Downhills PlayZones Engagement Report

September 2025

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1. Background

This report summarises the engagement undertaken in 2025 to inform the design and programming of the Downhills Park Playzone upgrade.

In 2023, prior to funding being awarded to Downhills PlayZone, the council held three main strands of engagement as follows:

- An on-line survey
- A number of focus group meetings both directly held to inform the approach to Playzones and drawing on extracts from relevant meetings held to inform Haringey's Parks and Greenspaces Strategy approved by the Council in July 2023.
- Professional meetings including with:
    - The Haringey Playzone Consortium,
    - Haringey sport and physical activity providers,
    - Haringey Football Forum,
    - Haringey Safer Parks for Women and Girls Network,
    - Tottenham Hotspur Foundation,
    - Streetgames,
    - Local clubs and NGB's,
    - Disability Action Haringey.

This engagement led to the selection of Downhills Park as a priority site to receive an upgrade to the existing MUGA with a proposal for astroturf and football facilities. The engagement also helped to inform the approach towards booking and programming for community use and targeted groups.

2. Engagement Overview

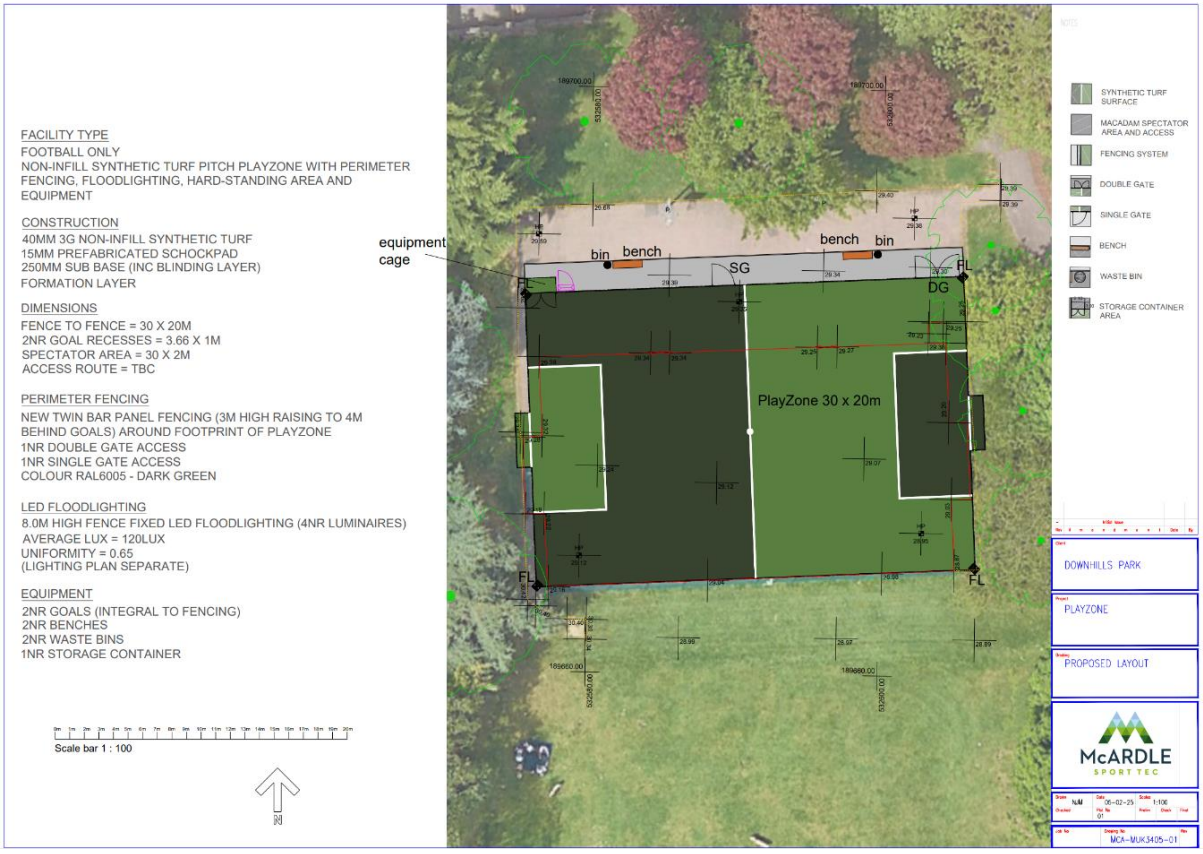
Following the award of funding for Downhills Park PlayZone, we have taken the following approach to refine the design and programming of the new PlayZone:

- Posters at every entrance to the park, in the existing MUGA, notice board and café advertising Commonplace and in person engagement sessions,
- In person engagement outside the existing MUGA facility:
    - 12/05/2025- 2:30-4:30pm,
    - 13/05/2025- 10:30-12:30pm,
- Commonplace:
    - Survey open from 2nd May until 7th July 2025,
    - Website included a survey about the playground improvement project,
- Meeting with Friends of Downhills Park,

- Door knocking/letter drop,
- Engagement with local stakeholders.

This engagement was held at the same time as the playground improvement engagement to ensure there was communication across both projects, reduced engagement fatigue and further opportunity to share plans with residents.

Design shared during engagement sessions:



3. Engagement summaries

3a. In person engagement

During two sessions, we spoke with 23 individuals outside the existing MUGA.

Key insights:

Basketball:

- Strong desire to retain basketball facilities; suggestions to add a dedicated basketball court or use existing concrete areas,
- Requests for shared use between football and basketball,
- Basketball is currently well-used and valued by young people.

Booking system:

- Some support it, especially for community groups. Others worry it will limit spontaneous use, especially for children without phones or data,
- Suggestions to test the system first, ensure free access after school (3-6pm) and a mix of free access and organised sport on weekends,
- Need for clear instructions on how to book, especially on opening day.

Safety and accessibility:

- Importance of maintaining a safe and welcoming environment, especially for women and girls,
- Requests for softer flooring, lighting, and inclusive programming,
- Concerns about environmental impact of 3G astroturf.

Programming:

- Interest in using the space for roller skating, capoeira, yoga, Pilates, volleyball, football,
- Would like organised sessions for women, mums, and youth groups,
- Would like to use in conjunction with networks like Go Mammoth or Community WhatsApp groups to help individuals play as part of wider teams.

Other requests:

Respondents mentioned wanting to create a memorial plaque for Harry Pitman, have better signage, ensure no dogs are on the court and that there are improved toilet facilities in the local café.

3b. Door knocking / Letter drop

43 households on Downhills Park Road and Wilmont Road received letters as neighbours closest to the proposed changes with potential to be most affected by the development. 31 households were visited with 5 provided feedback in person and the remaining households invited to provide feedback online.



Parks & Leisure

Haringey LONDON

Date: June 2025

Your ref: DownhillsPlayZones

Dear Sir or Madam,

Because you are a very close neighbour to this proposed facility, I am writing to inform you about consultation being undertaken to upgrade the current MUGA facilities in Downhills Park.

Following an earlier consultation in 2023, where Downhills Park was prioritised along with three other sites for this purpose, the council have been successful in bidding for £230,000 funding through the Premier League, The FA and Government's Football Foundation PlayZone Programme to build a new PlayZone on the existing MUGA in Downhills Park. The proposal is for the PlayZone to be a small-sided artificial turf pitch for football, although it can be booked for any activity. The external basketball court will remain but will be reduced in size.

The PlayZone design has seating for spectators placed outside the court, alongside bins and a small cage to keep equipment. There will be new lighting columns installed along the path, that connects to Pendennis Road entrance to provide safe access to and from the new facility. Year-round use will be supported, subject to planning permission, by floodlights, which will only be activated during booked sessions and will cease by 9pm. Modern lighting designs mean that there will be very little in the way of light-spill beyond the boundary of the PlayZone.

The council has many outdoor sporting and play facilities such as this across the borough and it is important to note that very few complaints are ever received because of noise or nuisance.

The Football Foundation PlayZone Programme is aimed at tackling inequalities and enhancing access to sport for groups facing the greatest inequalities. PlayZones will incorporate Smart Access which will include an online booking system and a keypad entry system. The PlayZone will be free to use the vast majority of the time. For regular block bookers and any commercial use, there are proposed fees, however these bookings will be kept to a minimum to ensure easy access to the community.

If you haven't had an opportunity to give your feedback on the proposal, our online survey will be available until 30th June 2025. Please visit downhillspark.commonplace.is or scan the QR code below.

For any further queries please email parkprojects@haringey.gov.uk

With kind regards

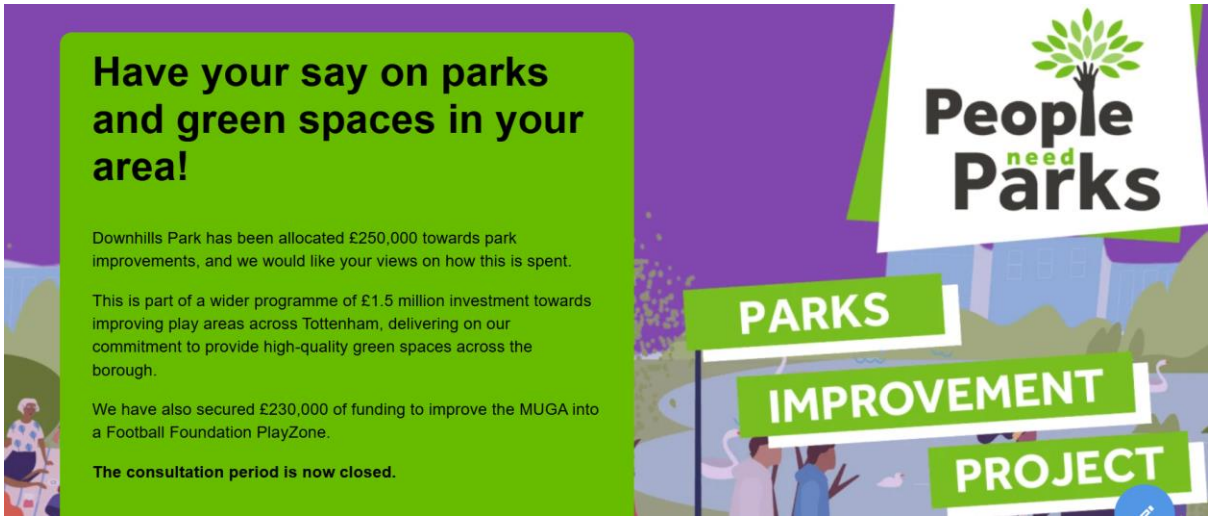
David Theakston
Principal Parks Development Manager

Key insights:

- Basketball is highly valued: Many residents prefer to keep basketball facilities due to frequent informal use,
- Football concerns: Women especially find football intimidating and overly competitive,
- Preference for spontaneous play: Residents want free access after school (4–5:30pm) without needing to book,
- Flood lighting concerns: Some nearby residents with young children are worried about lighting but are reassured by booking-based activation and non-spill lighting.

3c. Commonplace survey online

159 responses to our online survey, with the majority of respondents living in the area (76%) and in the age range 30-49 (83%).



Key insights:

Community sentiment:

- The community values Downhills Park as a flexible, inclusive space for spontaneous play and social interaction,
- While most support improvements, many oppose changes that restrict access, reduce basketball facilities, or introduce environmental and social disruptions,
- There is a strong call for preserving the park's informal character and ensuring any upgrades serve all residents equitably.

Sports and activities:

- The most requested activities are basketball, football, netball, yoga and personal training. Roller skating, skipping, learning to ride a bicycle and post-natal classes were activities also mentioned,
- There is strong advocacy for maintaining or expanding the court space due to high demand and limited alternatives for basketball provision.

Design layout:

Many respondents feel the benches and bins obstruct the basketball area and have suggested:

- Moving them to grassy areas and under trees,
- Avoid placing them directly on play surfaces,
- Add more bins, especially near entrances and the café. Add more dog bins.

Some support additional gates for safety and convenience, others oppose changes, preferring the current layout.

Booking system and programming:

There is a strong opposition to a booking-only model as it is seen as exclusionary, especially for children and those without internet access. There is concern that this reduces spontaneous and community-led play and may lead to eventual monetisation. The preferred approach is:

- Hybrid model with open-access hours,
- Reserved slots for community groups, especially during school hours,
- Suggested free use timeslots are weekdays: 3–6pm (after school) and weekends from 1pm onwards.

Environmental and community impact:

- There is concern about the effect of floodlighting on wildlife and residents,
- Astroturf has been criticised for its environmental harm and reduced versatility,
- Anticipated congestion due to increased demand, particularly with the introduction of the low traffic neighbourhood,
- Requests for long-term maintenance and better use of existing spaces,
- Requests for path lighting in the park.

3d. Friends of Downhills and Ward Councillor engagement

Key insights:

- Feel the condition of the court is good and development may not be necessary,
- Hugely concerned about reducing basketball provision,
- Feel the placement of bins and benches needs to be amended as currently encroaches upon external basketball court,
- Concerned about inclusion of bins, as something that could increase incidents of litter across the park,
- Seeking clarification on joining up lighting between tennis courts and café.

3e. Park View School Engagement

Participants: 15 students (ages 11–16) from Year Council and Student Leadership Partners.

Key insights:

- Students want to use the facility for roller skating, football, basketball, netball, and socialising,
- Suggested improvements: booking signage, competitions, and school use.

3f. Meetings with local stakeholders

- Disability Action Haringey state that a booking system is essential to meeting their users' needs,
- Tottenham Hotspurs (TH)
    - Target groups similar between PlayZone programme/Tottenham Hotspurs,
    - Have held heritage walks in Downhills for carers and those in care,

- TH have specialist officers in accessible sport and youth and community,
- Outdoor access can be a barrier for Women and Girls groups so sessions are often run indoors but would like to work together on Women and Girls engagement. School age girls want to use space during non-term time,
- TH run huddle sessions which is similar to touch rugby,
- Coaching and facilitation in kind for facility use. Coaching could include:
  - Premier League Kicks programme – ask parents to sign up before with space for drops in,
  - Shape Up – Women's and men's only programme.
- Flexibility is useful for community when booking.

4. Conclusions and next steps

1. Following clear feedback, we have amended the surfacing from an artificial turf pitch for football to a **macadam for football, netball and basketball to ensure basketball provision remains**, alongside supporting women and girls access to netball and offering a multi-purpose surface for notable uses such as fitness classes.

2. We have explored the option of extending the court south to accommodate 3v3 basketball outside of the PlayZone (alongside football-basketball-netball inside the PlayZone), but this is not feasible within the budget envelope. We will keep the external basketball ball hoops in place, but this court will be reduced in size, as per the original proposal. This will keep the opportunity for warming up or shooting practice.

3. The location of the two benches and bin have been placed at the edges of the external court, rather than interfering with play by being placed in the middle. External cycle parking will be kept and relocated on site.

4. The booking system and programme will respond to community desire for mixed open access and booked sessions. The recommendation for open access is 3-6pm on weekdays and 11-4pm at weekends and school holidays. Programmed sessions will look to include sessions for women, mothers and youth groups. This system will be managed by Haringey Council and can be further refined based on testing and feedback.

5. Signage with clear instructions on how to book will be provided at the facility next to the entrance gate.

6. Flood lighting will only be activated during booked sessions, and floodlighting will not extend beyond 9pm. Permission for the floodlighting will be considered as part of the planning application and conditions will be imposed restricting operational times to 9pm. This would be the same operational times as we have in other parks. It also allows us to maintain a balance between sports usage and biodiversity. Modern LED floodlights give direct lighting to a court with minimal spill to the surrounding area.

7. Lighting is still planned between the Keston Road entrance and tennis court facility/café when funding is available.

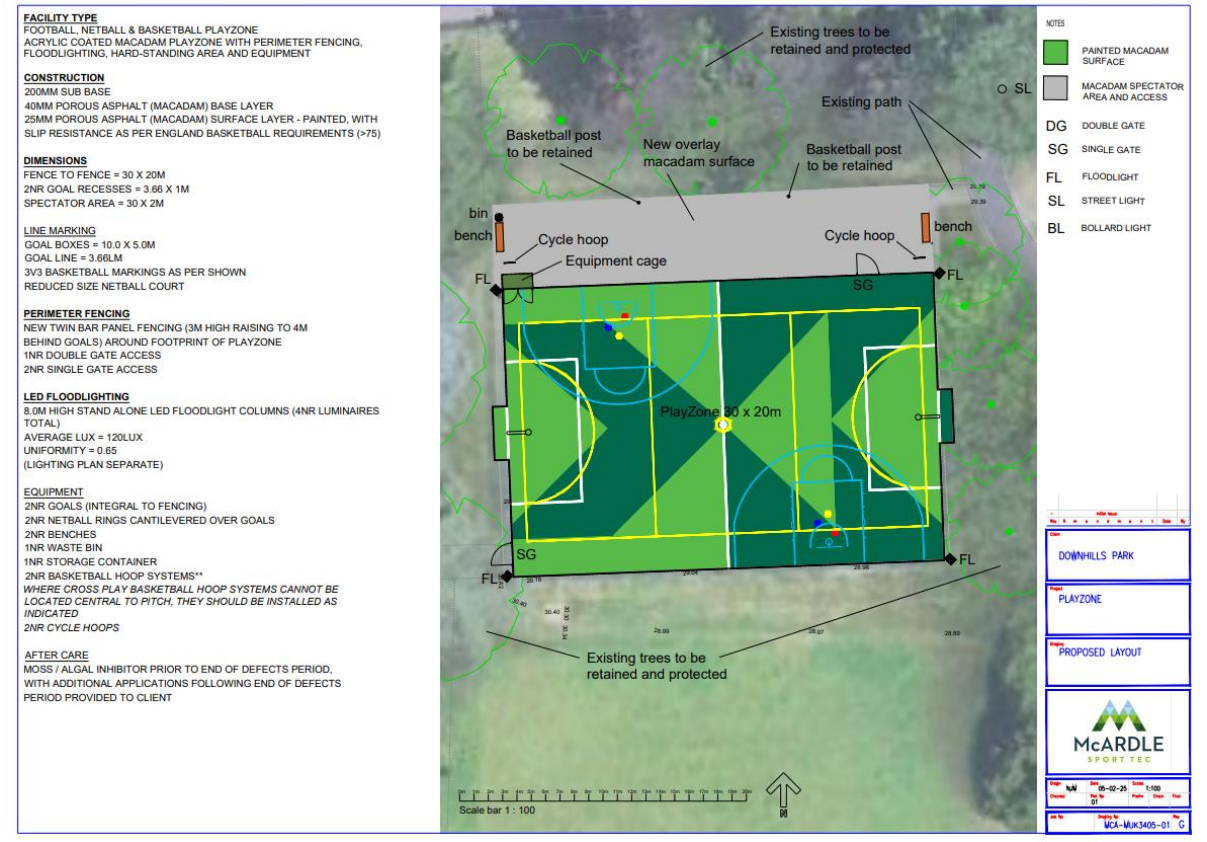
8. An ecological survey has been conducted to assess the current ecological state, key ecological constraints and opportunities associated with the project and possible mitigation requirements. These have informed both the floodlighting and pathway lighting design.

9. The new borough wide Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) determines that dogs cannot go into multi use games areas, unless an individual is registered as a blind person, has a disability that affects mobility, coordination or use of hands or has a registered assistance dog. If an individual does not follow the PSPO they may be liable for a £100 fixed penalty notice fine.

10. The council are working towards a memorial plaque for Harry Pitman.

11. Project updates and timelines will be shared on Commonplace and to local stakeholders for all Downhills Park developments.

The developed PlayZone design below highlights the change of surfacing to macadam and relocated benches and bin.



We would like to acknowledge the importance of everyone that has contributed their thoughts and concerns in order to help refine the design and programme of the new PlayZone. This has been hugely valuable to make meaningful amendments based on community need, aspiration and concern.