

# ***Information discussion paper***

Agenda Item **8**

Social and Community Overview and  
Scrutiny Committee

9 November 2009

This note contains information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee but where no decisions from Members are needed.

## **PlayBuilder Update**

### **Background**

Following the launch of the first National Play Strategy in December 2008, Gloucestershire County Council was awarded £1.1m, between April 2009 to March 2011, to develop a number of natural, creative, challenging play spaces that will appeal to children aged 8-13. A scoring process was undertaken by an internal officer group, which considered the merits of 20 parks in Cheltenham, and agreed a shortlist of the 7 highest ranked sites.

Following discussion through the Gloucestershire Play Partnership, it was agreed that for 2009/10, each district would be awarded £84k to enhance two play spaces.

The funding for 2010/11 was subsequently split, based on a weighted criteria – with Cheltenham being allocated a further £104,719 in the second year of the programme.

### **Progress**

Since April, a significant amount of consultation work has been undertaken with local young people, as well as with the Police, in order to shape the final designs for the top two sites – Springfield Park and Agg Gardner. Costings for these two designs are currently being finalised, with a view to commence both projects in November.

### **Implications**

At a previous Overview & Scrutiny Meeting in June 2009, members expressed some concern regarding the maintenance costs associated to this natural approach to play provision, and also questioned whether the securing of this funding for a small number of parks would enable existing funding to be redirected to support enhancements to other parks across the Borough.

In response to those questions, the Parks Development Manager has advised that there are maintenance implications associated with natural play, as they will still require regular inspection and maintenance as with conventional play areas. The amount of maintenance is limited by ensuring the play site chosen is one already visited by maintenance staff, and

that much of the equipment is static and does not have moving or complex parts. The use of grass safety matting is also preferred over loose fill materials like bark which required continual raking and cleansing, and in some cases is not required at all where the fall height does not require it.

Where Play Builder money is spent on increasing the play value of an existing site, then this will allow council funds to be spent on alternative play areas, sooner than it might otherwise be able to, i.e. improvements currently taking place to Sandy Lane Play Area.

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