

POLICY NO AM07 PLAYGROUND MANAGEMENT POLICY

DEPARTMENT:	Works & Infrastructure
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Manager Infrastructure and Development Services
LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN:	To provide quality infrastructure which enhances the liveability and viability of our communities for residents and visitors.
STATUTORY AUTHORITY:	N/A
OBJECTIVE:	Council's objective is to provide a practical and balanced approach to playground management that seeks to maximise the use of playgrounds on Council land whilst ensuring public safety.
POLICY INFORMATION:	Adopted 19 March 2012 – Minute No 03/12.15.4.069 Amended 16 April 2018 – Minute No 04/18.13.4.88 Amended 17 May 2021 – Minute No 05/21.14.4.114 Amended 15 July 2024 – Minute No 07/24.14.5.411

POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Council recognises the importance of Playgrounds in its commitment to provide high quality infrastructure for our community and visitors to enjoy.

2. CONSTRUCTION STANDARDS

Australian Standard AS4685 - Playground Equipment & Surfacing should be used to assist playground design, layout and inspection requirements.

3. INVENTORY

Council should maintain an inventory of all playground equipment.

The inventory will:

- Identify different pieces of play apparatus.
- Identify the manufacturer for each piece of play equipment.
- Record the approximate age of individual pieces of play equipment.
- Discern the physical location of play pieces located within the playground.
- Record playground surfacing data.
- Identify the remaining life.
- Record the Written Down Value of the individual assets.

Council shall also keep the following details for each playground:

- Works records.
- All correspondence and archived records.
- Maintenance costs.
- Condition monitoring including inspection program, inspection records, complaints/service requests and defect notices.
- Replacement program, including expected costs.

4. AUDIT

An independent audit should be carried out on all Council playgrounds every 12 months.

5. INSPECTIONS

Routine safety inspections are conducted at regularly used playgrounds (i.e. Binalong Bay, St Helens Foreshore, Lions Park and Scamander) weekly, and less frequented playgrounds are conducted every two weeks. Any required maintenance is conducted in conjunction with the inspection.

Operational inspections of all playground equipment shall be carried out every 3-6 months to precede times of expected heavy use e.g. Christmas and Easter holidays.

Playground inspections include:

- Damaged, broken, bent or missing components.
- Loose or poorly fitted components.
- Excessive wear of components.
- Damage to protective coating of components.
- Exposed rail or accessory ends that should be protected with caps.
- Worn or deformed 'S' hooks.
- Lack of lubrication on moving parts.
- Loose fasteners, nuts or bolts.
- Sharp or dangerous protruding bolt ends.
- Perished or damaged rubber components.
- Worn swing bearings, swing chains or swing chain mounts.

Site inspections shall include:

- Exposed, cracked or loose concrete footings.
- Worn, scattered or compressed surface material.
- Exposed roots, rocks or other environmental obstacles that form potential trip hazards.
- Broken glass, refuse or foreign objects around and on play equipment.
- Poor drainage areas.
- Vandalism.

6. EVALUATION OF EQUIPMENT

Criteria should be developed and established in the playground safety and maintenance plan to prioritise the levels of safety hazard discovered during the inspections.

- (a) High level of hazard
 - i. Life or limb threatening hazard.
 - ii. Falls from heights.
 - iii. Inadequate soft fall.
 - iv. Head or neck entrapment.

- (b) Medium level of hazard- injury potential but not life threatening:
 - i. Dynamic functions integrated with static items.
 - ii. Finger, toe and limb entrapment.
 - iii. Irregular and extended step distances.
 - iv. Lack of grab bars on platforms.
 - v. Lack of guard rails for dynamic equipment.

- (c) Low level of hazard -minor injury from ground level activities that usually involve single users, such as:
 - i. Rockers,
 - ii. Roll over bars,
 - iii. Climbing apparatus,
 - iv. Tripping and blind spots, and
 - v. Unguarded tunnels.

All High levels of safety hazard shall be removed from play immediately and replaced or repaired as the first or emergency priority of the playground provider.

Those areas or apparatus that scored a medium level of safety should be repaired or replaced as second priority of the provider and receive primary emphasis when budgeting for capital improvements, with in the financial year.

The lowest level of safety hazard should be repaired or replaced as third priority and receive secondary emphasis for capital improvement funds.

7. DESIGN FOR DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

Playgrounds should be designed to facilitate activities from each of the four categories. These will need to be provided in different forms for different age groups, as children's play activities, their interests and their abilities change dramatically as they develop. Play areas need to cater for this range of interests and to facilitate the gradual development of skills.

Young children are generally unable to cope with the same challenges as older children, due to their smaller physical stature, lower level of skill development and because their conceptual ability does not enable them to anticipate danger. They are common victims to injury on playground equipment which is designed for older children. Play activities for junior children (between three and seven years) and play activities for senior children (between seven and fifteen years) should be designed within the one play space to ensure appropriate supervision and participation of children of all ages and abilities.

Toddlers

The kinds of environments which these age groups will enjoy will be small scaled and detailed environments with friendly surfaces and a familiar adult close by. These age groups cannot perceive danger and must be protected from hazards. Play areas for young children must be sited away from traffic.

Junior children

The ages from three to six years, cover a wide range of development in children. Coordination and physical skill development is relatively proficient by the age of 5 years. Equipment and spaces for these activities need to be designed to take into account that the skills of these age groups are still not fully developed and realistic limits to challenge and hazards must be set.

Although playgrounds may not be the main focus of activity for some older children, they are still likely to be used for certain activities.

Teenagers

Areas specifically designed to meet the needs of teenagers are rare in open space systems.

Teenagers need to be consulted about the ways that they would like to use open space. Any opportunities for their involvement in the design and construction of their own spaces are worth exploring, as a means for positive contribution into their environment and for social and skill development. The assistance of Council or other local youth workers should be sought regarding such consultation processes with the young people.

Adults

Adult use of parks and playgrounds has already been referred to in this paper, but mainly in the role as supervisors of children. It should also be noted that there is no good reason why adults should be excluded from using playgrounds and suitable play equipment in their own right. This topic will not be addressed in any detail here, but suffice to say that it is a good idea to ensure that some items of equipment in a play area are suitable for adult use.

The provision of swing seats which can accommodate adults, for example, is a pleasant way of encouraging adults to use park facilities either on their own or with their children.

8. SIGNAGE

Signage at each playground will outline basic "rules" of use, a phone number for reporting hazards and an emergency contact number (112 from mobile).

9. COMMUNITY

More 'genuine' participation in planning opens up the real decision-making processes to members of the community. Such processes can be challenging, will take time and may be costly. However there are many good reasons for including members of a community in planning, and for seeking detailed information from them about their play and recreation behaviour and preferences.

Some benefits of involving the community are the processes of discussion, research and decision-making which tend to empower people and result in 'community building' benefits, this can have a positive effect on many aspects of participant's lives. The benefits of these processes often seem to outweigh the benefits of the final 'product'.

The sharing of local people's personal observations and local information with designers is also a useful and important part of the design process. As an outsider a designer is rarely aware of all the details which affect a site. Careful observations of how and why people use parts of a site, and discussions with users reveal information which would otherwise be unavailable.

Participatory planning processes do also make good economic sense, in spite of the time needed to be spent on them. Through such a process, there is likely to be a better match between community needs and recreation or play provision, and the community's investment of limited resources is less likely to be wasted or underutilised.

10. MONITORING AND REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed every three (3) years in line with the Council's Policy Framework or earlier in the event of major changes to legislation or related policies, procedures or if deemed necessary by the General Manager.