PlayZone Q&A for Belmont Recreation Ground

1. Why is Belmont Rec getting a PlayZone?

In July 2023 the council agreed its 15-year Parks and Greenspaces Strategy following two years of co-production and borough wide consultation. This strategy set out three key aims to be pursued. The aims focused on improving: Inclusion and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainability and a Quality Service.

The strategy includes an asset management plan which has a recommendation to "explore additional hard court sporting facilities to include in parks either directly or in partnership with others". Furthermore, the extensive community engagement drawn together under the Wood Green Voices project identified ten priorities for improving the Wood Green area which included a priority to "improve the offer of sport and leisure facilities".

In addition, we know that the population in Haringey is predicted to grow by 6.3% between 2021-2031 and that demand for sports like football and basketball is growing in the borough (Outdoor Sports & Play Facilities Framework 2016-2026). It also states that the demand for use of MUGAs across Haringey will only increase as the population grows. Latent demand for the following sports was identified as part of the Supply and Demand Analysis for MUGA's:

- Football: Latent demand of 3,009 people wanting to do more.
- Basketball: Latent demand of 1,102 people wanting to do more.
- Netball: Latent demand of 866 people wanting to do more.

The council's Physical Activity and Sport Strategy includes an Outdoor Sports and Play Facilities Framework which identities the forward plan of parks and sports and play facilities to be improved. This plan of works is funding-dependent and recognises that sites may come forward at different times, when external funding becomes available. The borough has a significant issue with both overweight and obese children (38% of year six children), we therefore need to do more to get our children off their screens and moving more.

Belmont Recreation Ground, at a little over three hectares in size, is considered a local park under the Mayor of London's typology of parks and would be expected to serve a catchment area of less than 5 mins walking time. Therefore, whilst there are facilities at Lordship Recreation Ground, Ducketts Common and Downhills Park, those facilities do not fulfil this catchment and are 10-15 mins walk away from Belmont Recreation Ground.

The launch of the Football Foundation PlayZone programme presented a new and unexpected funding opportunity for the council to consider in 2022. The Football

Foundation set out clear criteria for expected outcomes of the investment including increased physical activity levels in priority groups using PlayZones, and behaviour change leading to improved and sustained long-term physical activity habit.

Having assessed these criteria and outcomes the Football Foundation has stipulated; the council considered the PlayZone investment is a good fit with its Parks and Greenspaces Strategy aims as it would provide a mixture of both new and refurbished facilities across the Borough. The council was required to set up a consortium of interested parties to represent the Borough, and regular updates were provided to the Friends of Parks Forum and the Cabinet Member. Following the initial work by the consortium, a community engagement exercise was conducted, and a number of locations were voted upon. Belmont Recreation Ground featured third in the list of sixteen locations as a site where the consultees wanted to see new or refurbished provision to be made.

On the back of that community engagement, the council applied to the Football Foundation for grant funding for five sites to be supported in Haringey. Because of other project timelines the new PlayZone at Wood Green Common was fast-tracked and is now completed. Having received confirmation that the Football Foundation offered a grant; this was not initially accepted as the council needed to provide match funding which it did not have. Therefore, the council chose to prioritise the refurbishment at Bruce Castle and Downhills Park as match funding was available through Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy. However, following the reprioritisation of part of the Down Lane Park budget, the council was able to fund a programme of play area improvements and to provide the match funding needed for the Belmont PlayZone. This new funding was announced in February 2025 and in effect confirmed the provision of a MUGA in Belmont Recreation Ground.

2. I'm new to this project - what have I missed?

Please see an outline of the Belmont Recreation Ground improvement project to date:

- Aug 22 – The Football Foundation launched their new Playzone Funding Scheme.
- Nov 22 - An original masterplan led by The Friends of Belmont Rec was produced by Merrett Houmøller Architects.
- Nov 22 – The council submitted an expression of interest for the PlayZone Funding Scheme.
- Spring/Summer 23 – The Friends of Belmont Rec produced an engagement survey.
- June 23 – A project manager was appointed to oversee the PlayZone engagement and develop the potential list of sites across Haringey.

- Sep 23 – An initial list of nine parks sites was identified by the Parks and Leisure Service, which included Belmont Recreation Ground.
- Autumn 23 - The Friends of Belmont Rec produced an engagement report.
- Nov 23 – Public consultation commenced and as a result Belmont Recreation Ground was identified as the third most popular site to those responding in favour of a PlayZone.
- Dec 23 - A second draft of the masterplan was produced by Merrett Houmøller Architects. This masterplan located the PlayZone within the picnic area.
- Jan 24 – The council, based on the availability of match funding, made an application for four of the park sites (this is in addition to progressing Wood Green Common as a standalone scheme).
- May 24 – Confirmation was received that the council had been offered grants for the four sites it submitted.
- Jan 25 – Match funding for Belmont Recreation Ground Playzone was identified as part of a wider funding reallocation to the Tottenham Parks Programme.
- Jan 25 – A project manager was appointed to oversee the PlayZone development and masterplan development/delivery.
- Jan-March 25 – Council led tree planting in Belmont Rec.
- Feb 25 – A public announcement was made for £1.5m investment through the Tottenham Parks Programme which included proceeding with the Belmont Playzone.
- March 25 – The PlayZone grant was accepted for Belmont and the other three PlayZone sites. The first phase of council led engagement commenced on Belmont Rec Masterplan and PlayZone development.
- August 25 – Following community feedback, a PlayZone location appraisal was undertaken and ecological surveys leading to consideration and assesssment of other locations.
- Sept 25 – Engagement report produced and 5 project priorities for Belmont established.
- Oct 25 – The second phase of council led engagement commenced. This was a public vote offering three alternative locations for the PlayZone in Belmont Rec.
- Dec 25 - Third draft of masterplan to be produced by Merrett Houmøller Architects showing the new location of the PlayZone in line with the outcome of the public vote.

3. **Why is there a booking system? How will this operate?**

Existing research shows that MUGA's use can often be dominated by young men playing football or basketball. Having bookable facilities prevents the problem of one group of people's usage and not letting others use it.

Discussions with Disability Action Haringey show that having a booking system is seen as a way to give disabled users a better chance of using these facilities.

A booking system not only allows use by disabled groups, but also by other target groups such as women and girls groups, older people, and ethnic minority groups through specially programmed activity.

National sports governing bodies are in agreement that booking systems such as this are a critical factor in getting people who would not otherwise partake in exercise into healthier lifestyles.

Consequently, having gate controls and a booking system is a requirement from the Football Foundation covering all PlayZones in the UK. Although there will be a booking system in place, access to PlayZones will be free to use in all but a handful of situations (e.g. when booked for commercial use).

Having heard that a balance of open access and booked slots is preferrable, we will be ensuring time after school and on weekends remains open to all, allowing us to achieve both informal and structured play.

4. What are the hours of operation?

From community engagement, we have amended the PlayZone hours of operation to 9am-9pm.

5. How will wildlife be protected and ecology enhanced as part of this development?

The site selected for the playzone is on short mown amenity grassland. Amenity grassland is defined as having 'very low biodiversity value'. This is due to its intensive management, low species diversity, and limited habitat structure.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and bat survey has been conducted in August to assess the current ecological state, key ecological constraints and opportunities associated with the project, possible mitigation requirements and any detailed further surveys required. Lighting is currently being designed to ensure wildlife present on site such as bats are not impacted by the development.

As part of the planning permission process that Council will need to demonstrate how the scheme improves biodiversity within the area that the Playzone will be created. In England, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is mandatory under Schedule 7A

of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021).

BNG is an approach to development that makes sure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before the development. Developers must deliver a BNG of 10%. Therefore, the proposed scheme that is submitted to the Planning Department will be required to demonstrate how the 10% net gain in biodiversity is to be achieved which is likely to be through further tree planting, meadow creation and hedge planting for example.

In addition to this, through engagement held this year, five project priorities have been established for Belmont Recreation Ground including the ambition to 'improve biodiversity'. Ecological enhancements and biodiversity gain will be achieved across the coming years through meadow creation, tree planting, planted swales, relaxed mowing and habitat creation, subject to funding being available.

6. Why isn't there provision for a toilet?

The Council manages 150 parks and greenspaces across the borough. Only 13 of these have toilet provision within them. In each case they are associated with and managed by the café operators on those sites. MUGA's will have a very local catchment area and therefore we would expect anyone using the MUGA to be within walking distance of their home and therefore should be able to quickly return home if they need a toilet. There are many examples of parks and greenspaces that have, MUGA's, Tennis Courts, Basketball Courts, and Netball Courts that do not have toilet provision within the park. Similarly, there are many MUGA's on housing sites where there is no toilet provision. Therefore, having toilet provision in a park or greenspace is not a pre-requisite for a new sports court. To date we are not aware of any reports of public urination because of these types of facilities.

Adding a PlayZone will not significantly increase the risk of public urination beyond current levels. Public urination is an offence under the council's Public Spaces Protection Orders and therefore people caught urinating can be issues a fixed penalty notice.

7. How close will it be to my house?

We recognise that introducing a new facility like this will lead to concerns about the proximity of the new facility to people's homes. That is why we ensure that all our planning is in line with the relevant guidance for each type of facility. Sport England guidance PART 1 indicates that it is advisable to locate a MUGA (especially floodlit ones) at least 12m, and ideally at least 30m from other residences.

We will ensure that this new facility is at least 30m from any residence. Where we can, we will aim to ensure that the facility is physically as far away as possible from housing on the periphery of the park.

Through the PlayZone location appraisal, we have ensured that a maximum distance away from housing has been achieved and the final location vote ensures a greater distance than 30m.

8. Will noise be an issue?

By following the Sport England guidance mentioned above, any noise interference to existing properties should be minimised. Whilst we appreciate that noise from this type of facility may be of concern, complaints about noise from MUGA's are very limited in comparison with other issues park users and residents raise with the Council. The council's Corporate Feedback Team have confirmed that, since April 2024, they have only received one formal Member Enquiry, and no formal complaints, about issues of noise from a sports court in Haringey.

The council's Business & Systems Development Team have also confirmed that since January 2020 there have been no noise complaints relating to this type of facility via the Confirm system.

We did have one previous issue of people playing music within a sports court but that was a few years ago. On that occasion because of the booking system we were able to communicate directly with the users and ask them to reduce the volume of the music and no further complaints were received.

9. Will the facility have lighting?

Floodlighting is a requirement of the PlayZone funding and will help to ensure year-round access, particularly in winter months. Lighting has been a key request by women and girls in particular and our proposals will include new street lighting to and from the Playzone to ensure safe access and egress.

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. Pathway lighting will be on until 9:30pm, allowing sufficient time for PlayZone users to exit the park.

Below is an image of a drone shot highlighting the light spill from a similar PlayZone.



10. Will the PlayZone increase anti-social behaviour?

The council operates around 50 other hard-court areas across parks and has done for many years. It isn't the council's experience that these attract anti-social behaviour as a consequence of installing hard court provisions. In fact, many of the courts have a positive impact of providing new diversionary activities which reduce the risk of ASB. This is further supported by the work of the councils Sporting Partner Organisations that will run activation activities which can over time lead to young people gaining coaching and leadership qualifications.