

Committee Report:

Gorse Hill Rec Play Area

Date: 4th Sept 2025

To: Leisure & Recreation Committee

From: Andrew Briggs – Ops Manager

Subject: Edinburgh St Rec Play Area Review

Council Priority: Provide a high standard of facilities and Protect & Improve our Environment

1. Background

Following a site inspection of the Gorse Hill Play Area (Edinburgh Street Rec), the play equipment was found to be in a generally serviceable condition, though it offers limited play value overall.

However, serious deterioration was noted in relation to access, surfacing, and particularly the perimeter fencing, which now presents health and safety concerns.

2. Condition Summary

Perimeter Fencing

The current fencing and associated access gates are in significant disrepair:

- Rotten wooden fence posts
- Missing kickboards
- Broken gates that are no longer operable or secure
- Structural instability in several fence sections

This deteriorated state introduces multiple hazards including:

- Splinter injuries
- Exposed concrete
- Trip hazards
- Entrapment risks for children
- Potential for fence collapse

Surface Conditions

- The play surface is bark chip, which is:
 - Requires continually top up and thinning in areas (e.g. under the basket swing)
 - Inaccessible for many users, particularly wheelchair users or those with limited mobility
 - Labour-intensive and costly to maintain long-term





3. Legal and Operational Considerations

While the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HASAWA) primarily governs work-related risk, it applies to councils in their role as employers and duty holders responsible for maintaining safe public facilities. The following additional legal duties are also relevant:

- Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 & 1984: The council must take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of lawful visitors, particularly children using play areas.
- Equality Act 2010: The council must ensure that public facilities are accessible and do not place disabled users at a disadvantage.
- RoSPA & BS EN 1176/1177 Guidance: Recommends fencing where risks justify it (e.g. near roads or water), not as a default. In this case, fencing may no longer be necessary or effective.

4. Proposed Approach

To resolve the issues identified while improving long term outcomes, the following course of action is proposed:

Proposal:

1. Remove the existing perimeter fencing and damaged gates in full.
2. Level the surrounding ground area.
3. Install grass crete pads or similar surfacing to:
 - Provide clean, durable, and wheelchair-accessible access
 - Improve aesthetics of the play area.
 - Eliminate ongoing maintenance associated with failing fence infrastructure
4. Re position or replace bench.

5. Benefits

- **Safety:** Immediate removal of risk from damaged fencing
- **Accessibility:** Compliant and inclusive surface access for all users
- **Financial:** Avoids major expenditure on fencing replacement
- **Appearance:** Improves the visual impact of the area for park users and residents
- **Sustainability:** Reduces future maintenance liability

6. Potential Disadvantages / Considerations

While the proposed approach offers clear benefits, the following points should be acknowledged and assessed:

1. Loss of Containment

Removing the fence means children, especially younger ones, are no longer physically contained within a defined space.

This may cause concern for some parents or carers, particularly for toddlers or children with additional needs who may wander.

2. Risk of Dog Fouling

Without fencing, the play area becomes open to dogs, increasing the risk of fouling and hygiene issues.

Additional signage and patrols may be needed to mitigate this, or dog fouling bylaws actively enforced.

3. Potential for Unwanted Use / Vandalism

Open access may lead to increased foot traffic, loitering, or antisocial behaviour, especially during evenings.

Fencing, while deteriorated, currently acts as a subtle deterrent to some activity.

4. Perception of Downgrade

Some residents may perceive the removal of fencing as a reduction in quality or investment, rather than a safety or accessibility improvement.

Clear communication and visuals will be needed to explain the rationale and longterm benefits.

5. Grasscrete May Still Require Maintenance

Although more durable than bark, grasscrete needs some upkeep, especially during dry spells when grass may not establish well.

If poorly maintained, it could become muddy or uneven in high-wear zones.

6. Indicative Cost Comparison

Option	Estimated Cost
Fence Replacement (like-for-like) and top up of bark chippings	£12,000 – £15,000
Fence Removal + Level and Grass crete instatement	£4,000 – £5,000

This supports the proposed approach as a proportionate and practical alternative.

7. Community Engagement

Engage with the community through consultation and onsite notices to explain improvements.

8. Recommendation

A site visit is requested with ward members to:

- Review current conditions
- Discuss the proposed solution in context
- Address any concerns or alternative suggestions
- Agree next steps for delivery