



Cabinet

Tuesday, 11 February 2025

Rushcliffe Play Strategy 2025-2030

Report of the Director – Neighbourhoods

**Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Wellbeing, ICT & Member Development,
Councillor J Wheeler**

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. The Play Strategy refresh follows the previous strategy “Playing for Life in Rushcliffe” which was adopted in 2007 and provides a review of the previous policy standards in relation to play and proposes an update to these policy standards benchmarked against other local authorities and industry standards.
- 1.2. There are numerous benefits from the act of play highlighted in the substantive Strategy, but we know that play promotes children’s development, learning, creativity, independence, self-esteem, knowledge and understanding. Play also forms a key role in keeping children healthy and active and there is a scientific link between active children and teens becoming active adults, which can contribute to lifelong mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- 1.3. The Strategy refresh incorporates updated guidance such as the Government’s new Disability Action Plan for Play and recent research and guidance on providing sufficient, suitable play space for girls with the aim to provide equity of provision for all when developing new play spaces across the Borough.
- 1.4. It is intended that this analysis will illustrate if there is any additional provision required and which areas may benefit. This gap analysis will link with areas of health inequalities, to strengthen the case for play should any gaps be identified. However, it is noted that this strategy is forward facing and not designed to be retrospective and place an additional burden on play spaces already provided under previous guidance including those owned by third parties.
- 1.5. The full version of the updated Play Strategy 2025-2030 is attached at Appendix 1.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet adopts the updated Play Strategy 2025-2030 as a Strategy of the Council and supporting document to the Council’s overall Leisure Strategy 2021 – 2027.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. It is imperative that Rushcliffe Borough Council has an up-to-date Play Strategy to guide future provision for both Council owned and by other parties to ensure that play facilities continue to meet the needs of residents and contribute to community wellbeing.
- 3.2. The Strategy has been developed through a robust process adopting industry recognised methodology. This included a detailed assessment of current play provision mapping to provide an up-to-date picture of current provision across the Borough.
- 3.3. The Strategy was informed by a series of online surveys and in person focus group consultations across the Borough with specific sessions targeting young people with additional needs and disabilities and sessions focussing on tweenagers (9 – 12-year-olds) and teenage girls to inform future policy.

4. Supporting Information

Policy Review

- 4.1. The Play Strategy Review follows the previous Strategy adopted in 2007 and aimed to review current policy in relation to play, including guidance such as the Government's new Disability Action Plan for Play, and recent research and guidance on providing sufficient, suitable play spaces for tween and teenage girls. The new Strategy now provides an up-to-date review of relevant national policy including key consideration around equality, inclusion, disability and play as part of the district profile and policy review section.

Play Review

- 4.2. The Strategy aimed to provides an up-to-date list of all play sites within the Borough, broken down into; Local Area for Play (LAP), Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP), and Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP).
- 4.3. The play review section now provides an up-to-date breakdown of play provision in Rushcliffe. The Strategy has identified a total of 69 play sites at the point of review consisting of 14 LAP's, 46 LEAPs, eight NEAP's and one standalone skatepark.

Catchment & Gap Analysis

- 4.4. In line with the Playing Pitch Strategy, the Borough is split into five distinct catchment areas which are Bingham, Cotgrave and Radcliffe on Trent, East Leake, Keyworth and the West Bridgford and Ruddington analysis areas for the purpose of this study. The analysis presents all play sites within the Borough along with the appropriate catchment area applied.

- 4.5. In summary, there is generally a good spread of play provision for younger and older children across all catchment analysis areas of Rushcliffe, especially within the areas with greater population densities.
- 4.6. Most settlements are observed as being served by some form of play and youth provision. However, some gaps in catchment mapping are highlighted in Radcliffe on Trent, Bingham, Keyworth and West Bridgford and Ruddington analysis areas and recommendations have been made to either expand existing provision or provide new facilities to meet this demand.

Consultation

- 4.7. As part of developing the Play Strategy, engagement with stakeholders who use and manage play areas across Rushcliffe has been undertaken. This has been divided into a series of focus group consultation sessions and online surveys.

Online Consultation

- 4.8. The online public consultation survey was made available to enable the Council to understand the perception of play provision in Rushcliffe seeking views from across the Borough. A total of 397 responses were received, with many responding for more than one age group. The majority of responses were from children aged 10 and under (308 respondents), with 91 responses for and from people aged eleven and above.
- 4.9. Across all responses, Rushcliffe Country Park and Bridgford Park were the two most popular sites. Of the top 10 most popular sites, Wharf Lane Recreation Ground was the site most frequently visited, with 30% of people visiting this site at least five times a week.

Focus Groups

- 4.10. In addition to the online surveys three invitation youth focus groups took place in conjunction with Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Service at their youth centres in West Bridgford, Keyworth, Cotgrave and Ruddington to gather general perception of play from the users. The West Bridgford session was a specific “link” session, which serves young people across the entire Borough with additional needs and disabilities as a key line of enquiry. A session specifically targeting tweenage and teenage girls as a key line of enquiry was undertaken but due to a poor attendance a further focus group session was organised with St Giles Guides using the proposed Bridgfield teen area redevelopment as a case study.
- 4.11. The key themes emerging from the focus groups sessions were around making better use of interactive equipment across all sites, a lack of provision for girls, especially tweenagers and teenagers, a call for improvements across all sites and the use of alternative equipment.

Provision Standards and Benchmarking

- 4.12. The Strategy aimed to review and refresh the Council's guidance for new play areas in relation to housing development contributions. This will ensure the correct level of funding is provided to meet future demand. The updated Strategy now provides updated standards in line with local and national standards and updated guidance regarding on and offsite contributions and commuted sums.

5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection

- 5.1. There is no statutory requirement to produce a Play Strategy so a decision could be made not to accept the refreshed Strategy review. However, the review has highlighted the importance of play in delivering the Council's Quality of Life Corporate Priority and its contribution to delivering the overarching Leisure Strategy objectives.
- 5.2. Without up to date play data and guidance it would also be increasingly difficult to secure developer and other external funding contributions towards sustainable fit for purpose play provision.

6. Risks and Uncertainties

- 6.1. The Play Strategy provides an evidence-based approach to play area provision, which supports a balanced option for future development throughout the Borough.
- 6.2. Not adopting the Strategy could result in play provision and associated open space being inadequately considered during new developments.
- 6.3. Without adequate planning and investment in existing and new play infrastructure the cost of repairing existing provision or providing new play site may cause a financial strain on providers to keep facilities safe and operational. To mitigate this uncertainty the Strategy is designed to provide a guide to identify gaps and future demands so all parties can provide the pareto optimum of provision and strike the right balance for the growing population needs but also within financial constraints.

7. Implications

7.1. Financial Implications

- 7.1.1. Rushcliffe Borough Council manages play provision in the West Bridgford Special Expenses area and has a rolling programme of capital investment of £75k per annum across its play sites. In the 2025/26 budget it is proposed to increase this to £100k per annum for the next three years to make inclusive improvements to the Council's play provision as part of the rolling Capital Programme.

7.1.2. In addition to the West Bridgford Special Expenses area, the Council provides play provision in Rushcliffe Country Park, which has benefited from a £99k investment in 2024/25 financial year and has a further £25k allocated in 2025/26 to make additional inclusive improvement.

7.1.3. Table 1 below shows Rushcliffe Borough Council's capital investment in play infrastructure from 2020/21 to 2024/25 A total of £817k has been invested in making improvements to play provision over this period:

Table 1: Play Area Capital Investment 2021-2024/25

Play Areas Capital Investment	2020/21 £'000	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	Total £'000
<i>Scheme</i>						
Bridgford Park Trim Trail	9					9
Boundary Road	3	65	4	63		135
Abbey Road		69				69
Alford Road		83	3			86
Rushcliffe Country Park				3	99	102
Rushcliffe Country Park Skate*	74	146				220
Adbolton Play Area				87		87
Greythorn Drive				3	106	109
Total Expenditure	86	363	7	156	205	817
* RCP Skatepark funded 50/50 Capital Receipts and Skatepark Grant						

7.1.4. There are ongoing revenue costs associated with running the Council's play facilities and these are included within existing budgets. There is a risk that further inflationary pressures may increase costs significantly and consequently this may have implications on service provision contracts.

7.1.5. Outside of the play provision directly managed by Rushcliffe Borough Council, play provision is provided by parish councils or developers and subsequently maintained by management companies who make their own budgetary arrangements for the provision and management of play and have no budgetary implications to the Council for the purposes of this report.

7.2. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.3. Equalities Implications

Any capital play redevelopments would be constructed to align with the updated guidance highlighted in the Strategy to be inclusive and ensure people with disabilities have access to play facilities as required by the Equality Act 2010.

7.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

All design and development of capital play infrastructure will follow the Section 17 basic design principles to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

7.5. Biodiversity Net Gain Implications

Play provision and open spaces will be delivered in line with the RBC design Code where opportunities exist to create “wild play” with biodiverse rich planting enhancing connection with nature.

8. Link to Corporate Priorities

The Environment	In creating new play space there are opportunities to create natural play spaces with natural element to create biodiversity rich planting to enhance connection with nature.
Quality of Life	By re-developing and creating new play infrastructure for residents to meet, contribute to development needs, create friendships, reduce loneliness and social isolation, and take part in physical play and wellbeing this will improve the quality of life of users.
Efficient Services	With the current cost pressures on all aspects of local government, the Council need to ensure that it delivers efficient services that meet the needs of our residents. The play strategy is designed to achieve the pareto optimum of play provision across the Borough and to be both economically efficient and meet the need of our growing resident population.
Sustainable Growth	As our resident population grows, our play provision needs to accommodate these new residents by continual improvement and investment to ensure that our provision grows sustainably with our resident population.

9. Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet adopts the updated Play Strategy 2025-2030 as a Strategy of the Council and supporting document to the Council’s overall Leisure Strategy 2021 – 2027.

For more information contact:	David Banks Director – Neighbourhoods 0115 9148 438 dbanks@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1- Rushcliffe Play Strategy 2025-2030