



Huntingdonshire District Council

Geographic Gap Analysis of Play Sufficiency

Private & Confidential

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1. Executive Summary

This Geographic Gap Analysis forms a key component of Huntingdonshire District Council’s 2025 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 help guide future planning, investment, and policy development.

The findings highlight both the strengths of Huntingdonshire’s play network and opportunities for further improvement. The district benefits from a broad estate of play spaces that are regularly inspected and generally well-maintained, with flagship sites such as Hinchingsbrooke Country Park in Huntingdon and Riverside Park in St Neots attracting high levels of use and positive feedback. At the same time, the analysis identifies a number of areas where provision could be enhanced to ensure that all children and families benefit equally. Three themes emerge:

1.1 A Varied Estate of Play Provision

Observation and consultation data show a contrast between large, high-quality “destination” parks and smaller neighbourhood sites where usage is more variable. More than 40% of observed sites had no users present at the time of assessment, and over half recorded fewer than ten users. This does not necessarily reflect poor quality—usage is often shaped by factors such as weather, location, or visibility—but it does point to opportunities for more tailored design and investment to increase local engagement.

1.2 Opportunities to Strengthen Sufficiency

The analysis highlights three areas where future investment could make the greatest difference:

- **Inclusive play:** Of the 52 assessed sites, 17 currently include equipment accessible to children with physical disabilities, with fewer offering features that actively support co-play between children of all abilities. Many sites were designed before inclusive design standards were introduced, and incremental improvements offer a clear opportunity to broaden access over time.

- **Teenage provision:** Consultation with young people emphasised a desire for adventurous and social spaces. While traditional facilities such as MUGAs and fitness stations are present, they were less well-used. Future provision could respond to this demand with co-designed features such as pump tracks, zip lines, and informal gathering areas.
- **Governance and documentation:** In some cases, installation certificates or manufacturer plates were missing from site records. While this does not indicate unmanaged safety issues—regular inspections and repairs are in place—strengthening documentation processes would support efficient management and public confidence.

1.3 Addressing Geographic Inequity

Provision across Huntingdonshire reflects the district’s rural geography, settlement patterns, and the legacy of past development frameworks. Some areas with higher deprivation or larger child populations are more reliant on older or less inclusive facilities. By targeting investment towards these localities, the Council has an opportunity to ensure equitable access and to align provision more closely with community need.

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.

2. District-Wide Perspective on Play Provision

2.1 Current Usage and Community Engagement

Observational data and community consultation highlight an uneven pattern of engagement with play spaces across the district. A “honeypot” effect is evident, with high-profile destination parks such as Hinchingsbrooke Play Area, Riverside Park (St Neots), and Priory Park consistently attracting large numbers of users. These sites were among the most frequently visited and most positively rated in both surveys and interviews, praised for their design, variety, and perceived safety. They serve a broad age range and act as anchor assets within the wider play network.

Neighbourhood-level sites, particularly smaller parks in villages or peripheral estates, tended to show more variable levels of use. During observation visits, around 40% of sites recorded no users and over half had fewer than 10 children present at that moment in time. These figures may reflect external factors such as weather, time of day, or nearby competing attractions, rather than lack of demand alone. Consultation findings suggest that families sometimes bypass local parks in favour of larger sites with a broader play offer, highlighting that geographic proximity does not always equate to sufficiency.

Engagement also provided insight into user preferences. While traditional equipment such as swings and climbing frames remains popular, children and young people expressed a desire for more adventurous and socially oriented features. Younger children identified sensory and imaginative play as important, while older children and teenagers favoured elements such as zip lines, pump tracks, and informal gathering areas. Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs) and outdoor gym equipment were observed to be less popular, suggesting that current youth provision could be better aligned with user preferences through future co-design.

2.2 Accessibility and Inclusivity Landscape

The majority of sites are broadly walkable and well-connected, with 88% rated as accessible by foot or public transport. However, consultation and audit data indicate that once on site, experiences can vary, particularly for children with additional needs.

- Pathways and surfacing: Approximately 63% of sites rely on grass-only or partially surfaced routes, which can present challenges for users of mobility aids, wheelchairs, or

prams. While 87% of sites offer some soft surfacing, only 23% provide comprehensive coverage, limiting accessibility in some locations.

- **Inclusive equipment:** Of the 52 assessed sites, 17 include equipment designed to support children with physical disabilities. Many older sites were installed before inclusive standards became commonplace, and incremental improvements are already being introduced where feasible.
- **Sensory features:** Just nine sites currently include sensory elements such as tactile panels or musical play, indicating scope to strengthen provision for neurodivergent children.

Consultation highlighted that the presence of inclusive assets does not always guarantee ease of use. For example, at Hinchbrook Park's Sensory Play Area, a specialist wheelchair-accessible swing was locked at the time of observation. The Council is working with the manufacturer to resolve design and safety issues, but the example illustrates that practical adjustments (e.g. clearer signage or access protocols) are as important as the equipment itself.

2.3 Demographic and Socio-Economic Context

Huntingdonshire has a high and growing child population, with particularly dense clusters in wards such as Huntingdon North, Yaxley, and St Neots Eynesbury. These areas represent strong latent demand for play facilities.

Overlaying this with socio-economic data highlights areas of vulnerability. According to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), ten of Huntingdonshire's 106 Lower Super Output Areas fall within the bottom three deciles for child income deprivation. These are concentrated in Huntingdon North, Yaxley, and The Stukeleys—communities where access to safe, engaging public space is particularly valuable.

The need for inclusive design is further reinforced by local SEND data. Cambridgeshire's EHCP rate stood at 5.7% in 2024, above the national average of 4.71%, indicating a substantial cohort of children who would benefit from accessible and inclusive play environments. Aligning future investment with both demographic growth and inclusivity needs will ensure play provision continues to serve all families equitably.

3. Village-by-Village Analysis

3.1 Godmanchester

Overall Sufficiency RAG Rating: Amber

Godmanchester & Hemingford Abbots is home to 1,891 children aged 0–14, with the largest cohort (537) aged 8–11. Socio-economic indicators suggest relative affluence, with local LSOAs ranking in the least deprived national deciles for both IMD and IDACI. Strategic need here centres on quality, inclusivity, and age-appropriate variety rather than deprivation.

The three District Council-managed play areas (Stokes Drive, Wigmore Farm Infant, and Wigmore Farm Junior) are rated Amber. Wigmore Farm provides a good range and secure fencing, though accessibility is limited and features such as the zip wire are not usable by all. Stokes Drive has more limited equipment and surfacing that restricts mobility access. Observed use was moderate to low, reflecting the neighbourhood scale of these facilities.

Identified Opportunities

- Provision is weighted toward younger children; more challenge for 8–11s could be added.
- Surfacing and equipment could be improved to broaden accessibility.
- Investment could focus on upgrading equipment, expanding capacity, and embedding inclusive design.

3.2 Huntingdon

Overall Sufficiency RAG Rating: Amber

Huntingdon has the district's highest child population (2,171 in Huntingdon North alone) and contains areas of both relative affluence and high deprivation. Its play estate must therefore serve universal needs while addressing more complex social contexts.

The town contains the largest number of sites, with 22 observed and 14 audited. Hinchingsbrooke Country Park acts as a key district-level destination. Other neighbourhood sites, such as The Whaddons, would benefit from further investment in surfacing, furniture, and accessibility. While observational data recorded some sites with no users at the time of visit, others were well used, reflecting variation in location, design, and catchment.

Identified Opportunities

- Prioritise improvements at sites in higher-need areas, ensuring equitable access across Huntingdon.
- Strengthen inclusive design across the estate, including enhancing usability of the sensory park.
- Continue targeted investment to raise standards in neighbourhood parks while maintaining popular flagship sites.

3.3 Ramsey

Overall Sufficiency RAG Rating: Amber

Ramsey has a child population of 1,889 and is more geographically isolated than other towns. While relatively less deprived, limited local infrastructure increases the importance of strong neighbourhood provision.

One main Council-managed site serves most of the community. It is partially accessible and moderately used, though provision for older children is limited. Three of ten play items are placed on grass without accessible surfacing, restricting ease of use.

Identified Opportunities

- Explore options to expand or diversify play for a child population of nearly 1,900.
- Introduce features for older children and teenagers through co-design.
- Improve surfacing and layout to enhance inclusivity.

3.4 Sawtry

Overall Sufficiency RAG Rating: Green/Amber

Sawtry has a moderate child population (1,124 aged 0–14) and is among the district's more affluent areas. Provision remains important to meet local demand.

Rowell Way, the only Council-managed site, shows signs of wear and is affected by the sloped grassy setting. While moderately used, the lack of pathways, fencing, or shelter limits accessibility for disabled users, pushchairs, or toddlers.

Identified Opportunities

- Improve pathways, surfacing, and seating to make the site more accessible.
- Explore options for enhancing play variety and resilience against weather/wear.
- Consider longer-term redesign or additional provision to meet future demand.

3.5 St Ives

Overall Sufficiency RAG Rating: Amber

St Ives has a large and growing child population (2,740 aged 0–14). It is a generally affluent town, with demand driven more by population growth and diversity of age groups than deprivation.

HDC manages a small number of play sites directly (Hill Rise Play Area and Hill Rise Skate Park), while other sites such as Crescent and Dunnock Way are Town Council-managed. The skate park is well used but would benefit from refurbishment. At Dunnock Way, stair-only access limits inclusivity.

Identified Opportunities

- Refurbish Hill Rise Skate Park to maintain its popularity and safety.
- Work with the Town Council to enhance accessibility and inclusivity at secondary sites.
- Introduce inclusive equipment to broaden provision across the town.

3.6 St Neots

Overall Sufficiency RAG Rating: Amber

St Neots is the district's largest town, with 6,105 children aged 0–14. It includes areas of both affluence and deprivation, creating diverse needs.

The town has the largest portfolio in the district, with 18 observed and 15 audited sites. Destination parks like Riverside and Priory are popular and highly valued. Some neighbourhood sites, such as Riverside Coneygeare and Woodridge, were identified as priorities for improvement, with repairs already in hand.

Identified Opportunities

- Address maintenance and accessibility at selected neighbourhood parks, particularly in higher-need areas.
- Enhance inclusivity across the estate, ensuring large-scale sites reflect the diversity of the population.
- Conduct a town-wide review to balance investment between destination parks and local sites.

3.7 Yaxley

Overall Sufficiency RAG Rating: Amber/Red (Priority for Improvement)

Yaxley is home to 2,036 children aged 0–14, making it the district’s second-largest child population. Moderate deprivation increases the importance of effective local provision.

Three sites were assessed: Crocus Way, Scott Drive, and Shackleton Way. Crocus Way has experienced high levels of vandalism and remains underused. Scott Drive and Shackleton Way provide local provision but would benefit from investment in inclusivity and appeal. Observations recorded low use across all three, though this may be influenced by time of day and other factors.

Identified Opportunities

- Redesign Crocus Way to address vandalism challenges and enhance accessibility.
- Introduce inclusive equipment and pathway improvements at all sites.
- Explore options for a larger, community-led play space to meet the needs of Yaxley’s significant child population.