

Leisure & Rec Committee Report

Item: Oct Play Inspections – Summary of Findings and Risk Based Action Plan

Date: 4th December 2025

Officer: Andrew Briggs – Head of Operations

Purpose of Report

To inform Members of the findings from the weekly inspections of the Council's play areas and multi-use games areas (MUGAs) undertaken on 27 October 2025, and to note the risk based programme of works and planned refurbishments over the next 12 months.

2. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. Notes the inspection findings for the Council's play areas and associated MUGAs carried out on 27 October 2025.
2. **Approves** the risk based action plan:
 - **High risk items** – to be made safe, and rectified within 1 month.
 - **Medium risk items** – to be programmed for repair within 3 to 6 months, or earlier where practicable.
 - **Low risk items** – to be addressed through routine inspection, cleansing and grounds maintenance within existing budgets.
3. **NOTES** the following site specific:
 - **Barnum Court** – proceed on the basis that the play area will receive a full refurbishment within the next 12 months.
 - **Alanbrooke Crescent** – proceed on the basis that the play area will receive a full refurbishment within the next 12 months.
 - **Edinburgh Street** – remove the bench with exposed concrete as an immediate safety measure and undertake a wider review of the site's future use, including options for creation of a new play park.
 - **St Mark's Park** – note that slide repair/replacement works have already been approved and are to be completed in the coming weeks.

3. Background

Operational inspections of the Council's equipped play areas and MUGAs were carried out on 27 October 2025 by the Council's appointed inspector. The inspections covered:

- Fixed play equipment (swings, slides, multi play units, springers, roundabouts, cableways).
- Surfacing (wet pour, grass mats, bark, concrete/asphalt).
- Boundary (fencing, gates, self closers) and furniture (benches, bins).
- Associated hazards (trees, roots, trip hazards, litter, vandalism).

Each defect was assessed and assigned a risk level (low, medium or high) based on likelihood and potential severity of injury.

4. Summary of Inspection Findings

Across the estate, the most common issues identified were:

- **Surfacing failures** – exposed concrete bases, worn or shrinking wet pour, trip edges and exposed roots in impact areas.
- **Equipment deterioration** – rotting timber elements, worn or broken seats and handles, damaged or loose platforms and steps.
- **Boundary and access issues** – gates not self-closing, damaged or missing fence panels, and failing posts.
- **Environmental and cosmetic matters** – weed growth, litter, minor vandalism, and aged paintwork.

A number of these were categorised as high risk, particularly where exposed concrete, failed surfacing or structural defects could realistically lead to serious injury if not addressed.

5. Site Specific Strategic Issues

5.1 Barnum Court – Planned Full Refurbishment

The inspection identified a range of defects at Barnum Court including surfacing issues and wear to certain pieces of equipment.

Given that Barnum Court is scheduled for a full play area refurbishment within the next 12 months, it is proposed that:

- Only high risk items (e.g. exposed concrete, broken components on dynamic equipment) are addressed immediately, including temporary removal or isolation where necessary.

5.2 Alanbrooke – Planned Full Refurbishment

Similarly, Alanbrooke play area has recorded a number of surfacing and equipment defects.

As Alanbrooke is also scheduled for a full play area refurbishment within the next 12 months, the same approach is proposed:

- Make safe and repair only high risk defects immediately.

5.3 Edinburgh Street – Bench and Future Park Provision

Inspection findings highlighted a bench with exposed concrete at Edinburgh Street, presenting a trip and impact hazard, particularly for children.

27.10.2025

In response, it is proposed that:

- The bench is removed as a priority, eliminating the immediate high risk hazard at minimal cost.
- The wider site is reviewed as part of a strategic assessment of the play provision and with potential for a new play park in future capital programmes.

5.4 St Mark's Park – Slide Works

At St Mark's Park, the inspection noted defects associated with the slide/multi play structure, including surfacing and structural concerns.

Members are asked to note that:

- Slide works at St Mark's have already been approved (repair or replacement as specified), and

6. Risk Based Action Plan

6.1 High Risk Items (Immediate – within 1 month)

include:

- Exposed concrete bases or foundations in impact areas.
- Broken or missing seats/handles on swings and springers.
- Structural weaknesses in multi play units, see-saws addressed.
- Gates and boundary defects where play areas adjoin roads or car parks.

6.2 Medium Risk Items (Planned within 3 - 6 months)

Medium risk defects include:

- Worn but not yet failed surfacing, small holes and gaps.
- Early stage timber rot, corrosion, or loosening of non critical fixings.
- Fencing defects that do not directly expose children to traffic but may worsen over time.

6.3 Low Risk Items (Routine Maintenance)

Low risk items are typically cosmetic or environmental, such as:

- Weed growth and minor surfacing irregularities.
- Graffiti, minor fire damage not affecting structural integrity.
- Litter, green waste piles and animal holes.

These will be addressed through:

- Routine play inspections and grounds maintenance.
- Cleansing and minor repairs within existing staff workloads.

7. Legal and Risk Management Considerations

The Council has statutory and common law duties to manage risks arising from facilities it provides for public use. Failure to address known high risk defects could expose the Council to legal claims and reputational damage.

Further, maintaining safe and attractive play areas supports children's health and wellbeing, particularly for families without access to private outdoor space.

Ensuring that refurbishment programmes and new provision (including potential future provision) are distributed fairly across communities will support the Council's equality and inclusion objectives.