

Introduction

The development and enhancement of play parks has evolved significantly in recent years, with both the scale of provision and the expectations around quality continuing to increase. The delivery of new facilities now carries not only a higher capital investment requirement but also a growing commitment to long-term maintenance and lifecycle management. As a result, play provision must be carefully planned to ensure sustainability, value for money, and continued community benefit.

In response to these pressures, many public authorities have adopted a broader, more strategic approach to parks and open spaces. This includes a shift towards integrating environmental and ecological improvements alongside traditional play provision. Enhancements such as biodiversity planting, natural habitats, and green infrastructure are now recognised as key components in improving the overall appeal, usability, and environmental value of public spaces.

At the same time, there is increasing national recognition of the need to ensure that parks are inclusive, accessible, and welcoming to all members of the community. Modern play design is expected to support a diverse range of users, including those with differing physical, sensory, and social needs, while also creating spaces that encourage interaction, wellbeing, and community cohesion.

This proposal reflects these evolving priorities, identifying targeted improvements across a range of sites that will enhance accessibility, inclusivity, environmental value, and overall user experience, while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Council's parks portfolio.

Parks Improvement Proposal

Ingelow Avenue Play Park (17,000 sqm)

This large green space includes a multi-activity unit and basketball court. However, the current layout positions these key features at the far end of the site, reducing accessibility and limiting casual use.

Recommended Improvements:

- Relocate future play provision closer to main access points to improve accessibility, visibility, and user safety.
- Introduce football goals or informal play features to activate underused open areas.
- Consider a phased reconfiguration to enhance overall layout, inclusivity, and usage.

Estimated Cost: Football goal(s) and installation £2,500

Woodville Row Play Park (2,500 sqm)

A compact neighbourhood play space with a good range of toddler equipment and some outdoor fitness provision. The site benefits from an attractive green backdrop and mature boundary planting. However, the absence of formal pathways limits accessibility for wheelchair users, pushchairs, and those with reduced mobility.

Recommended Low-Cost Improvements:

- Install compacted stone paths to improve accessibility and year-round usability.
- Introduce inclusive and sensory play panels to broaden the play experience.
- Increase seating provision, including benches with armrests to better support older users and carers.

These interventions would significantly improve accessibility and inclusivity at relatively low cost.

Estimated Cost: Standard geotextile, crushed compacted stone and edging £35-70 per sqm.

Sensory play-panels 750-1000 per item.

Seating 320 – 550 installed (dependant on design/material)

Broadfield Lane

This site offers a strong range of equipment catering to a wide age group, with a good balance of active and physical play opportunities. It currently includes a basket swing as its primary inclusive feature.

Recommended Improvements:

- Expand inclusive play provision with wheelchair-accessible equipment and sensory features.
- Enhance imaginative play through themed or creative elements.
- Consider additional equipment such as a zip wire, varied swing types, and rockers to broaden appeal.

Targeted enhancements would further strengthen an already well-performing site.

Estimated Cost: Appendices at foot of document.

St John's Road Park

A well-equipped and popular facility providing a balanced mix of sport, fitness, and play opportunities, supported by attractive green space.

Condition & Improvement Priorities:

- Existing slides show signs of deterioration and should be prioritised for repair or replacement.
- Future enhancements could include additional agility, climbing, and creative play features.

The site is performing well and requires proactive maintenance alongside incremental improvements.

Estimated Cost: Appendices at foot of document.

Burgess Pit

An outstanding green space with significant potential for ecological and environmental enhancement. The site is well suited to nature-based initiatives.

Recommended Improvements:

- Increase tree planting and explore the creation of a community orchard.
- Establish areas of nectar-rich native wildflowers to support pollinators.
- Install seating and bird nesting features to encourage community engagement with nature.
- Position the site as a leading example of carbon-positive public space management.

Investment should prioritise biodiversity and environmental value.

Estimated Cost: Appendices at foot of document.

Sheltons Field

A well-regarded play space within a high-quality green setting. While offering good general play value, it reflects wider challenges around inclusivity.

Recommended Improvements:

- Improve inclusive provision, particularly for swings, roundabouts, and ground-level sensory play.
- Plan for the replacement of the ageing scramble net.
- Undertake targeted wet-pour surfacing repairs to maintain safety.
- Install a 5-way swing, which has proven effective in encouraging participation among female users.



This is a strong asset that would benefit from targeted investment in inclusivity and lifecycle maintenance.

Estimated Cost: Appendices at foot of document.

Central Park

The district's flagship park, offering a high-quality mix of recreation, sport, environment, and play with a recent £70, 000 of horticultural enhancement paving the way for potential Green Flag accreditation. Already benefiting diverse play and inclusive features it sits firmly as one of the upper portfolio Parks. The priority and focus of this prized space should be replacement pathways that open up the park for quality access for all and enable regular events including Park run and healthy lifestyles. Linking in with wider service such as Active Lincolnshire may enable realisation. Costs to reinstate/repair are extensive owing to significant damage, lifting and decay. A full resurface of the parks infrastructure is 157k – 210k dependant on finishing spec.

External funding is in-situ for the Park with thoughts of brightening up some of the hard surface area with thermoplastic activity for toddlers/young children. Illustration below.



Spotlight on sensory Play

Adding play features such as sensory panels into parks is a key part of inclusive design, ensuring spaces are accessible, engaging, and enjoyable for a wide range of users—including those with disabilities. Here’s a clear explanation of how they help and why they’re important. It is encouraging that sensory panels/play are financially lower in cost than solid/large structures.

Engage Multiple Senses (Not Just Physical Ability)

Traditional play equipment often relies on mobility (climbing, running). Sensory panels:

- Stimulate **touch, sound, sight, and movement**
- Include elements like textures, spinning parts, mirrors, or musical components
- Enables participation for children with:
 - Physical disabilities
 - Limited mobility
 - Visual impairments
 - Autism or sensory processing differences



Spotlight on costs

In recent years, the cost of park improvements and new play equipment has increased significantly. This reflects wider pressures across the UK construction sector, where rising material costs (including steel, timber and concrete), labour shortages, and higher energy and compliance costs have all driven up project prices. Industry data shows that construction costs have risen by around 15–20% since 2020, with some key materials increasing even more sharply, while ongoing wage inflation continues to add further pressure. As a result, even relatively modest upgrades to public parks now require substantially higher budgets than in previous years, making affordability and prioritisation a key challenge for local authorities.

A real-world comparison that reflects both supplier pricing and inflation over roughly the last decade focussing on the higher end of Park investment:

Example: Large Multi-Play Unit (UK)

Around 2015 (10 years ago)

- A **large multi-play unit** (e.g. tower with slides, nets, bridges):
 - Typically **£25,000 – £40,000 installed**
- Evidence:
 - Mid-range to large playground schemes were commonly **£18k–£40k**, with higher-end schemes starting around £40k+
 - Individual large structures often formed a big share of those budgets

A flagship unit in a council park would commonly sit in the **£30k range**

Today (2025–2026 equivalent)

- Similar **large multi-play unit (like-for-like complexity)**:
 - Typically **£40,000 – £70,000+ installed**
- Evidence:
 - Modern medium schemes: **£25k–£60k**, with larger projects **£60k–£150k+**
 - Individual large towers can reach **£60k+** depending on scale

The same style flagship unit now commonly sits in the **£50k–£60k range**

Simple Comparison

Item	Approx Cost 2015	Approx Cost Today
Large multi-play unit	£25k–£40k	£40k–£70k+

Spotlight on Safety Surfacing

Safety surfacing is a critical component of any play area, as it is designed to reduce the risk and severity of injuries from falls, which are the most common cause of playground accidents. Materials such as wet pour rubber, rubber mulch, or bonded aggregates provide impact absorption beneath equipment, helping schemes meet required safety standards. However, this comes with notable cost implications: safety surfacing typically ranges from **£40 to £120+ per m²**, meaning it can account for a significant proportion of a project budget, often matching or exceeding the cost of the equipment itself on larger sites. In addition, unlike equipment, surfacing carries ongoing liability, as it must be maintained and repaired over time—with patch repairs, wear from heavy use, and degradation potentially requiring further investment. This means initial installation costs must be considered alongside a continuing maintenance provision to ensure the surface remains compliant and safe throughout its life.

Spotlight on footpaths/pathways

Footpaths are a fundamental element of any park, both in terms of cost and inclusivity. A typical compacted stone or self-binding gravel path in a UK park generally ranges from £40 to £70 per m², rising to £60–£100+ per m² where higher specifications are required, such as deeper sub-bases, improved drainage, or formal edging. While these costs can represent a substantial portion of park improvement budgets, they are essential for creating safe, durable, and all-weather access routes. Well-designed paths enable people of all abilities—including wheelchair users, those with mobility impairments, parents with prams, and older visitors—to navigate the space easily and confidently. As such, investment in footpaths is not just an infrastructure cost, but a key component of delivering inclusive parks, ensuring that facilities, play equipment, and green spaces are accessible and usable by the whole community.

Spotlight on Environmental

Parks are experienced very differently today than they were 20 years ago. With a much greater understanding of environmental issues, there is now increased recognition that enhancing green space through biodiversity, habitat creation, and ecological improvements can deliver significant benefits for both people and nature. In many cases, these improvements can have an impact equal to traditional infrastructure or play investments, while often being more affordable and sustainable to deliver and maintain over time.

Indicative costings generalised

Item	Cost supply/install

Inclusive roundabout and surface	13, 000 - 20,000
Safety surfacing	110 per sqm
Mixed swings and surface	9, 000 - 15, 000
Rockers/Spinners	1,500 - 3, 000
Large multi-unit	26, 000 - 70, 000
Sensory panels/boards	1, 000
Zip-line	14, 000 - 22, 000
5-way swing	7,200 - 9, 000
Toddler multi-unity	7, 000 - 14, 000
See-saw	2,900 - 8, 000
Slide	4, 800 - 16, 000

Why the price disparities?





Low-End



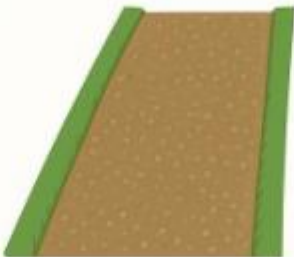
Mid-Range



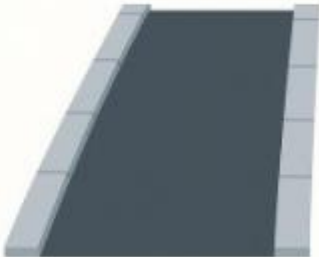
High-End



Low-End



Mid-Range



High-End