation	damaged elements	
Hill Rise Skate Park	St Ives	72.93%	Generally compliant; minor wear and structural issues	Negative reception; concerns on play quality; vandalism; unsafe	Missing installation certificate; movement in grind rail; worn surfaces; graffiti; trip hazard from edge	Provide documentation; address loose fittings; resurface entry/exit; remove graffiti	Red
Hinchingbrook e Park Main Playground	Huntingdon	86.22%	Satisfactory condition with several significant remedials	Regular visits; children enjoy it; site of recent injury due to uneven surfacing; safety hazard near large slide and café area	Missing installation certificate; damaged see saw; illegible ID plate; unsafe gates (finger traps); splintering wooden fence; unclear D bolt load markings	Provide certificate; replace see saw; make pivot safe in interim; replace gates and wooden fence; mark load-bearing D bolts clearly	Red

Hinchingbrook e Park Old Playground	Huntingdon	74.26%	Unsatisfactory condition; ageing infrastructure		Missing installation certificate; no safety signage; deteriorating wooden elements; no fencing or gates	Provide certificate and signage; monitor and plan to replace decaying timber; consider secure enclosure for safety	Red
Hinchingbrook e Park Outdoor Gym Equipment	Huntingdon	95.95%	Very good condition; minor equipment issues		Missing installation certificate; two missing equipment units; trip hazard from base plates	Provide installation certificate; replace missing gym items; address trip hazard from plate edges	Green

Hinchingbrook e Park Sensory Play Area	Huntingdon	89.58%	Satisfactory condition; key item currently quarantined	Occasionally visited; valued for nature and considered safe; large site and limited access split groups; not buggy- friendly	Missing installation certificate and signage; main swing padlocked and out of use;	Repair swing and reinstate safely; provide installation certificate; install safety signage including contact details; affix manufacturer ID plates	Amber
Hinchingbrook e Park Woodland Play Area	Huntingdon	92.17%	Well- maintained with minor documentatio n and signage issues		Missing installation certificate; no safety signage;	Provide original installation certificate; install safety signage with name and contact number; affix manufacturer ID plates	Amber

Hull Way (24 & 25)	St Neots	94.46%	High standard; minimal non-compliance noted		Missing installation certificate; no safety signage	Provide missing certificate and install safety signage	Green
Kester Way (MUGA)	St Neots	94.81%	Good condition; structurally sound with minimal issues		Missing installation certificate; area not secure out of hours	Obtain installation certificate; consider out-of-hours security options	Amber
Maryland Avenue	Huntingdon	90.74%	Good overall condition with multiple minor issues		Missing installation certificate; incomplete fencing; gates fail to close; trip hazards from soft pour; worn slide; unsuitable surface under climbing frame	Provide certificate; repair fencing and gates; fix surface and fall zones; monitor and maintain slide condition	Amber

Maule Close	St Neots	92.90%	Well-maintained; generally safe		Missing installation certificate; no manufacturer plates; gate lacks auto closer; undulating surface near equipment	Obtain certificate; fix gate auto closer; install ID plates; repair surfacing to address trip hazard	Amber
Mayfield Crescent	Huntingdon	87.62%	Satisfactory overall; minor damage and surfacing issues		Missing installation certificate; trip hazards from undulating surface; missing D bolt load markings	Provide certificate; address surface hazards; clearly mark load-bearing bolts	Amber
Oxmoor Lane	Huntingdon	93.08%	Satisfactory overall with minor remedials required		Missing installation certificate; surface degradation causing trip hazard; unclear D bolt load indicators	Provide certificate; repair soft pour surface; label load-bearing D bolts	Amber

Priory Park St Neots	St Neots	86.56%	Generally satisfactory; localised damage	Popular for natural play; supports demand for outdoor; no inclusive features; not safe for toddlers	Missing zip wire sleeves; missing installation certificate; loose gate; damaged surfacing	Replace sleeves; fix gate; install ID plates; resurface to remove trip hazards	Amber
Riverside Park	Huntingdon	90.48%	Good condition; minor compliance and surface issues		Missing installation certificate; gate not lockable; unclear D bolt markings; surface shrinkage causing trip hazards	Provide certificate; fix gate locking mechanism; label D bolts; repair surface to remove trip risks	Amber
Riverside Park (Indoor Bowls Club)	St Neots	85.94%	Mixed condition; multiple		Missing installation certificate; tree overgrowth; fast-closing gate; surface shrinkage; paint/rust issues;	Provide installation certificate; conduct tree survey; adjust gate	Amber

			remedial needs		missing load-bearing indicators	timing; resurface shrunk areas; repair paint/rust; ensure bolts meet standards	
Riverside Park Coneygeare	St Neots	56.84%	Poor condition: safety issues identified. It should be noted that many repairs have since been made.	Popular for younger children; limited inclusivity and enclosure. It should be noted that many repairs have since been made.	Missing installation certificate; no ID plates; damaged see saw and swings; surface trip hazards. It should be noted that many repairs have since been made.	Obtain certificate; affix plates; repair or remove unsafe equipment; resurface key areas. It should be noted that many repairs have since been made.	Red
Riverside Park St Neots	St Neots	80.68%	Mixed condition; several areas need repair	Highly favoured; varied accessibility, low for wheelchair	Missing installation certificate; worn surfacing; loose swing	Tighten bars; refill surfaces; replace swing parts; install	Red

				users; toilets far away	roller; missing bolts and ID plates	plates; monitor wear	
Rowell Way	Sawtry	63.99%	Well-maintained; issues with documentation and fixings		Missing installation certificate; manufacturer's plates not visible; surface fixings exposed	Provide certificate; affix ID plates; repair surface bolts	Red
Sapley Fields	Huntingdon	94.73%	Well-maintained with minor compliance issues		Missing installation certificate; exposed metal drain; missing load-bearing indicators on bolts	Provide certificate; repair/cap exposed drain; ensure D bolts are clearly marked	Amber
Scott Drive	Yaxley	98.14%	Fully compliant; recently		Missing installation certificate; no manufacturer's plates on equipment	Provide installation certificate; affix	Green

			installed equipment			manufacturer's plates	
Shackleton Way	Yaxley	87.08%	Functional but aging; moderate repair needs		Missing installation certificate; overgrown foliage; gate not auto-closing; damaged surfaces; trip hazard	Address gate timing; clear foliage; repair surfacing; ensure smooth travel run; install ID plates	Amber
Signal Road	Ramsey	90.31%	High compliance with minor maintenance needs		Missing installation certificate and manufacturer's plates; weeds; surface wear	Provide documentation; remove weeds; monitor surfacing condition	Amber
Stokes Drive	Godmanchester	86.32%	Satisfactory overall; some surfacing and		Missing installation certificate; overgrown bushes; insufficient bark	Provide certificate; trim vegetation; top up bark to 100mm;	Amber

			compliance issues		surfacing; unclear D bolt markings	label load-bearing D bolts	
Stukeley Meadows	Huntingdon	90.59%	Structurally sound with multiple minor compliance issues		Missing installation certificate; gate finger trap risk; surface gaps; missing steel caps; exposed bolts; cable wear	Provide certificate; correct gate stopper; infill surface; replace caps; protect bolts; monitor cables	Amber
The Whaddons	Huntingdon	84.07%	Satisfactory condition but impacted by cleanliness and wear		Missing installation certificate; no signage; loose bolts; trip hazards; rotting seating; surface damage; litter and sharp waste	Provide certificate and signage; tighten bolts; repair surface and seating; increase inspection frequency to manage waste	Red

Top Birches	St Neots	77.90%	Very good condition; compliant structure		Missing installation certificate; no safety signage	Provide required documentation and install signage	Red
Weston Court	St Neots	92.88%	Generally good condition with minor hazards		Missing installation certificate	Provide original installation certificate; replace or repair broken fence panels at rear; remove leaf mulch under swings to eliminate slip hazard	Amber
Wigmore Farm Infant	Godmanchester	95.31%	Good condition with limited minor issues		Missing installation certificate; no safety signage; unclear D bolt markings	Provide certificate; install appropriate signage; clearly	Amber

						mark load-bearing D bolts	
Wigmore Farm Junior	Godmancheste r	92.48%	Good condition with minor compliance concerns		Missing installation certificate; slow-closing gates; unclear D bolt markings; minor surfacing damage	Provide certificate; service gates for 4–8s closure; label D bolts; repair soft pour trip hazard	Amber
Woodridge	St Neots	Not listed	Functionally compliant with moderate risks		Surface damage; missing certificate; no safety signage; fencing damage; missing plates	Repair surfacing; install ID plates; replace fencing; provide certificate and signage	Red

6.4 Geographic

This Geographic Gap Analysis forms a key component of HDC's Play Sufficiency Assessment. Its purpose is to assess the alignment between current play provision and community need across the district, with a particular focus on geographic equity, accessibility, and strategic sufficiency. Drawing on a village-by-village synthesis of Health and Safety audits, observational usage data, and demographic profiling, the report delivers a place-based evaluation of play access and quality. Each locality has been assigned a strategic Red-Amber-Green (RAG) rating to guide future planning, investment, and policy development.

The findings are defined by three core themes:

6.4.1 A Diverse Estate of Play Provision

Observation and engagement data point to a diverse pattern of use across the district. A small number of large, well-equipped "destination" parks, such as Hinchbrook Country Park in Huntingdon and Riverside Park in St Neots, consistently attract families from a wide catchment area and are widely appreciated as key community assets.

In contrast, a broader range of smaller, neighbourhood-level sites are used more variably. During assessment visits, around 40% of sites had no users present at the time of observation, while over half recorded fewer than ten users. This does not necessarily reflect disuse or disinterest; usage levels often depend on time of day, weather, and surrounding context, but it does suggest an opportunity to better understand local preferences and to tailor provision accordingly.

6.4.2 Gaps and Opportunities in the Current Offer

The analysis highlights three areas where targeted improvement could enhance sufficiency and inclusivity across the district's play estate:

- **Inclusive Play Opportunities:** Of the 52 assessed sites, 17 featured equipment accessible to children with physical disabilities. A smaller number offered integrated features that actively support play between children with differing needs. This reflects the fact that many sites were designed prior to the introduction of inclusive design standards. HDC continues to improve

accessibility where possible, but full retrofits can be challenging within current budgets and site layouts.

- **Provision for Older Children and Teenagers:** Engagement with young people indicates that existing equipment such as MUGAs and fitness stations is often underused, with a preference instead for adventurous, social, and self-directed features such as pump tracks, zip lines, and shelters. These preferences offer a clear direction for future design and investment, especially in areas of high youth population.
- **Site Documentation and Compliance:** During audits, several sites were found to have missing documentation such as installation certificates or manufacturer plates. This does not necessarily indicate safety concerns, as routine inspections and remedial works are regularly carried out. However, improved documentation processes could help streamline compliance and future maintenance planning.

6.4.3 Targeted Investment to Support Equity

Play provision across Huntingdonshire reflects the district's complex geography, diverse settlement patterns, and historical development context. However, some areas, particularly those with higher levels of deprivation and larger child populations, tend to rely on older or less well-equipped sites. These patterns are often the legacy of past planning frameworks or resource constraints, rather than present neglect.

Addressing these imbalances through thoughtful, community-led investment can help ensure that all children have access to high-quality, inclusive play. Targeting resources to the areas of greatest need offers an opportunity to strengthen cohesion, promote wellbeing, and reduce barriers to participation in outdoor recreation.

The table below summarises sufficiency across the district's seven key localities, based on a triangulated assessment of need, quantity, and quality. These locality-level ratings feed directly into the Strategic Improvement Plan and should be read in conjunction with site-specific findings set out in the Gap Analysis Table.

Village/Town	Overall Sufficiency RAG Rating	Justification
Godmanchester	Amber	Local provision is well-used and generally safe, but demand from a growing child population is outpacing the variety and quantity of existing play equipment. Inclusive features are limited, reflecting legacy design, though improvements could be prioritised in future upgrades.
Huntingdon	Amber	Provision is mixed. While some parks are strategic assets and receive regular use, certain neighbourhood sites would benefit from modernisation and improved accessibility. Areas of higher deprivation may require targeted investment to reduce localised inequalities.
Ramsey	Amber	One centrally located park serves much of the town, and while well-maintained, it lacks dedicated youth provision. There is an opportunity to expand or diversify the offer for older children and teenagers through co-designed enhancements.
Sawtry	Green/Amber	The main park is centrally located, visible, and offers a wide range of equipment for different age groups. Although some natural features were flagged in earlier assessments, feedback from families is positive and the site remains well-used. Pathways and landscaping could be improved further over time.
St Neots	Amber	The town benefits from several well-used parks, but some sites are ageing and may require scheduled improvements. The scale of the town and child population creates higher baseline expectations; planned investment will help sustain quality and accessibility.

Yaxley	Red	Provision is currently limited in both quantity and inclusivity. The largest site suffers from repeated vandalism, and while safe at the time of inspection, is not well-used. There is clear justification for a comprehensive review or redesign.
St Ives	Amber	HDC operates only a small number of play assets here, such as Hill Rise Park and Skate Park. Other local parks are under the remit of St Ives Town Council. Strategic collaboration may support more consistent quality and accessibility across the town.

7. Proposed Strategic Plan

Play provision across Huntingdonshire reflects a varied landscape of assets shaped by historic development, demographic growth, and evolving community expectations. While flagship parks such as Hinchbrook and Riverside continue to attract high levels of use and appreciation, many smaller neighbourhood sites experience more variable usage. This reflects a range of factors, including location, design age, and surrounding infrastructure, rather than quality alone.

Routine Health and Safety audits have identified a number of sites where surfacing, equipment condition, or signage may require attention. These issues are already being addressed through scheduled maintenance or targeted investment. In some locations, lower levels of use, observed at over 40% of sites during visits, suggest opportunities to consolidate provision, realign with current demand, or reimagine underutilised spaces in collaboration with local communities.

Accessibility is another area with clear potential for improvement. Of the 52 sites assessed, 17 include at least one item of inclusive equipment. Given Huntingdonshire's EHCP rate of 5.7%, enhancing inclusive features offers a meaningful opportunity to improve experiences for children with additional needs and their families. It is important to note, however, that most sites were installed before current design standards and full retrofits may not be feasible in every case.

In response to these dynamics, the proposed strategy outlines a shift from reactive maintenance to a planned, equity-informed investment model. This approach positions play as essential community infrastructure, integral to child development, family wellbeing, and inclusive public space.

7.1.1 A Vision for Inclusive and High-Quality Play

This strategy proposes a shift in both ethos and delivery: from reactive maintenance and patchwork upgrades to a proactive, place-based investment programme that builds a network of high-quality, inclusive, and resilient play spaces.

The long-term vision is for play to be positioned as a pillar of Huntingdonshire's social infrastructure, on par with transport, housing, and education, as a public good that delivers measurable returns in child development, public health, and social cohesion. To support this, the Council will embed clear quality standards into all future planning and investment decisions.

Investment in high-quality play provision produces benefits that extend far beyond the park boundary. Well-designed public spaces are linked to improved physical and mental health, reduced pressure on NHS services, enhanced social connection, and increased civic pride. For children and families, they offer a safe and stimulating environment to learn, socialise, and thrive. For the Council, this represents a strategic opportunity to deliver lasting value in both financial and social terms.

7.1.2 Delivering on Priorities

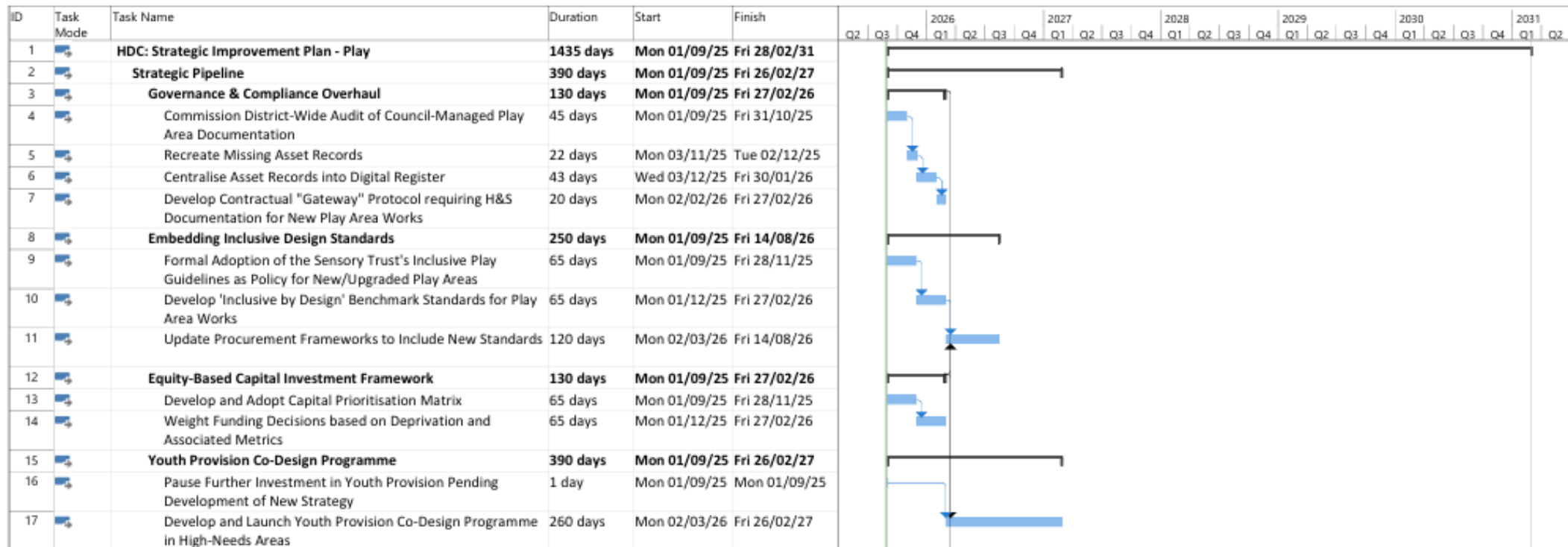
This strategic plan aligns directly with the ambitions set out in HDC's Corporate Plan and wider health and wellbeing priorities. The Council has committed to building "a better Huntingdonshire," with a strong emphasis on community health, active lifestyles, and place-based equity. High-quality play provision is a visible and impactful way to deliver on these commitments.

In addressing known safety risks, the strategy supports the Council's priority to create safer, healthier communities. By embedding inclusivity, it promotes equal access to public services and helps close health and opportunity gaps. And by adopting an equity-led investment model, the strategy ensures that resources are directed towards areas of greatest need, particularly where child poverty, social exclusion, or deprivation limit access to safe, enriching environments.

The successful delivery of this plan will provide clear evidence of progress against corporate priorities, reinforce the Council's leadership in place-based planning, and strengthen public confidence in its role as a steward of community assets.

7.2 Strategic Pipeline: Gantt Chart

To shift from a reactive to a planned, equitable, and risk-managed approach, HDC must first address the systemic barriers that currently undermine its play estate. The four foundational projects outlined below are not capital works in themselves, but rather programmes that establish the governance, compliance, equity, and engagement mechanisms needed to ensure all future investment is effective, inclusive, and legally sound. These initiatives are interdependent and must be prioritised before wider refurbishment and new build activity commences. The Gantt Chart is presented on the following page and has been submitted as a pdf document alongside this final report.



Project: HDC Strategic Improvement Plan - Play Date: Thu 28/08/25	Task		Project Summary		Manual Task		Start-only		Deadline	
	Split		Inactive Task		Duration-only		Finish-only		Progress	
	Milestone		Inactive Milestone		Manual Summary Rollup		External Tasks		Manual Progress	
	Summary		Inactive Summary		Manual Summary		External Milestone			

7.2.1 Governance and Compliance Overhaul

7.2.1.1 Purpose

To de-risk the play estate by establishing a baseline of documentation and safety compliance across all sites, enabling transparent asset management and audit readiness.

7.2.1.2 Rationale

Some sites lack installation certificates and manufacturer ID plates; key documentation required to evidence compliance with EN1176 safety standards.

7.2.1.3 Key Actions

- Commission a district-wide documentation audit across all council-managed play areas. Where documentation is missing, recreate asset records and upload them into a centralised digital register.
- Embed a new contractual “Gateway” protocol: final contractor payments for new works or refurbishments will be contingent upon receipt and verification of all Health and Safety documentation, including EN1176 certification.

Timescale: 0–6 months

Estimated Budget: £15,000–£20,000

Expected Outcomes

- Full EN1176 documentation coverage across the estate
- Reduced legal and insurance risk
- A reliable data foundation for lifecycle costing, budgeting, and capital planning

7.2.2 Embedding Inclusive Design Standards

7.2.2.1 Purpose

Overcome any barriers to play for disabled children by adopting inclusive design as a default standard across all new and refurbished provision.

7.2.2.2 Rationale

At the time of inspection, 17 of the 52 audited sites currently include any accessible play equipment.

7.2.2.3 Key Actions

- Formally adopt the Sensory Trust's inclusive play guidelines as policy for all new and upgraded play spaces.
- Update procurement frameworks to require all new installations to meet a defined 'Inclusive by Design' benchmark. This could include continuous soft-pour surfacing, step-free paths, integrated equipment, and sensory features that promote social play.

Timescale: Policy adoption within 3 months; ongoing integration into project delivery

Estimated Budget: Officer time only for policy development; capital implications integrated into individual refurbishment budgets

Expected Outcomes

- Clear compliance with the Equality Act 2010
- Improved accessibility and increased usage by disabled children and families
- Strengthened community inclusion and equity

7.2.3 Youth Provision Co-Design Programme

7.2.3.1 Purpose

To reimagine adolescent provision by engaging young people directly in the design and development of public play and recreation spaces.

7.2.3.2 Rationale

Consultation has shown that older children seek social and dynamic spaces like pump tracks, zip lines, and shaded seating. A youth-led co-design process is more likely to produce spaces that are relevant, well-used, and socially valuable.

7.2.3.3 Key Actions

- Pause further investment in traditional youth provision pending the development of a new strategy

- Launch a co-design programme in partnership with schools and youth groups in high-need areas (e.g. Huntingdon, St Neots, Yaxley), giving young people a central role in shaping design outcomes

Timescale: 6–12 months

Estimated Budget: £10,000–£15,000 (covering facilitation, materials, and youth honorariums)

Expected Outcomes

- A youth-endorsed strategy that reflects current needs and aspirations
- Higher engagement and positive use of public spaces by adolescents
- Long-term public health and community safety benefits through improved provision

7.2.4 Equity-Based Capital Investment Framework

7.2.4.1 Purpose

To ensure that future investment in play is targeted to areas of highest need, based on transparent, data-driven prioritisation criteria.

7.2.4.2 Rationale

In some areas, the poorest communities, often with the highest child populations, have provision in need of review. Key Actions

- Develop and adopt a Capital Prioritisation Matrix, informed by international best practice (e.g. Minneapolis Park Board’s 23-point equity model)
- Weight funding decisions based on deprivation (IDACI), child population density, provision quality (RAG rating), and sufficiency against Fields in Trust benchmarks

Timescale: 6 months

Estimated Budget: Officer time only

Expected Outcomes

- A consistent and defensible model for allocating investment
- Optimised return on capital through targeted interventions

- Demonstrable progress on reducing inequalities in access to quality play

7.2.5 Priority Phase 1 (Years 1–2): Urgent Safety and Strategic Stabilisation

The first phase addresses urgent Health & Safety risks and delivers flagship interventions in the most disadvantaged, under-served areas. The aim is to stabilise the estate and demonstrate the Council's commitment to inclusive, equitable provision.

Project 1.1 – Targeted Safety Remediation

Deliver focused works to address priority items identified through routine Health & Safety audits. This includes repairing surfaces, replacing worn components, and ensuring signage and access meet agreed standards. Most remedial works are minor in nature and will build on the Council's established inspection and repair programme.

Project 1.2 – Yaxley Park Overhaul: Feasibility and Design

Yaxley has a large child population but limited provision. This project will explore options for a mid-scale, inclusive park through feasibility studies and community co-design, ensuring the design reflects local priorities and addresses recurring challenges such as vandalism.

Project 1.3 – Ramsey Youth Provision (Co-Design Output)

Ramsey lacks dedicated teenage provision. This project will deliver the first outcome of a youth co-design process, potentially including a pump track, youth hub, or alternative activity space, shaped by young people's voices.

Project 1.4 – Huntingdon North Equity Refurbishment

Targeted investment in a key neighbourhood site (such as The Whaddons) to deliver a refreshed and inclusive park aligned with new design standards. Where recent investment has already been made (e.g. Bevan Close), resources will focus on complementary improvements.

7.2.6 Priority Phase 2 (Years 2–4): Strategic Enhancement and Expansion

With immediate priorities addressed, Phase 2 focuses on Amber-rated areas, continuing the roll-out of inclusive design and addressing broader gaps in provision and accessibility.

Project 2.1 – Godmanchester Inclusive Upgrade

Upgrades at Wigmore Farm (Junior Zone) will add more physically challenging equipment and improve inclusivity. At Stokes Drive, woodchip surfacing will be replaced with unitary surfacing to improve accessibility and usability.

Project 2.2 – St Ives Accessibility and Play Value

In partnership with St Ives Town Council, targeted improvements at Crescent and Dunnock Way parks will increase accessibility and play value. Works may include ramped access at Dunnock Way and the addition of features for a wider range of users.

Project 2.3 – St Neots Estate Park Renewal

St Neots benefits from well-used destination parks but some smaller neighbourhood sites are under pressure from age and heavy use. One site in an area of higher need will be selected for a full community-led redesign.

Project 2.4 – Sawtry Site Re-engineering

Sawtry's main park is popular but would benefit from improvements to accessibility and landscaping. This project will fund a full redesign to address topographical challenges and incorporate community feedback.

7.2.7 Priority Phase 3 (Years 4–5): Consolidation and Innovation

The final phase focuses on sustaining gains made through the programme, embedding inclusive design more widely, and piloting innovative approaches to broaden the reach and long-term resilience of the play estate.

Project 3.1 – Inclusive Equipment Retrofit Programme

Install inclusive equipment (e.g. wheelchair-accessible roundabouts, sensory panels, flush trampolines) at 5–10 existing sites in good overall condition. This ensures incremental improvement without requiring full-scale redevelopment.

Project 3.2 – Natural and Adventurous Play Pilot

Develop a community co-designed natural play site in a high-population area such as Huntingdon or St Neots. This could incorporate landscaping, water/sand play, and planting, responding to demand for more imaginative and nature-based experiences.

Project 3.3 – Establishing a Lifecycle Renewal Fund

Using asset data generated during Phase 2, prepare a business case for a dedicated lifecycle renewal fund. This will support proactive investment in repairs and upgrades, helping to sustain quality and avoid future cycles of decline.