

# **INTERIM PLANNING GUIDANCE**

**The development of areas  
of amenity open space,  
play areas and commuted sums.**



**October 2005**

# **AREAS OF AMENITY OPEN SPACE, PLAY AREAS AND COMMUTED SUMS.**

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# **INTERIM PLANNING GUIDANCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF AREAS OF AMENITY OPEN SPACE, PLAY AREAS AND COMMUTED SUMS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation sets out the Government's advice. The Government considers open space, sport and recreation to be fundamental in delivering broader objectives. These include health and well being, urban renaissance – by creating urban environments which are attractive, clean and safe – and promotion of social inclusion and community cohesion. All areas provided through development can help by adding to the supply of spaces and allowing children to play close to home.
2. The Government requires local authorities to undertake assessments of existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities and these must cover quantitative and qualitative elements. The District Council is undertaking such an assessment and following it, additional work will need to be carried out. In the meantime, this document is to provide a level of certainty by agreeing on the level of amenity open space and play areas prior to the determination of an application.
3. North Dorset, through its Local Plan policies, requires residential development to be designed for children's play, by the provision of play areas and also to provide all residents with amenity open space. Appropriate management arrangements and funding are also required to be secured.
4. Local Plan policies also allow the provision of public art to be negotiated on sites where major development is taking place. This can be on sites where residential development is proposed.
5. This paper is provided to give developers, officers and Members guidance on the requirements for play areas and amenity open space and on the procedures which need to be followed in negotiating its provision.

## **WHAT IS MEANT BY PLAY AREAS, AMENITY OPEN SPACE AND COMMUTED SUMS?**

### **Play Areas**

6. Currently, the Council uses the National Playing Association Standards (NPFA) and advice on design and layout. This is set out in the National Playing Fields Association document 'The Six Acre Standard.'

## **Amenity Open Space**

7. On larger developments additional amenity open space may be required and on some smaller developments, for example, those not intended for families, an amenity area for use by all residents may be required. These sites of amenity open space do not form part of the NPFA standard. They may be used for casual play, for walking and for visual purposes. In some developments, there may be large areas of amenity open space, for example adjacent to a river. In some instances, these open spaces may be best designed and managed as natural sites.

## **Commuted Sums**

8. Where new amenity areas or play areas are provided, their future maintenance needs to be assured. The payment of a commuted sum for maintenance will be appropriate when a developer hands over title and responsibility for the long term maintenance of on-site provision to a local authority or a third party such as a Town or Parish Council or Trust. These commuted sums are intended to fund a stream of revenue payments, over a period of years.

## **Home Zones**

9. Since the policies on play areas and amenity open space were drawn up and consulted on through the Local Plan process, changes in current thinking on the design and layout of residential developments have lead towards the concept of 'Home Zones'. The use of 'Home Zones' allow streets to be used for play and may mean that the need for 'Local Areas for Play' (LAPS) is reduced if the Home Zones guidance is followed.

## **THE LOCAL PLAN POLICY ON PUBLIC ART**

### **Policy 4.4 Percent for Arts**

10. 'On sites for major development (as defined in paragraph 1.24) negotiations to seek up to one percent of the overall cost of the development may be held. Any work commissioned should be designed as an integral part of the project and should be readily viewed from a public area.'

Paragraph 1.24 defines a major housing site as one of more than 50 dwellings or larger than 2 hectares.

## **THE LOCAL PLAN POLICY ON PLAY AREAS AND AMENITY OPEN SPACE**

### **11. Policy 4.8, Play Areas and Amenity Open Space**

'Residential development will be required to provide casual children's play space at a ratio of 0.4 - 0.5 ha per 1000 population and equipped play areas at a ratio of 0.2 - 0.3 ha per 1000 population (where a shortfall in existing provision is identified) as well as amenity areas, directly related to and necessary for the development, having regard to the type, location, scale and cumulative impact of the development proposed, and the physical constraints of the site.

A commuted sum for maintenance may be required where the play area is principally of benefit to the development itself. Where the physical constraints of the site do not allow for this provision, a contribution to an off site facility and a commuted sum for maintenance may be sought (where the play area is principally of benefit to the development itself).

Within new developments play areas should be within safe pedestrian distance - less than 200 metres for pre-school children and 400 metres for older children.'

12. The Council's Planning Guidance Note 'Planning Obligations for the Provision of Community Infrastructure' also refers to Children's Play Space in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.7. It should be noted the contributions negotiated from residential development do not contribute to the provision of play space and need to be negotiated separately.

## **DESIGNING RESIDENTIAL LAYOUTS AND CHILDREN'S PLAY AREAS**

13. Developers should consider designing layouts to take into consideration the advice in 'Better Streets, Better Places', as well as the advice on 'Home Zones'.
14. Para 4.25 of the Local Plan refers to provision being a fundamental part of the design of the housing layout. It also accepts that if more provision cannot be achieved on site, a contribution towards an off-site facility in a suitable location may be agreed. Play areas should be overlooked and not remote for safety reasons.
15. The requirements for children's play spaces is taken from the National Playing Fields Association Standard and is applied on a site-by-site basis. A population for the proposed development is calculated and thus areas required for play spaces can be identified.
16. NPFA standard recommends that play areas are provided of different sizes and for different age groups. For the youngest children a play space should be provided for every 15 units. On sites smaller than 15 units the principle should be adopted that an area of play space should be within 400m walking distance of the development.

17. An equipped area needs to be provided for every 50 units, to cater for younger accompanied children and unaccompanied older children. For smaller sites, a payment for off-site provision, within 100m safe walking distance will be acceptable if development creates a need to improve facilities in the area.
18. Larger equipped play areas, as part of areas of open space, may also be required. For developments in excess of 200 dwellings these will provide play equipment and also a kick-around area and opportunities for "wheeled" play and facilities for teenagers. This facility may be provided on larger sites or may be provided by a combined approach of smaller sites located close together. In some settlements this larger area may already exist to some degree. A survey is being made of play areas which can be related to their catchment as well as to their potential to expand and improve them to NPFA standards. In this case, a contribution to this may be made if there is need to improve facilities in the area, and this will meet the requirement for the development.
19. If the 'Home Zone' approach is followed, this may lead to the requirement for 'Local Areas of Play' (LAP) being reduced. However, additional equipment suitable for younger children up to 6 may be required as part of a 'Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP).
20. The following pages given some help on the design of play areas. These are based on the information in the NPFA document "The Six Acre Standard". Developers may wish to take a more imaginative approach and this is encouraged by the Council. Developers should discuss ideas as early as possible with the Council and with the relevant town or parish council. The information on commuted sums is based on the standard designs and more imaginative designs will require individual assessment taking into consideration maintenance and the life of the product used.
21. Designers of play areas should also refer to the "Dorset Play Strategy" published by Dorset Community Action and "Developing Accessible PlaySpace; a Good Practice Guide" from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
22. Where there is an existing population and a play area is being expanded as a result of new development, then children and young people living locally should be consulted on their ideas for their area.

## HOME ZONES AND CHILDREN'S PLAY

- Home zones are residential streets where the road space is shared by road users, where the wider needs of others, such as pedestrians, cyclists and children are taken into account.
- Home Zones reduce the dominance of the car and reduce the speed of the car, encouraging people to use the street, allowing children to play and people to walk and cycle.
- Home Zones can be streets, squares, courtyards or cul de sacs. The buildings, trees, plantings and surface treatments define the Home Zone's spaces. Residential buildings should have active fronts.
- Home Zones will provide children with a safe and attractive area outside their homes. Any communal features, including play equipment (if appropriate) must be located carefully so as not to cause nuisance to local residents.
- The following manuals have been published on Home Zones and will be of use in understanding general principles:
  - 'Home Zone Design Guidelines', Institute of Highway Incorporated Engineers
  - 'Home Zones, a planning and design handbook' Mike Biddulph
- Discussions on Home Zones and adoptable layouts must be discussed with the County Council.

## **SPECIFICATION FOR A LOCAL AREA FOR PLAY (LAP)**

- A LAP shall conform to the current edition of 'The Six Acre Standard' issued by the National Playing Fields Association.
- The LAP Activity Zone shall be a minimum of 100m<sup>2</sup> (5m minimum length on the smallest side) and positioned beside a pedestrian pathway on a well used route. A 5m minimum depth buffer zone to be provided between the activity zone and the forward-most part of the nearest dwelling that faces the LAP. The buffer zone may include planting (Please consult the Council's specification for open spaces and footpaths).
- The play area target range is for children including those with disabilities, up to 6 years in age.

### **Equipment**

- The space within a LAP contains demonstrative features rather than equipment and is designed to encourage informal play and social interaction. It also provides opportunities for children to bring their own toys and games.
- The features recommended are, a footprint trail, a mushroom style seat or a model of an animal or insect. A typical diagrammatic layout is attached.

### **Surfacing**

- The area shall be to an even grade and grass seeding or turf, which shall be a dense, hard wearing and weed free sward.

### **Fencing, Gates & Paths**

- Perimeter fencing of the activity zone should be constructed and erected in accordance with the appropriate part of BS 1722. A minimum height of 900mm is required. Galvanised, colour coated, metal round top railings are preferred, design details to be agreed prior to construction. Fencing to be suitable to exclude access to the play area by dogs.
- A 1200mm wide, outward-opening self-closing pedestrian gate is required. The pull/push force required should be in the range 15-25 Newtons (n). A barrier is required to limit the speed of a child entering or leaving the site.
- Access paths and other routes shall be a minimum of 1.2m wide and constructed in accordance with Dorset County Council Adoption Standard, dense bitumen macadam.

### **Ancillary Items (Seating, Litter Bin, Signs, Lighting, Hedges & Trees)**

- The play area shall be provided with one galvanised, colour coated, metal bench seat and a litter bin. A sign shall be provided detailing usage, as the attached sketch.



- The remainder of the area shall be landscaped with trees, shrubs and grass, all planted and designed to the attached specification for open spaces and footpaths.
- The level of lighting will depend on the location of the play area. Please discuss this at the design stage.
- Applicants are advised to submit full details for approval at the earliest opportunity.

**Barry Hollowell**  
**Senior Assistant Engineer**

## **SPECIFICATION FOR A LOCAL EQUIPPED AREA FOR PLAY (LEAP)**

- A LEAP shall conform to the current edition of 'The Six Acre Standard' issued by the National Playing Fields Association.
- The LEAP activity zone shall be a minimum of 400m<sup>2</sup> (10 metres minimum length on the smallest side) with a buffer zone sufficient to allow a minimum distance of 20 metres between the edge of the activity zone and the boundary of the nearest residential property. The buffer zone may include footpaths and planting (Please consult the Council's specification for open spaces and footpaths).
- The play area target range is for children of early school age and, as such, equipment should be selected to cater mainly for accompanied children including those with disabilities, aged from 4 to 8 years.

### **Equipment**

- Five items of suitable play equipment, of which two are individual pieces rather than part of a combination, shall be provided. The equipment shall conform to the New European Standard BS EN 1176 and preferably carry a BSI Kitemark or T V mark. The area, type of equipment and layout to be agreed prior to construction.
- Each item to be designed to stimulate one of the following: balancing, rocking, climbing, sliding, rotating, counting, swinging, jumping and viewing.
- Recommended equipment:
  - Balancing Beam, Adventure Trail
  - Multi-Play incorporating ladders, ramps, bridges, towers, nets, fireman's poles and slides. No moving items to be attached.
  - Play Houses incorporating wheels, maze puzzles and abacuses
  - Springer, Rocking Horse
  - Swings
  - Climbing Bars/Net

A typical diagrammatic layout is attached

### **Surfacing**

- The surfacing shall have a report of satisfactory testing conforming to the New European Standard BS EN 1177. The type shall be Matta Products or similar, to be agreed prior to construction.

### **Fencing, Gates & Paths**

- Perimeter fencing of the activity zone should be constructed and erected in accordance with the appropriate part of BS 1722. A minimum height of 1.0m is required. Galvanised, colour coated, metal round top railings are preferred, design details to be agreed prior to construction. Fencing to be suitable to exclude access to the play area by dogs.

- At least two, 1200mm wide, outward-opening self-closing pedestrian gates on opposite sides are required per site. The pull/push force required should be in the range 15-25 Newtons (n). A barrier is required to limit the speed of a child entering or leaving the site. A 2.4m maintenance gate shall also be provided where possible.
- Access paths and other routes shall be a minimum of 1.2m wide and constructed in accordance with Dorset County Council Adoption Standard, dense bitumen macadam.

### **Ancillary Items (Seating, Litter Bin, Signs, Lighting, Hedges & Trees)**

- The play area shall be provided with one galvanised, colour coated, metal bench seat and a litter bin. A sign shall be provided detailing usage, as the attached sketch.
- The remainder of the area shall be landscaped with trees, shrubs and grass, all planted and designed to the attached specification for open spaces and footpaths.
- The level of lighting will depend on the location of the play area. Please discuss this at the design stage.

### **Completion**

- A satisfactory post installation inspection report to be carried out by RoSPA is required prior to use.
- Applicants are advised to submit full details for approval at the earliest opportunity.

**Barry Hollowell**  
**Senior Assistant Engineer**

## OFF SITE CONTRIBUTIONS AND PLAY AREAS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

- LAPs and LEAPs cater for younger children but provision needs to be made for older children and teenagers.
- It is unlikely that developers will be expected to provide such an area within a residential development, unless it is a very large scheme. However, consideration must be given towards their provision within towns, perhaps located on existing recreation areas. In the future, following the work being carried out on open space, contributions may be negotiated for this provision and at present, officers may wish to discuss such contributions with some developers of larger schemes and with the relevant town council. Facilities required might include a multi-sport wall, a hard surfaced area and a youth shelter.

## **AMENITY OPEN SPACE**

### **Generally**

- Detailed drawings to be provided at the earliest opportunity for approval by the District Council. Further details and /or expansion on the details shown below are available from the District Council

### **Size of Areas**

- Avoid small open space areas, generally not less than 1,500 square metres.

### **Grassed Areas**

- For ease of mowing, areas to be unobstructed, as far as possible.
- Areas to be as level, or of even gradient, as possible, avoid steeply sloping areas. Maximum Slope 1 in 6.

### **Trees & Shrubs**

- Carefully consider location of trees within the area - to be agreed with Trees Officer.
- Plant trees and shrubs in groups, not singly.
- Plant trees within a temporary fence. Fence type to reflect the nature and location and will be discussed as part of the application.
- Shrubs are only to be considered for larger areas of open space.
- Consider intensive planting of sloping area.
- Plant native species.
- Not to be planted so as to obscure sight lines when mature.
- Not to be planted so as to obscure street lighting when mature.
- Not to be planted so as to overhang paths or gardens when mature.

### **Paths**

- Surface treatment of paths through these areas should be the subject of early consultation.

### **Street Furniture**

- Litter/dog bins to be located on points of access to site, but sited away from dwellings.

### **Equipment**

- No play or other equipment to be erected on land designated public open space.

**Brian Bray**  
**Principal Technical Officer**

## **COUNTRYSIDE SITES**

- Some areas of residential development may incorporate areas of open space, which are best managed as more natural sites.
- A management plan is to be provided by the developer to cover the first 15 years of the countryside site. This should include a map of the site indicating proposed enhancements.
- A detailed ecological study of the site should be researched, to highlight important species, such as 'Dorset notables' 'Red data species' and species and habitats included in the 'Dorset Biodiversity Action Plan'.
- The management plan should aim to promote and enhance:
  - \* Wildlife value (with reference to the Dorset Biodiversity Action Plan)
  - \* Public access (including the less able)
  - \*Landscape value
  - \*Sustainability
- Countryside site infrastructure such as trees, fencing, gates, seating and habitat improvement is to be provided by the developer.

### **Trees**

- Trees should be of native stock in good condition and be a suitable species for the soil type and location. Adequate weed suppression should be provided to aid survival, and first year establishment.
- Particular consideration should be made to the landscape value that trees can provide in screening roads and buildings.

### **Grassland**

- Grassland is an area where considerable gains in biodiversity can often be made. (This of course depends upon the existing quality of the grassland). The management plan should indicate its current wildlife value and how it is to be maintained or improved.
- Areas of 'wetland' are to be encouraged and referenced in the management plan.

## **Seating**

- Seating should only be provided where appropriate. It should be aesthetically suitable to the surroundings and be sustainably sourced.

## **Access**

- Access to the Countryside Site is of high importance. Especially for the less able, e.g. parents with prams and older people. Surfacing of paths should be considered to improve access while not detracting from the landscape quality. Site furniture should encourage access by all user groups, while preventing access to unauthorised vehicles, such as cars, motorbikes and travellers.

The management plan is to be accepted by NDDC before it is implemented.

**Giles Nicholson**  
**Senior Countryside Ranger**

## **SUSTAINABLE URBAN DRAINAGE SYSTEM**

- Please discuss any proposals for SUDS at an early stage with Development Control and Technical Services Officers.

## **PROVISION FOR PUBLIC ART WITHIN AREAS FOR AMENITY**

There are significant opportunities to develop public art within amenity areas, which can add value to compulsory provisions such as furniture and lighting. In addition, it can contribute to sense of place, add interest to a site, and potentially can add to feelings of community ownership.

The work or contribution is likely to be commissioned and created specifically for the development. In many cases it will be developed in collaboration with the architect or designer and in consultation with the users of the site. The approach adopted will vary from scheme to scheme depending on its nature, design, scale and end use. The council's preference is for public art to be fully integrated into development proposals.

The options include:

- An integrated or functional element (e.g. lighting, landscape, floor designs and signage)
- A temporary work such as performance or installation
- A 'Landmark' work by an artist (e.g. sculptor, painting etc)

The work should be appropriate to the scheme and its location, both in terms of public usage and design context. The work should be visible by, and accessible to, the public and should remain on site permanently or for an agreed period of time.

### **Considerations**

- Appropriateness to public usage and design context
- Demonstration of good practice with particular reference to project management and equal opportunities
- Linked education programmes
- Care and maintenance costs

The key to a successful public art project is to plan for the involvement of artists at the earliest opportunity in the development process, ensuring both that any costs are considered as part of the process and that alternatives to a financial contribution are fully explored.

In submitting details for outline planning permission, the following information will be required:

- Outline proposal for the involvement of artists
- Demonstration of how the scheme will contribute to the quality of the environment and the community
- Outline of the intended procurement process
- Budget allocation
- Proposals for future care and maintenance



## **COMMUTED SUMS**

- Commuted sums will include:
  - 1) Two whole life replacements within 20 years.
  - 2) Health and Safety inspections
  - 3) Maintenance costs
- Costings will be provided on each individual site, based on the size of the facility and the equipment provided.
- The following factors will be taken into consideration in assessing commuted sums.
  - 1) The estimated annual cost of maintenance
  - 2) An assumed rate of inflation
  - 3) An assumed discount rate
  - 4) The number of years for which the authority requires the commuted sum, normally 20 years.

## **PROCEDURES**

- 1) The Development Control Team will ensure this document is provided at the earliest possible stage for developers.
- 2) Pre application discussions with developers should include use of this paper for advice. It will ensure that the layout and design of sites takes children's play into consideration from the start. This includes sites of less than 15 units
- 3) The Development Control Officer will discuss the proposal at the earliest opportunity (prior to the application if pre application discussions are being held) with the Policy Manager, Conservation and Design. He will ensure that the correct people are then involved i.e. Technical Services, Countryside Rangers, Planning Policy, Anti-Social Behaviour Officer, the Environment Agency and Sports Development Officer, depending on the proposals. The appropriate town or parish council will also be contacted.
- 4) This paper will be sent to the applicant when an application has been received on sites over 15 units or on any sites where open space is proposed.
- 5) Once the application is made, again the Policy Manager, Conservation and Design will be consulted for referring on to the correct section.
- 6) Discussions on the Section 106 agreement will also be channelled this way.
- 7) The Section 106 agreement will include details of when the play area will be provided, i.e. at a precise stage of construction of the site. Play areas and open space will be clearly shown on the plans.

- 8) Following a decision to grant planning permission, the Section 106 Agreement will be prepared on the basis that the commuted sum will normally be paid and the associated land and equipment will be complete and transferred to the Council or Town or Parish Council prior to the first occupation of any adjacent dwelling.
- 9) After construction of the play area or laying out of the open space including planting, a joint inspection with the developer will be carried out and any defects are to be rectified by the developer within one month of the inspection. Once the defects are resolved to the satisfaction of the relevant Council the play area or open space will be deemed to be completed and the relevant Council will provide the developer with a certificate to this effect. The transfer will not take place until the certificate has been issued.
- 10) On completion of the land transfer and receipt of the commuted sum, the relevant Council will adopt the play area or open space, but subject to a Defect Correction Period of twelve months which will be deemed to cover material defects and poor workmanship only. The Defect Correction Period will not be expected to cover misuse of equipment or any form of vandalism.
- 11) When the land is finalised, the developer is to hand over an inventory of all the play area equipment together with all maintenance certificates. The name of the manufacturer of the equipment must be clearly stated together with contact details to enable any spare parts to be obtained, which may be required in future for maintenance purposes.
- 12) All the above points will be incorporated in the Section 106 Agreement/ Planning Condition that shall make reference to this procedure.
- 13) Failure to comply with the Section 106 Agreement/Planning Condition will result in the District Council taking enforcement action wherever possible, to ensure compliance.

### **Further Advice to Developers**

Site sales plans should clearly show play areas, so that purchasers can make decisions accordingly. Sales staff must also be aware of the location of play areas.

## Contact Names

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Development Control - contact the Duty Officer  
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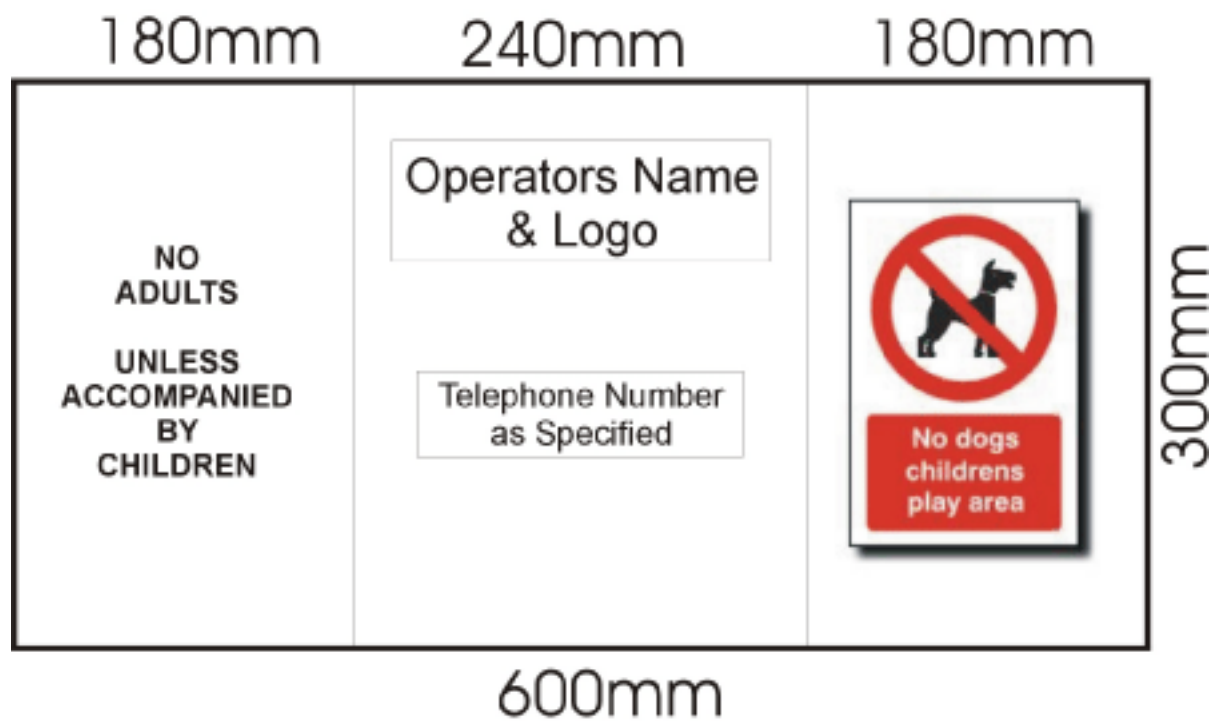
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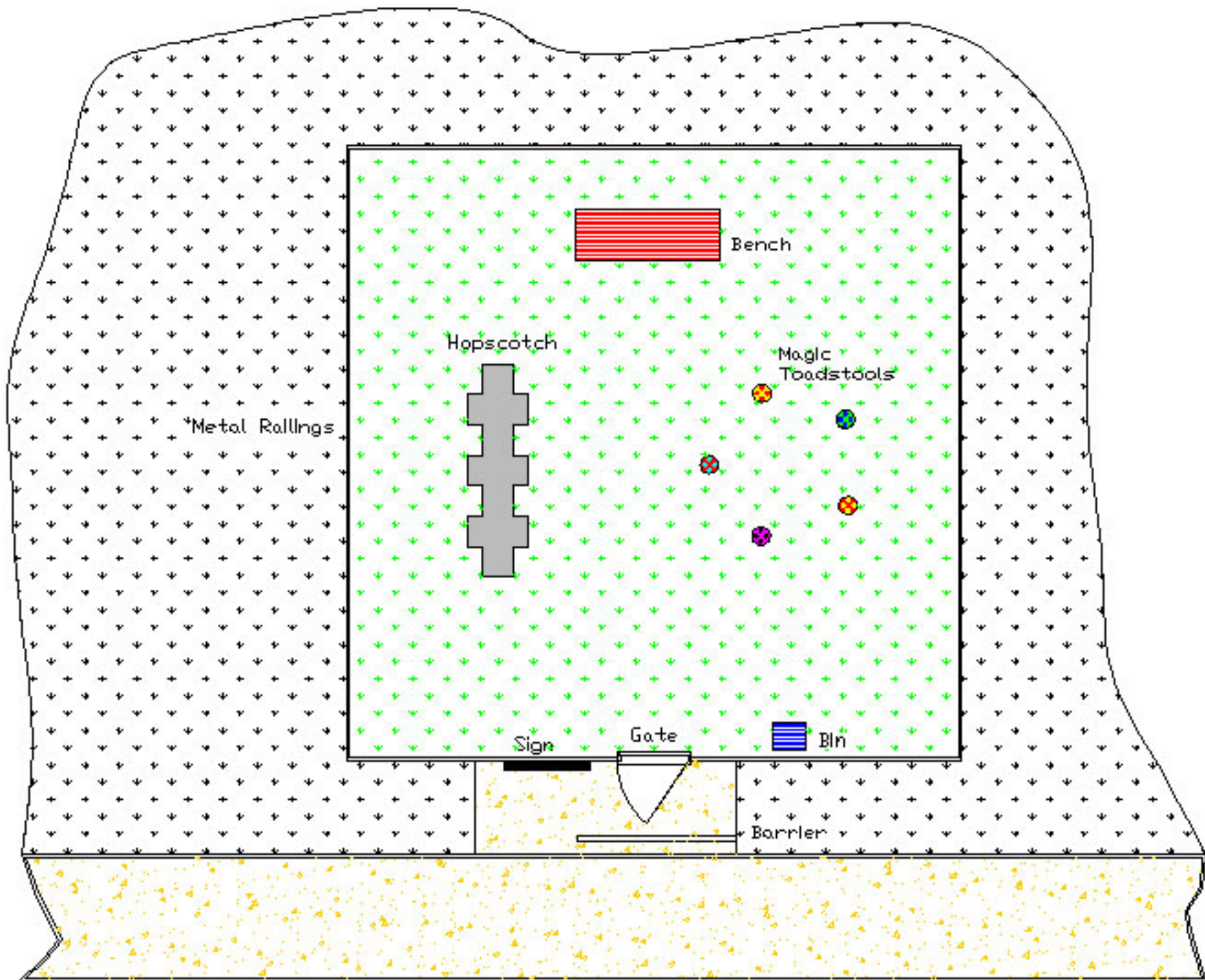
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## LAP & LEAP Sign Details

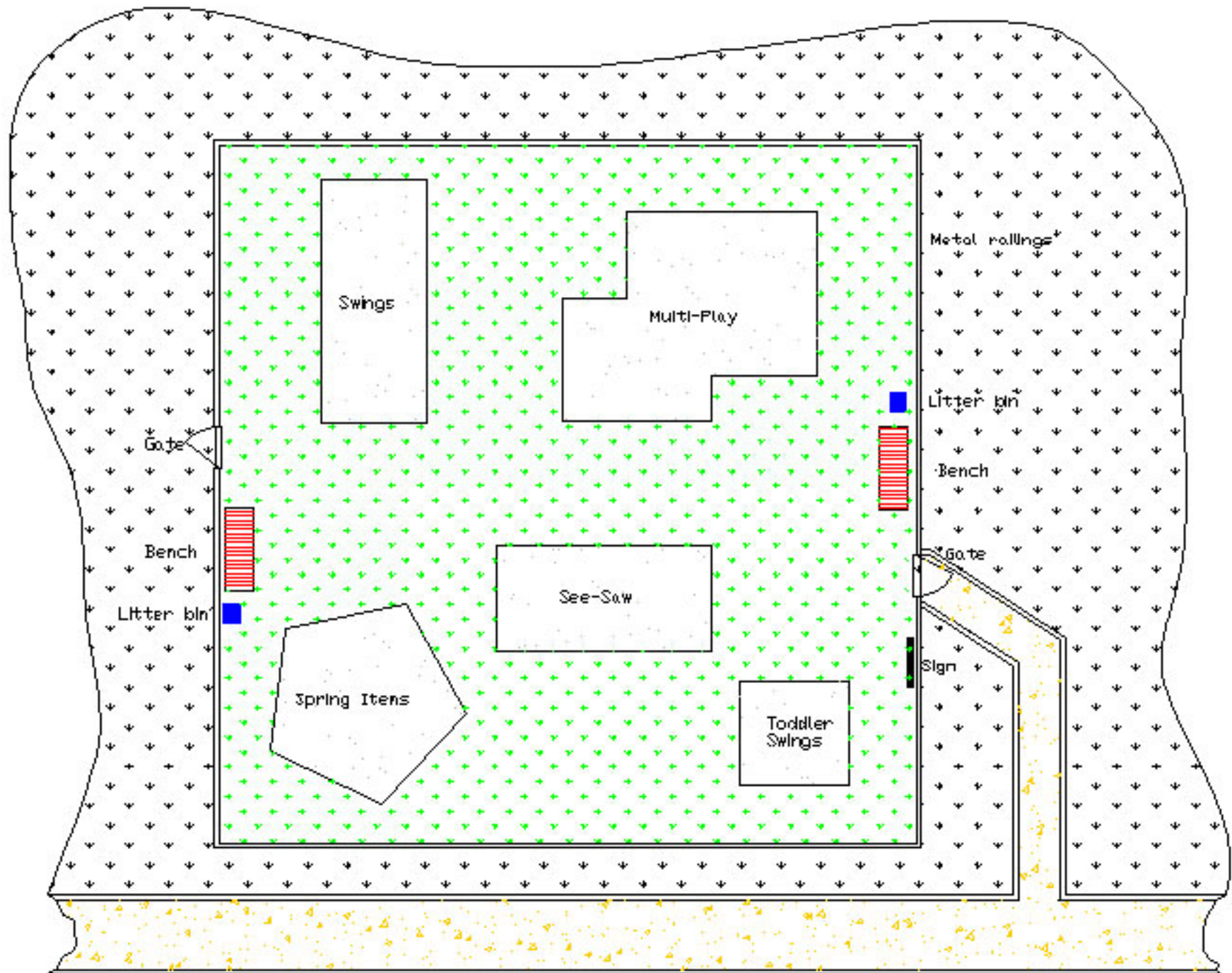


Note: NDDC logo available in electronic format



LAP Typical Layout, Size 10m x 10m





LEAP Typical Layout, Size 20m x 20m

# **NORTH DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **COMMUTED SUMS FOR PLAY AREAS AND OPEN SPACES**

North Dorset District Council requires commuted sums for the maintenance of play areas, amenity areas and countryside sites which result from development. The figures for play areas are based on the information contained in 'Interim Planning Guidance – The Development of Areas of Amenity Open Space, Play Areas and Commuted Sums'. The layout and specification given is for guidance only and it is likely that the site or the adopting authority may require a different design. In such cases the Council will calculate a specific commuted sum for that scheme. It is recommended that the commuted sum is discussed with the Council officers at an early stage who will involve the relevant town or parish council. The procedure and protocol for dealing with proposals for play areas is set out in the Interim Guidance is also available from the Development Control officer and on the website.

1. The sums have been based on the following factors:
  - The estimated annual cost of maintenance
  - An assumed rate of inflation
  - An assumed discount rate
  - The number of years for which the authority requires the commuted sum, normally 20 years.
  
2. Maintenance is based on :
  - Major refurbishment of play equipment during the 20 years
  - Health and Safety inspections
  - Maintenance costs – including maintenance visits, cleaning and repairs
  - Grass cutting
  - Litter picking and bin emptying
  - Health and safety inspections
  
3. Sums are normally agreed at the outline stage of a planning application. The standard figures per play area or per square metre or hectare are given.

### **LEAP**

4. Total Commuted Sum for 20 years = £114,200 minimum

### **LAP**

5. Total Commuted Sum for 20 years = £29,600 minimum

### **GRASSED AMENITY AREAS**

6. Total Commuted Sum for 20 years = £14 per square metre

NB For all other areas, officers will produce figures for individual sites.

The calculated figures will be updated on an annual basis in April with further inflation increases applied, on a part year basis, up to the date the section 106 agreement is signed.

April 2007