

**AGENDA ITEM 4: PETITIONS**

1. Lead Petitioner – Chloe Kidd

**Refurbish the Meadway Recreation Ground Play Area**

A lone swing, an empty space where the zip line used to be, and an ageing slide – this is the children’s playground at the Meadway Recreation Ground in Tilehurst. The play area desperately needs some attention. It serves five local schools – two of them for children with special needs from across our town – and is easy to reach by bus or car. Playgrounds all over Reading have had a revamp, but this part of Tilehurst has been left behind. We call upon Reading Borough Council to refurbish the dilapidated play area at the Meadway Recreation Ground in Tilehurst. Our children deserve better.

**RESPONSE** by Councillor Barnett-Ward Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture:

Thank you for your petition, and the interest it demonstrates in Reading’s play facilities.

Reading Borough Council maintains over eighty parks and open spaces, most of which have play and/or sport facilities. Reading’s Labour council believes that every child deserves a place to play and we value every one of our play areas, from flagship facilities like the recently replaced playground at Prospect Park, to small but perfectly formed local play spaces where neighbours can meet and chat while their children blow off some steam.

Outdoor play is essential for children’s health and wellbeing, so we believe that money invested in play areas is money well spent. Four years ago we reviewed the condition and accessibility of all our playgrounds, prioritising them in order of need and launching an ambitious programme of replacement and refurbishment. This programme has delivered fantastic fun, free and accessible play across the borough. Just this year we have opened improved play and/or sports facilities at Victoria Recreation Ground, Emmer Green Recreation Ground, Westfield Recreation Ground, Oxford Road Recreation Ground, and Albert Road park, with many more delivered in the previous years. All our new play facilities are designed to be used by every child in Reading, so they are not only exciting and inviting, but also accessible to children and carers with mobility support needs, and they include sensory play areas. We consult the local community on playground proposals to ensure that each facility is tailored to the children and community who will use it.

This Council has invested over £1.7m in playground equipment since April 2024, with a number of schemes already delivered and the remainder underway and expected to complete this financial year. These projects are not paid by council tax: they are typically funded using developers’ contributions obtained via Community Infrastructure Levies (often referred to as CIL). The availability of this funding therefore depends not only on whether eligible developments are being built, but also where in the Borough they are being built. Areas of Reading with more large-scale development attract more CIL funding than areas with no big building projects.

With the first wave of new playgrounds successfully delivered we are currently finalising the priorities for the next refurbishment programme, so this petition is timely. Facilities will be prioritised on condition, use and accessibility of the current equipment, but availability of funding will also be a factor. I am pleased to be able to confirm that we have already identified Meadway Play Area as a high priority for refurbishment, but I am not currently able to give any guarantees on timescale as Council officers need to identify and secure £350,000 of eligible funding before the project can go ahead.