



Flintshire County Council / Aura Leisure Play Review – November 2020



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Scope

The Play Inspection Company was commissioned Aura Leisure in 2020 to review the current play provision based on the findings and additional detail gathered during the Annual Inspection of the existing playgrounds that are owned and operated by the council.

The inspections took place during July - September 2020 and considered the age of equipment, current condition, compliance with current standards and remedial works required; all items were risk assessed to facilitate prioritisation of remedial works.

The purpose of the report is to consider and evaluate the provision across the County and make recommendations for improvement based on the location of the site, the current level of provision, play value and age of equipment.

The author of this report and the surveyor employed in the data collection are both Annual Inspectors (Outdoor) registered with the RPII (Register of Playground Inspectors International). Jon Dalton is also a member of the RPII Board and represents the UK on the SW65 Committee responsible for working with and updating British and European Standards for playground equipment and associated areas.

Introduction

The existing sites have been broken down into several categories to facilitate the review; these are:

1. Sites with no development opportunities
 - 1a Sites that have a good level of provision but may require minor works.
2. Sites to be strategically removed.
3. Site in need of priority development, possibly some reasonable provision but need improvement.
4. Sites with potential for development and would benefit from upgrading.
5. Sites that would benefit with the provision of additional equipment.
6. Sites to be enhanced that are close to sites earmarked for removal.

For clarity where costings are provided, these are based on calculated estimates and are rounded at the end of each section.

Life Expectancy, Play Value & Play Space Design

The detail provided for Life Expectancy and Play Value needs some explanation in terms of the recommendations made in this report.

For Life Expectancy most of the items assessed (78%) fall into a bracket of 5-10 years life remaining (assuming that the current inspection and maintenance regime is continued to the same standard as today). Our assessment is based on the current condition of the equipment, its approximate age and our knowledge and experience of the equipment type and manufacturer.

Out of 1344 equipment items total

92 items = >10 years life expectancy – 6.8%

1046 items = 5-10 years life expectancy – 78%

183 items = 3-5 years life expectancy – 13.6%

23 items = 1-3 years life expectancy – 1.7%

10 items = <12 months life expectancy – 0.74%

The reason that the equipment items fall into the brackets we have indicated is predominantly because the equipment choices made over the previous years have been sound, with good quality, long lasting equipment being installed across the County and clearly a good level of maintenance has been carried out.

There are some areas of the County that are light in terms of play provision; these are highlighted in the report and will need to be discussed with the author to determine the best strategy going forward.

NOTE - Whilst the life expectancy of most of the equipment is reasonable because of the way that the equipment has been looked after, some of the stock equipment is now more than 25 years old and sites would benefit from the introduction of more modern design equipment to provide an aesthetic uplift to the sites involved and re-engage the public with these sites. These recommendations have also been made throughout this report where the author felt it applicable.

Play Value Summary Detail:

With regard to Play Value the methodology used was based on a format intended to identify not only what the equipment provided in terms of play value, but also the location and to some extent the condition of the equipment and area (as areas that are well equipped may not be looked after that well) and to provide an overview of the sites involved. This assessment method was developed by Play England some years ago and has proven to be relatively useful in providing an overview of individual sites.

Sites have been broken down into the following categories as per Play England methodology:

TYPE A: Door-step space or facility: A space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults
TYPE B: Local spaces and facilities: A larger space which can be reached safely children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.
TYPE C: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities: A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safety and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences

Throughout the county the percentage numbers of each category are as follows:

Site Type	Count of Site Type (A, B or C)
A	47.27%
B	43.03%
C	9.70%
Grand Total	100.00%

Risk Assessment:

The risk assessments of defects found on site during our inspections are largely in the low or very low risk categories (99.30%), with only a very small percentage of findings falling into the moderate or high-risk categories. Again, this indicates that equipment is of good quality and that the current inspection and maintenance regime is both proportional and effective.

Out of 7677 total defects recorded.

High Risk – 8 defects representing 0.1% of all findings

Moderate Risk – 47 defects representing 0.6% of all findings

Low / Very Low Risk – 7622 defects representing 99.30% of all findings

High risk findings require immediate attention

Medium Risk findings should be actioned as soon as possible

Low and Very Low findings should be actioned over the next few months where possible as this will help to keep the playgrounds in a safe condition and are often a useful form of preventative maintenance

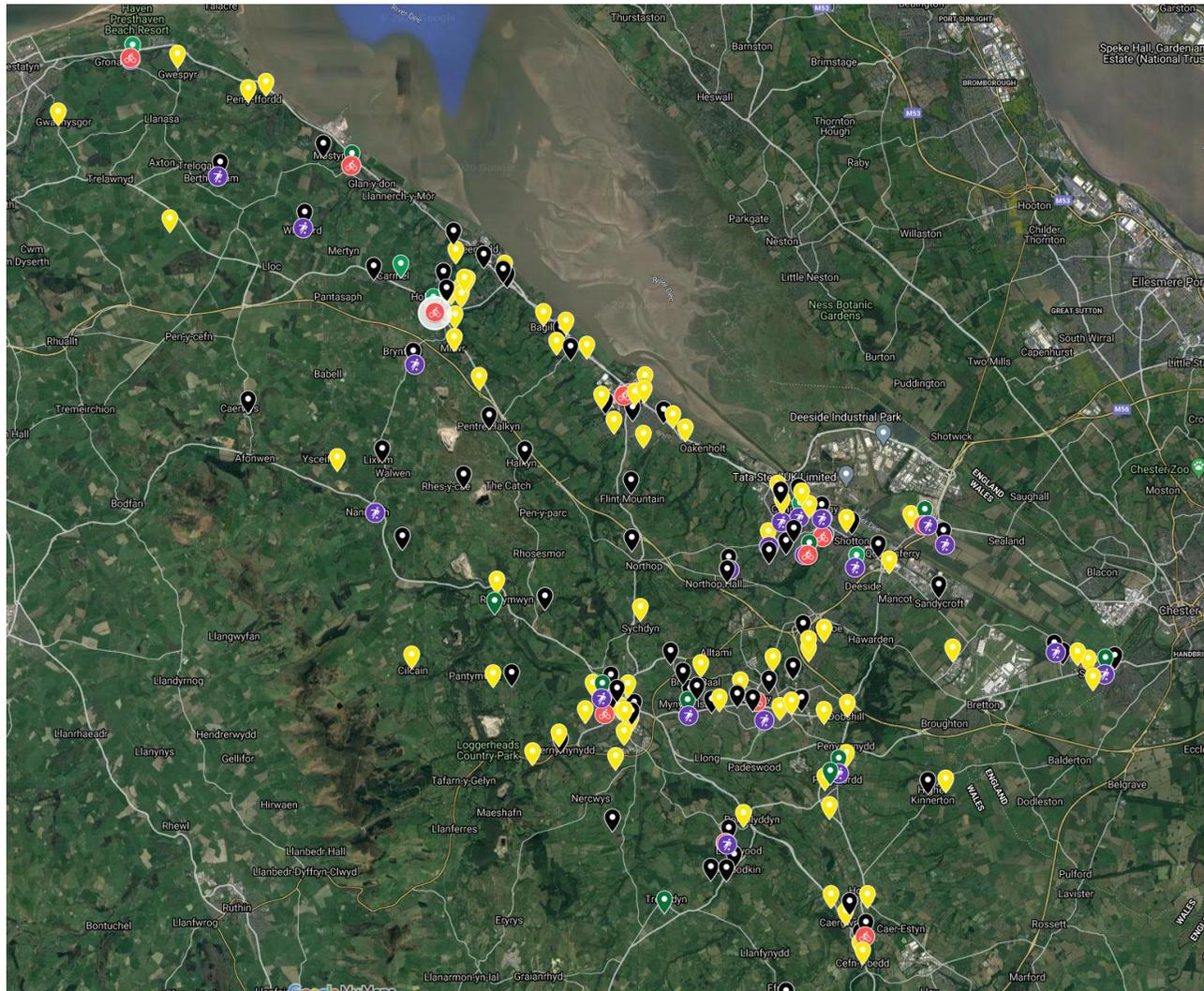
The recommendations set out in this report are based on a combination of factors including current Play Value & Life Expectancy, as well as location, scope for expansion and nearby provision.

Where costing information and equipment suggestions are made, these are indicative only and intended to provide an overview of the potential and possibilities; if sites are redeveloped, each should be treated as a unique space and equipment chosen in collaboration with the local community. Contingency values are intended to provide for removal and reinstatement where this is required.

Flintshire Boundary



Current Site Distribution



Overall cost summary

Category	Budget Cost
Category 1a	£67,400.00
<i>Category 2</i>	<i>£ tbc</i>
Category 3	£984,900.00
Category 4	£686,500.00
Category 5	£218,700.00
Category 6	£305,400.00
Additional Fitness Areas	
Total	£2,262,900.00

Summary & Conclusions

It is not envisaged that all the recommendations can be undertaken in a short period but looking at a plan over the next 3-5 years or so to deal with the higher priority areas and incorporating update reviews every three years to map and analyse progress with a view to achieving the long-term aspirations in approximately 10 years.

From what we have there are some clear opportunities for rationalisation and strategic improvements where there are poor sites in close proximity to other sites that have more development opportunity. These are not completely evident until the individual areas are examined with Google Earth however these have all been highlighted and included within this report. The removal of the sites suggested will allow more resource to be focused on other site improvements that will have a more beneficial impact on the local communities.

Google Earth details of all sites can be accessed here: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1RM5S8HGF7I47svGe35Ln4BqduJ1aPiIP&usp=sharing>

We consider a budget of **£2,262,900.00** will be required to address the shortfalls.

Consideration for play provision needs to be based on a community requirement and possibly the introduction of community involvement in the process may be beneficial in determining the actual rather than perceived need for play spaces and the provision within them.

We note that across the County there are only 4 sites that have Outdoor Fitness Equipment installed, which is very low in comparison with other authorities as this represents less than 2.4% of the total number of sites (170). Consideration should be given to the provision of Fitness Equipment across a greater number of sites, especially in areas of denser population. At this time, we feel it should be extended to a further 13 sites across the Borough to bring the overall percentage upto 10% - we have made recommendations against individual sites that we feel would benefit from the addition of this type of equipment but this does not extend to 13 parks so we have budgeted for the remaining in the overall cost summary so that these can be placed in the most suitable locations in accordance with local community needs.

Outdoor fitness areas are becoming more and more popular throughout the UK as they provide a valuable resource for older users and adults that do not have access to or are unable to afford to attend membership gyms.

There appears to be a real lack of toddler multiplay units throughout the sites assessed, so these have been suggested where the author felt applicable and should be considered in any new developments or future refurbishments. Most sites do not have much in the way of inclusive features, so we have also recommended some items that are inclusive for all such as inclusive roundabouts and interactive activity panels where the author feels these would be of benefit. These types of items should be considered when re-developing any new play areas, as well as other inclusive items such as basket swings.

Summary & Conclusions cont....

Several different surfacing types are present throughout the sites; they are mainly loosefill surfaces, wetpour, rubber tiles and grass mats. Further to reviewing all sites it is evident that there are several old, tiled areas that require replacement. We have recommended replacement of grass mat surfaces where this surface type does not appear to be working particularly well and is becoming compacted. Generally, we would recommend surfaces like wetpour or carpet surfacing underneath dynamic items or where there is heavy footfall or particularly wet soil. Grass mat can be a good surface when installed in the right environment and does appear to have established successfully on some sites and under some equipment items.

Loosefill surfaces are not particularly inclusive and generally have a higher ongoing maintenance cost since the levels need to be topped up and the areas require raking and levelling throughout the year and for this reason, we have recommended providing a synthetic surface in the majority of areas, aside from small areas of sand play that do provide good play value.

When redeveloping play areas, consideration should also be given to whether fencing is necessary, and this will need to be done on a site-by-site basis. Our current advice is to only fence a playground when it is required for safety reasons (i.e. busy adjacent roads or waterways). It may be prudent to fence areas for younger or less competent users, but if fencing can be removed from the budget requirement then there is more to spend on play.

Author

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