

Public
Key Decision – Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	A Sustainable Framework for Play in Huntingdonshire
Meeting/Date:	Overview & Scrutiny Panel - (Environment, Communities & Partnerships) – 6 th November 2025 Cabinet – 18 th November 2025
Executive Portfolio:	Councillor Julie Kerr – Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene
Report by:	Gregg Holland – Head of Leisure, Health & Environment
Ward(s) affected:	All Ward/s

Executive Summary:

This report presents a comprehensive framework for the sustainable delivery of outdoor play across Huntingdonshire, designed to meet the evolving needs of children, families, and communities while aligning with the Council's strategic priorities. The Sustainable Play Framework sets out a tiered model of provision as detailed in the HDC Final Report (**Appendix 1**) that prioritises investment in high-impact areas, enhances flagship sites, and reviews the entirety of our play assets to ensure long-term financial, environmental, and social sustainability.

The framework is underpinned by extensive consultation, evidence-based analysis, and national best practice, including guidance from Fields in Trust and Design for Play. It responds to the findings of the 2025 Geographic Gap Analysis (**Appendix 3**) and the Thematic Gap Analysis (**Appendix 4**), which identified significant disparities in accessibility, quality, and inclusivity across the District's play network.

Key features of the framework include:

- **Strategic Investment:** A phased programme of capital investment totalling £730,000 over four years, embedded within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to ensure delivery and financial resilience.
- **Commercial Sustainability:** Development of income-generating flagship sites to support reinvestment in the wider play network and reduce long-term maintenance liabilities.

- **Inclusive Design:** Commitment to accessible, imaginative, and inclusive play spaces that meet the needs of all age groups, including children with additional needs and teenagers.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Integration of sustainable design principles, biodiversity-friendly landscaping, and climate-resilient infrastructure to support the Council's Climate Strategy.
- **Community Engagement:** A co-design approach involving children, young people, and local stakeholders to ensure play provision reflects community aspirations and fosters local stewardship.

The framework supports the Council's Corporate Plan priorities, particularly Priority 1: Improving health and wellbeing and Priority 3: Doing our core work well, by positioning play as essential infrastructure for preventative health, social cohesion, and climate resilience. It also supports the Council's Place Strategy by working in partnership with Town and Parish Councils to deliver improvements which help to develop pride of place and support a good quality of life for our residents and improved physical activity, health and well-being in young people. The framework strengthens the Council's ability to secure external funding and developer contributions by demonstrating a clear, strategic approach to delivering high-quality, multi-functional green spaces.

Through this framework, Huntingdonshire District Council aims to become a national exemplar in delivering sustainable, inclusive, and impactful play provision that improves lives, supports communities, and protects the environment for future generations.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet is

RECOMMENDED

- a) to adopt the Sustainable Play Framework as the strategic approach for play provision across Huntingdonshire, ensuring alignment with the Corporate Plan, Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020) and the Council's Climate Strategy;
- b) to approve the tiered play provision model as detailed in the HDC Final Report (**Appendix 1**) and phased implementation plan (2025–2030) as outlined in the HDC Final Report (**Appendix 1**) and supported by the HDC Implementation Guide (**Appendix 2**), including audit and prioritisation, pilot projects, and District-wide rollout, to deliver inclusive, high-quality play spaces;
- c) to commit to securing multi-year funding through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to lock in the indicative £730,000 capital investment and enable delivery of the framework;

- d) to delegate authority to the Head of Leisure, Health & Environment in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene to identify and co-ordinate the development of income-generating flagship sites to create a commercially sustainable model that reinvests revenue into the wider play network; and
- e) to delegate authority to the Head of Leisure, Health & Environment in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene to develop community engagement initiatives and co-design to ensure inclusivity, local ownership, and alignment with the needs of children, young people, and families.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To present a strategic framework for the sustainable delivery of outdoor play across Huntingdonshire, ensuring inclusive, high-quality provision that meets the needs of current and future generations. The framework aims to prioritise investment in areas of greatest impact, enhance flagship sites capable of generating income, and to review the entirety of our play assets to ensure long-term financial sustainability.
- 1.2 This approach aligns with the Council's Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020) and the Council's Place Strategy, Corporate Plan priorities—particularly Priority 1: Improving health and wellbeing and Priority 3: Doing our core work well—and the Climate Strategy, by embedding inclusive design, environmental stewardship, and commercial viability into the future of play provision. It also supports the Council's ambition to reduce inequalities, promote preventative health, and deliver resilient community infrastructure.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Access to high-quality play is essential for public health, child development, and community resilience. Evidence from Public Health England and the Raising the Nation Play Commission highlights that play supports physical activity, mental wellbeing, and social development. Risk-based play builds resilience and problem-solving skills, helping to reduce long-term pressures on health and social care services.
- 2.2 National standards from Fields in Trust emphasise that every child should have access to quality green and play space. Their research estimates that UK parks and green spaces deliver £34 billion in health and wellbeing benefits annually, saving the NHS over £111 million each year. These spaces are vital infrastructure for health, social cohesion, and climate resilience.
- 2.3 The Design for Play guidance, endorsed by Play England and the Department for Children, Schools and Families, stresses that play spaces must be inclusive, imaginative, and integrated into the wider public realm. Good design is a strategic investment that ensures long-term use, community value, and sustainability.
- 2.4 Huntingdonshire District Council currently manages a diverse portfolio of play areas, many of which have been adopted through housing developments or inherited from previous local government stock. To develop a cohesive and evidence-based investment strategy, the Council commissioned the Play Sufficiency Report which identified key disparities in accessibility, quality, and usage.
- 2.5 Many estate-based sites are underused and lack inclusivity, while flagship sites require investment to meet accessibility and quality standards. Provision for teenagers remains limited. Without a clear strategy, inefficiencies and maintenance costs will escalate, and health inequalities may widen.

- 2.6 This framework provides a commercially sustainable approach which: reviews the entirety of our play assets, prioritising investment for maximum impact, and enhancing flagship destinations capable of generating income to reinvest in the wider network.
- 2.7 It aligns with the Council's Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020), the Council's Place Strategy and Corporate Plan priorities — particularly Priority 1: Improving wellbeing and Priority 3: Doing our core work well—and supports the ambition to keep people well and out of crisis. The framework also enables multi-year funding, partnership opportunities, and the delivery of an inclusive, financially resilient, and environmentally responsible play network.
- 2.8 The Council currently manages 47 play areas across the district, including 2 skate parks which are inspected weekly by the Council's dedicated Play Area Inspector to ensure safety and usability. An annual Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) inspection is carried out by the Council's insurers, Zurich. A full list of the 47 play areas that the Council manage on a weekly basis can be seen at **(Appendix 5)**.
- 2.9 Our current approach is focused on maintaining existing provision to a safe and accessible standard, within the limits of available resources. Urgent repairs are addressed immediately, while non-urgent repairs are assessed and prioritised based on risk, usage, and budget. At present, our strategy is maintenance-led rather than expansion-focused, with emphasis on routine safety inspections, responsive repairs, asset management and prioritisation and community engagement where possible.
- 2.10 To implement the current approach outlined in 2.9, the Head of Leisure, Health and Environment has identified a need to increase the revenue budget for play and has put in a capital bid in the 2026/27 MTFS to increase it from £35,000 to £60,000 for the next 5 years. This is in addition to a request for investment in the form of a capital bid totalling £730,000 over the next 4 years to enable delivery of the framework detailed in this report.
- 2.11 While this report focusses on the Council's 47 play areas, it is recognised that play provision across the District is also delivered by Town and Parish Councils and private developers. These areas are not inspected or maintained by the Council. The Council aims to complement existing provision and focus investment in the district where it will have the greatest impact and meet identified gaps in access.

3. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

- 3.1 Demographic analysis highlights several factors that are directly relevant to the strategic planning of play provision across Huntingdonshire. The district has seen a 6.7% population increase since 2011, with nearly 30,000 children aged 0–14 expected by 2026. While the population remains predominantly White (92.4%), there is a gradual rise in ethnic diversity, particularly among younger age groups. This evolving profile reinforces the need for culturally inclusive play spaces that reflect the lived

experiences of all families. Additionally, Cambridgeshire's above-average Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) rate (5.7%) signals a significant cohort of children with SEND, further underscoring the importance of accessible, sensory-rich, and inclusive design across the play estate.

- 3.2 Economically, Huntingdonshire performs well overall, but pockets of deprivation — particularly in Huntingdon North, Yaxley, and The Stukeley's — highlight areas where financial barriers may limit access to play. These insights are critical to the report's recommendations, as they provide a clear rationale for prioritising investment in areas of greatest need. Aligning future provision with demographic data ensures that play spaces are not only safe and engaging, but also equitable and responsive to the communities they serve. This evidence base supports a shift toward inclusive, place-based planning that delivers long-term social value.

4. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 Option1: Do Nothing

Choosing to take no action would mean continuing with the current approach without introducing a strategic framework for play provision. This recognises that play provision is discretionary. While this option requires no immediate planned investment there will be cyclical replacement works carried out. This option does not position the Council to respond to changing community needs, address accessibility requirements, or deliver on the ambitions of the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020) and Corporate Plan. It would also limit opportunities to create a financially sustainable model for play and to maximise the health and wellbeing benefits that high-quality play spaces can deliver.

4.2 Option 2: Do Something

This option involves making selective improvements to existing play areas without adopting a comprehensive strategy. While this would provide some visible enhancements, it would not deliver the systemic change required to ensure long-term sustainability, inclusivity, and financial resilience. Investment would be reactive rather than planned, reducing the ability to prioritise resources where they will have the greatest impact. This approach would achieve incremental progress but would not fully realise the potential benefits of a coordinated, evidence-based framework.

4.3 Option 3: Do Everything (Recommended)

Adopting the Sustainable Play Framework offers a proactive and strategic solution. This approach focuses on creating a tiered model of provision that prioritises investment in high-impact locations, enhances flagship and hub sites to deliver inclusive and engaging play experiences, and ensures compliance with national standards such as those set by Fields in Trust. It also incorporates the principles of Design for Play, ensuring that spaces are imaginative, accessible, and integrated into the wider public realm. By aligning with the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020) and Corporate Plan priorities, this option supports improved health and wellbeing, strengthens core service delivery, and contributes to environmental sustainability. It also establishes a commercially viable model by developing income-generating flagship sites, enabling reinvestment

across the network, and securing long-term financial resilience. It also positions the Council in a positive way when applying for external funding and working with partners to deliver improvements.

5. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) Panel discussed the A Sustainable Framework for Play in Huntingdonshire Report at its meeting on 7th November 2025.
- 5.2 Councillor Shaw praised the content of the report and mentioned that it was helpful to understand how the inclusive equipment at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park could be accessed. Councillor Shaw also commented on the gym style equipment installed in many parks across the district observing that it is rare to be seen in use. The Panel heard that the One Leisure Active Lifestyles team were in the process of creating demonstration videos which residents could access via the One Leisure website and via QR codes to encourage usage of the equipment.
- 5.3 Councillor Alban observed that often small pockets of play equipment would be installed by developers and enquired whether there was opportunity to create a more collaborate and cohesive approach in parishes to link projects into a larger and well funded park rather than several smaller in order to better serve communities. The Panel heard that work was underway to better link opportunities through a collaborative approach from Leisure and Planning in order to efficiently create a better developed outcome for residents.
- 5.4 In response to a further comment from Councillor Alban, the Panel heard that community engagement would be key to the future development of the framework.
- 5.5 The Panel were advised following a question from Councillor Wells, that in a drive to increase footfall and become more financially sustainable, the team would look at opportunities for secondary spend, with the example of the café at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park being given.
- 5.6 Councillor Pitt praised the positive content of the report and noted how vital play areas were in providing opportunities to form social connections within local communities. Councillor Pitt encouraged the Council to be more ambitious than the three flagship sites named within the report, in response to which the Panel heard that further opportunities would be developed once funding streams had been secured and that external funding opportunities would also be explored.
- 5.7 Following enquiries from Councillors Hunt and Lowe in relation to proposed engagement with young people, the Panel heard that the teams ambitions for engagement with young people were outlined within the report and that further detail on this would be developed as the relevant projects progress.

- 5.8 In response to enquiries from members relating to engagement from local communities, the Panel heard that ward members would be looped into further engagement opportunities as projects developed.
- 5.9 The Panel requested that further updates on the progress illustrated in the report be brought back to the Panel in due course and it was agreed that this would be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for Autumn 2026.
- 5.10 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

6. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- 6.1 Following the drafting of a desk top assessment, extensive community engagement was undertaken in March and June 2025 to test the finding and formalise the priorities for the proposed investment framework and align them with Strategic objectives.
- 6.2 The engagement programme combined quantitative and qualitative methods to capture a broad range of views, to include.
- District-wide online surveys promoted through the Council's website, social media channels, and local networks.
 - Targeted focus groups with parents, carers, and young people, including underrepresented groups identified in the Gap Analysis.
 - Stakeholder workshops with schools, health partners, Parish Councils, and community organisations.
 - Site-based engagement sessions at flagship parks and local play areas to gather feedback from users on-site.
- 6.3 The engagement findings provide a clear mandate for a strategic, tiered approach to play provision that prioritises inclusivity, quality, and sustainability while aligning with the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020) and Corporate Plan priorities. A number of key findings were initially identified by the engagement and are highlighted below.
- Strong support for investment in flagship and hub sites to provide high-quality, inclusive play experiences with supporting facilities such as toilets and seating.
 - Demand for inclusive and accessible play to meet the needs of children with additional needs and to provide opportunities for all age groups, particularly teenagers.

- Preference for natural and imaginative play features that encourage creativity, social interaction, and connection with nature, in line with Design for Play principles.
- Recognition of the need for sustainability, with respondents supporting a model that focuses resources where they deliver the greatest benefit and ensures long-term viability.
- Community willingness to engage in stewardship of local play areas, highlighting opportunities for partnership working and co-design.

6.4 To support this feedback, the table below summarises the comparative strengths of flagship and neighbourhood play sites, based on observed usage, play value and accessibility. This evidence reinforces the case for prioritising investment in high-performing, multi-functional sites that deliver the greatest community benefit.

Site Type	Indicative Locations	Play Types Offered	Accessibility	Strategic Value
Flagship Sites - High footfall, multi-age engagement	• Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, • Riverside Park (St Neots), • Priory Park	Physical, sensory, imaginative, cooperative	Generally good, some fully accessible	High community impact, suitable for investment
Neighbourhood Sites - Low to moderate usage, often single-age focus	• Crocus Way (Yaxley), • Moorhouse Drive (Huntingdon), • Stokes Drive (Godmanchester)	Mostly physical, limited sensory or imaginative	Often limited, few inclusive features	Potential for change or redesign

7. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 7.1 Implementing the Sustainable Play Framework will deliver significant benefits for health, wellbeing, and community cohesion, but it also involves managing a set of strategic risks.
- 7.2 While the provision of play facilities is a discretionary service, once installed, we have a duty to ensure they are appropriately managed and maintained. This includes undertaking regular inspections, risk assessments, and necessary repairs to mitigate potential hazards and ensure the safety and wellbeing of users. Our commitment to responsible stewardship ensures that play areas remain safe, inclusive, and sustainable for the communities they serve.
- 7.3 The primary risk relates to community perception and engagement. Reviewing play provision and prioritising investment in high-impact sites

may lead to concerns from residents about changes to local facilities. This will be mitigated through transparent communication, early engagement, and clear articulation of the benefits for health, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability.

- 7.4 Financial risk is another consideration. The framework requires upfront investment and a commitment to multi-year funding. However, this risk is offset by the creation of a commercially sustainable model that leverages income from flagship sites and reduces long-term maintenance liabilities. There is also a recognition that provision of high-quality play can have unquantified financial benefits to the Council; particularly around pride in place, reduction in anti-social behaviour, improving physical activity, and wider public sector benefits such as healthy lifestyles.
- 7.5 There is also a reputational risk if the Council is perceived as failing to act on the evidence gathered through consultation and the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020). Conversely, adopting the framework positions the Council as proactive, evidence-led, and committed to improving community wellbeing, which strengthens public trust and supports delivery of Corporate Plan priorities.
- 7.6 The sole focus of this report is to set out the proposed strategy of a sustainable play framework for Huntingdonshire which subject to full approval will underpin how the council should invest across the district in its play infrastructure over the coming years to support children and young people.
- 7.7 This report is separate to the ["Transfer of Public Open Spaces Policy" that was approved by Cabinet in November 2023](#). This report focussed on the process and policy around the Council transferring public open space from another stakeholder to meet the requirements of the Corporate Plan or the transfer of Council land to a partner organisation and the process that should be undertaken.
- 7.8 Whilst there are similarities between the two reports, this report (A Sustainable Framework for Play in Huntingdonshire) as stated above seeks to confirm the council's approach to investment over the coming years and the report set out and approved in November 2023 by Cabinet clearly indicates the process that should be undertaken for acquiring or transferring public open spaces between the council and its partners.
- 7.9 If in the future, an opportunity presented itself to transfer or acquire public open space then as per the "Transfer of Public Open Spaces Policy" Officer's would develop and present a business case for approval.
- 7.10 Finally, there is a delivery risk associated with the scale and complexity of the programme. This will be managed through phased implementation, robust governance, and partnership working to ensure timely and cost-effective delivery.

Risk	Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Community Perception	Concerns about reviewing play provision and making changes to local play areas	Medium	High	Transparent communication, early engagement, clear articulation of benefits
Financial Risk	Upfront investment and multi-year funding commitment	Medium	Medium	Embed in MTFS, develop income-generating flagship sites to offset costs
Reputational Risk	Perception of inaction or failure to deliver on consultation and strategy	Low	Medium	Adopt evidence-led framework, communicate progress, align with Corporate Plan
Delivery Risk	Complexity and scale of programme implementation	Medium	Medium	Phased delivery, robust governance, partnership working

8. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 8.1 Subject to financial approval, the intention would be to commence the main works in the 2026/27 financial year, albeit some preparatory work will be undertaken at the end of the 2025/26 financial year. The delivery of the Sustainable Play Framework will follow a phased programme designed to ensure strategic prioritisation, financial sustainability, and measurable outcomes. Each phase builds on the previous stage, moving from evidence-based planning to pilot delivery and then to district-wide implementation. This structured approach ensures that improvements are inclusive, future-proofed, and aligned with the Council's Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020), Corporate Plan priorities, and national best practice standards. The programme also embeds continuous monitoring and community engagement to maintain quality and relevance over time.
- 8.2 The phased approach will deliver a modern, inclusive, and financially sustainable play network across the district. Outcomes include full compliance with safety and accessibility standards, improved health and wellbeing through increased physical activity and social interaction, and

the creation of flagship sites that set a benchmark for quality and inclusivity. The framework will also establish a lifecycle renewal model, ensure long-term asset resilience, and embed community engagement to foster local stewardship and continuous improvement. Collectively, these outcomes will position Huntingdonshire as a leader in delivering high-quality, sustainable play provision aligned with national best practice and the Council's strategic priorities.

8.3 A summary of Activities and Outcomes can be found in the following table.

Phase	Timeline	Key Activities	Expected Outcomes
Phase 1: Audit and Prioritisation	Q3–Q4 2025/26	• Documentation audit; • Digital asset register; • Capital Prioritisation Matrix; • Inclusive Design Standards; • Youth Co-Design Programme	Full EN1176 compliance; Reduced legal risk; Equity-based investment framework; Youth-informed strategy
Phase 2: Pilot Projects	2026/7	• Safety remediation; • Inclusive upgrades; • Youth provision; • Yaxley feasibility;	Safer, inclusive parks; Increased youth engagement; Community-led designs; Improved accessibility
Phase 3: District-Wide Rollout	2027–2030	• Retrofit inclusive equipment; • Natural play pilot; • Lifecycle renewal fund	Broader reach of inclusive play; Sustainable asset management; Innovative play models piloted
Ongoing: Maintenance & Feedback	Annual	• Annual H&S audits; • Community surveys; • Observational studies; • Friends of the Park groups	Continuous improvement; Community stewardship; Evidence-based planning

9. LINK TO CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

9.1 The Sustainable Play Framework is a key enabler for delivering the ambitions set out in the Council's Place Strategy and the Corporate Plan. It directly supports Priority 1: Improving health and wellbeing by creating inclusive, high-quality play environments that encourage physical activity, social interaction, and mental resilience. It also underpins Priority 3: Doing our core work well by introducing a structured, evidence-based approach that ensures resources are targeted where they deliver the greatest impact and long-term value.

9.2 The framework aligns with the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020) and the Council's Place Strategy and integrates the Green Space principles established in the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which recognise open space and play as essential infrastructure for sustainable communities. These principles emphasise the role of green infrastructure in promoting health,

biodiversity, and climate resilience, and they set clear expectations for quality, accessibility, and long-term stewardship. By embedding these principles, the framework ensures that play provision is not only functional but also contributes to the wider environmental and social objectives of the district.

- 9.3 This approach positions play as a critical component of community infrastructure, supporting preventative health measures, reducing future demand on services, and enhancing the district's reputation as a forward-thinking authority. It also strengthens the Council's ability to secure external investment and developer contributions by demonstrating a clear, strategic plan for delivering high-value, multi-functional green spaces.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Council has a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty to ensure that public spaces, including play areas, are accessible and inclusive. This requires taking all reasonable steps to remove barriers and provide equal opportunities for children and carers with disabilities, while balancing safety considerations for all users. The emphasis is on inclusion and ensuring that play spaces enable children of all abilities to participate and interact wherever practicable.
- 10.2 In addition, the Council has obligations under the Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 and 1984 to take reasonable care to ensure that visitors are safe when using its facilities. This includes maintaining play areas to an appropriate standard, carrying out regular inspections, and managing foreseeable risks without eliminating the inherent benefits of play, such as managed risk-taking that supports child development.
- 10.3 Failure to meet these duties could expose the Council to legal challenge and reputational risk. Conversely, adopting the Sustainable Play Framework demonstrates compliance with statutory requirements, supports best practice in inclusive design, and reinforces the Council's commitment to equality, safety, and community wellbeing.

11. ACCESSIBILITY COMMITMENT

- 11.1 Ensuring inclusive access to play is a core principle of the Sustainable Play Framework. The Council recognises that many estate-based play areas are underused and lack features that support accessibility, particularly for children with disabilities and teenagers. Flagship sites, while popular, require investment to meet modern standards of inclusivity and quality.
- 11.2 The framework commits to embedding inclusive design principles across all tiers of provision, guided by national standards such as Fields in Trust and Design for Play. This includes the installation of accessible equipment, imaginative features that support neurodiverse engagement, and supporting infrastructure such as seating, shade, and accessible pathways.

- 11.3 Provision for teenagers will be addressed through targeted upgrades and co-design programmes that reflect their needs and preferences. By prioritising investment in high-impact sites and reviewing the entirety of our play assets, the framework ensures that resources are directed where they deliver the greatest benefit—creating a play network that is equitable, welcoming, and future-proofed.
- 11.4 This approach supports the Council’s statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty, and contributes to wider goals around health equity, community cohesion, and preventative wellbeing.

12. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Delivery of the Sustainable Play Framework will require phased capital investment supported by robust financial planning to ensure long-term sustainability. The indicative investment plan below outlines the proposed allocation of resources across key locations and activities over the next four financial years. This approach prioritises early wins to address safety and accessibility, feasibility work for future flagship projects, and targeted investment in high-impact sites. It also incorporates district-wide initiatives for inclusive play and lifecycle renewal, ensuring compliance with national standards and alignment with the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020) and the Council’s Place Strategy.
- 12.2 To secure these investments, the programme will be embedded within the Council’s Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and annual budget-setting process. This will ensure that funding commitments are locked in, enabling multi-year delivery and reducing the risk of delays or underfunding. By aligning with the MTFS, the framework supports financial resilience and provides a clear basis for leveraging external funding and developer contributions.
- 12.3 The total indicative investment across the district is £730,000, representing a strategic commitment to creating an inclusive, resilient, and commercially sustainable play network. This indicative sum will be subject to review in terms of the location for development and value based on evidence, constraints at the time of the investment.

12.4 Indicative Investment Plan for the Sustainable Play Framework; -

Financial Year	Location of investment	Value	Total
26/27	Remedial quick wins District Wide	£20, 000	£165,000
	Feasibility	£25,000	
	Ramsey	£120,000	
27/28	Huntingdon	£100,000	£160,000
	Godmanchester	£60,000	
28/27	St Ives	£50,000	£150,000
	St Neots	£100,000	
27/28	Sawtry	£100,000	£175,000
	Inclusive Play District Wide	£75,000	
28/29	St Neots Destination Play	£80,000	£80,000
Total Indicative Investment across District			£730, 000

- 12.5 To deliver more substantial improvements to play areas, the Council will seek to layer funding from multiple sources. This may include internal budgets, external grants, developer contributions (Section 106), and partnership funding. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) can be used to support the overarching capital funding as outlined in this report to mitigate the impact of growth or respond to future development needs. Where appropriate, this report and associated evidence can be used to support CIL funding bids — for example, in areas where population growth is placing increased pressure on existing infrastructure. By aligning investment with strategic growth and working collaboratively with stakeholders, the Council can ensure that play provision remains responsive, inclusive, and sustainable.

13. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 Improved access to high-quality, inclusive play spaces delivers significant health and wellbeing benefits for children, families, and communities. The Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020) identifies play as a critical intervention for tackling social isolation, improving mental health, and promoting physical activity from an early age. Well-designed play environments encourage active lifestyles, support emotional resilience, and provide opportunities for social interaction, which are essential for reducing loneliness and building stronger communities.
- 13.2 These outcomes align directly with the Corporate Plan priorities, particularly Priority 1: Improving health and wellbeing, and contribute to

the Council's overarching ambition to keep people well and out of crisis. By embedding inclusive design and co-creation principles, the Sustainable Play Framework ensures that play provision is equitable, accessible, and capable of delivering long-term preventative health benefits across the district. The outcomes also contribute to the delivery of the Council's Place Strategy to support a good quality of life for all people at all stages of life.

13.3 The following evidence-based benefits highlight why investment in play is a strategic health priority:

- Improved Physical Health: Regular active play reduces the risk of childhood obesity and supports healthy growth and development.
- Enhanced Mental Wellbeing: Play reduces stress and anxiety, improves mood, and builds emotional resilience in children and young people.
- Social Development: Inclusive play spaces foster social interaction, cooperation, and communication skills, reducing isolation and loneliness.
- Cognitive and Creative Growth: Risk-based and imaginative play supports problem-solving, creativity, and decision-making skills.
- Preventative Health Impact: Increased physical activity and social engagement contribute to long-term health, reducing future demand on health and social care services.
- Community Cohesion: Accessible, well-designed play areas create safe, welcoming spaces that strengthen community ties and intergenerational interaction.

14. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

14.1 The Sustainable Play Framework supports the delivery of the Council's Climate Strategy by embedding sustainable design principles into all stages of play provision. This includes the use of natural and low-carbon materials, biodiversity-friendly landscaping, and sustainable drainage solutions to manage surface water and reduce flood risk.

14.2 By concentrating investment on strategic sites, the framework creates opportunities to integrate play into green infrastructure, enhancing habitats and contributing to the district's climate resilience objectives. These measures align with the Climate Strategy outcomes of reducing carbon emissions, increasing biodiversity, and promoting sustainable land use. In addition, the framework encourages children and young people to engage with nature, fostering environmental awareness and building a lifelong connection to the natural world—supporting both climate goals and community wellbeing.

15. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 The Sustainable Play Framework reinforces the Council's commitment to equality, accessibility, and community cohesion. By embedding inclusive design principles and aligning with national standards such as Fields in Trust and Design for Play, the framework ensures that play provision meets the needs of all residents, including those with disabilities and underrepresented groups. It also supports the Council's statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 and contributes to wider policy objectives on health, wellbeing, and climate resilience. Beyond compliance, the framework strengthens social value by creating spaces that foster intergenerational interaction, encourage community stewardship, and enhance the quality of life across the district. This approach positions the Council as a proactive, evidence-led authority delivering long-term benefits for residents and the environment.
- 15.2 As the Council moves through the process of Local Government Reorganisation, the Sustainable Play Framework offers a timely opportunity to embed lasting principles that will shape future service delivery. By investing in inclusive, high-quality play spaces now, the Council can leave a positive legacy that reflects its commitment to community wellbeing, environmental stewardship, and social equity. This proactive approach ensures that play provision remains a priority during the transition and provides a strong foundation to build upon with significant benefits to the community, particularly for children and young people.

16. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 16.1 The Sustainable Play Framework provides a strategic, evidence-led approach to improving outdoor play provision across Huntingdonshire. It responds directly to consultation findings, national best practice, and the Council's Healthy Open Spaces Strategy (2020), ensuring that play spaces are inclusive, imaginative, and accessible to all. By prioritising investment in high-impact areas and enhancing flagship sites, the framework supports improved health and wellbeing, community cohesion, and environmental resilience—delivering on Corporate Plan priorities and statutory duties.
- 16.2 The recommended decisions also enable the Council to establish a financially and commercially sustainable model for play. Through the identification of underused sites and development of income-generating destinations, the framework allows the Council to direct resource appropriately and create opportunities for reinvestment. Embedding the programme within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy ensures delivery is achievable and resilient. Collectively, these measures position Huntingdonshire as a forward-thinking authority committed to delivering high-quality infrastructure that improves lives and supports thriving communities.

17. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – HDC Final Report. Premier Advisory Group (2025).

Appendix 2 – HDC Implementation Guide. Premier Advisory Group (2025).
Appendix 3 - HDC Geographic Gap Analysis. Premier Advisory Group.
Appendix 4 - HDC Thematic Gap Analysis. Premier Advisory Group.
Appendix 5 – List of 47 HDC play areas.

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- HDC Summary Report. Premier Advisory Group. (2025)
- HDC Equality Addendum. Premier Advisory Group. (2025)
- HDC Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Premier Advisory Group. (2025)
- HDC Sustainability Strategy. Premier Advisory Group. (2025)
- HDC Observation Report. Premier Advisory Group. (2025)
- HDC Consultation Report. Premier Advisory Group. (2025)
- HDC Annexes for Community Engagement and Consultation Report. Premier Advisory Group. (2025)
- HDC Community Profile. Premier Advisory Group. (2025)
- HDC Demographic Data Report. Premier Advisory Group. (2025)
- [Everything to Play For: A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play \(2025\). Raising the Nation Play Commission.](#)
- [HDC. Corporate Plan](#)
- [HDC. Healthy Open Spaces Strategy and 10 Year Action Plan](#)
- Huntingdonshire District Council - Transfer of Public Open Spaces Policy – November 2023

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