



East Cambridgeshire
District Council

Inclusive Playground Strategy

2026 to 2028



Contents

Foreword	4
Background	6
What we mean by ‘inclusive play’	8
The audit process	9
ECDC managed play areas audit findings	10
Top 5 district-wide priorities	11
Delivering inclusive playgrounds	12
ECDC Actions 2026 to 2028	13
Working with developers	14
Supporting local councils and other providers	16
Inclusive Play and Open Spaces CIL Grant Scheme	17

Foreword

East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) is committed to ensuring that children and young people of all abilities can access high-quality opportunities for outdoor play.

This strategy provides a practical framework for making playgrounds across the district more inclusive. It builds on the council's decision in May 2024 to undertake an independent audit of the playgrounds it maintains, to invite parish councils to participate in the same process, and to use the findings to shape this district-wide inclusive playground strategy.

To enable delivery of the strategy the council has also created an Inclusive Play and Open Spaces Community Infrastructure Levy fund, which supports capital projects that improve accessibility and create additional capacity in response to growth.

The key actions in section 6 sets out what the council will do to ensure the playgrounds that it maintains are more accessible and enjoyable for all children and young people across the district and how it will help other providers to do the same.

Cllr Alan Sharp
Chair, Finance and Assets Committee



01

Background

In May 2024 the council passed an Accessible Play Motion in which it recognised that all children and young people should have access to outdoor play opportunities that are inclusive and accessible, including children with disabilities, wheelchair users and those with special educational needs. It acknowledged that playgrounds are important community assets that support childhood development, wellbeing and social inclusion.

The motion also acknowledged that some existing playgrounds do not currently meet these needs and stated that East Cambridgeshire District Council should lead by example by embedding inclusive design principles in playgrounds under its control and encouraging the same approach across other providers, including parish councils.

To support this, an independent audit was carried out of all council-owned playgrounds, and parish councils were offered the opportunity to have their play areas audited at the district council's expense, and a budget of up to £25,000 was allocated to this work. The motion also required a report on the findings and the development of an Inclusive Playground

Strategy covering improvement plans, funding opportunities, a toolkit of good practice and a communications programme.

The motion also sought to embed inclusive play within planning processes for new developments, explore a Local Plan policy requiring inclusive playgrounds, and improve public awareness of accessible playground features through the council's website, social media and local information boards.

In February 2026 the council approved a bespoke Community and Infrastructure Levy (CIL) grant scheme for Inclusive Play and Open Spaces to facilitate delivery of the play audit recommendations.

This strategy sets out the actions ECDC will take in response to the play audit findings to improve council managed playgrounds. It also explains how the council will support others to develop and enhance their own playgrounds through the Inclusive Play Toolkit and funding available via the Inclusive Play and Open Spaces CIL Grant Scheme.

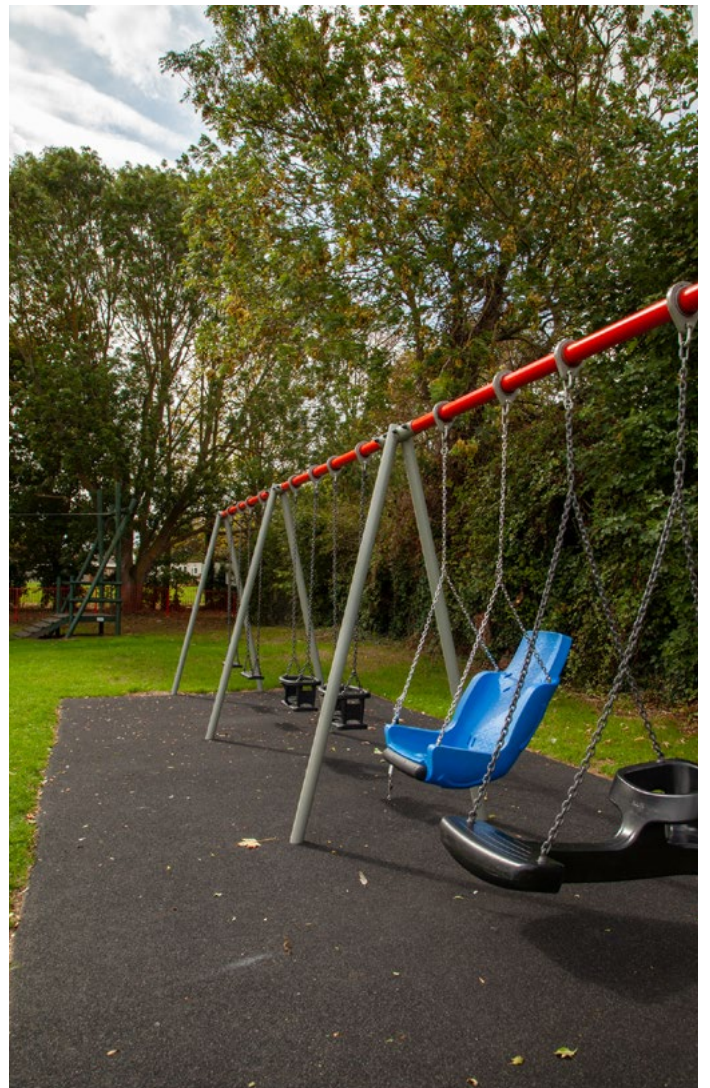


02

What we mean by ‘inclusive play’

Inclusive play means designing, managing and improving play spaces so that children and young people can reach them, enter them, move around them, stay comfortably, and participate in a wide range of play experiences alongside others.

The strategy adopts an understanding of inclusion that goes beyond minimum physical access. Inclusive play spaces should enable disabled and non-disabled children to play together, offer a variety of physical, sensory, social and imaginative experiences, and remove barriers created by layout, surfacing, equipment and access.



03

The audit process

PiPA (Plan Inclusive Play Areas) is a social enterprise with the sole aim of helping to improve accessible and inclusive play facilities for children and families across the UK. PiPA is the only tool to independently assess inclusive provision in outdoor play areas. PiPA exists to empower the true meaning of inclusion, equality and diversity in play area design, enabling everyone the same opportunity to play in a fun and safe environment, because all children need and have the right to play.

PiPA were contacted by the council in 2025 and they carried out an audit of 23 play areas managed by ECDC.

Parish councils were provided with the opportunity to have an audit of their play areas and initially 20 Parishes expressed an interest that covered 37 playgrounds.

Those parish councils were invited to an audits workshop which explained what the outcomes of the audits would show, discussed the overall inclusivity of playgrounds and detailed what information PiPA needed from playground owners. 15 parish council play areas were audited.

Each audit report included an assessment of 4 key areas:

- **Accessibility of the Area**, barriers that might be in place, surfaces that exclude users from the play area
- **Dynamic Play Opportunity**, opportunities for everyone to get their whole bodies involved in dynamic play (this can be achieved through sliding, climbing, spinning or swinging)
- **Nurturing the Senses**, at least 3 of the senses from the 6 senses must be accessed from both a seated and standing position
- **Rest and Recharge**, assess areas for families to relax in quiet zones or play on their own and review seating throughout the space

These are all given a RAG rating and a summary provided alongside some recommendations for the play area.

Each parish council that requested an audit received a report and ECDC also received reports for each play area in Ely and Fordham, with Littleport and Soham areas receiving separate joint reports for the area overall.

04

ECDC managed play areas audit findings

The audits identify a consistent theme across nearly all the play areas the district council manages: while many sites have reasonable or good physical access, they offer very limited inclusive dynamic play, sensory play and rest/recharge provision.

Most sites require targeted improvements to support children with physical, sensory and cognitive needs.

Common weaknesses

Nearly every site received the following:

- red ratings for Dynamic Play
- red ratings for Nurturing the Senses
- Frequent red ratings for Rest and Recharge provision
- little or no provision for wheelchair users
- limited opportunities for play at height for less mobile users
- few sensory play opportunities

Insufficient seating and resting spaces were found at the following locations:

- Beresford Road, Ely
- Brooke Grove, Ely
- Cherry Drive, Ely
- Collier Close, Ely
- Darwin Close, Ely
- Goldsmiths Court, Ely
- Kingsley Walk, Ely
- Morley Drive, Ely
- Murfitts Close, Ely
- Tennyson Place, Ely
- Fishers Bank, Littleport
- Highfields Green, Littleport
- Sandys Crescent, Littleport
- The Orchards, Littleport
- Celadine View, Soham
- Downfields, Soham
- Lion Mills, Soham
- Millers Place, Soham
- Fordham

Top 5 district-wide priorities

Common strengths

Many sites have hard standing surfaces, level access and accessible gates. Several parks already provide a good foundation for future inclusive improvements.

Existing accessibility means future investment can focus on equipment rather than extensive groundworks at some locations, for example:

- Cherry Drive, Ely
- Darwin Close, Ely
- Morley Drive, Ely
- Murfitts Close, Ely
- Tennyson Place, Ely
- Teal Avenue, Soham
- Bittern Grove, Soham
- Lapwing Way, Soham
- Kingfisher Drive, Soham

1. Wheelchair-accessible roundabouts (Littleport, Soham, Fordham)
2. Sensory play areas and gardens (Beresford Road, Ely; Cherry Drive, ELY; Fordham)
3. Ramped play units providing inclusive access to play at height (Collier Close, Ely; Darwin Close, Ely; Soham)
4. Accessible pathway improvements (Brook Grove, Ely; Goldsmiths Court, Ely; All sites, Littleport)
5. Additional accessible seating and rest areas (Brook Grove, Ely; Kingsley Walk, Ely; Fordham)

These actions would address the most common shortcomings identified by PiPA and provide the greatest improvement in inclusive play provision managed by ECDC across East Cambridgeshire.

05

Delivering inclusive playgrounds

ECDC will support the improvement of playgrounds across the district in four ways, making improvements to the play area it manages, working with developers during the planning process to ensure new play areas that are delivered are inclusive, supporting parish councils and other providers to deliver improvements to both new and existing playgrounds and making CIL funding available to local organisations to support the delivery of improvements.



06

ECDC Actions 2026 to 2028

A review of the audit findings has identified that the key priorities for the council to address to support inclusive playgrounds are:

- ◆ providing new specific items (depending on consultation with parishes to avoid duplication) as provided in top 5 priorities
- ◆ access improvements to current playgrounds
- ◆ utilising equipment already in place to ensure it is as accessible as possible
- ◆ align future equipment replacement decisions with inclusive design requirements
- ◆ embed inclusive play expectations in planning advice, developer discussions and the evidence base for future planning policy where appropriate
- ◆ use the council's Inclusive Play and Open Spaces Community Infrastructure Levy fund to support eligible projects that improve accessibility and respond to growth
- ◆ support parish councils to bring forward investable projects with needs evidence and match funding
- ◆ promote this strategy and toolkit and the Inclusive Play and Open Spaces CIL funding to parish councils and other partners
- ◆ update the play area information on the Councils website to highlight accessible features
- ◆ costs to deliver the actions will be met from existing budgets as part of ongoing maintenance and replacement works and CIL funding where applicable.

07

Working with developers

Alongside improvements to existing play areas, the district council works with developers delivering new play facilities and open spaces to embed inclusive play expectations into planning advice and early project discussions. This helps ensure new provision is accessible, inclusive and considered consistently from the outset.

Following on from the audits carried out by PiPA the template and criteria is now used to review and comment on play areas through the planning process. This provides more robust evidence of need and also supports planning officers with knowledge of inclusive playgrounds.

Little Downham Case Study, Accent Housing

A good existing relationship with the housing provider supported early consultation on play areas for a new housing estate in Little Downham. Working with the developer at an early stage in the process allowed sight and discussion regarding the play area to be provided. Following this early consultation the design of the playground was changed resulting in better surfaces being provided to be inclusive to allow adequate access between the various items of equipment.





08

Supporting local councils and other providers

ECDC has funded play audits for 15 parish council playgrounds and will continue to offer support to local councils and other providers of playgrounds and open spaces. The council has produced an Inclusive Playground Toolkit which is intended to support local councils, open space planners, housing associations and other playground and open space providers to develop and upgrade accessible play spaces. The toolkit brings together the standards and principles that should guide inclusive play projects, practical help for providers, and funding information.



09

Inclusive Play and Open Spaces CIL Grant Scheme

To enable local councils and other organisations to deliver changes to make playgrounds more inclusive, ECDC has set up a specific grant funding scheme. The Inclusive Play and Open Spaces CIL Grant Scheme provides capital funding towards projects that ensure playgrounds are accessible to children of all abilities. It can be used to fund new facilities or to create additional capacity and improvements at existing playgrounds.



End of document.