

WIRRAL COUNCIL

YOUTH & PLAY SERVICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

29 MAY 2012

SUBJECT:	PLAY BUILDER PROGRAMME REPORT
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	DAVID ARMSTRONG
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	CLLR SHEILA CLARKE
KEY DECISION	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with a final update of the completed Play Builder programme.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 The Play Pathfinder and Play Builder Programme flowed from the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) consultation on the national play strategy, and was a key commitment in the Government's "Children's Plan", launched in December 2007.

2.2 In December 2008, £235m funding was made available by DCFS for national investment into play spaces as one of 5 key areas of Government action to deliver better play opportunities in children's play. Local authorities were invited to bid for a proportion of this investment.

2.3 In January 2009, Wirral Council successfully applied to DCSF and was awarded Wave 2 Play Builder status from April 2009. The Borough received capital funding of £1,129,445 and £45,648 revenue funding.

2.4 Over the two-year programme period, 2009-2011, the funding was to support the development or improvement of a minimum of 22 play areas across Wirral to ensure a variety of freely accessible play facilities specifically targeting the 8 -13 year age range. The programme sought to develop public play spaces close to where children live, make them safe, but also interesting, exciting and stimulating, whilst being available to all. It mirrored a similar ethos to the BIG Lottery Children's Play fund, namely being accessible to children and being free of charge with children free to come and go and free to choose what play activities they do.

2.5 The Play Builder programme also had to meet criteria set out by the DCSF in five key areas:

- **More places to play:** responding to children's demands for high quality play spaces in every area;

- **Supporting play throughout childhood:** improving provision through a range of settings for children of all ages;
 - **Playing safely:** providing safe, accessible and stimulating places for children to play;
 - **Child-friendly communities:** engaging communities and involving children in decisions; and
 - **Embedding play in local priorities:** ensuring leadership and effective delivery in every local area.
- 2.6 The initial Play Pathfinder application was prepared by Officers from the Youth and Play Service (Children and Young People's Department) and the Parks & Countryside Service (Regeneration Department). The Play Builder Project Plan (appendix 1) was produced to outline the delivery, project details, compliance with the key criteria and a list of the 22 proposed sites to be developed. It was submitted and approved by the DCSF in April 2009.
- 2.7 The Play Builder plan had a number of key objectives aligned with Wirral's strategic play objectives to improve the quality and accessibility of outdoor play provision on Wirral.
- Increase the number of opportunities for children and young people to engage in free play activities in areas of identified need.
 - Enable more children and young people to participate in a range of inclusive and accessible play experiences.
 - Improve children and young people's personal safety and reduce the fear of playing beyond the confines of their home environment, i.e. Parks and Open Spaces.
 - Consult with more children, young people and the Community, in the design, planning and delivery of play provision.
 - Improve the quality and the play value of local equipped play areas to include more varied and challenging equipment, which allow children to test their boundaries and take risks.
- 2.8 A Project Manager was appointed to manage the delivery of the Play Builder programme reporting to the Wirral Play Partnership and Youth and Play Advisory Committee.
- 2.9 The delivery of the Play Builder programme was commissioned to the Parks and Countryside Service and managed by the Project Manager who provided quarterly reports to the Wirral Play Partnership and the Youth and Play Service Advisory Committee (YAPSAC) and, when appropriate, Cabinet update reports were submitted. The Project manager also reported to the monthly Departmental Capital Monitoring Group.
- 2.10 Wirral Play Partnership is the key mechanism for cross-service and departmental working in the development and promotion of play in Wirral. The Play Partnership Includes elected member representation; the membership is drawn from a wide range of departments within the authority and also includes local voluntary and community organisations. In addition, a Councillor was appointed as the Play Champion.

2.11 The first year programme was completed in March 2010, 11 play areas were built and improved (appendix 2 and 3). Due to the timescales involved and the grant conditions, year one sites were selected based on the Play Strategy audit and consultation, areas of identified need, geographical locations, maintenance cost, match funding opportunities and sites where there was strong community involvement. These sites were approved at the Cabinet on 23rd April 2009 and subject to further consultation with the Play Partnership the proposed year 2 sites were considered as projects for 2010/2011.

No. Year 1 sites Completed

1. Meols Recreation Play Area
2. Harrison Park, New Brighton
3. Ashton Park, West Kirby
4. New Ferry Park
5. Moreton Linear Park
6. Woodlands play area, Birkenhead
7. Irby Park
8. Newton Park
9. Tower Grounds, New Brighton
10. Victoria Park, Tranmere
11. Bromborough Recreation Ground

2.12 In June 2010, a ring fence was placed on the year two programme and the play capital and revenue funding were withdrawn. The Department for Education also removed any expectation on how many play facilities Councils were expected to deliver.

2.13 A further announcement in July 2010 led to the year 2 programme being put on hold until further notice. Therefore, the Wirral programme was suspended until the revised Play capital grant was allocated.

2.14 At this stage, three play areas had been committed for improvements. These were Warwick Park (were the contract had been awarded), Port Causeway and Whitfield Common. In addition to these sites expenditure had already been incurred on the purchase of play equipment in preparation for the year 2 programme.

2.15 In October 2010, the Department for Education announced Wirral's revised allocation of £373,990 to cover expenditure already incurred, contractual commitments and, as affordable, to support some other valued projects already identified in Wirral's year 2 programme.

2.16 Initial year 2 sites were finalised through further consultation and negotiation to ensure a strategic approach to the location of improved play areas with the Wirral Play Partnership across the Borough. However, a revised allocation of Play Builder capital grant meant 4 play areas received major improvements as well as the 3 sites already committed. The remaining sites had new play equipment installed determined by the revised budget allocation and the priority ranking list and any other additional funding that was available.

2.17 Projects to be delivered in the second year were chosen using a selection process, rationale and range of factors agreed by the Wirral Play Partnership.

- 2.18 The revised year two programme and play area sites were approved at Cabinet on 9th December 2010 (appendix 2 and 3). The year two programme was completed in November 2011.

No. Year 2 sites Completed

12. Whitfield Common, Heswall
13. Port Causeway, Bromborough
14. Warwick Park, Upton
15. Higher Bebington Recreation
16. Whiteheath Park, Leasowe
17. Tor Park, Eastham
18. Birkenhead Park
19. Arrowe Park
20. Central Park, Seacombe
21. Ilchester Square, Birkenhead
22. Duck Pond Lane, Oxton

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 This report is for information, therefore no risks are outlined.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 As this report is for information, this is not applicable.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 In 2007, Wirral carried out a comprehensive play audit. The level of need and analysis was determined through a public consultation and a play audit. A number of surveys were undertaken including a children and young people's schools play audit, public playground survey and six focused neighbourhood studies. The views of stakeholders and children and young people informed how play provision could be improved and targeted to those areas of most need. This led to the production of the Wirral Play Strategy and Implementation Plan, which set out a framework of Wirral's understanding of play and its commitment to ensure all children and young people living within the Wirral area have access to quality play provision. It also informed the delivery of the BIG Lottery Children's Play Programme and subsequent Play Builder Programme. In addition to this work carried out for the Play Strategy, Wirral conducted a comprehensive Green Space asset review which also evaluated existing play facilities. The findings of the review were used as part of the site selection process and provided baseline information on which to measure the improvements after the completion of the programme.
- 5.2 Local consultation was conducted by Play Rangers, Play Practitioners and Friends of Parks groups on all 22 play areas allocated for improvements. Children and young people were involved in the decision making process, through local feeder schools, youth clubs, play centres, play area open days, Wirral Play Day and the Wirral Youth Conference. This included identifying their play needs, any barriers to playing outdoors and what they liked to experience through playing. The children worked in small focus groups which generated ideas and drawings. These were interpreted

and included in the final designs. This has led to the inclusion of more risky and challenging play equipment and natural materials being incorporated into the final play area plans. These key findings identified issues regarding the culture of play in Wirral and access to play opportunities. Children and young people also identified possible solutions which informed the planning, design and location of the individual play areas and how play provision could be delivered to meet their needs.

- 5.3 A focus group was held with parents and carers of disabled children at Stanley School to discuss access issues from their perspective. A number of questions were raised to generate their views around issues of equality and inclusion. Following this discussion an additional grant of £25,000 from Aiming Higher was secured to provide more inclusive play equipment. Specific consultation work with girls was also undertaken through a local secondary school, who preferred equipment which enabled more risky play experiences.
- 5.4 The general public also participated in the consultation process. A page on the Wirral Council website provided draft plans of all the identified play areas for improvement. Local residents were invited to comment on the designs and become involved in the planning process through public events.
- 5.5 The Youth and Play Service (now the Universal Youth Support Service) in conjunction with the Wirral Play Council led the consultation and the engagement of children and young people. The Parks and Countryside Service Landscape Team within the Council's Regeneration Department implemented the individual projects, including developing the final designs and managing the procurement and delivery of the construction contracts.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 6.1 Voluntary and community organisations have been directly involved in the consultation, planning, fund raising and delivery of a number of play area initiatives.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 7.1 Playbuilder capital and revenue allocation was revised in October 2010 by the Department of Education:

Playbuilder Capital			Minimum Number of play areas/year		
09/10	10/11	total	09/10	10-11	Total
£530,952	£373,990.63	£904,942.63	11	11	22
Playbuilder revenue					
2009-10	2010-11	Total			
£27,389	Nil	£27,389			

- 7.2 A new Grant Determination Letter from the Department for Education set out the new grant criteria and the revised allocation. The final year grant was paid in two equal instalments on 30th November 2010 and 28th February 2011.
- 7.3 No new play areas were built, only existing play sites were developed and improved; these are currently maintained by the Parks and Countryside Service. There was no

additional funding available for maintenance in the programme. However, a high percentage of play areas were full refurbishments replacing all existing play equipment and landscaping.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Playbuilder authorities had to comply with HM Treasury guidelines in the procurement of goods and services for the grant it received, so as to secure best value for money. In particular, contracts of work, equipment, stores and services were awarded on a competitive basis. Tendering procedures were in accordance with the EU Procurement Directive and UK Procurement Regulations, where applicable and any additional guidance issued by the Department for Education.
- 8.2 Wirral Council had to prepare and send a Statement of Expenditure (Annex G), certified by the Chief Financial Officer, the responsible officer under s.151 of the Local Government Act 1972, in respect of the Grant for the financial year 2009-10 and 2010-11 to the Department of Education.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Play Builder programme reflects inclusiveness and promotes equal opportunities and access. The programme endeavours to ensure children have equal access to play and are able to participate in local play opportunities. The 22 improved Play areas are provided free of charge and geographically located across Wirral for all children, with a high density of play provision in areas of identified need.

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There were none.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There were none.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 12.1 The committee is asked to note the report.

13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 13.1 The report is for information.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Steve Chan**
Deputy Head of Universal Youth Support Service
Telephone: (0151 637 6300)
Email: stevechan@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 Play Builder Action Plan
Appendix 2 Play Builder Projects Year 1 and 2
Appendix 3 Play Areas Map
Appendix 4 Feel Safe, Play Safe Action Plan

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet– Play Builder Programme Report	23 April 2009
Cabinet– Revised Play Builder Programme Report	9 Dec 2010