

Planning Statement

Prospect Park New Children's Playground Relocation



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1. Introduction

This Planning Statement is submitted in support of a planning application for a new relocated playground based at Prospect Park Pavilion, Liebenrood Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG30 2ND.

This Planning Statement assesses the proposals against the policies in the Development Plan and other material considerations and should be read in conjunction with the other supporting planning documents.

2. The site and current playground

Prospect Park is a 46hectare grade II registered historic park, laid out in the 19th Century and includes an 18th Century grade II registered country house, 'the Mansion House' set on the hill overlooking the park. In 1902 the Reading Corporation (now Reading Borough Council) acquired the park and developed it as a public park. The park now comprises a bowls green, grass sports pitches, tennis courts, multi-use games / 5aside courts, a children's play area, a wooded area and informal park land. A mid-1970's single storey brick pavilion with an 85space car park is located approximately 180m along the main vehicle access road from Liebenrood Road. The Mansion House screened by trees is a further 300m along the access road.

The current children's playground is 1500m² and located behind the 5G football pitches.

The existing children's playground lies c. 70m to the northwest of the site. The site is screened from the main house by topography, intervening vegetation and existing sports facilities. It has a mature oak in the current area. In 2019 a healthy mature oak tree fell just outside the area due to underground springs eroding the soil underneath. The toddler and junior play equipment is at the end of its viable use and the safety surface is a mixture of sand and mulch. The current children's playground offers limited access both to the area and equipment for children with disabilities.

2. Proposals

The proposed scheme is for the relocation of the existing children's playground from their current location to a new site located to the northeast of the pavilion. The proposed new site location is preferred for several reasons

- Proximity to car parking, which is convenient for small children and people with mobility problems
- Proximity to the public toilet
- Proximity to a tarmac footpath, which makes access easy for people with mobility issues
- Proximity to the Prospect Parks Sports pavilion, for which the Council is seeking a new leisure use
- Dry ground: this part of the park does not get boggy from underground springs or pooling water
- Trees: this location presents no significant tree-related problems
- Screening: over time, as the new avenue matures, there will be some screening from the main driveway
- Availability: much of the rest of the park is used, at least part of the year, for football, car boot sales, fun fairs, or temporary events car parking; the preferred new location is not ever used for any of these functions
- Safety: the site is well overlooked and, while it is near to the main driveway (which has a 20mph speed limit), it is further from busy roads
- Profile: it is easy to find

The work will comprise: the reinstatement of the existing children's playground to an informal open space; retention of all existing trees, installation of a 1m high fence, safety surface and new play equipment within the application site; and linking paths to existing pathways.

A webpage has been set up to provide details on the scheme proposals and can be found at <https://www.reading.gov.uk/leisure/proposals-for-a-new-playground-at-prospect-park/>

4. Planning history and pre-application advice

Relevant planning history:

27/12/1991 / 91660 Extension to Bowls club to provide extended changing rooms and sitting area - permitted.
03/06/1993: 930142 Application to vary condition 10 of 90/0050/OA so a play area is not provided - application refused.

27/02/1995: 950069 Extension to paved area outside pavilion - permitted.

24/05/2007: 070361 Demolition of existing public toilet and new toilet erected in another location - permitted.

29/08/2009: 090271 Retrospective minor amendment to 07/00166/REG3 - agreed.

Pre-application advice

The Council requested pre-application planning advice from the Local Planning Authority and received comments from the Berkshire Gardens Trust relating to the Heritage status of the Park. This has been answered within the Heritage Statement detailed within this report.

Community engagement

Once the new children's playground location has been agreed. The scheme will then be offered for tender to specialist playground supplier companies. This will be a design and installation tender with an emphasis on a design that is accessible to children of all abilities.

The successful tender designs will then go through a consultation process that will include the Public and the Access Disability working Group as part of the selection process. This is an established and standard process of consultation with local residents and will follow once proposed detailed designs are known.

A webpage has been set up to provide more details on the scheme proposals <https://www.reading.gov.uk/leisure/proposals-for-a-new-playground-at-prospect-park/>

5. Planning policy context

Introduction

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Reading Borough Council's Local Plan was adopted in 2019 and has 'Development Plan' status.

The National Planning Policy Framework is also a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In making decisions on planning applications: *"Local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible. Local planning authorities should work proactively with applicants to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area."*

6. Proposal Assessment

As mentioned previously the application concerns the master landscape plan for the playing fields and this is considered against the following:

- Heritage and Open Space impact
- Transport
- Ecology
- Trees
- Flood risk
- Archaeology

Heritage and Open Space Impact

In accordance with the requirements of paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) this statement describes the significance of the heritage assets affected by the proposals and provides an assessment of their impacts on that significance. The assessment methodology is in accordance with Historic England's Conservation Principles (2008), the Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (2017) and Advice Note 12 Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets (2019).

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the Local Planning Authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving (i.e. not harming) listed buildings and their settings. Listed buildings and Registered Parks are termed 'designated heritage assets' (NPPF glossary) and paragraph 189 requires the applicant to establish the significance of any assets affected by proposals. Paragraphs 193 to 196 deal with impacts on heritage assets and requires the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to give great weight to an asset's conservation. Any harm must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal but requires 'clear and convincing' justification.

Proposals that preserve elements of setting that make a positive contribution to an asset or better reveal its significance should be treated favourably (paragraph 200) and loss of elements which contribute positively should be treated as harmful. Significance is defined in the NPPF as 'The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.'

Relevant local planning policies are contained in the Reading Borough Local Plan - adopted November 2019. This Heritage Statement highlights the importance of the heritage of Prospect Park as one of the country houses which once surrounded Reading.

The following policies are relevant to this planning application:

- EN1 - Protection and enhancement of the historic environment.
- EN4 - Locally important heritage assets.
- EN6 - New development in a historic context.
- EN7 - Local green space and public open space

Prospect Park is a designed landscape with considerable artistic and aesthetic interest. Mansion House lies at the centre of its design, taking advantage of the south facing slope of Prospect Hill to create a layered panorama across the naturalistic parkland and into the landscape beyond. Working areas of the park, including service buildings, kitchen garden and orchards lay to the rear of the house away from this view and paths across the park were routed to the east, west and from the north avoiding crossing the park to the south of Mansion House.

The park's Historical Interest is also a contributor to its heritage significance. The park is a surviving element of the historic manorial estate of Calcot and the story of its origins, and in particular the naming of Prospect Hill, is a legend which has been immortalised in literary works of poetry, albeit by an unknown author.

Since the late 19th century, the significance of the park has been impacted by the loss of land on its eastern side and by the encroachment of the hospital complex on its west side. A consequence of these changes has been to increase the use and prominence of the path from Liebenrood Road to Mansion House. This path, which once appears to have been a meandering way through parkland, has become a main thoroughfare, expanded to accommodate modern traffic. Use of this path has been encouraged by the addition of public facilities.

Mansion House is a late 18th century house surrounded by parkland. It has Historical Interest as a grand house with association to the Calcot Estate and to the architectural tastes of the gentry in the late 18th century. As a country manor house with a clear design intention linked to the landscape it also has considerable architectural and artistic interest. The surrounding landscape setting is integral to its design which presents a grand elevation to the south overlooking sweeping parkland views.

However, views to the west are restricted by flatter topography and vegetation and make a more limited contribution to the setting.

When considering the impact of moving the playground it is important to note that the path from the east has become the principal route into the park only in modern times and by virtue of previous impacts to the park. The historical role of this path and the paths which cross the park from the north entrance, place neither one above the other in importance.

By amalgamating public sports and play facilities around the path from Liebenrood Road, the scheme will open up the north entrance and better reveal the park from the north.

It is recognised that there will be an impact to the experience of the park when entering and passing through the park from Liebenrood Road, resulting from the intensification of public facilities adjacent to the path here. However, this route through the park already has the character of a modern municipal amenity and the impact is to be balanced against an anticipated improvement at the northern entrance.

The proposed new playground will lie within views looking across the park from the northeast quarter. It is considered that these views are already impacted by modern facilities flanking the path including the carpark and pavilion. Topography and vegetation also limit views of the park from this location. It is considered that, overall, there will be no intensification of facilities within the park as a result of the works. It is also considered that no important designed views within the park will be affected by the scheme.

The proposals to move the children's playground are expected to have a neutral effect on the heritage significance of the Park and Mansion House.

Open Space Impact

Once the need to relocate the existing children's playground. Various locations at the site were reviewed for their suitability in terms of heritage, ecology, access and open space. See appendices for appraisal of each location.

The proposed location was assessed as the preferred location for the relocation of the new children's playground.

In the context of open space, the NPFF and Local Plan place a high emphasis on access to high quality open spaces, sport and recreation which can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. These proposals contribute to meeting these aims.

Transport Statement

The proposal to relocate the children's playground within the park will have no material impact on the transports needs for the site. There is no predicted increase on existing users of the playground.

Ecology and Trees

The proposals are considered in the context of the planning policies

- EN12 Biodiversity and the Green network
- EN14 Trees, hedges and woodlands

The proposed work is supported by an Ecological Appraisal carried out by John Wenman Ecology and a tree report carried out by Reading Borough Council Parks Department.

John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was commissioned to carry out a preliminary ecological appraisal of an area of grassland towards the north-eastern corner of Prospect Park, adjacent to the Pavilion in Prospect Park, in connection with proposals to seek planning consent for the demolition of the existing play area and the building of a new play area within the survey site.

A Phase 1 walkover survey completed in February 2021 has shown that the site comprises of mostly amenity grassland with scattered broadleaved trees and a tarmac path across the southern side of the survey site.

A search of pre-existing data held by the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) shows that the site falls within the Prospect Park Local Wildlife Site (LWS). There are records of protected and notable species for Prospect Park, which the site falls within, including several birds, and a few invertebrates and flowering plants.

The survey has shown that overall, the site supports species poor amenity grassland habitat with occasional scattered broadleaved trees of no conservation importance beyond the site or to the wider Prospect Park LWS. The mature oak trees on the boundaries are of local conservation importance.

The proposals are unlikely to have an impact on bat roosts or a significant impact on bat foraging habitat.

The survey shows that the survey site is unlikely to support notable amphibians, badgers, hazel dormice or notable assemblages of birds or invertebrates; however, the nearby woodland and wider area of parkland with mature and veteran scattered trees connected to the site could mean the survey site is used as a corridor for some species.

Trees

An arboricultural impact statement was carried out in April 2021 and is summarised below:

No trees are being removed as part of the proposed work.

Retained trees to be protected

The following actions are proposed in order to protect retained trees within and adjacent to the works area:

- Where possible, no construction will take place within 5m of the stem of any mature tree.
- Trees will be protected with a tree protection barrier, like heras fencing, outside the root protection areas as set out in the survey table.

Where works are required within the root protection area, it will hand dug under direction of the Parks Arboricultural Unit.

Flood Risk

The proposal is considered in the context to planning policy EN18: Flooding and sustainable drainage systems. The site is located in a Flood Zone 1 area, is at a low risk of fluvial flooding with a similarly low risk of surface water or groundwater flooding. The proposed scheme is not propose a flood risk.

Archaeology

The proposal is considered in the context of planning policy EN2: Areas of archaeological significance. The outline proposal was discussed with Berkshire Archaeology who researched the Historic Environment Record and advised that the immediate vicinity would have been disturbed in the past and would not be of particular archaeological concern. However, the wider park is registered under the Historic Buildings and Monuments Act 1953 as a Grade II listed within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens (refer to the Heritage Impact statement).

7. Conclusion

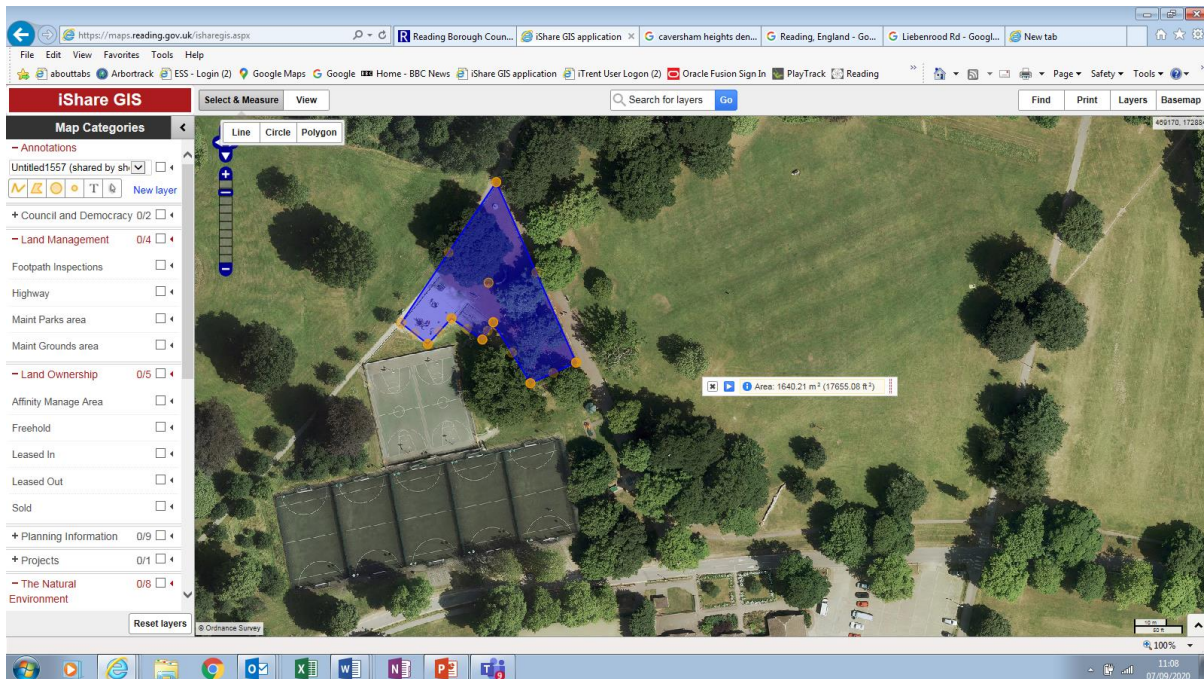
This Planning Statement is submitted in support of a planning application made by Reading Borough Council for the relocation of the existing children's playground to a new location which sits within the wider Grade II registered Historic Prospect Park, an open space designated for the provision of recreational facilities to the benefit of local people. The proposals set out a scheme that meets these requirements and provides an opportunity for a new playground without any adverse impacts in planning terms.

Appendices

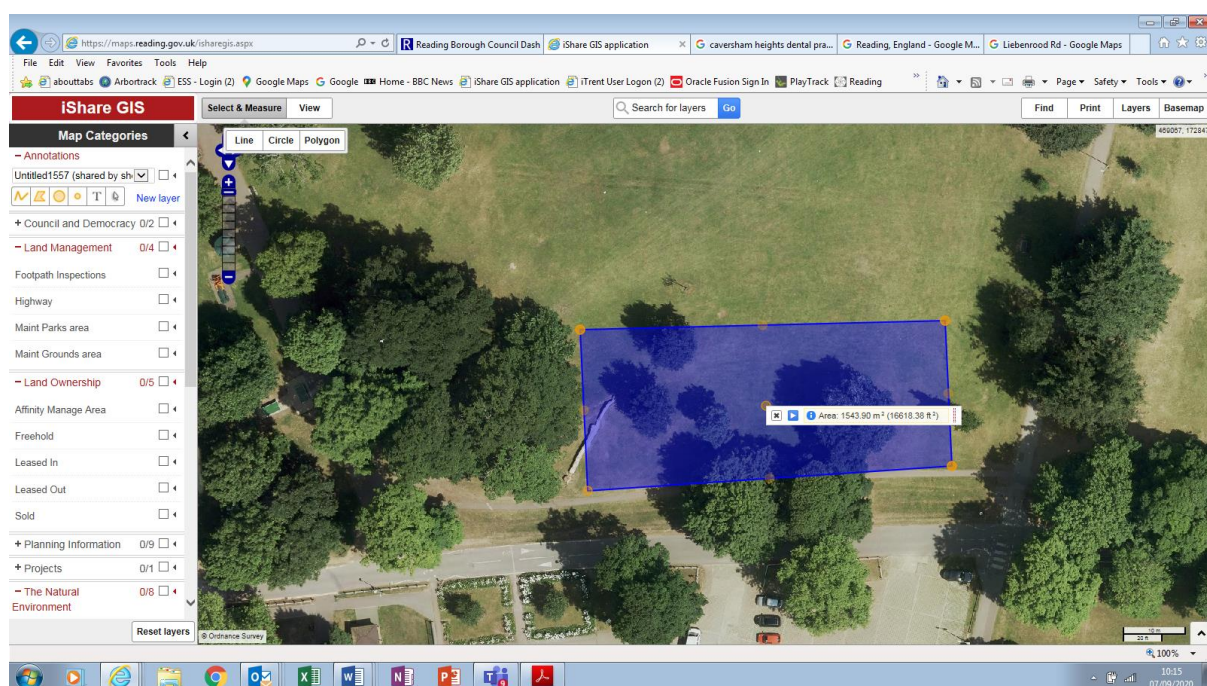
Playground Location Appraisal

The existing play areas covers an area of around 1,500 m². See aerial view 1 below. This includes not only play equipment, but run-around space and picnic tables.

Aerial view 1: location of existing playground



Aerial view 2: preferred location for proposed playground A

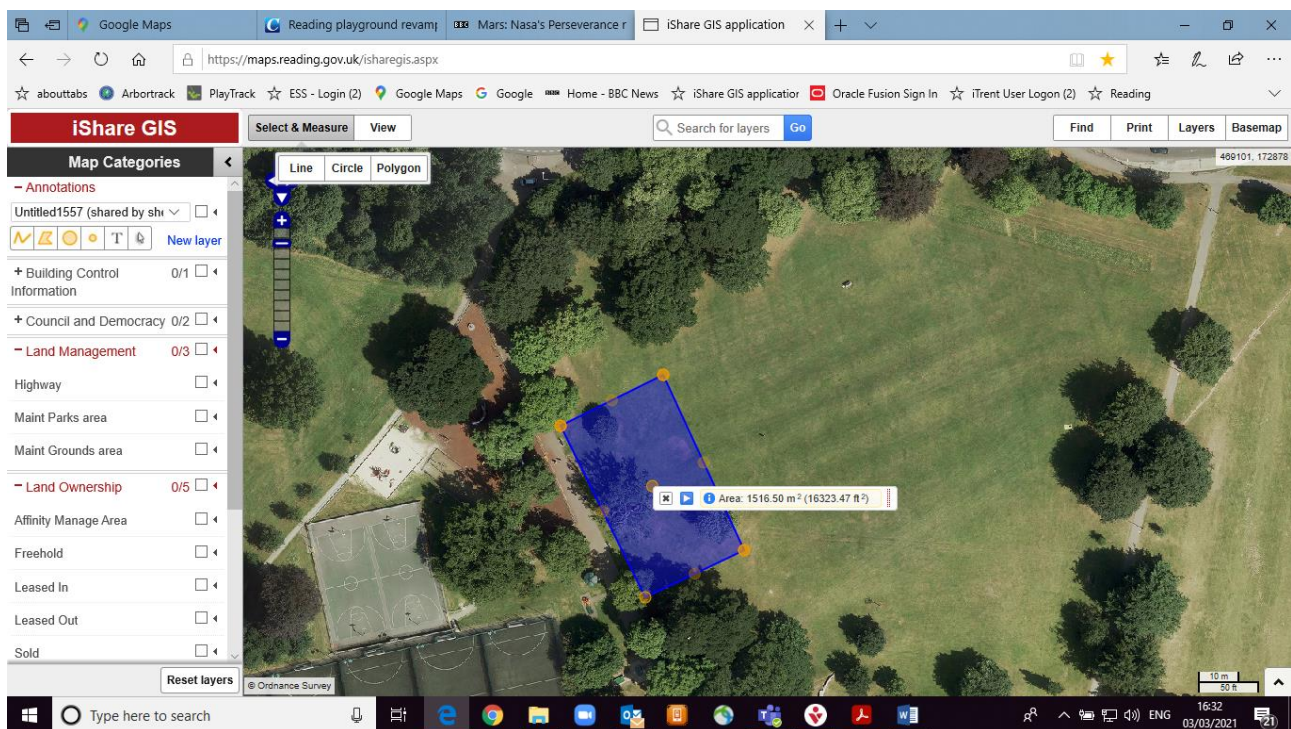


Advantages of Location of Playground A:

The proposed location (see aerial view 2 above) is preferred for several reasons:

- Proximity to car parking, which is convenient for small children and people with mobility problems
- Proximity to the public toilet
- Proximity to a tarmac footpath, which makes access easy for people with mobility issues
- Proximity to the Prospect Park Sports Pavilion, for which the Council is seeking a new leisure use
- Dry ground: this part of the park does not get boggy from underground springs or pooling water
- Trees: this location presents no significant tree-related problems
- Screening: over time, as the new avenue matures, there will be some screening from the main driveway
- Availability: much of the rest of the park is used, at least part of the year, for football, car boot sales, fun fairs, or temporary events car parking; the preferred new location is not ever used for any of these functions
- Safety: the site is well overlooked and, while it is near to the main driveway (which has a 20mph speed limit), it is further from busy roads
- Profile: it is easy to find

Aerial view 3: alternative location for proposed playground B



Advantages of Playground Location B:

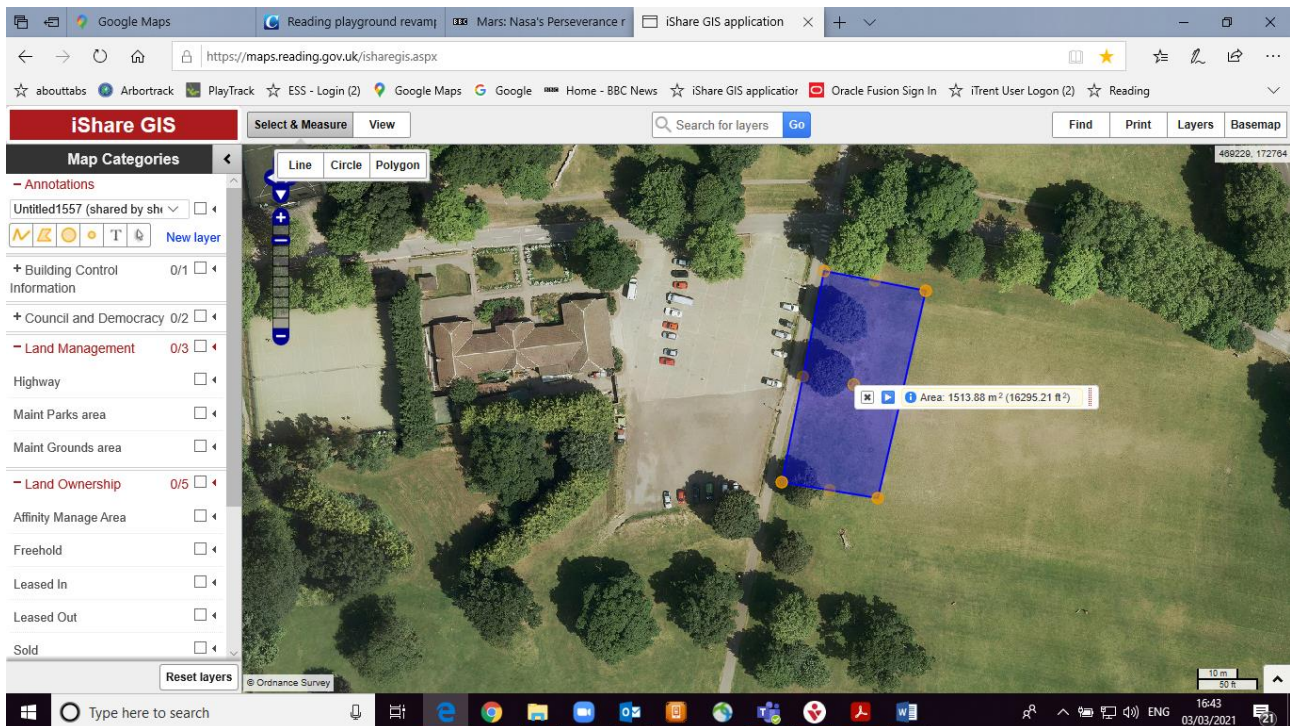
See aerial view 3 above

- Proximity to car parking: it is no further from the car park than the current children's playground
- Proximity to a tarmac footpath, which makes access easy for people with mobility issues
- Proximity to the Prospect Park Sports pavilion, for which the Council is seeking a new leisure use
- Safety: the site is well overlooked
- Profile: it is easy to find, and is familiar because it is close to the current playground

Disadvantages of this location:

- Wet ground: this part of the park gets very wet from underground springs or pooling water; this is the main problem with this location, as this will compromise fixings (rust) and safety surfacing (lifting)
- Trees: the area is close to and includes some very mature trees
- Availability: it encroaches on an area used for car boot sales, fun fairs, and temporary events car parking
- Safety: relatively close to a busy road
- Proximity to the public toilet: there is some distance to walk to take a small child

Aerial view 4: alternative location for proposed playground C



Advantages of Playground Location C:

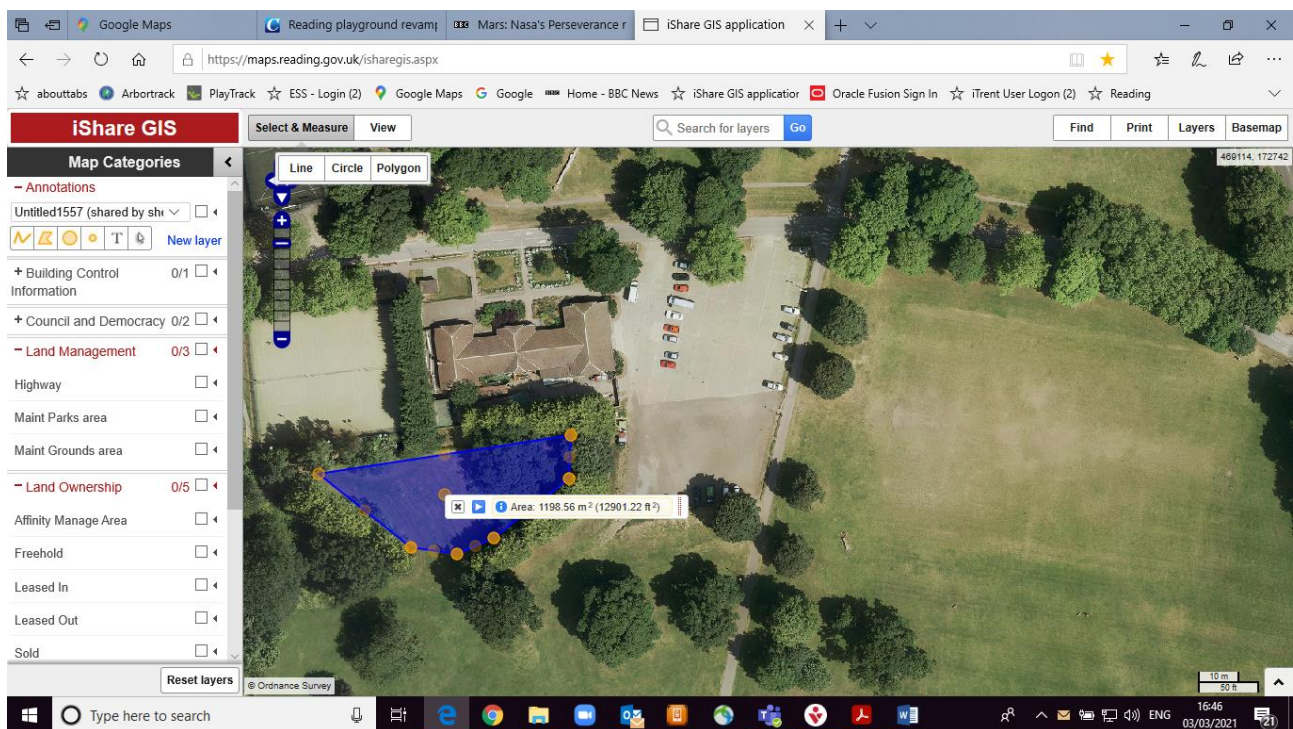
See aerial view 4 above

- Proximity to car parking, which is convenient for small children and people with mobility problems
- Proximity to a tarmac footpath, which makes access easy for people with mobility issues
- Proximity to the Prospect Park Sports pavilion, for which the Council is seeking a new leisure use
- Dry ground: this part of the park does not get boggy from underground springs or pooling water
- Safety: the site is well overlooked and access is protected from passing traffic
- Profile: it is easy to find

Disadvantages of this location:

- Availability: it encroaches on an area used for football; this is the main problem with this location
- Trees: the area is close to and includes some mature trees
- Proximity to the public toilet: there is some distance to walk to take a small child

Aerial view 5: alternative location for proposed playground D



Advantages of Playground location D:

See aerial view 5 above

- Proximity to car parking, which is convenient for small children and people with mobility problems
- Proximity to the Prospect Park Sports pavilion, for which the Council is seeking a new leisure use
- Dry ground: this part of the park does not get boggy from underground springs or pooling water
- Safety: the site and its approach is well protected from traffic

Disadvantages of this location:

- Availability: it encroaches on an area that is proposed for use by a new Pay-to-Play scheme; this is the main problem with this location
- Trees: the area is close to and includes some veteran trees; this is another significant reason to avoid this location
- Proximity to the public toilet: there is some distance to walk to take a small child
- There is currently no tarmac footpath for easy access
- Safety: the site is currently not well overlooked because of the Leyland cypress hedge