

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
DATE 4 MARCH 2026**

Officer: Helen Ball (Town Clerk)

PLAY AREA PRIORITIES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide Members with a delivery update and proposed implementation plan for the Play Area Upgrade Programme for the remainder of this electoral term, following the report presented to Full Council in January 2026 which identified priority sites for phased improvement.

2. BACKGROUND

In January 2026, Full Council considered a strategic report on the condition, compliance, and long-term sustainability of the Town Council's equipped play areas.

The report was on the basis on:

- Reviewed inspection data and condition surveys.
- Identified priority sites based on condition, usage, accessibility, and deprivation indices.

Full Council has endorsed a structured programme of improvement, with priority sites to be addressed first. Council already holds an Ear Marked Reserve of £769,624. This together with amalgamated minor budget reserves of £100,000 for play and an annual upgrade of £150,000 a year there is potential to address some of the most used and high priority sites.

This report outlines the proposed delivery framework, timescales, and next steps.

3. PLAY AREA SITE PRIORITY

Play are sites are prioritised on a number of areas including:

- Ageing equipment reaching end of lifecycle.
- Higher levels of recorded defects.
- High usage levels.
- Limited inclusive play provision.
- Opportunities to improve accessibility and community value.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE UPGRADE PROGRAMME

The Play Area Upgrade Programme will aim to:

- Replace ageing and non-compliant equipment.
- Improve inclusivity and accessibility.
- Increase play value and diversity of equipment.
- Enhance safety surfacing and drainage where required.
- Improve site aesthetics and landscaping.
- Ensure long-term sustainability and reduced maintenance burden.

The programme also aligns with the Council's broader objectives around health, wellbeing, and community cohesion.

5. PROPOSED DELIVERY APPROACH

The following sites have been identified for new and improved sites:

5.1 Phase 1 2026/27

New

- Bowbrook Meadows – New Play Area
- Sutton Grange - New Play Area

Renewal

- Greenacres Runway – Condemned by ROSPA – requires replacement
- Castlewalk Recreation Ground Play Area
- Kynaston Road Junior Play Area
- Monkmoor Recreation Ground Infant & Junior Play Area

5.2 Phase 2 – 2027/28

Renewal

- Quarry Play Area – to align with the Quarry Conservation Management Plan
- Stanley Lane Play Area
- Sydney Avenue Play Area
- St Michael's Recreation Ground Play Area

5.3 Phase 3 – 2028/29

Renewal

- Ashfield Road Recreation Ground Play Area
- Oxon Road Recreation Ground Play Area
- Church Road Recreation Ground Play Area
- White Hart Play Area
- Oakfield Drive/Ras Valley Road Play Area

6. FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

The January Full Council report identified an indicative capital envelope for delivery accommodating the Ear Marked Reserves of £769,624, amalgamated legacy funding in the Minor Reserves budget of £100,000 together with an agreed addition to the Revenue budget of £150,000 per annum.

Officers are currently:

- Refining cost estimates for each priority site.
- Reviewing potential external funding opportunities.
- Assessing potential phased expenditure across the next three financial years.

A detailed capital breakdown will be brought to Committee once tender returns are received.

7. DESIGN PRINCIPLES

All upgraded sites will seek to incorporate the following:

7.1 Inclusive Play

- Equipment accessible to children with varying abilities.
- Sensory play features.
- Accessible surfacing where feasible.
- Appended to this report is the difference between Accessible Play and Inclusive Play and why the Town Council's approach should always look at Inclusivity as its primary objective

7.2 Durability and Maintenance

- High-quality materials with strong warranty provision.
- Reduced reliance on high-maintenance components.
- Improved drainage and edging detail.

7.3 Environmental Considerations

- Sustainable materials where practical.
- Retention of mature trees and green infrastructure.
- Biodiversity enhancements where appropriate.

7.4 Play Value

- Looking at individual play pieces, the number of activities on each piece, user numbers and accessibility

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

Key risks include:

- Inflationary pressures on playground equipment.
- Contractor availability and programme delays.
- Ground condition surprises.
- Community expectation exceeding budget.
- Wear & Tear including user impact and external factors like flooding

Mitigation measures:

- Early market engagement.
- Clear budget parameters in consultation.
- Inclusion of contingency allowance.
- Robust contract management.

9. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

During the last play area improvements, the Communications Officer has developed programmes to keep both elected members and the public informed.

Future Communications Plans will include:

- Press release announcing programme commencement.
- Social media updates.
- On-site signage explaining closures and expected completion dates.
- Post-installation launch events where appropriate.

Positive communications reinforce the Council's commitment to investing in children's wellbeing and community infrastructure.

10. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Following completion there will be a programme of monitoring and evaluation including the following:

- Post-installation safety inspections will be undertaken.
- Usage levels will be informally monitored.
- Maintenance costs will be reviewed annually.
- Lessons learned will inform future phases.

11. NEXT STEPS

1. The Play Area Officer will develop invitations to tender specifications for Phase 1 Sites.
2. The Town Clerk will look to drawdown CIL Local Funding for the new development site play areas at Bowbrook & Sutton Grange.
3. The Communications Officer will engage with the relevant Ward Member around community consultation.
4. The Operations Manager will proceed to procurement in accordance with Financial Regulations and the Procurement Act 2023.
5. Progress shall be communicated to this Committee throughout this process.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 1. Notes the Report;**
- 2. Notes the proposed delivery plan for the Play Area Upgrade Programme;**
- 3. Endorses the phased approach to consultation, procurement, and installation;**
- 4. Authorises officers to proceed with detailed design and procurement for Phase 1 priority sites;**
- 5. Request a further update report following procurement stage.**

APPENDIX - Why We Should Focus on *Inclusive Play* Rather Than Only *Accessible Play*

1. Accessible Play Is About Entry — Inclusive Play Is About Participation

“Accessible play” traditionally focuses on physical access — for example:

- Wheelchair-accessible surfacing
- Ramped platforms
- Wider pathways
- Accessible gates and seating

These elements are essential and must be provided. However, accessibility alone does not guarantee that a child can meaningfully participate in play.

A wheelchair-accessible path leading to equipment that cannot be used independently is technically accessible, but not inclusive.

Inclusive play goes further. It ensures that:

- Children of all abilities can play *together*
- Equipment offers graduated challenge levels
- Play experiences support a wide range of physical, sensory, cognitive, and social needs
- Children are not segregated into “special” or separate equipment areas

2. Inclusive Play Avoids Segregation

Accessible play can sometimes result in:

- One or two “disability-specific” pieces of equipment
- Equipment positioned separately from the main play area
- Children with disabilities being visibly differentiated

This can unintentionally reinforce difference.

Inclusive play aims for:

- Shared equipment that multiple children can use simultaneously
- Play features that appeal to all children
- Design that does not label or separate users

The goal is for children with disabilities to play alongside their peers, not apart from them.

3. Disabilities Are Diverse — Inclusion Recognises Hidden Needs

Accessibility often focuses primarily on mobility impairments, but many children experience:

- Autism spectrum conditions
- Sensory processing differences
- Learning disabilities
- Visual or hearing impairments

- Neurodiversity
- Anxiety or social communication challenges

Inclusive play design considers:

- Sensory-rich but not overwhelming environments
- Quiet or retreat spaces
- Clear sightlines
- Graduated levels of stimulation
- Varied play types (social, imaginative, physical, sensory, solitary)

This approach reflects the reality that many disabilities are not visible.

4. Inclusive Play Benefits All Children

Inclusive play is not just for children with disabilities.

It supports:

- Toddlers and older children
- Children with temporary injuries
- Grandparents and carers
- Children with varying confidence levels
- Families with mixed-age siblings

Features such as wide paths, seating with backs and arms, varied challenge levels, and sensory elements benefit everyone.

Inclusive design improves the quality of the entire play environment.

5. Industry Best Practice Supports Inclusive Play

Modern play design standards, industry guidance, and disability advocacy organisations promote inclusive play as best practice. The shift reflects:

- Social model of disability principles
- Equality and inclusion frameworks
- Modern understanding of child development
- Community cohesion objectives

Using inclusive play language ensures the Council aligns with current professional standards and future-proofs investment.

6. Inclusive Play Is a Strategic Approach, Not a Single Piece of Equipment

Accessible play can sometimes be interpreted as purchasing specific items (e.g., an accessible roundabout).

Inclusive play is about:

- Overall site layout

- Surfacing
- Circulation routes
- Play value
- Social interaction opportunities
- Equipment selection
- Landscape design

It is a holistic approach rather than a tick-box exercise.