



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

South Kesteven District Council

Play Area Strategy

DRAFT

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Introduction

South Kesteven District Council's Corporate Plan (2024 – 2027) sets out the corporate ambition to be 'A thriving District to live in, work and visit' with the aim of encouraging physical activity to support healthy lifestyles and reduce health inequalities.

The Council is responsible for 38 play areas, as shown in **Appendix 1 and Table Two**, across the district which provide safe and sustainable places for young people to play, supporting them to maintain and improve their quality of life. Provision of play areas also helps to support children and young people to meet Sport England's target for them to be considered active, which is to undertake an average of 60 plus minutes of exercise per day.

It is vital that the Council uses its resources effectively to ensure that play areas can remain inclusive and attractive, are easily accessible for all users, and comply with health and safety requirements. There are some challenges facing South Kesteven in respect of its play areas, which include an historical lack of investment, and the costs associated with adequately maintaining the facilities within available budgets, ensuring that spend is directed where it is most needed.

The Council also recognises that there may be a need for additional play areas within the district, for example to accompany any major new housing developments. The Council aims to take an active role in ensuring that any new play areas meet the local need and are developed to a high standard, as well as limiting the exposure to ongoing maintenance liabilities in the longer term.

In assessing the adoption of any additional play areas, the Council will be guided by the 2023 Open Space, Sports and Recreation Study which complements the Council's Local Plan, and liaise with developers at an early stage to ensure that the requirements are understood. The Council is also committed to work with partner organisations in the design and development of any new play areas to ensure they offer a wide variety of inclusive equipment that supports the needs of all children and young people.

The Play Area Strategy will help to prioritise the maintenance, development, and refurbishment of play areas within the district, taking into account any opportunities to transfer play areas to the ownership of town or parish councils. Having a robust play area inspection process is viewed as an integral part of providing the service.

Play Area Strategy

Central Government and Sport England both recognise the importance that physical activity has on the health and wellbeing of children and young people, through their respective strategies 'Get Active: A Strategy for the future of Sport and Physical Activity, and Uniting the Movement'. Furthermore, the Council's Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027) sets out the Council's priorities with a key theme of supporting healthier lifestyles. The provision of high-quality play areas supports the Council's corporate ambition and provides opportunities for improved health and wellbeing outcomes for local communities.

Delivery of the Council's Play Area Strategy will ensure that residents have access to high quality play areas in key locations across the district. To complement the financial resources the Council has within its budget

framework the Council will continue to identify external funding opportunities to facilitate the future development of play areas.

When looking at housing growth the Council will ensure that adequate open space including play facilities are included as part of the planning process. New play areas should form an integral part of the development layout however where it cannot be provided on-site a financial contribution towards provision elsewhere will be sought. In all cases, it is expected that provisions will be made for the ongoing future maintenance of any play facilities and this will be secured through the planning process either through financial contributions or other suitable management strategies.

The nature of play is continuously evolving, and the Council will need to ensure that, working with partner organisations, play areas are inclusive, exciting and are inter-generational spaces for all to enjoy.

The Council will also need to identify the future improvement and development requirements for current play areas to ensure it has a portfolio that is fit for current and future needs and demands.

Our Priorities

The Council's key priorities for play areas are to ensure that they are accessible to all, providing quality play equipment that is exciting and includes both individual and social play elements. To achieve this the Council will:

- Prioritise strategic capital spending on play area improvements
- Secure and utilise appropriate S106 developer contributions
- Identify external funding opportunities to rejuvenate play areas
- Continue a robust inspection regime to ensure play areas are safe
- Collaborate on the design of play areas with relevant ward members, local communities and external partners
- Promote play areas to both residents and visitors
- Undertake audits of play areas to identify capital investment programmes based on the age and condition of the equipment
- Transfer the assets to local Town and Parish Councils where there is appetite to do so

As part of the Local Plan Review an updated Open Space, Sports and Recreation Study is currently being undertaken which will consider the requirements for play areas and informal activity spaces both now and in the future taking into account planned development. This would inform the planning policy requirements for future play areas that will need to be provided as part of new development.

Local and National Context

The Play Strategy is informed by a wide range of local and national initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents and communities as follows:

Sport England has a priority to tackle inactivity with a specific ambition to increase levels of activity of children and young people from the age of 5. The provision of high-quality accessible play equipment and improved

opportunities for play supports this aim. This is one of the five big issues within their Strategy ‘Uniting the Movement’.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) identifies sport and activity as a fundamental part of the planning and delivery of sustainable communities. The objectives also look to protect existing facilities, enhance the quality, accessibility and management of existing facilities, and provide new facilities to meet demand.

South Kesteven District Council’s Sport and Physical Activity Strategy (2021 – 2026) sets out the Council’s aims to provide the support our residents need now and, in the future, to build healthy and strong communities and encourage residents to live healthy, active lifestyles.

Fields in Trust (FIT) guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play sets out the required provision for outdoor sports, play and informal open space. The recommendations aim to ensure that the provision of outdoor sport, play and informal open space is of a sufficient size to enable effective use; is located in an accessible location and in close proximity to dwellings; and of a quality to maintain longevity and to encourage its continued use.

FIT categorise designated play areas into three types:

- Local Areas for Play (LAPs) aimed at very young children within a 100m walking distance from dwellings
- Locally Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs) aimed at children who can go out to play independently within a 400m walking distance from dwellings
- Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAPs) aimed at older children within a 1000m walking distance from dwellings

These can be complemented by other facilities including Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) and skateboard parks. **Table One** below sets out the quantity requirements per 1,000 population, the indicative walking distances and the quality guidelines:

Table One – Fields in Trust guidance per 1000 population			
Open Space Typology	Quantity Guideline (hectares)	Walking Guideline	Quality Guideline
Playing pitches	1.20	1,200m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality appropriate to the intended level of performance, designed to appropriate technical standards - Located where they are of the most value to the community to be served - Sufficiently diverse recreational use for the whole community - Appropriately landscaped
All outdoor sports	1.60	1,200m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintained safely and to the highest possible condition with available finance - Positively managed taking account of the need to repair and replacement over time as necessary - Provision of ancillary facilities and equipment - Provision of footpaths - Designed so as to be free of the fear of harm or crime
Equipped/designated play areas	0.25	LAPs – 100m LEAPs – 400m NEAPs – 1,000m	
Other outdoor provision (MUGAs and skateboard parks)	0.30	700m	

Current Provision

South Kesteven District Council currently manages 38 play areas across the district in 33 locations, these being situated on a mixture of Council housing estates, formal park settings and open space areas. In October 2022 a review of the Council's play areas was undertaken by the Council's Corporate Health and Safety team along with Officers responsible for the inspection of the play areas using Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) guidelines.

This review identified a Health and Safety RAG status for each play area based on the condition of the play equipment and floor surface which was used to determine the frequency of visual and operational inspections to be undertaken. **Table Two** below summarises each play area the Council is currently responsible for and its location, and **Appendix One** demonstrates the spread of play areas across the district.

Table Two – SKDC Play Areas and Locations	
Locality	Play Area
Stamford	Andrew Road, PE9 1HN
Stamford	College Close, PE9 1FN
Stamford	Elgar Way, PE9 1EY
Stamford	Elizabeth Road, PE9 1HY
Stamford	Empingham Road, PE9 2GR
Stamford	Foxglove Road, PE9 4BW
Stamford	Lonsdale Road, PE9 2SF
Grantham	Arnoldfield Adventure, NG 31 8HU
Grantham	Beechcroft Road, NG31 7NL
Grantham	Dysart Park, NG31 6JB (x3 play areas)
Grantham	Gonerby Hill Foot, NG31 8HU
Grantham	Harrowby Lane, NG31 9QY
Grantham	Hornsby Road, NG31 7RE
Grantham	Larch Close, NG31 7XL
Grantham	Tissington Road, NG31 7FP
Grantham	Queen Elizabeth Park, NG31 8FJ
Grantham	Princess Drive, NG31 9QA
Grantham	Tyndal Road, NG31 8AH
Grantham	Wyndham Park, NG31 9BB (x4 play areas)
Denton	Hungate Road, NG31 1LP
Langtoft	Manor Close, PE6 9LY
Morton	The Crescent, PE10 0NX
South Witham	Troughton Walk, NG33 5PR
Witham on the Hill	Main Street, PE10 0JH
Market Deeping	Church Street, PE6 8AL
Market Deeping	Kesteven Drive, PE6 8DU
Market Deeping	Wellington Way, PE6 8LF
Deeping St James	Crowson Way, PE6 8EY
Deeping St James	Churchfield Close, PE6 8PP
Deeping St James	Hereward Way, PE6 8QB
Bourne	Northfields, PE10 9DB
Bourne	Pinewood Close, PE10 9RL
Bourne	Wellhead, PE10 9PQ

Inspection and Maintenance of Play Areas

The Council has a legal responsibility to those using the play areas it is responsible for and is required to have a robust inspection and maintenance regime in place. Inspections of play equipment undertaken should meet the requirements of BS EN1176 part 7 – Guidance for installation, inspection, maintenance, and operation. The provision of a robust inspection and maintenance regime for play areas is also recommended as best practice by the Department for National Heritage, the British Standards Institute, the Health and Safety Executive, and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA).

The British and European safety standard BS EN1176 was published in 2017. In addition to setting the standards to be maintained, this also details good practice in relation to the design, manufacture, installation and maintenance of play equipment, as well as playground surfaces.

The guidance recognises that the standards are not retrospective or a legal requirement, and that equipment installed prior to 2017 will most likely have met previous standards. Whilst the play areas managed by the Council contain equipment and surfacing of varying ages, and therefore may contain older equipment which does not meet current standards, this does not necessarily mean that it is unsafe or that remedial action is required.

Where it is no longer possible to replace parts on ageing equipment, there may be times where equipment must be removed, any new equipment installed will then need to meet current standards.

The Council has a defined inspection regime in place which covers the whole site and not just the play equipment and employs trained staff to undertake visual and operational inspections. This has been complemented recently by commissioning an external contractor, KOMPAN, to undertake monthly operational inspections on behalf of the Council. As well as providing an independent assessment, KOMPAN are undertaking a lifespan audit on all pieces of play equipment, this information will assist the Council in prioritising play areas, and specific pieces of equipment, which require attention or investment.

All inspection findings undertaken by both Council Officers and KOMPAN are recorded in real time on a specialist mobile app called Public Sector Software Live (PSS Live) with any minor and major remedial works required being recorded.

Inspections occur on the following basis:

- **Weekly Visual Inspection** – a visual assessment is made of the condition of equipment and the play area. Frequency of inspections can vary and are identified by the risk assessment and risk rating associated by each play area.
- **Monthly Operational Inspection** – this looks in more detail at the equipment and requires the inspector to physically use the equipment and look for signs of deterioration. This is currently being undertaken by KOMPAN on behalf of the Council.
- **Six Monthly Inspection** – this is undertaken by Zurich Insurance, and provides external assurance to the Council. This regime satisfies the British and European safety standard BS EN1176, and is over and above the recommendation of the Health and Safety Executive that at least one inspection is undertaken every year from an independent suitably qualified body such as RoSPA.

- **Post Installation Inspections** – these are carried out following the installation of any new play area or major refurbishment programme to ensure that the playground meets modern standards and has been correctly installed.

Where it is not possible for Council Officers to undertake minor remedial works to play equipment, then specialist contractors or equipment providers are used to undertake the highlighted remedial works from any of the inspections. Any works conducted are also recorded on the PSS app to provide an audit trail.

Future Design Principles

When considering any investment or refurbishment the Council will give consideration to the type and range of play equipment, including surfacing, to ensure that this is accessible for users with a range of abilities, and appropriate to the type of play area and its setting.

- Equipment should be laid out to maximise the play value and provide the best use of the space available. Special attention needs to be given to new or existing tree planting, orientation (particularly for metal slides) and fall areas – with plenty of ‘slack space’ included around and between equipment to allow free movement and to facilitate different types of informal play.
- Equipment should be arranged to ensure that younger children do not feel intimidated by older children and teenagers.
- Timber elements deteriorate most when buried in, or are in contact with, the ground. Therefore, any timber structures must be secured into the ground using metal feet to avoid contact and deterioration. All manufactured timber equipment must be supplied with a minimum 15 – 20 year guarantee. Bespoke, natural timber equipment needs to be treated correctly with a safe, long lasting, non-reactive preservative to ensure a minimum 10 year life.
- Rope equipment and netting must be sufficiently heavy duty and durable.
- Large, oversized and distinctive equipment is to be welcomed.
- Exciting, innovative and bespoke equipment, that will appeal to a wide range of user groups and provides a significantly high level of play value may be deemed to offer a level of play experience equivalent to more than one piece of standard equipment.
- Choosing the best surface for an area is dependent on many variables and should be carefully considered based on the activities planned and ease of maintenance.
- Robust finishes and high-quality detailing are essential to create an attractive hardwearing play area that will be suitably long lasting and fit for purpose.
- The opportunity for surfaces to add play value or to be a play feature, designed for traditional games or imaginative play should be considered.
- Acceptable types of bound surface include wetpour, grass matting and carpet system artificial grass. This should be used primarily as it has low ongoing maintenance requirements, however loose fill surfaces such as bark nuggets, play safe pea gravel and play sand may be considered but the needs must be balanced against routine maintenance requirements.

All safety surfacing must conform to the relevant British Standards relating to the type of play equipment and the level of impact attenuation required, in addition to the quality of the product used.

Process for Adopting New Play Areas

Before a completed play area is legally transferred to the Council from a developer the following information will be required prior to the transfer:

- Land ownership and boundary responsibility with a Land Transfer Map as a Portable Document Format (PDF) and a Geographic Information System (GIS) Shapefile
- As built drawing(s)
- Anticipated routine monitoring and inspection requirements for the play area including trees
- Maintenance schedule setting out the frequency and types of operation for the scheme including planting during establishment and once established
- National Bureau of Standards (NBS) Landscape specification for hard and soft landscaping maintenance operation where relevant
- Confirmation of payment of agreed commuted sum figure to cover maintenance requirements for a 25 year period which is consistent with the Council's supplementary planning document on open spaces

Table Three below sets out South Kesteven District Council's handover process:

Table Three – Handover Process for new play areas	
Inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council to be notified on completion of the scheme and arrange an inspection to confirm build in accordance with the approved details.• The Council will need to agree the scheme has been installed satisfactorily or identify any defects and remedial work required
Safety Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrange an inspection to ensure any outstanding works are agreed before a RoSPA post-installation inspection is undertaken.• Any items flagged and recorded to be rectified.
Maintenance Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree the start date of the 12-month maintenance of the scheme. The maintenance period will normally begin once any outstanding or remedial works have been completed satisfactorily. The Council should be contacted one month before the end of the agreed maintenance period to arrange another inspection.• On completion of the 12-month maintenance period, a further RoSPA inspection report must be provided and any items flagged by the report will need to be rectified.
Transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Once all outstanding or remedial work is completed satisfactorily, the scheme is ready to be adopted. The Council will confirm the final Commuted Sum figure to be paid.

Transferring Ownership of Play Areas

Where possible the Council is committed to transferring assets to local Town and Parish Councils. This would bring further benefits in them being better positioned to attract grant funding, as well as ensuring that the facilities continue to serve and meet the needs of local communities.

The Council recognises that the current condition of its play areas may require a level of capital investment prior to asset transfers taking place. The Council will adopt a policy of actively seeking opportunities to asset transfer play areas, identifying any required investment during the early stages of discussions and, if appropriate, seek an agreement in principle to proceed with an agreed level of investment.

For an asset transfer to be undertaken the following process would be followed:

- Engagement with Town and Parish Councils to establish interest
- Once interest has been established, engagement with the Council's Property Team to discuss asset transfer process
- Copies of insurance inspection reports to be provided in relation to the play area
- Confirmation of any agreed improvements as part of the transfer
- Restrictive covenant placed on the land to ensure it can only be used as a play area and must be maintained as such
- Confirmation of transfer – freehold or leasehold arrangement
- Both sides would be required to cover their own legal costs
- Under the Local Government Act 1972 Section 123 the Council would need to advertise the site in the local press for two weeks to give consideration to any objections.
- Dependant on the size of the site, an external valuation may be required and would be arranged by the Council if deemed necessary.

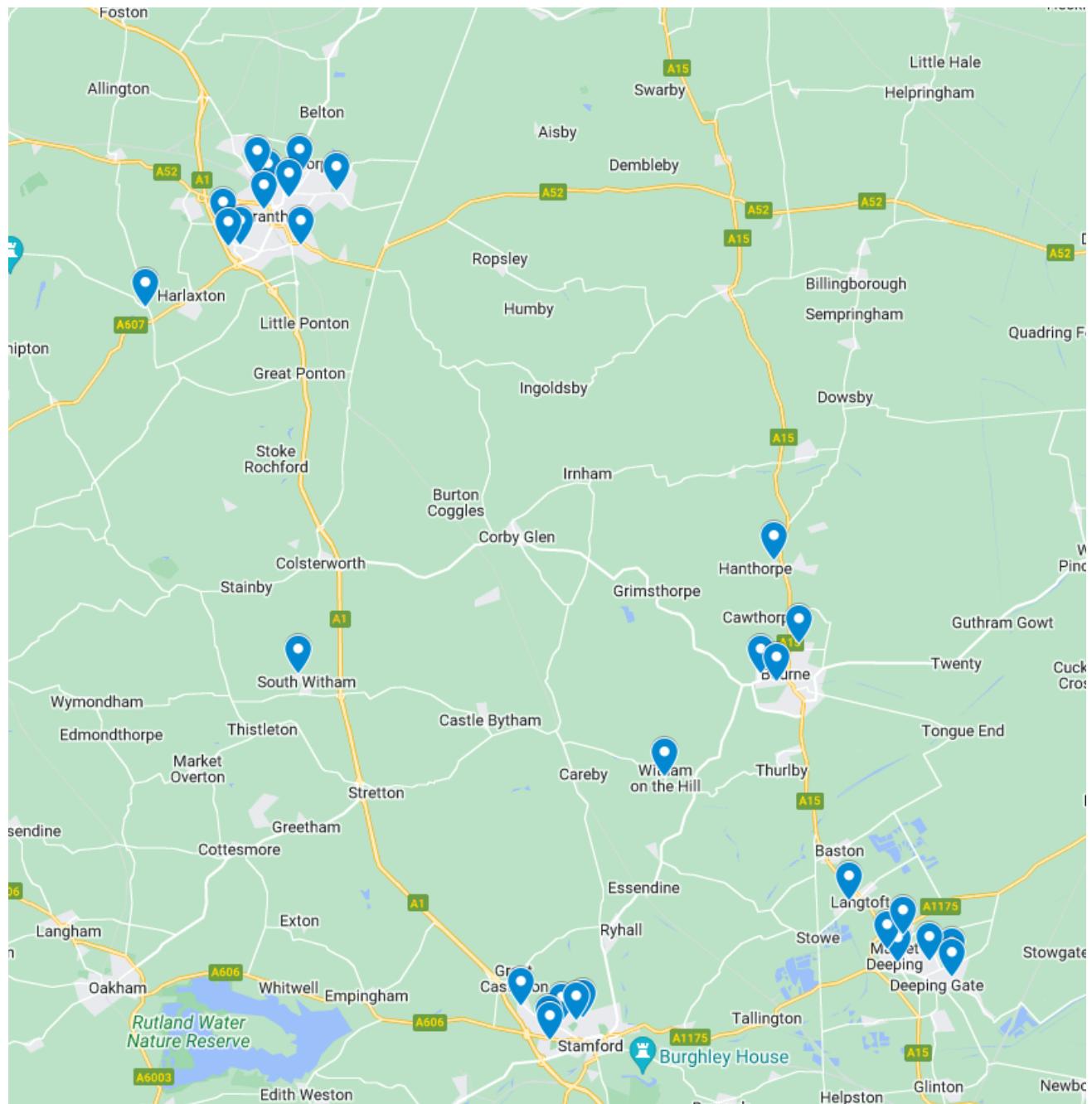
Process for Play Area Investment

To ensure that investment into play areas across the district is undertaken in a way that is fair and utilises the Council's resources appropriately, **Table Four** below shows the step by step process which will be followed:

Table Four – Process for play area investment		
Step 1	Identify reported piece of equipment on PSS Live	
Step 2	Review the history of inspections and findings	
Step 3	Is the risk associated with the equipment 10 or above classed as either medium or high risk	If yes move to Step 4 If no move to Step 5
Step 4	If equipment is classed as high risk with a score of 16 or above, remove or isolate equipment from public use	Move to Step 7
Step 5	Is the life expectancy of the equipment within the next 12 months	If yes move to Step 7 If no move to Step 6
Step 6	Monitor the condition of the equipment through regular inspection regime and add to future replacement programme based on life expectancy	
Step 7	Contact play equipment suppliers to quote for replacement or suitable alternative	
Step 8	Identify whether budget or funding is available	If yes place order
Step 9	If more than one piece of equipment isolated or has a life expectancy within the next 12 months identify any grant funding opportunities	

Appendices

Appendix One – A map of the Council's play areas it's responsible for across the District



Resources

Fields In Trust – Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play, Beyond the Six Acre Standard [Guidance-for-Outdoor-Sport-and-Play-England.pdf \(fieldsintrust.org\)](https://fieldsintrust.org/)

Children's play areas – A guide to standards for playground equipment and surfacing (BS EN1176 series: 2017)

DLUHC National Planning Policy Framework [National Planning Policy Framework \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk)

South Kesteven District Council – Sport and Physical Activity Strategy (2021 – 2026) [SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.pdf \(southkesteven.gov.uk\)](https://southkesteven.gov.uk)

South Kesteven District Council – Corporate Plan (2024 – 2027) [South Kesteven District Council Corporate Plan - 2024 to 2027.pdf](https://southkesteven.gov.uk)

RoSPA Play Safety - [Advice and information - RoSPA](https://www.rospa.com)

DCMS – Get Active: A Strategy for the future of Sport and Physical Activity (August 2023) [Get Active: A Strategy for the future of sport and physical activity \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk)

Sport England – Uniting the Movement (January 2021) [Sport England - Uniting the Movement \(sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)

South Kesteven District Council – Local Plan for South Kesteven – Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (June 2012) [Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document: June 2012 \(southkesteven.gov.uk\)](https://southkesteven.gov.uk)