

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 15/09/2025

Subject: Transformation of Playgrounds and other Play Facilities

Report of: Councillor Florian Chevoppe-Verdier, Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Councillor Frances Umeh, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

Report author: Ian Hawthorn, Assistant Director of Highways & Parks

Responsible Director: Bram Kainth, Executive Director of Place

SUMMARY

The report sets out an ambitious 3-year, £8.3m improvement programme that will transform the play facilities in the borough, creating exceptional facilities for our children.

The Council manages 95 playgrounds (33 in parks and 62 in Housing estate areas). Regular investment has been made to improve and maintain the playgrounds, but the standard of the playgrounds remains inconsistent.

The proposed investment programme will provide exemplar play facilities in our major parks that will be some of the very best public playgrounds found in the country, including significant enhancements for Ravenscourt Park play facilities and replacing its outdated paddling pool with a state-of-the-art water play area. It will also bring a high standard of play equipment to all our public play areas across the borough, and in collaboration with the Housing Department playgrounds in strategic locations in housing estates will be enhanced. This will ensure excellent play facilities are readily accessible to all families across the borough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To invest £8.3 million into a three-year programme of improvement works to deliver an enhanced high-quality playground offer across LBHF, including developing exemplar playgrounds in our major parks of Ravenscourt Park and Bishops Park. Working with the Housing Department to make sure the play offers in both Housing and Parks is coordinated.
 2. To establish a Play Forum to advise on the proposed changes and priorities, ensuring the programme is co-produced with local communities and there is a coordinated approach with schools, housing, and other providers of play in LBHF.
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Wards Affected: All

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Corporate Plan and the H&F Values
Building shared prosperity	The maintenance of playgrounds will enhance the local environment, making it more attractive for residents and businesses.
Creating a compassionate and inclusive council	Ensuring all playgrounds are well-maintained and accessible to children, young people and their parents and carers.
Doing things with local residents, not to them	Engaging with the community through the proposed Play Forum to understand their needs and preferences for improving and maintaining playgrounds.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	Allocating resources effectively to maintain high standards without overspending.
Taking pride in H&F	Maintaining playgrounds to a high standard reflects the pride we take in LBHF.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	Implementing sustainable practices in playgrounds improvements and maintenance.

Financial Impact

The proposed Improvement Programme for Playgrounds and other Play Facilities requires one off capital investment of £8.3m over a 3-year period. This is expected to be fully funded from external sources, including £8.05m in developer funding and a £0.25m third-party contribution for playground works proposed at Wormwood Scrubs. Of the £8.05m required developer funding, £5.05m has already been secured (£2.6m S.106 and £2.45m Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)) with the remaining £3.0m expected to be secured from future expected receipts over the next 3 years. This secured developer funding is specifically from funds relating to parks, leisure and outdoor sports facilities, community facilities, environmental improvements, regeneration areas and borough neighbourhood CIL.

The funding is summarised in the table below.

Funding Source	Amount (£m)
Secured S.106	2.60
Secured CIL	2.45
Expected future developer receipts	3.00
3 rd party contribution	0.25
Total Funding Required	8.30

Kellie Gooch, Head of Finance (Place), 10 July 2025

Verified by Sukvinder Kalsi, Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services, (S.151 Officer), 10 July 2025

Legal Implications

The Council has the power to provide and incur expenditure on parks and open spaces under a range of legislation, in particular s10 of the Open Spaces Act 1906, s76 of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907 and s19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

Any works required to carry out works of improvement will, depending on their value, need to be subject to a competitive tendering exercise pursuant to the Procurement Act 2023. The requirements of Contract Standing Orders, including the preparation of a procurement strategy will need to be complied with.

John Sharland, Special Projects Lawyer, 21 May 2025

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Proposals and Analysis of Options

1. The Council has 95 playgrounds across the borough, consisting of 33 in public parks and 62 in housing estates. Several of the larger public open spaces have more than one playground such as Bishop's Park, Ravenscourt Park, and Wormwood Scrubs. The report sets out an ambitious 3-year, £8.3m improvement programme that will transform the public play facilities in the parks, and those in housing areas where there are gaps in public provision, creating exceptional facilities for families across the borough.
2. Over several years the Council has consistently invested to make improvements to its play facilities. For instance, in 2023/24 £100,000 was invested in phase 1 of the Braybrook Street playground improvements on Wormwood Scrubs, and further substantial enhancements are in development

for this playground in 2025/26. The safety surfacing has recently been refurbished in Frank Banfield Park and the playground was enlarged in 2024/25. In addition, play equipment improvements to Lillie Road Recreation Ground and Rowberry Mead playgrounds have been delivered, and improvements to play in Margravine Gardens will be delivered in 2025/26 following consultation with the local community.

3. The facilities are a vital asset for young children, resulting in heavy use so there is a considerable amount of wear and tear. Adding to the maintenance challenge are incidents of vandalism damaging equipment.
4. It has become increasingly apparent, through regular inspections of the public playgrounds, that the level of investment being made to improve and maintain them is no longer achieving the desired standard and there is inconsistent quality provision across LBHF.
5. An independent evaluation was commissioned in late 2024 to provide a detailed assessment of the 33 park playgrounds. This assessment has been used to assess the quality of the current playground provision and to inform the investment required to enhance the quality of play experience for children across the borough.
6. Each playground was assessed against 15 evaluation criteria which consisted of all the industry best practice criteria including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) playground inspection checklist. Each of the 15 criteria were scored out of a maximum of 10 for different playground features including accessibility, play value and equipment. The assessment also considered the quality, safety standards, inclusivity, and the overall amenity value of the play spaces. In addition, any play 'gaps' within LBHF were identified i.e., areas where children have less access to quality play spaces within certain walking time/distance. The playgrounds were also assessed against the best available in London to understand what would be required to deliver exemplar play facilities in the borough.
7. In addition to the 33 public park playgrounds there are a further 62 playgrounds in the borough that are managed by Housing for residents from specific estates. A strategic review will be carried out in collaboration with the Housing Department to identify playgrounds in housing areas that would benefit from improved play facilities through this investment and remove gaps in public play provision. The aim being to ensure that excellent play facilities are readily accessible to all families across the borough.

Proposals

8. In addition to the sums proposed in this report, £714,000 of funding has already been committed for 2025/26 to deliver improvements to several playgrounds, including, Bishops Park, Hammersmith Park, Margravine Gardens and Wormwood Scrubs – Braybrook Street.

9. It is now proposed to create a consistent high quality play provision for children across the borough as part of a 3-year programme using the findings from the playground assessment to inform investment decisions. This will include investment in strategically placed housing estate playgrounds in collaboration with the Housing Department, to ensure all families across the borough can readily access high quality play facilities.
10. There will be a particular focus in the main parks (i.e. Ravenscourt Park and Bishops Park) to deliver facilities that will compete with the best play facilities in the country. This will include replacing the outdated padding pool in Ravenscourt Park with a water play area.
11. The creation of a Hammersmith & Fulham Play Forum is proposed to help advise on the development of the 3-year playground development programme and future initiatives involving play.

Reasons for Decision

12. The Council places a high priority on ensuring LBHF's children and young people have access to high-quality, accessible play facilities. This report has set a clear framework for improvements in the current provision and collaboration with other providers to improve play sufficiency across LBHF and deliver exemplar destination playgrounds.

Risk Management Implications

13. This initiative incurs multiple risks should it be adopted and whilst clearly necessary it should not be embarked upon until mitigations are put in place both at a programme wide level and at an individual playground improvement level.
14. There is a programme wide operational risk that the management of such a multi-delivery initiative becomes overly complex, that the involved parties are not coordinated, that planning and local implications (including closures) are not understood, and that the delivery is piecemeal or incomplete.
15. This risk must be reduced. It is recommended that the initiative is constituted with a defined programme board with a clear programme director and sponsor. It is advised that rigour is applied to the board through the addition of external industry experts. It is further recommended that the programme is supported by tranches for playground delivery (as defined in Managing Successful Programmes (MSP)) determining specific areas of responsibility and control; this should be reinforced with a regularly updated programme risk register, programme and project support documents, change management process, communication plan with regular reporting as well as defined and tracked benefits/disbenefits. These items will contribute to warding off any external criticism of management failures.
16. There is a severe financial risk (as defined above) that funds to complete the initiative will be reduced or be insufficient to complete delivery.

17. Furthermore, it is apparent that the costs to complete delivery by LBH&F will be unduly onerous especially when other budgets are being reduced.
18. This risk must be reduced. Only through clear, agreed funding will delivery be completed. The associated risk is that delivery will be piecemeal and sporadic leading to an associated reputational risk (see below).
19. It is recommended that further sponsors and contributors are sought to support delivery costs. Budget planning must be tightly controlled and planned with associated change control and contingency funds. It is recommended that a 'big bang' delivery approach is not used to complete the playgrounds as this may result in multiple playgrounds being incomplete and unusable / dangerous; again, leading to a reputations and human risk.
20. There is a reputational risk that the delivery is incomplete or piecemeal. There is an associated people risk that injury could occur in the case where children attempt to use incomplete playgrounds. This would result in potential legal risks, bad press, and resident dissatisfaction.
21. This risk must be reduced. As noted above it is recommended that careful delivery planning as part of a wider programme is implemented and that a big bang delivery is not used.
22. Other associated risks include:
 - Operational risk that any third-party supplier is unable to undertake and implement such an extensive project.
 - People and operational risk that due consideration is not given to maintaining the playgrounds once they are complete.
 - Financial and operational risks that sufficient consideration has not been given to the design, planning, and resident involvement in the construction of the playgrounds. Further consideration should be given to the costs of security (including CCTV), safeguarding, disabled access, and specialist disabled playgrounds.

Jules Binney, Risk and Assurance Manager, 3rd June 2025

Equality

23. The report seeks to enhanced play across the borough. Officers will engage with care-experienced youth or their advocates to understand their needs. Consideration will be applied on how play facilities can support social inclusion, emotional wellbeing, and a sense of belonging. Inclusive designed principles will be applied. This is set out in the included attached EIA.

Procurement Implications

24. If the play facility review is approved to proceed, any associated procurement activity will require a procurement strategy to be agreed. The procuring officer must work with the Procurement and Commercial team to ensure any

procurement activity is undertaken compliantly and in accordance with the relevant legislation and the Council's own Contract Standing Orders (CSOs).

Chris Everett, Category Lead – Procurement and Commercial, 29th May 2025

Consultation

25. The condition survey completed by the consultants included feedback from parents as part of the analysis of the playgrounds. In addition, there has been continuous engagement with Park Friends Groups, Parks customer satisfaction surveys and playground users. Engagement with leaseholders will take place before any enhancements are made to facilities in housing estate areas.