Tākaro – Investing in Play
Discussion Document
Forward

One of Auckland Council’s key functions is to provide our growing population with opportunities to play. A challenge is how to meet an anticipated increase in demand for play over the next 20 years.

Auckland Council aims to take a holistic approach to the way we invest in play. We want to ensure that we direct our investment to where it can benefit the most people. To do this, we are developing an investment plan for play, Tākaro – Investing in Play.

This discussion document is the first step in the process. It seeks stakeholders’ views on the following question: How should Auckland Council invest in play, given funding constraints and a growing and changing population?

Auckland Council will consider all feedback before drafting the Tākaro – Investing in Play investment plan.

Approach

The initial sections of this document provide background information on the benefits of play and council’s current approach to investment. It then summarises changing demand for play and challenges with the current funding approach. The back sections describe opportunities to deliver better value for money, while offering a wider range of play.

Definitions

What is play?

Play is an activity engaged in for enjoyment and recreation, especially by children. It is informal, spontaneous and uses both body and mind. It differs from sport and other recreational activities as it is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated, and performed for no external goal or reward.

What are play spaces?

Play can happen anywhere. For the purpose of this document, we are interested in play that happens outdoors and away from the family home. This includes play that happens in your immediate neighbourhood or street (‘on the doorstep’), at parks and playgrounds, in natural environments such as the bush or beach and in our civic spaces.

How to provide feedback

We would like to hear your views on the information presented in this discussion document.

You can provide feedback online at www.shapeauckland.co.nz.

A series of workshops with local boards and stakeholders are scheduled to take place from 29 May to 10 July 2017.

The deadline for feedback is 10 July 2017.

Auckland Council will publish a summary of consultation feedback. If you do not wish your name and/or organisation to be published with your feedback in the consultation summary report, please indicate this in your submission. If you do that all comment will be anonymous.
1 Why does council invest in play?

Auckland Council invests in play because it provides a range of health, social, community, environmental and economic benefits to Auckland. The strategic direction for the council’s investment in play is set out in a series of council plans, and supports the vision of the Auckland Plan.

Strategic context

The Auckland Plan

The Auckland Plan places strong emphasis on putting children and young people first in the delivery of all public services, including in provision of quality opportunities for recreation and sport. This is the key strategic driver for Auckland Council’s investment in play.

Local Board Plans

Auckland’s 21 local boards are the decision-makers for how funds are used to provide play in their local board areas.

Each local board administers a plan setting out the priorities for their communities. These contain information on the type and location of future play provision.

I Am Auckland: The Children and Young People's Strategic Action Plan

This plan details Auckland Council’s commitment to support children and young people (under 25 years of age). Goal Six of the plan ‘Auckland is my playground’ affirms that the council will provide a range of opportunities for sport, recreation, arts and culture, which are easy for children and young people to access.

The Parks and Open Space Strategic Action Plan 2013

This plan sets out what needs to happen to Auckland’s parks and open space network over the next 10 years in order to implement the Auckland Plan. It includes a commitment to develop guidelines for the design of play spaces and the provision of play opportunities.

Auckland Sport and Recreation Strategic Action Plan 2014 – 2024

This plan sets out the collective sport and recreation vision: ‘Aucklanders: more active more often’. The plan identifies key priorities and initiatives which support this vision, including the provision of affordable and accessible recreation, and increasing physical activities for children and young people.

The benefits of play

Physical and mental health benefits

Play supports cognitive development and the learning of many skills needed in adult life. These include the ability to:

- think creatively, make decisions and problem-solve
- manage stress, anxiety, depression and aggression
- negotiate and build relationships
- assess personal safety and manage risks.

Active forms of play such as walking, running, jumping and climbing, support physical health and development through:

- the development of basic motor skills
- the exercise of muscles, the heart, lungs and other vital organs
- obesity prevention.

Active play can also provide a foundation for participation and performance in organised sport.

Play has benefits for individuals at any age, but is most beneficial to the very young. The first five years of a child’s life affect their emotional and social wellbeing more than at any other time in their lives.

Children raised in an otherwise secure environment with frequent opportunities to play are likely to perform better at school, and to become resilient and healthy adults. Public investment targeting children in these years delivers the best return (Figure 1).

For older children, unsupervised play assists in the development of independence and the ability to manage risk and make good decisions. It has also been linked to minimising the occurrence of depression.

Play into adulthood and old age supports the continued development and maintenance of the cognitive and behavioural functions first gained as a child. It is also thought to help reverse cognitive decline in seniors with dementia.

Social and community benefits

Community play spaces support social cohesion by enabling:

- routine interactions between neighbours, which generate a sense of unity and improve perceptions of safety
- exposure to, and tolerance of, people with different backgrounds and beliefs
- community participation by disabled people and vulnerable groups.

---

Environmental benefits

Playing outdoors supports a wide range of opportunities for physical, cognitive and social play. It allows for exploration, including sensory experiences with mud, dirt, water and sand. It allows for the creation and construction of new spaces; the collection of and interaction with, found objects; and the opportunity to hide. Such experiences help children to understand and respect nature.

Economic benefits

There is growing evidence that play can deliver economic benefits to individuals, businesses and society. This may be demonstrated through:

- increased economic activity for businesses situated near play spaces
- employment opportunities in the management and delivery of play spaces and play programmes
- better mental and physical health among workers who play, resulting in increased workplace productivity and fewer sick days.

Case study: New Regent Street and Margaret Mahy Playground, Christchurch

Following the Canterbury earthquakes, the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority identified anchor projects to support the recovery of Christchurch and catalyse development in the central city.

The development of a high quality playground was selected to attract domestic and international visitors. The Margaret Mahy playground was developed near to the historic New Regent Street, a pedestrian shopping mall which had closed immediately after the earthquakes. When New Regent Street re-opened in 2013, many businesses vacated the area and sales were low for those which remained.

Since the opening of the playground in January 2016, anecdotal evidence suggests that businesses in New Regent Street have enjoyed a significant increase in sales and patronage.

Question

1. Which benefit(s) of play are the most important?
Auckland Council is the single largest investor in play provision in Auckland. We own approximately $60 million of playground equipment spread across 940 play areas. The Long-term Plan 2015-2025 includes $25 million to provide new play spaces, and $33 million to renew existing assets over 10 years.

Current provision

The council owns or funds approximately 940 play spaces across the region. These range from a single swing in a park through to destination play spaces catering for all ages and abilities.

Auckland Council also owns $66 million of playground equipment. This is primarily targeted at able-bodied two to seven year olds.

A 2016 audit of council playgrounds found most were in good condition, and enjoyed high levels of use.

The council also provides a small number of play programmes, generally free of charge. These are mostly funded through local board budgets for open space activation. The nature of these programmes varies, but includes a mix of recurring and ad hoc events run by community or council staff. Some of these programmes specifically serve to encourage the use of public spaces.

Planned expenditure

The Long-term Plan 2015-2025 includes $25 million to provide new play spaces, with a further $33 million to renew existing assets over the next 10 years.

Investment approach

The council’s investment in play is predominantly by way of capital expenditure focused on traditional playground assets. New playgrounds are funded from growth funding and development contributions. The renewal of older playgrounds is funded through depreciation with current policy allowing for renewal every 17 years.

Most budgetary responsibility and decision rights for investment in play sit with local boards.

Investments are made on a case-by-case basis, within set budget allocations. This allows the council to be flexible and responsive, but limits its ability to systematically assess alternative opportunities for investment across the play network.
3 Current demand for play

Aucklanders are spending less time playing outdoors due to safety concerns, access barriers, and the influence of technology. Current play provision is not meeting the needs of all Aucklanders.

Who is playing?

There is minimal data around who is currently playing. Broadly, we know that New Zealand children are not playing as much as previous generations\textsuperscript{2}. One in two children (46 per cent) between eight to 12 years are not playing every day.

Between 50 and 70 per cent do not regularly experience ‘real’ play activities such as tree climbing, messy play (involving paint, mud, dirt, sand and water) and the use of hand tools, props or found natural materials\textsuperscript{3}.

Despite evidence that experience of play can benefit anyone, a stocktake of council playgrounds found that most are targeted at able-bodied two to seven year olds.

A study of council play investment identified gaps in provision for:

- children over the age of eight years (40 per cent of Auckland’s population is 19 year of age or younger)
- adults and seniors (the number of people aged over 65 years is expected to increase by 188,669 by 2033)
- people with disabilities, including mental disabilities (one in four New Zealanders was identified as having a disability in 2013).

No information is available on how well Auckland Council’s play investment meets the needs of the 180 different ethnicities in Auckland.

Youth

A New Zealand study found that traditional playgrounds are not challenging enough for children over the age of eight years.\textsuperscript{4}

Auckland Council does have some play space dedicated to youth interests including skate parks, basketball half courts and BMX tracks. These types of play which are typically favoured by young men.

Our existing youth spaces seem to lack:

- natural elements or play in natural spaces
- diversity of play experiences (especially for young women)

- opportunities to experience risk and challenge
- opportunities for social interaction with other age groups.

Adults

Our existing playgrounds do not provide the challenge or diversity of experience needed to appeal to adults.

In 2014, 78 per cent of Auckland adults participated in sport or recreation in any given week.\textsuperscript{5} While sport provides many of the personal benefits of play, research shows that play is particularly beneficial for stress relief in adults. Play also provides unique opportunities for adults and children to interact as equals.

Seniors (over 65 years)

Few of our existing play spaces are designed to engage seniors. There are examples where park gym equipment is used to provide for seniors’ play needs. However, exercise is different from play and does not offer much diversity of experience.

Disabled persons

Auckland Council has few play spaces specifically designed for people with disabilities. In particular, there is a lack of provision for mental disabilities such as autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Provision of suitably designed spaces would foster participation and allow caregivers to relax while children play.

Ethnic minorities

There is little information about how different cultures play or whether Auckland Council’s current play investment meets the needs of different ethnicities.

We do know that different cultural values can influence how, when and where children play. For example, in some cultures, children, particularly girls, have limited freedom of choice and movement, meaning they are likely to play closer to home.

Play builds social cohesion and can help in children and adults coping with changes in cultural environments.

\textsuperscript{2} Milo, 2011; Human Potential Centre, Auckland University of Technology, 2015
\textsuperscript{3} Milo, 2011; Human Potential Centre, Auckland University of Technology, 2015
\textsuperscript{4} Sargisson, R and McLean, I, 2013
\textsuperscript{5} Sport New Zealand and Auckland Council (2016).
Why are people not playing?

Attitudes towards play and children

- Play is deemed a low priority for adults and children.
- Adults are not confident in children’s abilities to undertake difficult tasks.
- There is a perception that play is noisy and disruptive.

Access

- A lack of street connections and narrow footpaths restrict access to some play spaces.
- Inconvenient locations and lack of facilities for families make it difficult for families to use play spaces.
- Access to play spaces is not always affordable.

Safety concerns

- Parents fear children will hurt themselves.
- Fear of risk has resulted in the closure of risky, challenging and enjoyable play opportunities.
- Opportunities for unsupervised play are less available to today’s children than in the past.

Sedentary, technology focused lifestyles

- 58.1 per cent of New Zealand children spend more than four hours a day in front of a screen each weekday and 62.7 per cent during the weekend.
- Too much screen time and reliance on cars reduces opportunities for outdoor physical activities.
4 Influences on future demand for play

Auckland is growing and changing. It is important to plan for effective and efficient investment in Auckland’s play space network for the next ten to twenty years. We need to account for an expected increase in the number of children and young people, a more diverse population and increasing urban intensification.

One of the key functions of Auckland Council is to undertake long-term planning for the provision of services and facilities to meet the needs of a changing population.

Play investment should consider both current and future trends in population geography and demographics.

Geography

Aucklanders inhabit a diverse range of urban, suburban, and rural environments. While this is unlikely to change in the near future, population growth and scarcity of land are likely to drive intensification in urban and suburban neighbourhoods. Households in these areas will have increasingly little private space, forcing them to rely upon public open space and playgrounds for their play opportunities. Those without access to a private car or public transport will only be able to access playgrounds within walking distance.

In rural and coastal areas households often have access to large amounts of private open space, while the natural environment provides a wide range of play opportunities. Access to formal playgrounds and other public amenities are limited.

Age

The primary users of play spaces are children and young people. Auckland’s population is relatively youthful. Under 25s represent 35.9 per cent of the Auckland population.

In future decades, the number of children and young people living in Auckland is expected to increase. This will be driven by Auckland’s generally youthful age structure, migration from other parts of New Zealand and overseas, and the relatively high fertility rates of the Māori and Pacific peoples. Statistics New Zealand population projections (medium series) suggest that the number of children and young people may reach 641,810 by 2043, representing a 26.5 per cent increase over the 2013 numbers.

At the time of the 2013 Census, a third (33.4 per cent) of all children and young people in New Zealand lived in Auckland. Children and young people made up over a third (35.9 per cent) of Auckland’s population.

Projections show there will also be a higher proportion of older people.

Figure 2: Projected numbers of children and young people in Auckland (2013 to 2043)

Ethnic diversity

The ethnic diversity of Auckland is expected to increase in the future. Those who identify as Asian are projected to constitute a growing proportion of the Auckland population. The proportion of people of European or Other ethnicities will decline.

The proportion of Māori is projected to remain relatively stable (11 to12 per cent) and the proportion of Pasifika is projected to increase slightly (15 per cent in 2006 to 17 per cent in 2021).
Renewal of existing play assets comprises over half of all current spending on play. However, investment is increasingly not in the areas where the greatest number of young Aucklanders live. Investments in new assets are made on a case-by-case basis with limited consideration for the wider network or community needs.

We are investing in the wrong places

Existing play infrastructure is of mixed quality, and poorly distributed, but consumes over half of all council funding.

Prior to amalgamation, Auckland’s legacy councils invested in different levels and types of play assets, services and provision. Some focused on acquiring open space, while others invested in built assets or in the activation of open space through play programmes.

This has resulted in disparities in the quality, concentration and distribution of play provision across the Auckland region. For example, 25 per cent of the region’s children and young people live in the Southern Initiative area, but this area only has 16 per cent of the region’s play assets.

These disparities are set to continue. The distribution of future funding is heavily weighted towards the renewal of existing playground assets. Figure 3 compares the percentage of funding allocated for asset renewal by local board area against the number of people aged under 25.

Figure 3: Percentage of funding versus percentage of the population under 25 years of age

We lack policies to support high quality investment

Auckland Council lacks policy direction to decide when and where to invest.

There is no policy defining what good play looks like, or specify the circumstances in which the council will invest, or describes the full range, type and quality of play experiences council will invest in.

The lack of clear policies makes it difficult for decision-makers to address disparities in existing provision, or compare the relative costs and benefits of investing in different types of play.

It also enables the persistence of perceptions that play is best delivered through investment in traditional playgrounds; ignoring the potential of how the wider park and street network can contribute to play provision.

Information, monitoring and evaluation are also lacking

The council does not collect any information about the age group a play space is targeted at, its utilisation, changes in user composition, natural play opportunities nearby, or the quality of the route to the play space. The limited information it does hold relates to the age and location of play equipment for maintenance and financial purposes.

There is limited monitoring or evaluation of the impacts of council investments in play. This limits the quality of information to inform future investment decisions.
6 Developing a robust investment framework

The development of an investment framework for play could enable Auckland Council to obtain better value from its investments. The proposed investment plan would provide a hierarchy of provision, supported by a series of investment principles. This would provide a process for comparing alternative investments.

A new approach to investment

A hierarchy of play assets

It is not possible or desirable to provide the same types of play experiences at every park or play space.

Each play space needs to be tailored to the needs of the local community. It should take into account demography, density and the local environment. The objective is to provide a variety of experiences across the network.

Considering the provision of play through a hierarchy would allow investment opportunities to be assessed and prioritised. This would facilitate strategic, transparent decision-making across council, ensuring a diverse range of provision.

A hierarchical approach recognises that most play opportunities happen close to home, with a lower level of amenity or equipment.

Destination play spaces are fewer, and visited less frequently. They are equipped with the widest range of facilities, meaning people spend more time there and are usually prepared to travel a distance to get there.

Figure 4 is an example of a hierarchy of play provision. It is not aligned to the council’s Open Space Provision Policy as it includes the entire public realm, streets, civic spaces, beaches and open space.

Figure 4: Hierarchy of provision of play spaces

Questions

2. Should council investment continue to target a particular demographic group, such as young children, or should it seek to cater to users of all ages and abilities and backgrounds equally?

3. Should council prioritise investment in areas of high socio-economic deprivation over other areas?
Safety, challenge and risk management

How to manage risk during play, and who should be held responsible, are important questions in the delivery of a diverse network of provision.

Auckland Council playgrounds are currently developed and maintained to minimise the risk of serious injury occurring. All playground equipment is required to comply with the New Zealand standard for playground equipment and surfacing. The New Zealand standard recognises that children will experience minor injuries as they grow and learn, in playgrounds and away from them.

However, play is inherently risky, and protecting against all forms of risk is difficult and costly. It will always been easier for parents and caregivers to monitor and manage some forms of risk directly, rather than require the council to eliminate or mitigate these through investment or operating decisions.

There have been several recent examples suggesting the council’s current approach to play is too risk-averse, and that a greater degree of personal responsibility should be permitted.

Locally and internationally there is a movement to unwrap ‘bubble-wrapped’ children and allow them to experience more challenge and risk.

No safety standard is able to eliminate all the hazards from a playground. Bumps, bruises and even broken bones are to be expected as part of play and learning. Research shows that the actual risk of injury on playgrounds is considerably lower than perceived.6

Taking on challenges and risks are fundamental to a child’s development. Risky play allows children to develop their own risk perception skills and enhance their ability to cope and avoid injury.7

Evidence shows that as children age, their need for challenge increases. Standard playground equipment, with high fencing and safety mats, does not afford enough challenge for children to develop these risk-related skills. From the age of about eight years, children are more likely to use equipment in unintended ways to generate greater risk.8 Such use increases the risk of injury.

The possible long-term effects of risk-avoidance in play space include a lack of self-confidence and a lesser ability to judge risky situations as adults, which may result in greater chance or occurrence of injury.

Play spaces need to allow the opportunity for risk and provide uncertainty and challenge to users. This will increase people’s enjoyment and engagement with play as well as maximise the developmental benefits.

Inclusion

A hierarchy of play will need to be physically and socially accessible to people of all capabilities and disabilities.

The extent to which individual play spaces can be inclusive will vary across the network. Destination play spaces are likely to be the only completely inclusive play spaces in the play network. However, all other play spaces should be designed to be as welcoming and as inclusive as possible.

This is particularly necessary for families who are looking for a play space to meet their particular needs such as wheelchair access, close to public transport or suitability for toddlers.

Applying Te Ao Māori (a Māori worldview)

Te Ao Māori has a strong foundation in the relationship between people and the natural environment. Auckland Council can work with local communities to apply Te Ao Māori in the design and delivery of play.

- Interpreting Te Ao Māori and stories of local Māori occupation and settlement provides opportunities for education, place-making and establishing a unique local identity.

Re-establishing the connection between individuals and the environment assists in promoting the value of health, physical activity and play within Māori communities.

---

8 Sargisson, R. 2013; Solomon, S. 2014
Question
8. How can council provide a play network that welcomes and accommodates:
   - youth?
   - adults?
   - families?
   - seniors?
   - the disabled?
   - culturally diverse communities?

Community engagement
A hierarchy of play needs to be responsive to community needs, and will provide opportunities for partnerships between council and the wider community.

Community involvement is the foundation of successful play spaces. It also serves to educate the community on play and foster ownership of a local play space. Developing policies for involving communities in the planning, design and construction of play spaces can help ensure community needs are met.

There may be opportunities for communities, schools, companies, trusts and philanthropic organisations to partner with council to deliver play assets and programmes in open spaces. Such partnerships enable sharing of resources, expertise, evidence and facilities.

Schools are a natural partner, as stewards of their own play spaces and natural environments. Some schools already allow the community access to their facilities outside of school hours as an informal part of the public play network. A framework for formal partnership would provide to these schools, and other prospective partners over responsibilities, expectations and resource sharing.

Question
9. What opportunities do you see for partnerships between council and private providers of play?

Case study: Omana Regional Park play space
The play space was designed in conjunction with local iwi Ngāi Tai Ki Tāmaki and an artist, Ra Kopu. The play space includes a mixture of bespoke and off the shelf play equipment and artworks. The play space tells the story of Ngāi Tai Ki Tāmaki and their relationship with the land. The play space has a unique Māori identity which makes Māori art available and accessible to children so that all children feel a sense of belonging and inclusiveness.

Features include a climbing structure with a pataka (food store) entry with tekoteko and maihi, pou whenua and taniwha shaped climbing bars.

---

Potential investment prioritisation criteria

Assessing investment opportunities against a consistent set of criteria would enable Auckland Council to obtain better value from its play investment and provide a wider range of play opportunities.

The following are some tentative criteria on which an investment framework could be based. These are intended to stimulate discussion and to elicit feedback.

- **Focused**: Investment is focused on core play elements which include play equipment and play activations.
- **Equal access**: Aucklanders have the same opportunity to participate in play.
- **Equity**: Investment targets those most in need.
- **Inclusive**: Provide for a diversity of experiences, cultures, levels of ability and age groups. Inclusive play ensures the design and provision of play is both physically and socially accessible to people of all capabilities and disabilities.
- **Integrated**: Provide for play across the public realm including streets and public open spaces, recognise that play may not include equipment.
- **Diverse**: Provide for a wide variety of play opportunities including nature play, play along the way, equipment based play and play activation.
- **Tolerant of risk**: Recognise that risk is part of play and it benefits child development.
- **Community-centric**: Involve communities in the planning, design and construction of play spaces ensures community needs are met.
- **Evidence-based**: Auckland Council has high quality information upon which to make well informed decisions.

Questions

10. What criteria should underpin Auckland's investment in play?
7 Opportunities to deliver a wider range of play

Play should not be restricted to playgrounds; the wider park and street network can contribute to play provision. There are opportunities to provide a greater variety of play in the region by promoting nature play, water play, providing play activation programmes and by incorporating play into the wider public realm.

Nature play

Auckland has a unique environment capable of supporting a wide range of opportunities for creativity, risk or messy play and physical movement. The benefits of being outdoors in nature include reduced levels of stress, depression and anxiety. There is also growing evidence to suggest being outside improves learning and attention skills.

There may be a perception that the natural spaces in parks and open spaces are off limits, and that climbing trees, building huts, and playing in mud and streams is against the rules.

Changing these perceptions may take time. Nature play spaces may need to be initially activated through pop-up programmes to invite people to use the space.

Inviting and encouraging people to play in wild, natural spaces that Auckland Council owns presents some challenges for both Auckland Council and the public. In a traditional public playground, Auckland Council will take significant steps protect public safety. In nature play, a heightened element of risk is part of the play experience.

If Auckland Council is going to foster participation in nature play, it will need to manage some of the risks to public safety. Users will also have to take personal responsibility for risk. This can be done in a number of ways:

- signage at parks where nature play is being encouraged
- safety briefings to participants in nature play programmes
- safety warnings on promotional material that encourages nature play.

Some natural areas in the region will remain inherently unsuitable for nature play because of hazards and sensitive environments.

Encouraging nature play would be a cheaper alternative to play equipment. Play spaces which incorporate or work with nature can lower maintenance costs, while providing communities with diverse experiences. For example:

- Grass: leaving grass to grow longer enables sensory experiences, exploration and hiding.
- Fallen trees: rather than paying to have trees removed, they can be left in one piece or cut on site to provide objects for play.
- Stones or boulders: require minimal maintenance and provide similar play opportunities as fallen trees.

However, it is not cost-free. Some materials in nature play areas may need to be replenished and the space regularly inspected and maintained. Other park users may be uncomfortable with the unkempt appearance of nature play areas compared to regularly mown lawn areas.

An alternative to uncontrolled nature play are the ‘kids off leash’ areas that are popular in Scandinavia. These are fenced natural areas where nature play is encouraged. These areas are regularly inspected for hazards and cleaned in the same way playgrounds are. These areas make it easier to manage risk while providing some of the benefits of nature play.

Questions

11. Should we encourage and provide for nature play?
12. Where should we provide for nature play?
13. How accepting do you think the wider community would be to lowering maintenance standards to provide for nature play in some parks?
Water play

Water can be an important part of the play network. Water play can be enjoyed throughout the year. Water offers stimulating opportunities for play as it can change temperatures, colours and textures. Opportunities for water play can be simple as playing in a creek, at the beach or adding a hose to a sandpit. Or it can be a purpose built structure which includes equipment like pumps, channels and dams.

Purpose built water play areas have ongoing operating costs and require regular maintenance.

Splash pads

Splash pads are popular in the summer months as an alternative to pools. Splash pads require a very high level of maintenance and cleaning to keep them functioning. Parks that have splash pads tend to attract visitors who spend more than two hours at the park and require investment in supporting facilities like toilets, changing rooms, picnic areas, seating and barbeques. These facilities are well used and require high levels of service including more frequent rubbish bin emptying and toilet cleaning.

Splash pads are rarely used in the cooler months and consideration which means they may be poorly suited to parks where there are competing demands for space.

Play in the public realm

A public realm designed for play recognises that play happens everywhere; including in the street and in civic spaces. Opportunities for play can be designed into the wider urban fabric including through artworks, painting games on the footpath and putting swings in trees.

By designing the public realm with play in mind we can provide play opportunities everywhere and enable access to play through a well-designed street network. In some cases it would require the council and users to develop a new understanding of, and tolerance for, risk.

Case study: Vauban, Germany

Vauban has been designed and promoted as a predominately car-free city. This has provided ample space to provide play opportunities such as sandpits, a swing or climbing rock sporadically along pedestrian and cycle networks.

Case study: Montreal, Canada

Montreal has 21 swings in bus-stops in the city. This is part of a wider art installation (where the swings play a song when all 21 swings are in use), however it demonstrates an ability to utilise existing infrastructure to provide play.

Learn to ride

Learn to ride facilities are popular parts of both the play network and the public realm. They provide opportunities for children to learn basic cycling skills and develop confidence before riding on cycleways and the road. Cycling provides children with the freedom and independence to get around, interact with their neighbourhood and other children, health benefits and opportunities to manage risk.

Learn to ride facilities can be easily incorporated into play spaces or can be standalone facilities. The can be located near cycleways, BMX and pump tracks provide a logical progression for new riders once they develop their skills and confidence.

Question

14. Should we encourage and provide more opportunities for water play? If so, in what form?
Play activation

Although Auckland Council already delivers some forms of play activation through local programmes, there is scope for it to do more. Play activation is often delivered through temporary pop-up events. This gives it great flexibility to be tailored to serve a range of different individual or community needs. Opportunities to provide for play activation include:

- areas where there are constraints around providing permanent infrastructure
- where budget is not available for play assets
- situations where the existing play assets no longer meet the needs of the community
- the promotion of underutilised play spaces
- where there are no play opportunities
- to support another goal, such as local economic development.

Play activations are most beneficial when they occur regularly in the same location. This helps to establish a pattern of participation. The scope for trying something new, being creative and learning to take managed risks makes the play experience in these settings feel very different to those offered by standard unstaffed play provision.10

Funding of play activations needs to be enduring and not subject to one off grants to ensure a regular programme of play can occur. Local boards currently have small activation budgets which are used for a variety of activities including play. More investment would be required to deliver regular play activation sessions across Auckland.

Case study: Moubray Street Pop-up Park, Melbourne

A pop-up play space was established outside Albert Park Primary School, temporarily removing 11 car parks. The space primarily provided extra play space for the school and also provided extra public space. The design was nature-based and included trees, fake grass, planter boxes for community gardens and seating. Apart from a half-netball court, there was no traditional play equipment. The space was available for use during the week (during and after school hours) and weekends. Key findings were identified following observation, video footage and interviews with children and teachers.

- The space was used for a wide range of activities: a meeting point to sit or talk, semi-structured and non-competitive games (dance routines, cartwheels, skipping ropes, chalk writing), relaxation, and “enjoying nature”. Children bought their own equipment where required for their play.
- The unconventional location and general flexibility of the space was the most important feature for users – the lack of traditional play equipment and park features provided a physical and emotional respite from structured activities.

Children felt included and engaged with the local environment and community.

Case Study: Kaipatiki Summer Fun

The Kaipatiki Local Board funds the Kaipatiki Community Facilities Trust to deliver a series of summer events such as families in parks, preschool mornings and fun runs. These events provide for play, activate local parks and promote community cohesion.

Adventure playgrounds

Unlike most forms of play activation, adventure playgrounds are fixed spaces that consist of random objects like wood scraps, branches, and tyres. Children are given tools and paint and allowed to create their own spaces using available materials. Trained play workers supervise adventure playgrounds.

Adventure playgrounds provide opportunities for unpredictable and risky play with loose parts. They can be enjoyed by all age groups, but are most beneficial for older children, from about eight years and up as there is a more physical and mental challenge.11

Adventure playgrounds have been popular in Europe after World War Two. Recently pop-up adventure playgrounds have been successfully trialled in the United States and Australia in response to the need to provide challenging and dynamic play experiences.

There is no current funding to provide an adventure playground in Auckland.

Case study: The Land, Wales

The Land is the epitome of risky play. It is a dedicated play space based on the idea of children creating their own play out of loose parts – wood scraps, tires, rope, netting, hammers, nails, saws, plastic tubes, fabric and so on. All play structures have been constructed by the children using tools found on site, or brought from home.

The play workers have minimum intervention – only getting involved at the invitation of children or where there is a health and safety risk. For instance, when lighting fires a child must first tell a play worker and ensure there is a bucket of water on hand.

Questions

15. In what situations should the council prioritise play activations?
   - seasonally?
   - to promote existing play spaces?
   - where there are no other play opportunities?
   - to activate underutilised spaces?

16. What priority should be given to investment provision of temporary play experiences over permanent play assets?

17. Does Auckland need an adventure playground?
Public facilities such as toilets, seating, shelters, fences and picnic facilities are essential for developing successful play spaces. There is a trade-off between investment in playground equipment and investment in supporting facilities. We can’t afford to provide a full range of facilities at all play spaces, and some facilities are more appropriate for council to provide than others.

The provision of facilities such as toilets, changing facilities, water, seating, shelter, shade, fences and picnic facilities enhances the popularity of play spaces.

The provision of these facilities need to be considered across the local play network. Currently, the council has no policy on how or when these facilities should be provided at different play spaces.

Destination play spaces are likely to have the widest range of facilities as families are likely to spend a whole day there. It is anticipated that doorstep play spaces would not have any facilities as they are close to where people live.

It is not affordable or practical to provide supporting facilities at all playgrounds. Facilities at playgrounds are usually funded from the council’s play budget. This means that the more council invests in supporting facilities, the less it can invest in play equipment.

Many people are willing to take responsibility for their own comfort, bring seats, shade and BBQs to parks. This raises questions over which facilities are it most appropriate for council to provide, and which can be provided by users themselves. Council should prioritise investment in facilities which are most important, and which it is difficult or costly for individuals to provide for themselves.

Recently, there has been particular interest in whether council should prioritise the provision of shade and fencing at playgrounds. These issues are discussed below.

Shade

The Cancer Society of New Zealand recommends providing shade over children’s play equipment in summer in conjunction with personal sun protection and signage alerting the public to the danger of exposure to the sun. The provision of shade also prevents metal equipment heating up and reduces glare.

Shade can be provided artificially with permanent or seasonal structures like shade sails, or naturally with trees. However, shade cannot be provided at every playground. This means that parents and caregivers need to take responsibility for managing the risks of sun exposure.

The personal cost of sun protection is relatively low compared to the public costs of shade provision. Of the 940 playgrounds across the Auckland region, only 29 currently have a artificial shade structure. The approximate cost to provide a shade sail at a neighbourhood playground is $25,000.

The cost to provide a formal shade structure at all 940 playgrounds would be $23.5 million. This excludes the cost of removing the shade sail during the winter, as well as the cost to repair or replace damaged or vandalised sails.

Natural shade is preferable, new play spaces can be designed to take advantage of the shade provided by existing trees and neighbouring buildings. New trees can be planted where there isn’t existing shade. Planting three to five large specimen trees for shade would cost around $5,000 per playground, this would cost $4.7 million.

Fencing

Fully-fenced play spaces are provided on an ad hoc basis in order to manage hazards, to separate children from the wider park, or provide dedicated play space for children and families with special needs, including multiple birth families, deaf or autistic children, or children who run away from adults.

Fencing a play space restricts play and prevents access to play opportunities beyond the fenced area. Gates are sometimes difficult to navigate for prams and wheelchairs, and most locks are almost impossible for a person in a wheelchair to open.

Fences are only as effective as the last person to use the gate. The gate lock often fails from vandalism, children swinging on the gate or the gate being propped open. The cost of replacing locks can be expensive over time.

It is not practical or desirable to provide a fence at every playground. This means that parents and caregivers need to take responsibility for monitoring children and managing hazards.

The provision of fencing needs to be considered across the whole network, and targeted at play spaces where it can benefit the most people.

Fencing is expensive and it uses budget which could be invested to provide for play. The cost of fencing is approximately $250 per metre or approximately $65,000 to fence an average neighbourhood park. Fencing a whole park is preferable to just fencing the playground equipment as this provides for the whole park to be used for play.

There are a variety of natural barriers which can provide an alternative to fencing. These including planting hedges, creating grass mounds and design features which can provide a similar sense of enclosure as a fence, especially for small children. Natural barriers are cheaper than fences and do not isolate the playground from the whole park.

Question

18. Which are the most important supporting facilities which council should provide at play spaces?
9 Summary of questions

1. Which benefit(s) of play are the most important?
2. Should council investment continue to target a particular demographic group, such as young children, or should it seek to cater to users of all ages and abilities and backgrounds equally?
3. Should council prioritise investment in areas of high socio-economic deprivation over other areas?
4. What is an acceptable level of risk in play?
5. Where does Council responsibility end and personal responsibility begin?
6. What happens if something goes wrong? How should Auckland Council respond?
7. How can council provide a play network that welcomes and accommodates:
   - youth?
   - adults?
   - families?
   - seniors?
   - the disabled?
   - culturally diverse communities?
8. What opportunities do you see for partnerships between council and private providers of play?
9. What criteria should underpin Auckland’s investment in play?
10. Should we encourage and provide for nature play?
11. Where should we provide for nature play?
12. How accepting do you think the wider community would be to lowering maintenance standards to provide for nature play in some parks?
13. Should we encourage and provide more opportunities for water play? If so, in what form?
14. In what situations should the council prioritise play activations?
   - seasonally?
   - to promote existing play spaces?
   - where there are no other play opportunities?
   - to activate underutilised spaces?
15. What priority should be given to investment provision of temporary play experiences over permanent play assets?
16. Does Auckland need an adventure playground?
17. Which are the most important supporting facilities which council should provide at play spaces?
10 References

3. Milo, 2011; Human Potential Centre, Auckland University of Technology, 2015
5. Milo, 2011; Human Potential Centre, Auckland University of Technology, 2015