

Hood Memorial Hall, Devauden

Playground Redevelopment Project – Learning From Experience (LfE)

July 2025

Aim

This document aims to provide useful information to those seeking to initiate, conduct and deliver projects to build, upgrade or replace playgrounds or playparks. It is based on insights from members of the Playground Action Group (PAG) at Hood Memorial Hall, Devauden, Monmouthshire.

It is hoped that these insights assist others in determining the best approaches to solving similar problems and helping them to avoid pitfalls overcome by PAG.

Background

PAG initiated a project to redevelop the ageing playground in the grounds of the Hood Memorial Hall in September 2023. The project concluded with a successful opening of the new playground by Catherine Fookes MP on July 5 2025 at the village fête.

The redevelopment was funded by the community (via the village hall charity), National Lottery grants, fundraising events and donations from local individuals and bodies.

The PAG comprised five volunteers, all from the local community, who delivered the project on behalf of village hall trustees, one of whom frequently attended PAG meetings. In turn, a lead member of the PAG attended trustees' monthly meetings to report on progress and answer any questions.

Scope

The scope of this document covers the entire project through the following phases:

- Concept – recognising a problem, generating an idea and taking action.
- Initiation – scoping the project, building a team, early planning and feasibility studies.
- Planning and estimating – working out time, cost and requirements.
- Initial supplier engagement – optioneering and early insight into preferred suppliers.
- Fund raising – securing money through donations, fundraisers, grants and more.
- Supplier selection – how to select responsibly based on your projects or communities' values.
- Placing an order.
- Construction – planning, managing and afterwards.
- Project close-down and ongoing efforts.

A – Concept and Initiation LFE

#	Concept and Initiation LFE
A1	Consultation! Consultation! Consultation! To deliver the best for your community it is important to collect data from users (children and parents) and other stakeholders at the earliest opportunity. Funding organisations such as the National Lottery place great importance on evidence of community consultation when considering grant applications.
A2	Establish a team. A clear leader is needed to drive the project and make decisions where consensus is elusive. But a small team who can share the workload is very beneficial – our experience suggests 4-6 people is good. Too big and you'll have too many chefs, too small and you'll lack diversity of thought and may be limited by volunteers' time and availability. Expect to be on the journey for approximately 2 years with a team who feel they can commit to that.
A3	Building a diverse team of volunteers is a good idea. We found that a mixture of retirees with more time to commit during working hours (when supplier site visits take place, etc) and working professionals with up to date knowledge, skills and ideas for modern good practice. Similarly, grandparents bring observations and ideas about what makes a good playground which complement those of parents. We were fortunate that our team had a broad range of strengths; knowledge of how local authorities work, environmental impacts and associated regulations and procedures, public relations and communications expertise, project management skills and good community contacts on whom to draw for additional knowledge, skills and resources.
A4	Communication, communication, communication. Keep it going throughout your project. Use it to receive as well as give information and to build evidence of your activity that grant givers will want to see. Map and use all the tools you have available in your community - newsletters, websites, WhatsApp groups, email lists, posters, leaflets, flyers (distribute in schools, Brownie, Scout and Guide groups etc), local events (your own and any you can piggyback), word of mouth, local media (don't be afraid to get in touch with details of your project making sure you cover the five 'W's that all journalists need - who, what, where, when and why). Take photographs where you can to bring your communication to life (always seek parental consent when taking pictures of children and keep a note of parents' names and contact details for future reference if you need them). If you're redeveloping an existing playground, conduct user surveys to monitor usage. You may be asked by a grant giving body for numbers of children using your existing playground - and how many more children you anticipate will use the redeveloped one.
A5	Ensure you have identified who is responsible for the safety of the playground. Suppliers are responsible for meeting your requirements under the contract and installing in accordance with relevant standards and regulations but clients also have responsibilities too.
A6	As part of your communication think about how you will deal with complaints. Tell your community how they can raise legitimate complaints or concerns and with whom. Take complaints seriously, approaching them with an open mind and curiosity. You will want to resolve legitimate complaints swiftly for the benefit of the community. Be prepared for unfounded complaints and take those seriously too. Be dispassionate and see them through to their logical conclusion. Complainants must feel they have been listened to and that their complaints have been taken through the proper processes which may include appropriate authorities.

B – Planning and Estimating LFE

#	Planning and Estimating LFE
B1	Consultation is key. Seeking the views of parents and children of varying ages and abilities at the start of your project is essential to making good decisions on what equipment, within your budget, to include in your new playground. You may like brightly coloured equipment with intriguing shapes but it may not suit your target audience.
B2	Sequencing activities: we found the best way to plan our activities in this phase was to 1. consult 2. be guided by the outcome of our consultation, our budget and the available space in determining what equipment to include in our scheme 3. estimate costs using online information from at least 3 reputable suppliers 4. consider our fund raising target, capacity and whether what we'd ideally like was achievable.
B3	Fall heights – the extent of safety surfacing required beneath an item of play equipment is governed by the height from which a child may fall. The taller the equipment, the deeper the excavation and the more shock absorbing material required. This can be a cost multiplier that isn't always clear until you get formal quotes from suppliers.
B4	Having an excel spreadsheet guru in your team is helpful to set up your costs so that you can chop and change according to different equipment options from a range of suppliers and make cost comparisons. This can then be re-used when you get formal quotes.
B5	Our project was straightforward and didn't require formal project management with a schedule etc. As a small, agile team, we progressed our project through email, meetings and a WhatsApp group. If you have a complex playground project or are repurposing a site, a more formal approach may be needed, led by someone with professional project management experience.
B6	When estimating your budget plan to have some contingency funds to draw on in case something doesn't go to plan.
B7	Establish at the start of your project whether you need planning permission and/or an environmental impact assessment. This will avoid potential disruption and stress later in the project. If you are replacing equipment in an existing playground and within the same footprint, you shouldn't need planning permission and you may not need an environmental impact assessment either – but please, do your own research!
B8	Consider shade provision as part of your project planning/scope in light of climate change and rising temperatures. Tree planting is a good method but not always possible.
B9	Expect to have to pay for site protection (temporary fencing) and workforce welfare (portaloos etc) during the installation phase as well as removal and disposal of old broken play equipment if necessary.

C – Initial Supplier Engagement LFE

#	Initial Supplier Engagement LFE
C1	Continue with your communication and consultation at this phase – refer to item A4 on this subject.
C2	Set out your principles and priorities for your project so that you (and your community) are clear on how you will deliver the project. Is limiting the environmental impact more important than aesthetics, for example. Do you want to prioritise the use of local suppliers? What materials suit your surroundings and how will they age? Is it important to have vibrant, bright, fun colours or natural colours? Do you want an urban or a rural scheme? Wood or metal and plastic? Do you want to pick suppliers based on their experience and track record?
C3	Have a list, with options, of the types of equipment that you want to include in your park based on the results of your consultations. Form your own ideas about which are the most important and those which you might be willing to trade to save money or space or to substitute for a better suggestion from a supplier. Our experience was that we had to make some iterations of the final list to fit within our budget.
C4	Have a clear understanding of what you can fit into your space including consideration for the required spacing or 'isolation zones' between each item of equipment. Suppliers should be knowledgeable about this but to be a smart customer and save time, you should form your own ideas in preparation.
C5	Do you research. Visit other playgrounds to see examples of equipment and note the suppliers' names from the tags on the equipment. This can also help you see how different suppliers' equipment and ground materials for fall impact absorption look as they age.
C6	Draw up a list of a handful of suppliers/manufacturers including a mixture of well-known national or international companies as well as some local companies. Website catalogues aren't always helpful so ask for hard copy brochures but be aware that few if any include prices.
C7	Shortlist potential suppliers down to 3 based on your priorities, principles or selection criteria. Contact them and set up site visits during which they will take measurements, photos etc to inform any subsequent quotes. Some suppliers will generate simple designs with equipment in place which can be really useful in helping to visualise a supplier's suggested scheme.
C8	Secure initial quotes and revise your budget up or down accordingly. Be aware that the cost of safety surfaces that comply with legal requirements on fall heights can be almost as much as the price of equipment.

D – Fundraising LFE

#	Fundraising LFE
D1	You are likely to need a grant or grants as part of your funding package. Be prepared to make several, smaller applications rather than one big one – and be aware that many grants are ‘all or nothing’.
D2	When making smaller applications , apply for a particular item of equipment rather than a generic sum of money. An example for our project was some perimeter fencing. Note that different awarding bodies focus on different themes so make sure your application is appropriately targeted.
D3	Most grant bodies expect to see evidence of fundraising as part of the total financing of the project. A rule of thumb is that for every £1 you raise you might be able to achieve £2 in grants.
D4	Grant applications can be very time consuming. An efficient approach is for a lead writer to draw up an initial draft and seek comments/revisions from others. Diversity of thought from a team with different perspectives and experiences from within your community helps to achieve a rounded application.
D5	Don’t be afraid to apply for a National Lottery grant. Talk to those who have already made successful applications and when your time comes, carefully follow advice and guidance from the Lottery’s own funding advisors who are very helpful and knowledgeable.

E – Supplier Selection LFE

#	Supplier Selection LFE
E1	Price is important but should not be the only criterion. To avoid random or emotional decision making which is hard to justify should you be asked to do so, draw up criteria for selection - e.g. compliance with national safety standards, environmental impacts of timber and other materials, equipment guarantees, customer satisfaction ratings, industry awards, business experience etc.
E2	Use a points based system to score your 3 suppliers' quotes against your criteria to avoid any unconscious bias or being swayed by sales patter rather than facts and evidence. Include in your selection criteria issues important to your community based on your consultation with them.
E3	Protect suppliers' commercially sensitive information such as costs. Do not publicise them before signing a contract with your supplier.

F – Placing an Order

#	Placing an Order LFE
F1	Be aware that there may be a considerable time lag between agreeing a price with a supplier and having the money in place to sign a contract. During that time, the price may have gone up – hence the need to establish a contingency sum at the budgeting and planning phase.
F2	Expect a reasonable lead time between placing and order and installation starting. 3 months is typical but it does vary depending on specific material choices and the suppliers' size and order book.

G – Construction/Installation LFE

#	Construction/Installation
G1	Expect to do some basic site management. Meet the installation team at the start of the installation, orientate them and ensure they have what they need.
G2	Depending on your arrangements you may have had to supply welfare facilities and fencing yourself or your suppliers may do that as part of the contract.
G3	Make regular visits to the site to check progress – even on simple projects things can get missed or mistakes made. The sooner these are spotted, the quicker and easier it is to fix them. A good supplier will be receptive if you spot something which is not in accordance with your specification and will promptly remedy it. Similarly, if anything gets damaged in the vicinity you will want to act quickly.
G4	Make sure you have an independent inspection of the completed works. Keep the site protection fencing up for safety reasons until the inspection is complete. Leave a 'risk window' before the planned opening of the new park in case any snags are picked up by the inspection which then need to be rectified.

H – Project Close Down and ongoing efforts

#	Project Close Down and ongoing efforts LFE
H1	A formal opening after all your hard work will give you and your team a chance to celebrate with your local community. We were fortunate that our local MP agreed to do the honours. We were able to time the opening with our village fête which added an extra layer of excitement.
H2	Communicate the successful completion of your project to all your stakeholders and funders. Communities thrive on the efforts of their volunteers so don't be shy about making a fuss. And if you are lucky enough to have had a Lottery grant, you will be expected to publicise it with the appropriate Lottery branding (you will be advised on how to do this). Don't forget to send your local media pictures of your finished project along with a short report including those all important five 'W's (see A4).
H3	Celebrate with your team. Congratulations! You've done so very well. Pop some bubbly and reward yourselves.
H4	Share the knowledge – other communities can benefit from your experience.
H5	Some funders may expect a report some time after the opening of your new playground. They may ask you to conduct monitoring surveys to analyse how well your new playground has met your objectives, what difference it has made to your community and whether there has been an increase in the number of users.

For further information contact lynn.may@devaudenhall.org