

29th June 2020

Report of the Assistant Director of Transport, Highways and Environment

Reopening of Play Areas

Summary

Due to the outbreak of COVID 19, all play areas and outdoor gym equipment across the city were closed in mid-March. This includes 50 CYC sites and a further 30 or so Parish / Housing Association and MOD sites. As well as securing CYC sites, the Council supported several Parish Councils by providing locks, chains and barriers.

The Government announced on the 23rd June that play areas can reopen from the 4th July.

This report considers how we can undertake this in a safe and orderly manner.

Recommendations

1. That a rolling programme to reopen council play area starts on the 8th July subject to the necessary signage and social distancing measures being in place and safety inspection carried out.
2. The councils approach is shared with Parish and Town councils, and, assistance with signage and social distancing measures made available to those councils which request it.

Reason to deliver services in accordance with the agreed business continuity plan and ensure recovery is as stable a process as possible.

Background

In reopening the Council play areas and supporting Parish Councils consideration has been given to the latest Government guidance contained in

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms> Issued 26.6.20

For context the Director of Public Health has confirmed that although there is a theoretical risk of transmission of the virus on surfaces this risk is significantly reduced in outside play areas for the reasons described in the report. These risks must be balanced against the need for children to be able to get outside, run around and play and the physical and mental harm of not opening playgrounds is greater

than the risk of infection, even without social distancing and hand sanitizing measures being put in place.

Key considerations are

Preparing a playground or outdoor gym for re-opening

Owners/operators must ensure playground and/or exercise equipment is safe to use and that risks from damaged or defective equipment are addressed before opening.

Response – all sites will be subject to a safety inspection prior to reopening. Nb The closure period has been used to catch up on repair and maintenance issues no so new problems are expected and in April the council insurers carried out their six monthly assessment.

Social distancing

Social distancing aims to reduce social interaction between people to minimise the opportunity for transmission of COVID-19. All owners or operators of playgrounds and outdoor gyms should consider how to put in place measures to support social distancing. Potential measures to facilitate social distancing include:

Example measure	Response
For fenced area identify an advisory limit on the maximum number of users able to use a playground or outdoor gym area at any one time and use signs to communicate this	Applicable to several York sites
where practicable, owners/operators could implement a booking system so that users can book a slot to use the equipment	Not practical to implement or manage on site
Limiting the number of users able to use a particular piece of equipment to minimise the transmission risk of COVID-19.	Applicable to several units e.g. basket swings For equipment with multiple entry points instigate a one way system
Limiting the available number of seats on equipment or numbers of swings available to promote social distancing, including for parents, carers or guardians who might push children on swings for example	Applicable to many York sites – e.g. one swing would be secured so that it is not usable
Setting a time limit and using signs to communicate this to users, parents, guardians or carers	Not possible to enforce as no staff presence at sites

Cleaning and hygiene

Scientific advice suggests that the virus can survive for up to several days on some hard surfaces, particularly when indoors. These risks are reduced when outdoors,

where surfaces may be subject to UV light and/or rain. This guidance applies to outdoor playgrounds and outdoor gyms but the virus could survive long enough on frequently used/touched outdoor surfaces to facilitate transmission. Owners and operators are advised to manage any potential risk, cleaning high traffic touch points frequently.

There are 48 CYC play areas and two outdoor fitness sites with a total of approximately 500 individual pieces of equipment. Some of these are multi activity units so this down plays the scale of provision; surfaces include wood, metal, rope cable and plastic based materials. The units then sit on a variety of safety surfaces from wood chip to porous bonded rubber mulch. In line with the existing approach of not cleansing of public seating, gates and handrails across the city it is not proposed to instigate a cleansing regime for play areas and gyms.

Instead the onus will be placed on users via signs and posters:

- encouraging parents to bring hand sanitiser gel or wipes to clean their children's hands
- to encourage hand hygiene with including washing/sanitising hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds using soap and water or approved gel and foam sanitiser, particularly at the beginning and end of play
- Not to bring or eat food within the play areas

Re-opening

All CYC play areas will be inspected prior to reopening by CYC staff to ensure safety standards are met, non CYC locations will be the responsibility of the respective owner.

Teams from Public Realm, Blacksmiths and Communities and Equalities are available to reopen sites. A small number of sites are traditionally locked and unlocked by the community i.e. Glen Gardens; this duty will only recommence once the site has been confirmed a suitable for reopening.

Smaller and less complex sites will be reopened first followed by play areas in the six main parks and gardens (Rawcliffe Country Park, Rowntree, West Bank, Hull Road Parks, Glen and Clarence Gardens). Where practical reopening will be spread evenly across the city.

New corporate signs are being produced and these will be displayed at each play area entrance and on equipment as appropriate.

The council web site will be updated as sites reopen and the information shared on social media and with community groups.

Implications

Finance

Costs will be from normal budgets

Human Resources (HR)

None

Equalities

None

Legal

None

Crime and Disorder, Information Technology and Property

Not applicable to this report.

**Author & Chief Officer
responsible for the report:**

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Report
Approved

☐

Date 0

Specialist Implications Officer(s):

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

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For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None