

Leisure & Recreation Committee

Report: Play Area Inspection and Weekly Condition Update

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1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the condition of the Council's play areas, based on the weekly operational inspections carried out during April 2026.

The report highlights recurring issues, areas of concern, and the proposed approach for managing defects, repairs and ongoing monitoring.

2. Background

The Council undertakes weekly inspections of its play areas to identify defects, safety concerns, vandalism, wear and tear, and general maintenance requirements.

The inspections are visual operational checks and are used to identify issues requiring either immediate attention, planned repair, further investigation, or continued monitoring. They sit alongside the Council's wider approach to play area management, including annual inspections, reactive repairs, capital replacement programmes and day-to-day grounds maintenance.

The inspection sheets reviewed for this report cover the following dates:

- 7 April 2026
- 14 April 2026
- 20 April 2026
- 28 April 2026



20.04.2026.pdf



14.04.2026.pdf



07.04.2026.pdf



28.04.2026.pdf

The reports show that a number of issues are recurring across several inspections, particularly in relation to surfacing, fencing, gates, timber play equipment, worn moving parts, exposed concrete, missing bolts/caps, and general degradation of older items of equipment.

3. General Condition Summary

The inspections confirm that the play areas remain subject to regular monitoring and that defects are being identified through the weekly process. However, the overall position shows a clear pattern of age-related deterioration across a number of sites.

The most common issues identified are:

- worn, uneven or damaged safety surfacing;
- exposed concrete, roots, membrane or trip hazards;
- damaged or degraded timber components;
- loose or missing bolts, caps, panels and fixings;
- gates not self-closing or closing too slowly;
- damaged fencing or loose panels;
- worn swing seats, bushes, chains or moving parts;
- damage to MUGA panels and fencing;
- vandalism, litter, small fire damage and holes dug in surfaces. 7

A number of items have already been removed or made safe where necessary, including some damaged swings, balance beams, loose items and rotten stepping stones. However, several defects remain ongoing and require either specialist repair, programmed works or further assessment.

4. Site-by-Site Condition Update

Site	Current Position / Key Issues	Officer Comment
Barnum Court	Issues noted with surface condition, exposed concrete, uneven areas, weeds, holes, gaps and splits. Train climber has damage to fall boards and tunnel movement, with nail heads noted. Spring aeroplane and rocking moose also identified as higher concern items due to exposed concrete, damaged timber and metal bracket issues.	Site in process of full refurbishment
Churchward	Gates require attention, including a broken spring and one gate not self-closing. Surfacing mats are receding, with some corners lifting. Multiplay junior has damaged steps and missing caps. Spring seesaw has a split frame and broken handle.	Surfacing and gate repairs should be prioritised to reduce trip and access risks. Equipment defects appear manageable but require repair before deterioration increases.

Site	Current Position / Key Issues	Officer Comment
Mannington	Exposed concrete, roots, membrane, uneven surfacing and timber defects noted. Swing panels, rope climber and MUGA show more significant issues, including exposed concrete, missing panels and damage to MUGA panels. Previous comments also note damaged wetpour and pathway issues.	This site should be treated as one of the higher-priority sites for a repair package due to the combination of surfacing, timber and MUGA defects. Cllr EMR and CiL money available
Alanbrooke Close	General surfacing defects including uneven areas, splits, weeds and holes. Fence damage by the gate is creating an entrapment concern. One gate is closing too slowly. Junior swing bushes require changing and timber spring equipment shows damage.	Site in process of full refurbishment
Harcourt Road	Gate issues include missing stopper and slow closing. Surfacing has gaps, splits, weeds and a lump near the fence from an old bracket. Toadstools and seesaw show wear. One piece of gym equipment is noted as loose.	Loose gym equipment has been RESOLVED. The gate defects should be addressed. Surfacing defects require monitoring and possible repair.
St Mark's Park	Several defects identified, including broken fencing, gate issues, exposed concrete, timber defects, exposed membrane and damaged/missing components. Sandpit area has exposed membrane, timber, concrete and projecting points around fencing. Kickabout wall and embankment slide have more significant defects.	This is a higher-priority site. Intention for bark chip to be replaced by wetpour style surface. Sand should be replenished
Medlar Court	Significant number of defects noted, including gate damage, exposed concrete, holes, tree stumps, damaged/missing boards, swing damage, worn ropes exposing wire,	A full specialist play contractor review is recommended, with urgent make-safe works where sharp edges, exposed metal, broken ropes or

Site	Current Position / Key Issues	Officer Comment
	cable runway defects, MUGA damage and sharp exposed edges. Basket swing has been removed.	damaged surfacing are present.
Pinetrees	Damaged fencing/loose posts, dropped gate, loose multisound panel, stuck spiral spinner and slide defects noted.	Moving parts and loose panels should be repaired to prevent further deterioration.
Willcox Close	Fence panels missing, bolts missing, loose panels and damaged posts. Surfacing issues include holes by swings, receding mats, gaps and uneven areas.	Fence and surfacing issues should be included in the planned repair programme. Cllr EMR available.
Chapel Street	Rotten fence posts and kickboards, missing kickboards, exposed nails, loose gate posts, missing stopper and snapped gate spring. Surfacing includes exposed concrete, membrane and weeds. Pathway from the car park to play area is damaged.	Site is subject to full review
Trowbridge Close	Animal holes, rope hanging from tree, split base cover on spring boards and removed balance beam. Green waste also noted.	Lower-level defects overall, but animal holes and tree/rope issue should be monitored and resolved.
Alton Close	Surface marked as high risk due to uneven areas, gaps and missing flooring. Multiplay junior has damaged fall board, rust on net bracket, loose step, tunnel board damage, missing bolt covers and split surface at bottom of slide. Small seesaw mechanism broken.	Surfacing and multiplay defects should be prioritised. Broken seesaw mechanism should be repaired or isolated.
Minety Road	One gate pulled out with post. High-risk concerns noted around furniture/surface due to gaps, uneven surfacing and small fire damage. Multiplay toddler has worn rope exposing wire, damaged fall boards and loose handrail. Cable runway has loose steps and perishing seat. MUGA fence panel damaged and loose.	Gate post, exposed wire and surface defects require prompt attention. This site should be included in the priority repair package.

Site	Current Position / Key Issues	Officer Comment
Inglesham Road	Fence wall leaning/split, gates not fully closing, exposed concrete and holes on mound worsening. Worn ropes, damaged steps, broken chain cover, removed basket swing seat, sunken equipment feet and raised trampoline edges also noted.	This is a higher-priority site due to the volume of defects and combination of fencing, surfacing and equipment issues. Specialist assessment recommended.
Pembroke Gardens	Cable runway has loose steps and missing bolts. Bee play board and sun spinner not moving freely. Multiplay has damaged washers and washer protrusion. Spinning seesaw has seat damage, possibly dog damage.	Moving parts and protruding washer should be checked and repaired.

5. Key Issues Requiring Member Attention

The inspection records show that the Council is continuing to identify and record defects through weekly inspections. However, there is a clear difference between minor routine defects and wider condition issues arising from older play assets.

The main areas requiring attention are:

1. Surfacing deterioration

Several sites have uneven, split, receding or missing surfacing. Exposed concrete, membrane, roots and animal holes are recurring issues. This is particularly relevant at Barnum Court, Mannington Park, St Mark's Park, Medlar Close, Alton Close, Minety Road, Inglesham Road and Chapel Street.

2. Gate and fencing defects

A number of gates are not self-closing or are closing too slowly. Some fencing is damaged, loose or creating potential entrapment or sharp-edge risks. This needs continued priority management as it affects safe access and site security.

3. Ageing timber and older play equipment

Several timber items show signs of splitting, rot, damaged fall boards, exposed fixings, broken handles or worn edges. Some items have already been removed or temporarily made safe, but a wider review of older equipment condition is required.

4. **Loose, missing or exposed components**

Missing bolts, caps, covers, panels and loose fixings are repeatedly recorded. These defects can quickly worsen through use, vandalism or weather exposure.

5. **MUGA and boundary issues**

MUGA damage is noted at a number of sites, including damaged panels, loose fencing and sharp edges. These items should be reviewed as part of planned maintenance, particularly where panels expose sharp edges or where fencing integrity is compromised.

6. **Proposed Officer Action**

Officers will proceed with an immediate make-safe action where a defect presents an unacceptable risk.

It is proposed that the next stage is to separate defects into three categories:

Category	Action
Immediate make-safe	Sharp edges, exposed metal, protruding fixings, broken moving parts, failed gates, exposed concrete or items presenting an immediate hazard to be isolated, removed or made safe.
Planned repairs	Surfacing repairs, gate adjustments, replacement bolts/caps, worn swing seats, worn bushes, damaged panels, timber repairs and MUGA panel works.
Capital / replacement consideration	Older assets showing repeated deterioration, extensive surfacing failure, rotten timber, failed play value, or uneconomical repair costs to be considered for future capital replacement programmes.

Officers will also review whether a specialist play contractor (like Wicksteed) should be instructed to provide a consolidated repair quotation for the highest priority sites, rather than continuing to manage the issues as separate individual defects.

The Council has an ongoing relationship with Wicksteed following their successful tender of the Rodbourne Cheney Play Area.

7. **Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial approvals sought within this report.

Any minor repairs will be progressed through existing play area maintenance budgets where possible. However, the extent of defects across a number of sites may require further budget consideration once costs have been obtained.

Where repairs are likely to exceed existing delegated budgets, a further report will be brought back to Committee with costed options.

Members should also note that some of the defects identified may not represent good value as isolated repairs if the equipment is nearing the end of its useful life. In those cases, replacement or wider refurbishment may provide better long term value for money.

8. Risk Implications

The Council has a duty to maintain its play areas in a reasonably safe condition. The weekly inspection process provides an important record of monitoring and helps ensure that defects are identified and managed.

The key risks are:

- injury to users if defects are not addressed;
- increased repair costs if defects are allowed to deteriorate;
- reputational risk if visibly poor condition issues remain unresolved;
- reduced play value if equipment is removed and not replaced;
- budget pressure if multiple sites require repairs at the same time.

The ongoing inspection regime helps mitigate these risks, but the number of recurring defects now indicates that a more structured repair and replacement programme is required.

9. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. **Note** the findings from the weekly play area inspections carried out during April 2026.
2. **Note** that a number of defects are recurring across several inspections, particularly in relation to surfacing, fencing, gates, timber equipment and missing or loose components.
3. **Agree** that officers continue to take immediate make-safe action where defects present a potential risk to users.
4. **Agree** that officers obtain specialist repair advice and costings for the higher-priority sites identified within this report.
5. **Agree** that a further report be brought back to Committee, if required, setting out costed repair options and any recommended capital replacement priorities.