

Leisure & Recreation Committee

Report: Play Area Update

Date: 3rd September 2026

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1. Purpose of Report

To provide Members with a general update on the findings arising from the weekly play area inspections undertaken during June 2026, and to set those findings within the Council's planned programme of refurbishment, repair and future capital investment.

2. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- **Note** the recurring defects and maintenance issues identified through the June 2026 inspections;
- **Note** that the full refurbishments of Barnum Court and Alanbrooke Close are due to proceed shortly, and that a comprehensive repair scheme is being developed for Trowbridge Close;
- **Note** that options appraisals are being prepared for Mannington Park and Edinburgh Street, with any preferred upgrade schemes and funding requirements to be considered through the 2027/28 budget-setting process.

3. Background

The Council's inspection regime identifies defects, deterioration and hazards across the play area portfolio. Four sets of weekly inspection records dated 3, 11, 15 and 22th June 2026 have been reviewed for this report. The records cover 15 sites and show a mixture of routine maintenance matters, component defects, surfacing issues and more substantial age-related deterioration.

The same defect may appear in successive weekly records until a repair is completed or incorporated into a wider scheme.

4. General Findings

The main recurring items identified during June were:

- surfacing defects, including uneven or receding safety surfacing, gaps, splits, exposed concrete, exposed membrane, roots, holes and localised trip hazards;
- gate and fencing defects, including gates not self-closing, missing stoppers, damaged springs, loose or missing panels and posts, and isolated entrapment concerns;
- wear or damage to play equipment, including damaged timber, missing bolt caps or fixings, worn ropes, damaged seats, loose steps, broken handles and exposed metalwork;
- MUGA and kickabout defects, including damaged panels, missing fixings, sharp or projecting edges and deteriorated posts; and
- general housekeeping issues such as weed growth, vegetation encroachment and items requiring removal from play areas.

5. Planned Programme

Site / group	Assessment	Planned response
Barnum Court	Recurring surfacing and equipment defects, including damaged timber/components and exposed concrete.	Full refurbishment due to proceed shortly. Interim risks to remain subject to inspection and risk-based controls.
Alanbrooke Close	Surface deterioration, gate/fence issues and worn or damaged equipment components.	Full refurbishment due to proceed shortly. Interim repairs or restrictions to be applied where necessary.
Trowbridge Close	Local defects to activity-trail components, spring-board cover, animal holes and dumped green waste.	A comprehensive repair scheme is being developed to restore the site, rather than relying only on isolated patch repairs.
Mannington Park	More extensive surfacing, root, pathway, timber, swing and MUGA defects, with some equipment already removed.	Options appraisal being drafted for a potential upgrade in 2027/28. Essential safety repairs and controls continue in the interim.
Edinburgh Street	Site to be considered as part of the next phase of planned play investment.	Options appraisal being drafted for consideration through the 2027/28 budget process.
Remaining sites	A range of routine and component-specific defects, with several recurring observations across weekly reports.	Continue maintenance, obtain specialist repairs where required, and prioritise works according to risk, condition and available budgets.

6. Risk Management and Interim Controls

The inspection process enables defects to be prioritised according to the risk presented. The appropriate response will vary depending on the nature and urgency of the defect and may include:

- minor adjustment, tightening, cleaning, vegetation clearance or local repair by the grounds/maintenance team;
- referral to a competent play equipment or surfacing contractor;
- removal of damaged components or equipment from use;
- temporary isolation or closure where a defect cannot be made safe immediately; and
- incorporation into a planned refurbishment or comprehensive repair scheme where repeated patching would not provide good value.

Weekly inspections will continue, with any change in condition or new urgent defect acted upon through the established operational process. The planned capital works do not remove the need for proportionate interim controls.

7. Financial Implications

No capital commitment is requested in this report for Mannington Park or Edinburgh Street. The options appraisals will identify scope, priorities, indicative costs, funding options and deliverability so that Members can consider potential schemes as part of the 2027/28 financial year budget process. Routine and urgent repairs will continue to be managed from existing operational budgets, subject to available provision and the Council's financial regulations.

8. Legal, Safety and Equality Considerations

The Council must continue to manage its play areas so far as reasonably practicable and respond proportionately to identified risks. Maintaining documented inspections, clear repair records and suitable interim controls supports this duty. Refurbishment and upgrade proposals will also consider accessibility, inclusive play value, age range, durability, future inspection and maintenance requirements, and compliance with relevant play equipment and impact-attenuating surfacing standards.