Te Kaunihera o Te Tairāwhiti
GISBORNE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

25-126

Title: **25-126 Play Spaces Network Review**

Section: Liveable Spaces

Prepared by: Angela Newman (Asset Planner) and Katie Kennedy (Play Advocate)

Meeting Date: 05 June 2025

Legal: No	Financial: No	Significance: **Low**

Report to OPERATIONS - ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITIES/NGĀ WHAKAMAHI - TE TAIAO ME NGĀ HAPORI for decision

PURPOSE - TE TAKE

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the recent review of Council's network of play spaces, and to seek approval to prioritise the renewal of a play space in Elgin in the remaining years of the 2024-27 Three-Year Plan.

SUMMARY - HE WHAKARĀPOPOTOTANGA

Council has recently completed a review of its play spaces network, which comprises of 41 Council-owned playgrounds spread across the region. Twenty eight (28) are located in Gisborne and surrounds, seven in coastal townships and six in rural townships.

The network is challenged by ageing equipment, rising costs, inequity of provision, limited diversity in play experiences and a lack of accessible spaces. These issues highlight the need for a strategic, equitable, and long-term investment approach to ensure the network can meet the evolving needs of tamariki and whānau across the region.

Council has developed a network plan to support strategic investment into play spaces moving forward. The Tairāwhiti Play Spaces Study and Future Network Plan (The Network Plan) balances end of life renewals with a longer-term view of the requirements of the network. It also considers where play space investment will have the greatest outcome, such as prioritising sites that address inequities.

The Network Plan is intended as an internal document that sets high level intentions for network management and renewals. Investment priorities for the network are to be consulted through the next Long-Term Plan (LTP) and individual site priorities consulted as appropriate.

The Network Plan also recommends a renewed play space in Elgin as the priority investment for the remainder of the Three-Year Plan period. This would be the only significant renewal that could be achieved with the budget allocated.

The decisions or matters in this report are considered to be of **Low** significance in accordance with the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS - NGĀ TŪTOHUNGA

That the Operations - Environment & Communities/Ngā Whakamahi - Te Taiao me Ngā Hapori:

1. Notes the Tairāwhiti Future Play Spaces Network Summary (**attachment 1**).
2. Endorses the renewal of a play space in Elgin as the priority play space renewal in the remainder of the Three-Year Plan period.
3. Notes that the future programme of play space renewals will be consulted as part of the 2027-37 Long-Term Plan.

Authorised by:

Michele Frey - Director Liveable Communities

Keywords: play spaces, long term plan, 3 year plan play spaces network, network plan, tairawhti play spaces study

BACKGROUND - HE WHAKAMĀRAMA

1. **Definition:** Play spaces refer to the 41 Council-managed playgrounds in outdoor areas across the Tairāwhiti region.
2. Tairāwhiti has a total of 41 Council owned play spaces: twenty eight are in urban areas, seven are in coastal townships, and six are in rural locations.
3. The network has an average age of 15 years (22.5 years in rural locations, 16.5 years in urban areas and eight years in coastal townships).
4. The Gisborne District Council (Council) Play Spaces Plan was developed in 2018 as part of the Community Facilities Strategy to "enable holistic and innovative thinking around affordable and effective future provision of play spaces within the Tairāwhiti-Gisborne region."
5. A priority action of this plan was to prepare a play spaces development and upgrade programme. A summary of the objectives outlined in the plan include:
    a) Distribution and hierarchy - Develop a network of play spaces across precincts to maximise play value for the most people.
    b) Play for all ages and abilities - Provide accessible play opportunities for all ages and abilities.
    c) Collaboration and community participation – Work in partnership with the community to design, fund, and care for a network of play spaces that meets community needs.
    d) Quality design - Create diverse, well-designed spaces that fit their surroundings and are loved by children.
    e) Financial sustainability - Ensure the play spaces network is provided in a way that the community can afford.
    f) Maintenance and management - Ensure that play spaces remain safe, in good working order, free of hazards and are attractive.
6. Since the adoption of the plan, 13 play spaces have been upgraded in response to equipment failures, severe weather events, and delivery of the Township Programme.

DISCUSSION and OPTIONS - WHAKAWHITINGA KŌRERO me ngā KŌWHIRINGA

7. In late 2023, a region-wide play spaces audit was undertaken to inform Council's asset management approach in the 2024–27 Three Year Plan. The audit evaluated performance, safety, and accessibility across the network.
8. The findings of the play spaces audit informed the development of The Network Plan, which was completed in 2025.

Understanding our play spaces network

9. The audit evaluated asset performance, safety, and accessibility across the network.
10. On average, each of our 41 play spaces provides essential play opportunities for 371 tamariki and rangatahi aged 0–19 across the rohe, per play space.

11. Our network of play spaces is categorised as follows:

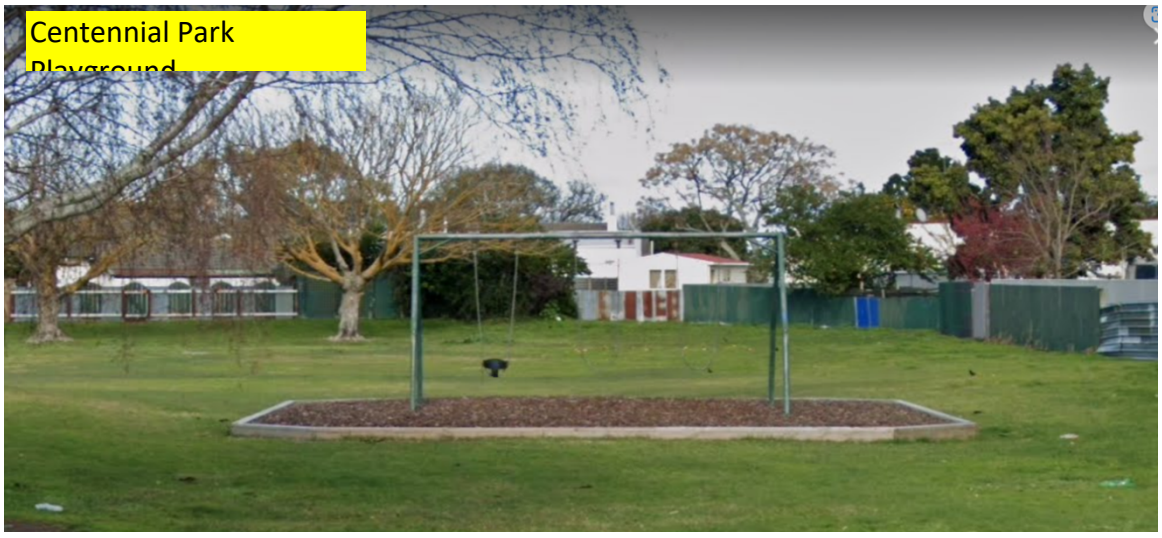
Category (Typology)	No. in Network	Description	Median Age
Neighbourhood Play Spaces	22	Neighbourhood play spaces are small play spaces, offering 2–4 pieces of proprietary play equipment for all ages and abilities, designed to support short visits and foster local community connection. Note: Eight of these sites currently provide only a swing or swing set.	19
Community Play Spaces	16	Community play spaces are inclusive, medium to large play areas near sports or community hubs, designed for whole suburbs with 5–8 play elements and additional features such as courts or skate parks.	12
Community or Neighbourhood Play Spaces with additional Nature Play areas	2	These are bespoke, site-built play areas that sit in close proximity to the play spaces and use natural materials (site specific) to create immersive, imaginative and sensory play experiences that connect children to te taiao. In Tairāwhiti these are supported by the newly developed Gisborne District Council Operational Guidelines.	9.5
Destination Play Spaces	2	Destination Play Spaces are large, tailored-designed, inclusive play areas with unique features and extensive amenities, designed to attract visitors from across the region and beyond for half-day visits and cater to all ages and abilities.	11

12. While some sites are well-maintained and offer a variety of experiences, others face challenges with outdated equipment, limited universal design, and lack of diversity in age-appropriate play opportunities.
13. Equity and accessibility remain a concern, as underserved communities—both urban and rural—often have fewer, lower-quality play spaces.
14. To inform The Network Plan, we've assessed each of Council's 41 play spaces for their:
    - Current quality of play opportunities.
    - Site suitability for future development, including resilience to climate change and natural events.
    - Importance of the play space to the community, based on socioeconomic and demographic data, number of children in the surrounding neighbourhood and other opportunities for play nearby.
    - Network equity and geographic distribution.
15. Of the 41 assessed sites, 34% offer poor play provision, based on available equipment and overall playability. These play spaces are primarily located within the urban network and have an average remaining asset lifespan of 4.5 years.

16. However, most sites were seen as average or good sites for ongoing use and development, with only four identified as poorly suited to future development.
17. Similarly, 90% of Council's current play spaces were seen to be important or very important to the surrounding community, based on demand, dispersion and equity considerations.
18. Bright spots include recently modernised play spaces through targeted investments and promising pilots exploring 'nature play' opportunities.
19. The top images show the recently renewed Mātāwai Playground, completed as part of the townships upgrade programme. The bottom image shows the Centennial Crescent Reserve Playground, typifying the inequity of play provision in Elgin presently.







Key Challenges

20. **Ageing Infrastructure**: Many play spaces are overdue for renewal, with 23 more upgrades needed within 12 years, driving up risks and maintenance costs due to deferred renewals.
21. **Affordability**: The cost of constructing and maintaining play spaces has increased significantly over previous decades, due to increased material and labour costs, and compliance requirements. Renewal investment hasn't kept pace with the rise in costs, creating significant pressure on the existing funding model.
22. **Equity and Accessibility Gaps**: Underserved communities face fewer, older, or lower quality play spaces. Additionally, the region lacks fully accessible play spaces, limiting inclusivity.
23. **Limited Play Diversity**: The network offers similar equipment across sites, with limited age diversity, inclusive play options, and opportunities for nature-based play
24. **Climate Impacts**: Increasing impacts from heat, flooding, and other stresses, demand a shift toward sustainable materials, local contractors, and carbon-conscious practices.
25. **Universal design, inclusion and equity**: Tairāwhiti's lack of fully accessible play spaces highlights a critical equity gap that can be most effectively addressed by prioritising universal design in early planning to ensure inclusive, community-connected environments for all children.
26. These challenges underscore the need for strategic investment and planning to ensure a resilient, equitable, and engaging play space network.

Ensuring that we're Strategic and Equitable in our Play Space Investment

27. There's a growing need to move from isolated fixes to a coordinated, long-term approach. This includes setting clearer service standards, embedding inclusion, equity, and resilience into how we plan, deliver and fund play spaces, embracing innovation and aligning future investment with community outcomes.
28. Building on the review of the network's performance and criticality, the Network Plan is able to take a strategic approach to future play space investment, balancing end of life renewals with a longer-term view of the requirements of the network. It also considers where play space investment will have the greatest outcome, such as prioritising sites that address inequities.
29. To enable this approach, the Network Plan will inform the next Liveable Spaces Asset Management Plan (AMP), providing a list of priority investments for the 2027-37 (and future) Long-Term Plans.
30. These priorities will be consulted on through the 2027-37 Long-Term Plan, and community can provide feedback on whether our investment is achieving what we need them to.

Priorities for the Remainder of the 2024-27 Three Year Plan

31. Play opportunities in Elgin are limited compared to many other places across the city, as is quality public land for developing play spaces. This has been discussed within Council over multiple decades and continues to be presented as a multifaceted challenge.

32. The Network Plan identifies Elgin as a high-priority area for play space renewal due to a combination of limited play opportunities, lack of suitable public open space, and greater barriers to access compared to other parts of the city.

33. The nearest significant playground (Adventure Playground) is over two kilometres away, across a state highway and industrial area.

34. While Council has explored several short - and medium-term approaches—such as temporary installations, activation initiatives, and partnership projects—we have been unable to deliver a solution with sufficient impact to address the area's play inequity.

35. Most recently, staff explored the potential to develop a temporary play space in partnership with Kāinga Ora, on their land. Unfortunately, we found that due to costly consenting and site establishment costs, we weren't going to be able to develop a play space for a cost that was justifiable given its temporary nature.

36. Therefore, renewing a single, community-level play space in Elgin is seen as the most economically viable option to resolving play equity challenges in Elgin, in both the short and long term. This approach remains consistent with Council's previous interest in addressing play inequity in the area.

37. The recommended approach is to consolidate the Blackpool Street and Centennial Crescent play areas into one upgraded community-level play space, delivered in two phases. Phase One would be funded and completed under the current Three-Year Recovery Plan, with Phase Two subject to funding in the next Long-Term Plan.

38. The project would require that the majority of the play spaces renewal budget over the coming two financial years is prioritised into the design and delivery of the first stage of the project.

39. Council has a play spaces renewal budget of $300k across 2025/26 and 2026/27. Delivering the project would require that $190K of this is allocated to this purpose, and the remainder used for reactive capital purchases.

40. As a result, Elgin will be the only significant play space renewal during the remainder of the Three-Year Plan period.

41. Some other sites are likely to receive smaller repairs and replacements during this period, nonetheless.

ASSESSMENT of SIGNIFICANCE - AROTAKENGA o NGĀ HIRANGA

Consideration of consistency with and impact on the Regional Land Transport Plan and its implementation
Overall Process: **Low** Significance
This Report: **Low** Significance

Impacts on Council's delivery of its Financial Strategy and Long Term Plan
Overall Process: **Low** Significance
This Report: **Low** Significance

Inconsistency with Council's current strategy and policy
Overall Process: **Low** Significance
This Report: **Low** Significance

The effects on all or a large part of the Gisborne district
Overall Process: **Low** Significance
This Report: **Low** Significance

The effects on individuals or specific communities
Overall Process: **Medium** Significance
This Report: **Low** Significance

The level or history of public interest in the matter or issue
Overall Process: **Low** Significance
This Report: **Low** Significance

42. The decisions or matters in this report are considered to be of **Low** significance in accordance with Council's Significance and Engagement Policy.

TREATY COMPASS ANALYSIS

43. Council acknowledges the shared interest of iwi in the play spaces network. Engagement with iwi will be conducted in accordance with our treaty partner compass approach, ensuring respectful and meaningful engagement consistent with articles 1-4 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

TANGATA WHENUA/MĀORI ENGAGEMENT - TŪTAKITANGA TANGATA WHENUA

44. This body of work should be used as a roadmap or starting point for planning.

45. Each future play space development or play intervention will require detailed, site-specific research, iwi engagement and community consultation at the outset of each project to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the play network across Tairāwhiti.

46. In previous conversations with Iwi groups around reactive site development, Iwi has expressed a preference for engagement to be at a high-level across all of their rohe at the outset of the Long-Term Planning process.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - TŪTAKITANGA HAPORI

47. Community engagement happens on a site-by-site basis, based on the significance of the renewal and the importance of the play space to the surrounding community.

48. Currently the majority of play spaces in rural and coastal locations have been delivered via the Township Programme, under the expressed wishes and design of the community.

CLIMATE CHANGE – Impacts / Implications - NGĀ REREKĒTANGA ĀHUARANGI – ngā whakaaweawe / ngā ritenga

49. Climate Pressures: Assets are increasingly impacted by heat, flooding and other environmental stresses.

50. The future network will look to incorporate more sustainable materials and practices to support our ongoing commitment in responding to the impacts of climate change.

51. This includes using natural and recyclable materials and using local contractors where possible to help reduce our carbon footprint.

CONSIDERATIONS - HEI WHAKAARO

Financial/Budget

52. Replacement values are substantial - an increase in investment will be required to keep pace with asset failures.

53. Without an increase in maintenance and renewal funding over time, Council would need to reduce its level of service.

Legal

54. There are no legal implications arising from the matters in this report.

POLICY and PLANNING IMPLICATIONS - KAUPAPA HERE me ngā RITENGA WHAKAMAHERE

55. This work also reflects a priority action outlined in the Tairāwhiti Play Spaces Plan 2018 (TPSP) - to prepare a play spaces development and upgrade programme.

56. In the three-year plan we outlined the following project initiatives for our play spaces: Ensure that our existing play spaces are safe, compliant, and the appropriate quality through targeted renewals, including play spaces such as Te Karaka, Lytton West, Atkinson Street and Waihirere Domain.

57. Although Elgin was not specifically listed, it would be approached as a targeted renewal, with a similar focus as outlined above ensuring safety, compliance, and quality.

RISKS - NGĀ TŪRARU

Compliance and Health and Safety risks

58. We have clear obligations to provide safe play spaces. One way that we achieve this is through compliance with the NZ Safety Standards. Regular and ongoing inspections and audits by certified safety specialists are essential to meet these standards.

59. It is crucial for the Council to invest, plan and respond proactively to the ongoing maintenance and renewal of these assets, and prioritising the safety of the community using them.

Funding and Resourcing

60. Without a step-change in resourcing, the network will continue to degrade and diverge from community expectations.

NEXT STEPS - NGĀ MAHI E WHAI AKE

Date	Action/Milestone	Comments
2025-2027	Completing ongoing network renewals	Sites prioritised by immediate safety compliance requirements and equity.
2025-2027	Redevelop a community-level play space in Elgin (phase one) guided by design and budget priorities.	**Phase one includes:** **Concept Design** – based on community and hapū/iwi engagement. **Developed Design** – Detailed drawings for procurement and any required consents. **Construction** – Build of the initial play space stage within available budget.
2026-2027	Prioritising future play spaces renewals in the Liveable spaces Activity Management Plan	Planned renewals will consider affordability and likely to represent an increase in councils ongoing renewal investment to keep pace with asset expiry.
2026-2027	Consultation on play space renewal priorities through the 2027-37 LTP	Key priorities sites will be identified for community feedback.

ATTACHMENTS - NGĀ TĀPIRITANGA

1. Attachment 1 - Tairāwhiti Future Play Spaces Network Summary [**25-126.1** - 6 pages]