

BLYTH TOWN COUNCIL
Environment Committee
Thursday 18 September 2025
Decision Report

Recommendations Inclusive play areas.

The Committee RESOLVE to agree:

- a. That Blyth Town Council engage in detailed discussions with Northumberland County Council to consider the investigation, design, and costing for the creation of a dedicated SEND-inclusive play area and associated infrastructure within Blyth.
- b. Consider a structured review of our existing play areas looking at play equipment, signage, seating, shelter, access to the play area, surfacing within the play area, play options for wheelchair users, and the ability for teenagers/young people with SEND, to ensure that play areas provide age-appropriate, safe, and enjoyable experiences for all users.
- c. Prior to any capital purchase relating to the above two items, a meaningful consultation should be conducted with local families, SEND groups, schools, and relevant experts to ensure that design meets the needs of the community and delivers best practice in accessibility and inclusion.

Ward

All wards

Risk Management

The budget allocation for new play area refurbishment within this budget year has been spent.

Objective

Promoting the environmental, social, and economic wellbeing of the town and its community.

Crime Prevention

There would be no Crime Prevention implications to consider regarding this matter.

Report

A request was submitted on 3 June 2025 by Cllr B Erskine advocating for a dedicated play facility for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and fully wheelchair accessible; see appendix 1. Feedback from several residents with SEND children/young people, were received by members via email highlight a preference not for a “special” or separate play area but for an inclusive environment where children and young people, of all abilities can play together. A verbal request was also received from Cllr B W Elliott for an update on costings for an ability swing (wheelchair accessible swing)- estimated costs are £30,000 including groundworks and safety surfacing. Cllr D Nicholson has requested consideration be given to replacing the existing grass mat surfacing at the Kitty Brewster Play area (which is prone to get muddy) with wet pour to improve accessibility.

Officers were unable to find any examples of dedicated SEND play areas under the responsibility of Town or Parish Councils. The Town Clerk and Deputy Clerk visited the Tim Lamb Centre located at Rising Sun County Park. The Centre, run by the charity Pathways for All, offers specialist activity and leisure facilities for disabled children/ young people and their families. The Centre has a large outdoor secure play area (with high fencing) which includes a range of inclusive play and sensory equipment and a range of wheelchair accessible equipment. Within the centre they also have a disabled toilet that includes a full-size changing bed and ceiling hoist facility. The centre is continually updating and adding to the facility through fundraising, recent additions to the park and improvements to surfacing cost in the region of £100,000, also noting that individual inclusive items, of which they had many, costing approx. £20,000-£30,000 each.

The creation of a dedicated SEND play area may require additional infrastructure e.g. disabled car parking provision, changing places toilets, staff on site.

Such a facility may be better placed in one of the strategic parks e.g. Ridley Park or South Beach where an extent of these facilities already exists. It is recommended that this be discussed in greater detail with Northumberland County Council who are not only responsible for these sites but are also the landowner.

If a new facility were to be created at neighbourhood level the Town Council would need to consider where, as we do not own any land. Any asset transfer or licence for land would need to be discussed with Northumberland County Council. This requires further discussion NCC.

Indicative costings for a new dedicated SEND play area featuring wheelchair accessible swing and see-saw along with other inclusive play

equipment is in the region of £155k excluding VAT, this does not include toilets or parking.

Across our existing nineteen play provision sites we offer a mix of play equipment including a range of inclusive equipment, e.g. wheelchair accessible multi-play unit, carousels, trampolines, and interpretation panels for example. As our play provision is neighbourhood based, we do not provide parking or toilet facilities, although parking is provided at the Isabella skate park.

Existing play facilities in Blyth are perceived (based the feedback emailed to members by several residents) as limited in meeting the diverse needs of SEND children/young people, those with sensory needs, and families requiring wheelchair-accessible environments, with the inclusive elements within the play areas being described as 'tokensim'.

It is recommended by officers to conduct a comprehensive review of the inclusive provision for SEND within our existing play areas and bring a report back to Committee. This work would include reviewing the play equipment, signage, seating, shelter, access to the play area, surfacing within the play area, play options for wheelchair users, and the ability for teenagers/young people with SEND to play and a consultation with local families, SEND groups, schools, and relevant experts. This also incorporates the request from Cllr D Nicholson.

Elaine Brown

**Deputy Town Clerk
8 September 2025**

Appendix 1

As Councillor for Cowpen Ward in Blyth, I am writing to once again raise a proposal I have been advocating for over the past four years — the development of a dedicated park designed specifically for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which is also fully wheelchair accessible.

This is not a new request. For four years, I have consistently raised this issue in meetings, conversations, and community discussions because I believe passionately that all children — regardless of ability — deserve access to safe, inclusive, and enjoyable play spaces. Unfortunately, our current facilities fall short for many families across Blyth, particularly those with SEND children or children who use wheelchairs and other mobility aids.

A dedicated inclusive park would be a huge step forward for our town, reflecting the values of equality, compassion, and accessibility. This would be a place where no child feels excluded, where parents and carers can feel supported, and where the whole community can come together.

I am asking the council to seriously consider:

- Allocating funding for the development of such a facility;
- Identifying a suitable, central site within Blyth;
- And working in partnership with local families and experts to deliver a space that meets real-world needs.

The park should include:

- Fully accessible play equipment and surfacing,
- Sensory-friendly zones for children with autism and sensory processing differences,
- Adaptive swings, roundabouts, and other inclusive features,
- Wide, level paths and accessible seating,
- Secure boundaries for safety and peace of mind.

I remain fully committed to this cause, and I would welcome the opportunity to help lead a consultation process with local families, SEND support groups, and relevant stakeholders to ensure we get this right.

After years of discussion and advocacy, I believe now is the time to take meaningful action — and I hope the council will work with me to make this much-needed facility a reality for the people of Cowpen and the wider Blyth community.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Brian Erskine

Cowpen Ward, Blyth