

PLAYSCAPE

A Vision For Great Shelford

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Executive summary

This Study reviews the existing play facilities on Great Shelford's Recreation Ground and proposes a plan for their improvement. It has been carried out by the Playscape Working Group (PWG), made up of volunteers, at the request of the Parish Council. Part one of the Study examines the present play equipment and its condition, considers best practice in playground design, and presents a vision for the future. Part two outlines the PWG's proposal for a project to implement this vision.

Our review shows that the present equipment is in poor condition, it is not inclusive of certain age groups or abilities, and the setting lacks any shelter or sense of place. In short it is uninspiring. Three options for improving the provision are outlined:

- Maintenance and piece-meal replacement
- Refurbishment with Playground Company
- Full redesign using a Landscape Architect

We also review best practice in playground design, based on a Play England document published in 2008. Successful play spaces are bespoke, make use of natural elements, are accessible to both disabled and able-bodied children, allow different ages to play together, and provide opportunities to experience risk and challenge.

In the light of its review the PWG recommends a full re-design with a Landscape Architect as the option best suited to address the identified issues and we present a 'Vision for Great Shelford' for consideration by the Parish Council. We believe that this should include the playground area, the skate ramp and the copse area by the river – using landscaping, planting, new equipment and surfaces, whilst also tying the Pavilion into the scheme.

Part 2 of this Study describes the Design Phase, including a top-level project plan and timeline, with milestones. The Design Phase will see public consultation and outline design development in parallel with initial publicity and fundraising. Detailed design and the main fundraising effort will follow. The PWG has offered to deliver the plan, working in partnership with the Parish Council under agreed terms of reference.

- The public consultation will be carried out via focus groups with young people together with an online questionnaire
- A website (www.shelfordplayscape.org) will be launched hosting project updates and an online donations facility
- A Landscape Architect will be engaged with the aim of having an outline design ready for public consultation at the 2015 Shelford Feast
- The fundraising plan outlined in this Study will be developed, aiming to raise an estimated £180k for the project via donations, fundraising events, corporate sponsorship and sizeable grants
- PC to handle the contractual elements of the next phase: Construction Phase

We ask the Parish Council to review this Study and to support our vision by authorising us to proceed with the design phase.

Introduction

The Pavilion and Recreation Ground Sub-Committee of Great Shelford Parish Council has initiated this preliminary study into the children's play provision on the recreation ground. Its purpose is to review the existing facilities, look at options for improving the facilities, gauge the potential scope of such a project, and make recommendations on how to proceed.

The study has been carried out by the newly formed Playscape Working Group (PWG), a group of volunteers with a vision to transform Great Shelford's play provision into an exemplary facility for the benefit of the whole community. Our founding members are Holly Barr, Eleanor McCrone and Alison Sillence (local parents), Duncan Grey (Grandfather to playground users and member of the Shelford Feast Committee) and Simon Talbott (Vicar of St. Mary's Church and Parish Councillor).

PART ONE - REVIEW

1.1 Review of existing play facilities

This review covers the play facilities on the Great Shelford recreation ground, namely, the fenced off playground and the skate ramp near the car park, plus the basketball hoop and football wall situated near the river.

The facilities serve a village of 4000, but due to its array of good amenities the village regularly hosts visitors from Little Shelford, Stapleford and beyond. During holidays when the children's tennis camps are on families often travel out from Cambridge and spend the whole morning on the rec.

2011 Census recorded 1536
0-17-year-olds living in the
Shelfords & Stapleford ward.



Included in this section is a site plan showing where the play areas are situated on the rec, plus a table listing the current play equipment, its condition, and what ages each piece caters for. The main shortcomings of the play provision are then discussed.

This review and its conclusions are based on the PWG's experiences of the play provision, the many conversations with other users, and a review by Landscape Architect, Aileen Shackell (see appendix). A formal consultation with the village is needed in the future to gain a broader understanding of feelings towards play provision in general.

The majority of the play equipment is to be found in the playground between the car park and the Pavilion. The skate ramp is tucked away behind the hall and the basketball hoop and ball wall are right down by the river.



Review of current equipment

Current Equipment	Target age *				Adult help required?	Condition	Comments
	0-3	4-6	7-10	11-13 13+			
Horse	✓	✓			Yes	Needs a repaint	
Junior swings x 2	✓				Yes	Decay to wooden supports	Would be preferable to have both sets next to each other. One set particularly muddy underfoot.
Senior swings		✓	✓	✓			
Monkey bars		✓	✓	✓	Yes, to reach		
Climbing frame		✓	✓			Net and posts need replacing	
Slide	✓	✓	✓		Yes for younger ones		Toddlers do use this slide, but it is too high for adults to reach and help without climbing up too. Older children use it as a climbing frame substitute.
See-saw	✓	✓	✓		Yes for younger ones	Needs a repaint	
Roundabout	✓	✓	✓	✓	Yes for younger ones	Needs a repaint	
Sandpit	✓	✓	✓				Popular, but fence round it now redundant
Hedgehog rocker	✓						
Skate board ramp			✓	✓		In need of urgent repair	Used by the younger children to climb and slide on before the older ones arrive with boards etc.
Basketball hoop			✓	✓		Net torn	Only space for a couple of players, a chain net would be more durable.
Wooden ball wall		✓	✓	✓			Need public consultation to see if this is indeed used at all.

* assessed on average ability to access the equipment and whether it is of interest, of course there are always exceptions.

Poor condition

Much of the equipment is in poor condition: at best a repaint is required and in some cases major work is needed. For example the net section on the timber-climbing frame is rotten and needs replacing. The Parish Council (PC) is aware of this and has received a quote of c. £2000 to replace the wooden posts and the net. The skate ramp also needs c. £2000 spent on it urgently. Ideally the whole thing needs replacing soon. The ground surfaces are also poor: the grass matting does not stop the playground getting very muddy at times.



Limited and exclusive provision

Children at either end of the age spectrum are currently being left out: for crawlers and toddlers there's nothing to climb and investigate safely. Due to the nature of much of the dated equipment even able-bodied 4 to 6 year olds need adult help to use some of the apparatus; it is certainly not very inclusive for the disabled. For those ages 10 and above, the only real options in the playground are the monkey bars, swings, and roundabout.

The skate ramp and basketball hoop (the two elements designed for the older child or teenager) are unhelpfully located a quarter of a mile from one another. We have observed that the younger children use the skate ramp probably as often as the intended demographic, a demonstration perhaps of children's ability and need to seek out challenge wherever they can find it.



Often deemed too old for 'play', teenagers need more than youth shelters and areas for ball games. More places where they can congregate and socialise with their friends are especially important.¹

¹ Shackell, Butler, Doyle, Ball, Design For Play: a guide to creating successful play spaces, p12

Aesthetically uninspiring – for all ages

“As a traditional playground the setting has been given little or no consideration and it lacks any sense of place...[it] feels a bit exposed, a bit draughty, slightly uncomfortable, not somewhere to linger - lacking any enclosure and sense of shelter. This is not a space that an adult would want to spend any significant amount of time in!” A. Shackell



An ICM survey shows that 71 per cent of adults played outside in the street or area close to their homes every day when they were children, compared with only 21 per cent of children today.²

Catering for adults is a consideration as these days children make very few visits to outdoor play areas unaccompanied. Indeed, children’s roaming range has shrunk dramatically by 90% in the last 30 years³.

Everyone recognises children’s need for play: it’s the way they explore the world, their abilities, and risk. The health benefits of playing outside and in a natural environment are also becoming more widely understood for both physical and mental well being. Yet we live in an age and society where few children have the freedom to play outside on their own and in general they spend less time outside than previous generations.

Because of this, play areas and communal open spaces need to work harder at giving our children resources and inspiration for play, whilst enticing their accompanying adult out too. Currently, the play provision in Great Shelford is falling short on this aspect.

Summary

The equipment found on the recreation ground is dated and in need of repair. It does not cater for a wide ability or age-range, with toddlers and teenagers in particular being excluded. The playground itself lacks any inherent design that encourages play beyond use of the apparatus. It is also a very exposed site and shelter from both wind and sun would improve the enjoyment of all users and prolong time spent outside playing.

² Shackell, Butler, Doyle, Ball, Design For Play: a guide to creating successful play spaces, p11

³ <http://www.landscapethejournal.org/Swings-and-Roundabouts>

1.2 Options for improving the facilities

We have considered three broad approaches available to the PC to address the issues outlined in section 1.1.

- I. On going maintenance and piecemeal replacement
- II. Full refurbishment via a playground equipment company
- III. Full redesign using a Landscape Architect

Option I - Maintenance

The cheapest and easiest approach would be to repaint and repair existing equipment and replace pieces when required. An obvious candidate for replacement would be the wooden-climbing-frame as it needs a sizeable amount spent on it. Looking at a current equipment price-list a comparable climbing frame could be bought for around £6000 plus installation fees. The skate ramp is also coming to the end of its life. A like for like replacement would cost c. £10,000, however a more durable steel and concrete version would cost between £20,000 and £30,000. Therefore we estimate a total cost in the region of £25,000 to £45,000 to implement this approach.

This option, however, would not deal with the issues of shelter, improved play provision for all ages, or a sense of place – to name but a few.



Option II - Refurbishment with Playground Company

All playground equipment manufacturers offer “design services” to support equipment supply. They also offer advice with regard to fundraising for such projects. They don't charge for the design process and can produce 3D images, which provide an idea of what the finished product will look like. However, design services are a cost-of-sales and business dictates such costs to be minimised.



Case Study: Comberton Playground

The company Kompan completed this full redesign and refurbishment last year.

Like Great Shelford, Comberton had out dated equipment that was in poor condition. They opted for a complete renovation.

Total project cost c. £100,000

£50k WREN grant

£25k Cambridge Community Foundation grant

£10k Awards for All grant

The remainder came from section 106 monies, grants, and community fundraising initiatives.

The whole process took about 2 years.

Little Shelford is currently in the process of refurbishing their playground. In March they had a village consultation where four equipment manufacturers presented designs ideas. Looking at these proposals it was notable that the only elements addressed were equipment, surfaces, and some ground modelling (to include tunnels etc.). This approach has been summed up by the acronym ‘KFC’: Kit, Fence, Carpet, coined by the landscape architect and academic Helen Woolley.

A strong sense of design and manipulation of the spaces around equipment to create more play opportunities was lacking, certainly no integrated planting schemes or innovative seating were represented. This is less of an issue for Little Shelford Playground as it is surrounded by mature trees with a grassy incline down to the nature walk by the river. The spirit of the place (or genius loci) is a strong and positive one, and the new equipment will be a great addition.

We are not so fortunate with our playground location in Great Shelford and this KFC approach is not equipped to address issues such as genius loci or shelter from the elements satisfactorily. Drawing the various facilities scattered across the rec into a unified resource for all is also a challenge that requires great design ideas, not just equipment.

Option III – Full redesign using a Landscape Architect

All around the world there are exciting and innovative play spaces that eschew the formulaic equipment-focused approach and look to original design to provide an inspiring and well-used playscape.

Car Mountain, Montsouris Park, Paris



Teardrop Park, NYC



Seabrooke Rise Play, Thurrock



Peter Corlett's 1969 bubbles, Australia



Pictures from play-scapes.com

A Landscape Architect can tackle both the equipment and landscaping to create a space inspiring for everyone. They can consider the recreation ground as a whole and create a design that solves all of the issues, such as shelter, sense of place, and a broader-age provision, with solutions that don't just rely on more equipment.

This can also be a more sympathetic and cost-effective approach. Unused areas such as the copse by the river could be incorporated into a more natural play area (especially as the woodland path is now out of bounds, much to the dismay of many young people). An experienced designer would be able to produce a strong design that complements our contemporary pavilion. They are free to source features from anywhere (not just from one company's catalogue), often saving money.



Good play spaces avoid segregating children on the basis of age or ability, and are laid out so that equipment and features can be used by a wide range of children, even allowing different patterns of usage throughout the day or week.³

³ Shackell, Butler, Doyle, Ball, Design For Play: a guide to creating successful play spaces, p19

Professional Landscape Designers are often more interested in an inclusive solution, seeking to provide features that offer open-ended play to all, with different ages and abilities interpreting these features in different ways, rather than specific “age or ability-appropriate” equipment. A line of upturned logs, say, can be impromptu seating for sports spectators, stepping-stones for youngsters or a workout area.

Area A: Quiet space with abstract sculptural features. A place to sit for everyone; surrounded by scented + colourful planting.

Area B: Open grassy space for informal kickabout newly enclosed by low mounds to separate it slightly from surrounding play spaces. One small piece of equipment located just off the path.

Area C: New play space with sand or grit surface.

Area D: New play space aimed at slightly older children + providing more challenging play opportunities, with a tyre swing and a bespoke climbing structure designed to fit the space around the kickabout area.

Area A images: Photos of children sitting on a bench, children in a garden, and a child with a large black bear sculpture.

Area B images: Photos of children sitting on a log, children on a grassy field, and a child on a log structure.

Area C images: Photos of a child on a swing, a child on a log structure, and children playing in a sandpit.

Area D images: Photos of a child on a large wooden structure, a child on a log structure, and a child on a climbing structure.

BLAIR STREET

Scale: 1:1000

Client: [Redacted]
 Date: [Redacted]
 Author: [Redacted]
 Title: [Redacted]

An example of how a Landscape Architect would present their initial ideas for public consultation, courtesy of A.Shackell

Unlike equipment manufacturers, design is not buried in the cost of equipment (as a guide it is sensible to allow around 10% of the contract value). However within this the Landscape Architect will be able to advise and help with the consultation and engagement side of the project, as well as detailed design and site administration, ensuring that the project is delivered to a high standard.

Case Study: Abbey Gardens play area

In the heart of Bury St Edmunds lies The Abbey Gardens. The large play area nestles between the ruins of the medieval abbey and the River Lark.

Notable features include a willow maze (existing play equipment was refurbished and is now enclosed by a living willow structure), a 'sand and water' area (equipped with pumps and wells), a woodland area with tree houses and sheltered seating areas with sail canopies. Planting schemes were key to the overall design.



Pictures courtesy of St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Abbey Gardens was commissioned by the borough council as part of a wider scheme to improve the whole gardens. The design was undertaken by PLAYLINK who have a number of designers working for them.

According to council records the play area cost approximately £180k. The project was proposed in 2008 and completed by 2011/2, however it should be noted the timescale was greatly affected by the sensitive archaeological nature of the site.

1.3 Best Practice in Playground Design

In 2008 Play England (a charity that champions the importance of play as set out in the UN's Rights of a Child Article 31) commissioned a guide to successful play spaces: '**Design for Play: a guide to creating successful play spaces**'.

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/70684/design-for-play.pdf>

Produced in association with another charity, Free Play Network, and backed by two government departments, this report informed the distribution of over £200 million funding allocated by the last government towards upgrading play spaces across the UK.



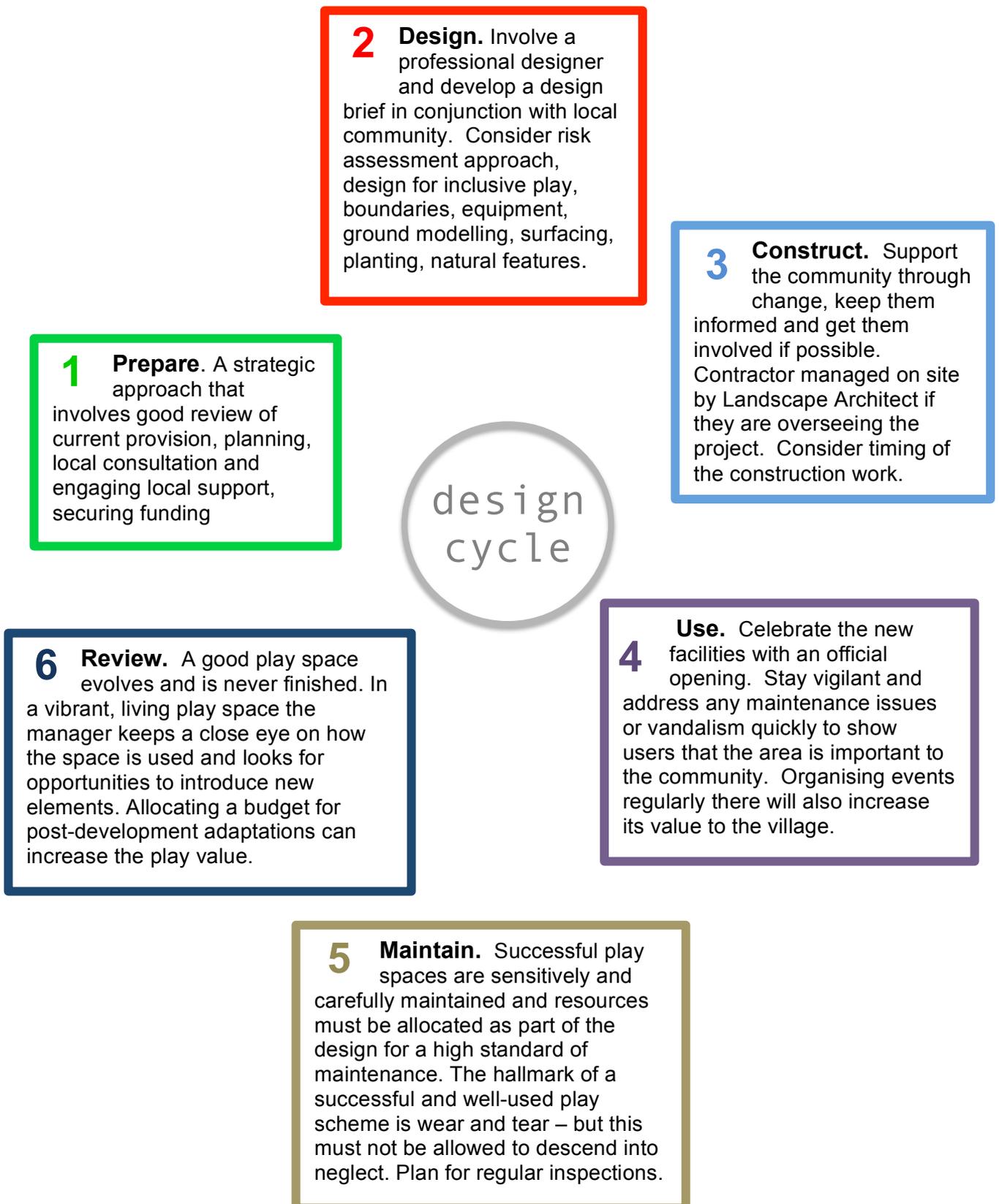
The report sets out the principles for creating imaginative, innovative, and inspiring play spaces that enrich the lives of children and young people, whilst also providing useful “how-to” templates for each stage. The overriding message is that good play spaces are made up of playful landscaping and well-selected equipment that adds up to far more than ‘the sum of their parts’.

Successful play spaces...

- ...are 'bespoke'
- ...are well located
- ...make use of natural elements
- ...provide a wide range of play experiences
- ...are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
- ...meet community needs
- ...allow children of different ages to play together
- ...build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge
- ...are sustainable and appropriately maintained
- ...allow for change and evolution.



As well as including many inspiring case studies the guide also helpfully details the optimal approach to designing a play space. This approach, termed the design cycle, is summarised below:



1.4 A Vision for Great Shelford

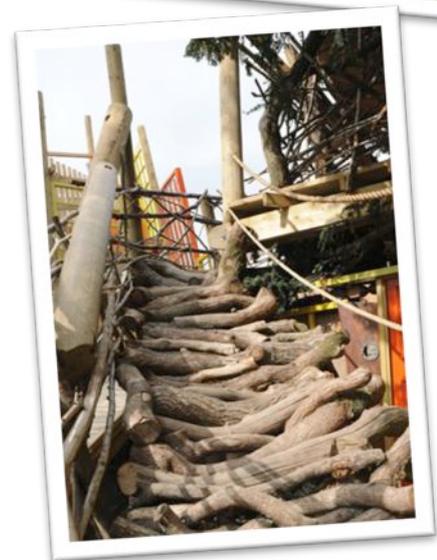
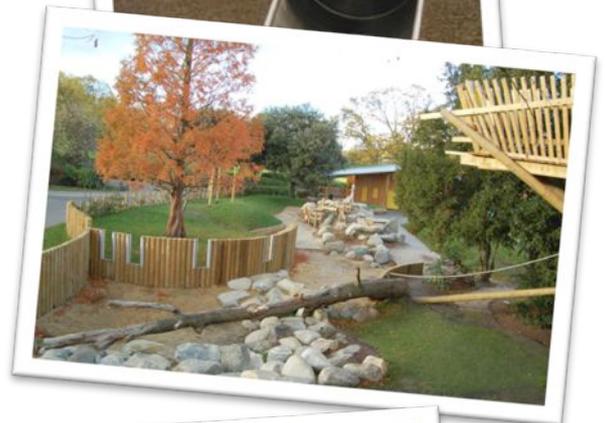
We have an opportunity to breathe new life into the play provision in Great Shelford – to create an inspiring place drawing on best practice in playground design. Somewhere that welcomes children of all ages and abilities, engages all of their senses, invites nature in, and encourages play for all. The PWG therefore recommends Option III: full redesign using a landscape architect. We believe that this will create a playscape that Great Shelford can be proud of and encourage greater use of the recreation ground.

The ambitious scheme would address the playground area, the skate ramp and a feature leading to the copse by the river.

As part of this redevelopment the current playground area could be more intrinsically linked to the Pavilion. For example, a deck at the north-end of the Pavilion could lead into a natural sand area. The deck would provide a place to enjoy the shade that the Pavilion provides and could inspire a community café. This in turn would help the Pavilion to become a hub for the whole community. Regardless, the Pavilion should inspire the overall playscape design, which in turn should seek to blur the lines between the playground and the recreation ground, drawing people all over the rec to use all the space we have.

As well as introducing planting and landscaping to the play area, we should use this opportunity to encourage use of the natural landscape that we already have. Some new interactive features that wend their way beside the sports pitches down to the river would draw people to the Copse. If the undergrowth was cleared and some modeling of the land completed (all to be done under a guiding design) we could have our very own place for play in nature. A meadow could be used to extend the wild area of the copse and attract wildlife.

Part two of this Study describes the PWG's proposal to the PC for the next step in delivering this vision: the Design Phase.



PART TWO – DESIGN PHASE

2.1 Overview

This section describes the PWG's proposal to the PC for a Design Phase. Beginning with a public consultation this phase will include development of an outline design for review and then detailed design for tendering and planning purposes. Fundraising will be a major activity of the design phase: we expect that £180,000 will be required to realise the proposed scheme. At the conclusion of the phase we aim to be in a position to begin the Construction Phase by inviting tenders.

We have provided a draft plan for the Design Phase on the following page, indicating the anticipated tasks and their approximate timings, together with significant milestones.

Design Phase Outline

With the PC's blessing the PWG expects the Design Phase to begin in May. This enables the bulk of the public consultation and the outline design work to be completed in time for the Shelford Feast, which we see as an important opportunity to showcase the design ideas to the residents of Great Shelford and obtain feedback.

PR activities will include launch of www.shelfordplayscape.org (subject to PC review) kindly designed and hosted by Dave Jones from platformtwenty. We also anticipate regular updates to the PC, Village News and Website.

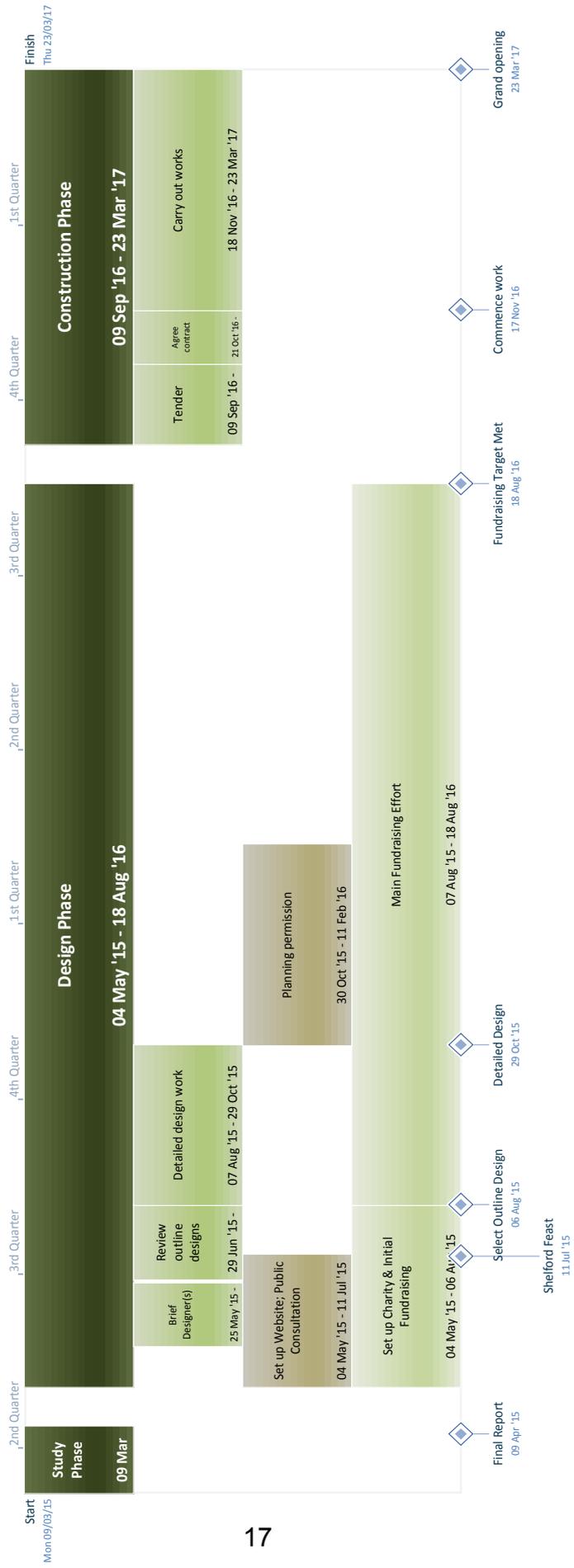
Public consultation will be via focus groups with Beavers, Scouts, Shelford School, Sawston Shelford Youth Initiative, and hopefully Guides and Brownies, in addition to general community outreach through an online questionnaire and website.

A full design brief can then be produced which will form the basis of an approach to a number of Landscape Architects. The PC will invite those selected to present their approach, past schemes and initial thoughts about Great Shelford's play provision. The company best suited for the project will then be asked to produce an outline design. This will have to be paid for by initial fundraising, £1000 being a reasonable estimate for this work.

Once an outline design has been approved the process of detailed design can begin. We anticipate submitting a planning application following this. The most significant task – and likely to gate overall timelines – is the fundraising effort. At present we estimate that the Construction Phase could begin in September 2016, with the new facility opening in March 2017.

In the following sections we outline the roles and responsibilities of the various bodies involved, and outline our intended approach to fundraising.

Guide timeline with milestones for proposed project



2.2 Roles and Responsibilities

The primary bodies that will be involved in implementing this project are the Parish Council (particularly the Pavilion and Recreation Ground Sub-Committee) and the Playscape Working Group. The PWG aims to cooperate closely with the PC, through the PRGSC, obtaining the PC's full blessing and support for its activities.

The PWG anticipates the following roles and responsibilities during the Design Phase:

PC (acting through the PRGSC):

- Agree the Terms of Reference for the Design Phase
- Support initial fundraising efforts to fund the Design Phase
- Monitor the work of the PWG through its representative Simon Talbott
- Support the main fundraising efforts, including making applications for grants
- Promptly review and approve key documents (e.g. charity constitution, PR)
- Nominate a trustee for a dedicated fundraising charity
- Generally support the work of the PWG

PWG:

- Collaborate closely with the PC (through the PRGSC), in accordance with the Terms of Reference
- Carry out the Design Phase activities through a team of volunteers including initial fundraising, public consultation, PR, design work, and main fundraising efforts
- Showcase the outline design at the Shelford Feast 2015
- Set up a charity to raise funding tax-efficiently
- Apply for grants, where this is best done via a charity
- Raise funding (both money and in-kind) from local businesses and through organisation of fundraising events
- Provide regular updates on its activities to the PC through the PRGSC
- Provide a proposal for the Construction Phase

The Parish Council routinely carries out construction and maintenance works under contract (notably the recent Pavilion build). It is therefore the appropriate body to handle the contractual elements of the Construction Phase. The PC will also necessarily have an on-going role in the maintenance of the playscape facilities, and provision for this must be considered as part of the Design Phase.

2.3 Fundraising

With a target of £180,000 we anticipate that this project will need donations, fundraising events, corporate sponsorship, and grants if it is to be realised. A full and thorough fundraising plan is therefore required. This will detail how we plan to approach identified high-income individuals and local businesses, as well as residents, and grant-making organisations for their financial support.

Sizeable grants can be accessed through the AmeyCespa Community Fund with a maximum grant of £40,000 (managed by Cambridgeshire Community Foundation) and WREN with a maximum grant of £50,000; both of which distribute Landfill Communities Fund money. Great Shelford PC has previously received funding from the AmeyCespa Community Fund, but this was over 12 months ago and does not affect future applications. There is no guarantee that the full amount requested would be awarded as requests often exceed funds available. However, if you are successful with one funder you will likely fulfill the other's criteria too and they will often fund projects jointly.

Once funding is awarded there is a limited amount of time in which to spend it, so applications should be made once most of the money has been raised. Thought should also be given to the requirement to raise 11% of the value of each Landfill Communities Fund Grant from a third party. The Landfill Operator providing the funding (for e.g. AmeyCespa) can only claim tax relief on 90% of the contribution plus administration costs and is left with an 11% shortfall. Grant recipients are therefore required to fund this themselves, or find another body or individual willing to be the contributing third party. The contributing third party will need to make a payment to the Landfill Operator equivalent to 11% of the value of the grant offered on completion of the project, before grant funding can be claimed. Detailed information about who is eligible to be a contributing third party can be found in guidelines produced by the funders.

Community consultation and support is crucial for success with grant making organisations. Support should be manifested through good will and enthusiasm for the project as well financial support demonstrated by raising funds within the community. Accessibility for all age groups and people with disabilities are also key criteria. These two funders require us to be under the umbrella of the PC as they will give directly to the landowner and will need an audit trail.

The website (www.shelfordplayscape.org) will be crucial in keeping people informed and enthused about the project, plus it will have a facility for online donations.

For further grant opportunities it may be useful to sign up to www.governmentfunding.org.uk that lists and updates grant schemes and funding rounds. We could also consider joining the Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service (www.cambridgecvs.org.uk), an umbrella organisation established to support local community groups and charities. They provide training for setting up organisations, including writing policies etc., and fundraising advice. They run funding fairs where local funders have stands and offer advice on the funds they have available, they also have access to a database of funding opportunities and they send out newsletters with details of funding deadlines for a number of local funders - Lottery, Local Authority etc. There may be a small fee for membership, but it could prove useful.

Charitable Status

It will be financially prudent to form a charity in order to raise money for this project. Charities are solely able to apply for certain grants, and enable Gift Aid to be reclaimed on eligible donations, enhancing the amount given by 25%. The proposed charity would have a narrow remit (i.e. raising money for the project) and would donate what it raises to the PC (who we expect to manage the contractual elements of the Construction Phase).

The Comberton project found that there are some grants that are more easily (or only) available to charities and some are more easily (or only) available to the landowner. So they had a charity in parallel with the PC – both applied for grants as needed. The charity ran the community relations, PR and fundraising. The Council (Clerk) ran the contract for the work and the charity donated its money to the council. As a single purpose charity (i.e. raising money for the playground) they dissolved it when the project was completed.

Setting up a charity of this type is straightforward, with standard governing document templates readily available. The only significant cost (indemnity insurance – estimated at £700) is strongly offset by the tax advantage for a fundraising target of this scale. We believe that donors will be reassured by charitable status, and encouraged to donate knowing that their contributions are being used to maximum effect.

To get tax relief the charity needs to be recognised by HM Revenue and Customs, a simple online registration process. Basic accounts needs to be kept, as do records of meetings.

We anticipate three trustees for the charity: Simon Talbott (representing the PC), Duncan Grey, and Eleanor McCrone. The PC will be asked to review and endorse the governing documents for the charity. We expect donations in kind to support the setting up and operation of the charity.

2.4 Next Steps

The PWG welcomes feedback from the PC once it has received and reviewed this Study. We hope that the PC will support our vision and authorise us to proceed with the Design Phase.

In this case we see the next steps as:

- **PWG and PC to agree Terms of Reference for the Design Phase**
- **Begin activities in line with the Design Phase plan**
- **Showcase outline design at the Shelford Feast in July**

Acknowledgements

- Aileen Shackell for her advice and desk study review
- Dave Jones from platformtwenty for building and hosting www.shelfordplayscape.org
- Marion Carey for her advice on funding
- Images courtesy of Edmundsbury Borough Council, Erect Architecture, MUF Architecture, Play-scapes.com, Tamsin Mann and Eleanor McCrone.

Resources

Design for Play: a guide to creating successful play spaces, A.Shackell, N.Butler, P.Doyle and D.Ball, 2008

www.playlink.org

www.plays-capes.com

Appendix

Aileen Shackell's Desk Study Review



Great Shelford Play Area – desk study review

This review was carried out by Aileen Shackell, director of Aileen Shackell Landscape Design, a landscape practice based in west Dorset which has a specialism in play design, on the basis of photos and other information supplied by Rev. Simon Talbott.

Current situation

Located along the edge of a large expansive recreation ground predominantly marked up with pitches, (football and cricket?), very flat, surrounded by mature trees round most of the perimeter

Car parking, toilets? So potentially with good potential for 'inclusive' use – catering for children with a range of needs and abilities

Inside the Great Shelford Conservation Area boundary (with consequent implications for tree protection and in terms of TPO consent)

Traditional style playground typical of the 1970s, 80s, 90s.....very equipment focused

Long narrow footprint occupying the strip of land sandwiched between footpath and tennis courts – sense of it being squeezed into the only available space

Equipment and site furniture

Equipment is overall in poor condition and very dated in style offering a limited range of play opportunities and in some cases not easy for the targeted age group to use

Bias towards catering for the younger age range, nothing here for anyone over 8 or so to get excited about

Small skate/BMX? facility off to the side, very poor condition

Seating probably originally selected to be vandal proof and low maintenance – some poorly located

The RoSPA report dated April 2014 confirms that much of the equipment is in poor condition. However it should be noted that the scope of these reports is restricted to Health and Safety issues and as such it does not identify the many other problems apparent with the provision, arising from the unimaginative layout and design

Surfacing

Mix of grass, rubber tiles (?) and some artificial grass (Nottsport?)

Sand pit enclosed inside bow top fencing

Leftover odd bits of concrete slabs etc

Setting

As a traditional playground the setting has been given little or no consideration and it lacks any sense of place

The way in which the equipment is located within the setting is purely utilitarian and focuses largely on observing Critical Fall Zones

Squeezed in between the tennis courts with their unattractive green mesh fencing and the footpath on the other side, with the expansive space of the pitches beyond, this adds up to an area which feels a bit exposed, a bit draughty, slightly uncomfortable, not somewhere to linger- lacking any enclosure and sense of shelter

This is not a space that an adult would want to spend any significant amount of time in!

First thoughts

This is an opportunity to start again with a new and more 'up to date' approach to play space design which acknowledges current good practice and particularly current guidance which is summarised in '**Design for Play: a guide to creating successful play spaces**' (lead author, Aileen Shackell).

This document was published in 2008 and it formed the basis for the distribution of over £200 million funding which was allocated by the last government towards the upgrading of play spaces across the UK, carried out as part of their wider play strategy.

The link to the document can be found on the Play England website:

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/design-for-play.aspx>

This document is currently being revised however many of the case studies are still worth looking at and the key messages remain the same.

The fundamental 'message' is that good play spaces are **landscapes in their own right** – *playful* landscapes, in which the setting and the equipment are mutually enhancing and together add up to far more than 'the sum of the parts'. This contrasts with the equipment-focused approach which is typified in the current layout.

Project example

An example of one of our projects is shown below. At **Wyvis Street Play Space** two very different spaces – a sand pit / seating area, and a Tractor Tyre Swing set in an 'amphitheatre' - were carefully located within a grassy area. No fencing was used and the area was enclosed instead by landform (mounding).

Both the Tractor Tyre swing and the sand pit / seating area are used all day round but by all age groups, including adults, so this is very much a 'shared space' for everyone to use. The space has been 'adopted' by the local residents who use it to run their own informal events, such as the bonfire party every November.

Photos are included overleaf; more information can be found in **Design for play** in which the scheme was included as a case study.

Wyvis Street Play Space, Poplar, LB Tower Hamlets



Great Shelford Brief

The importance of working up a good design brief which encapsulated the project objectives should not be underestimated. We would recommend, for example...

- Providing as **much play value as possible** – trying not to let maintenance anxieties constrict design thinking too much at the outset;
- But – the scheme will still need to be **low maintenance** – parish and town councils need to be mindful of scarce resources;
- A **'shared space'** which offers as much as possible to the local community – not just a fenced-off area for under-8s;
- Somewhere which offers something for **all ages and abilities** (and caters for both disabled and non-disabled children);
- A **high quality design and layout** worthy of the Conservation Area Status and which would enhance this designation;
- **Value for money!**

There are many other criteria which should be considered too and the **10 Key Design Principles** in Design for Play will also provide an excellent framework for the group's thinking. Overleaf is a Case Study for one of our schemes, Inwood Park Water Play, which won an award in the Local Government News Children's Play category in 2013. This scheme exemplifies these design principles.

Process

The traditional procurement process for play spaces involves contacting a number of play equipment companies and getting them to provide design proposals. In the interests of democracy, the community is often invited to vote on their preferred option. This process tends not to deliver the 'landscape-led' approach advocated above as equipment companies are ultimately motivated by the need to include as much equipment as possible in a site, as this is where the profit margins are created, with the result that the landscape setting generally remains a much lower priority, or is not considered at all. Most companies do say that they advocate 'natural play' however this statement needs to be taken with quite a large pinch of salt.

We would recommend that the group instead approaches qualified landscape architects with a track record in play design who will address both the equipment and landscape setting to make the most of both.

There will be an additional design fee charged for this, in comparison with play companies who do not itemise this separately, but include any design costs in their overheads, however a landscape architect would work with the group to make the best use of the budget available and this extra design thinking is usually the most cost effective way of approaching the design process. For example, a landscape architect has the freedom to select natural materials such as fallen timber, where appropriate, whereas a play company will tend to focus on more costly catalogue items (or even specify a log from a catalogue.....!).

Design fees will vary depending on the level of service to be provided however a good guide is to allow around 10% of the contract value. Landscape architects will be able to help with the consultation and engagement side of the project, as well as detailed design, and site administration, to make sure the project is delivered to a high standard.

Case Study: Inwood Park Water Play Area, Hounslow

Client:	London Borough of Hounslow
Location:	5 minutes walk from Hounslow town centre
Designers:	PLAYLINK (Aileen Shackell and Sioned Williams)
Completion date:	2010
Capital Cost:	£100k (plus extra funding to upgrade the toilet block)
Funding:	Big Lottery Fund; Aiming High; LBH internal budgets.

Describe your project..... The 1950's paddling pool had been derelict for some time when PLAYLINK was approached to prepare design proposals. The Friends were keen to see a paddling area retained and we also managed to create some areas of wet and dry sand around it – separated from the splash pool by an area of lush planting. With numerous jets to discover and chutes and tables to play with sand, and to make plenty mess, as there's a pump included too, there's scope to spend all day here.

We are most proud of designing a play facility which had something to offer disabled children so that they can play alongside their non-disabled friends. With extra support and information from the 'Aiming High' programme we were able to include accessible paths down into the sand constructed out of decking, and high level controls for some of the jets so that people in wheelchairs could use these too. The sand table means that people who can't get down into the sand themselves can still enjoy the tactile messiness of wet sand at a level which they work at. Catering for disabled children means reducing barriers and enabling them to make choices about how they play and we feel at Inwood that we've managed that to a degree, though there's always scope to do more and we learnt a lot about Inclusive Design in the process. There's lots of good guidance available now and KIDS publishes two documents that should be on every designer's shelf, the Inclusivity Design Tool, and 'Inclusion by Design'. Too often landscape architects focus too much on wheelchair-users - but disabled people are not a homogenous group! We've found these documents really helpful.

The biggest challenge we overcame was probably holding onto the integrity of the scheme and keeping the objectives in sight, when we had to make big cost savings after the tender process. The contractor was very helpful here and we had a constructive meeting where we agreed together on where money could be saved. The scheme shrunk in size slightly but the elements stayed intact.

We've had good feedback from users: they're very pleased indeed with it and they've had some very successful events there, where everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves so much they didn't want to leave.

How is the maintenance going? The maintenance hasn't been entirely trouble-free – there have been some issues with some of the water jets, and with the drinking fountain. But the planting has done very well, and there hasn't been a problem with the sand blocking the drains, which often happens on these sort of schemes. The client also replaced some of the boulders – a health and safety inspector had deemed them to be unsuitable and they were replaced with rounded granite ones.

To what degree did you achieve your project aims with the scheme? Our aim was to provide an all-year-round water play scheme which would include creative, messy play too, and we've managed that. Sadly we didn't manage to run the waste water into an area of planting, due to the need to make cost savings – but this concept of finding an additional secondary use for water makes a scheme so much more sustainable, we'll definitely try on the next scheme to include it.

Phil Doyle, PLAYLINK

