BUCKLESHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Mrs Ruth Johnson (Clerk to the Parish Council)
54 Levington Lane, Bucklesham, Ipswich, Suffolk IP10 0DZ

clerk@buckleshamparishcouncil.gov.uk 07854 712 734

Playing Field Inspections

Report prepared for Bucklesham Parish Council Meeting on 13th November 2026
by Ruth Johnson, Clerk to Bucklesham Parish Council

Brief: To research the legal requirements for Playing Field Inspections, and obtain quotes from reputable qualified Playing Field Inspectors.

Introduction

The Playing Field on Levington Lane, Bucklesham, is managed and Held in Trust by Bucklesham Parish Council. The Field consists of a large football pitch with 2 full sized goals, bike jumps, 2 table tennis tables, a five-a-side goal and basket ball hoop, and a large children's play area with multiple pieces of equipment.

In the Past

In the early 2000s when the original play equipment was installed, the Parish Council arranged for an annual RoSPA inspection of the whole Field by a qualified inspector, and weekly inspections and litter picks took place by Councillors and the Clerk. Councillors and the Clerk undertook training by RoSPA. All weekly inspections were recorded in a log book.

It became increasingly difficult to ensure that the inspections were carried out to a high enough standard, and regularly enough, by relying on the volunteers. Therefore the Parish Council agreed to pay for the services of a qualified inspector to inspect the Field on a quarterly basis.

This arrangement continued over the last 25 years using various inspectors including Suffolk Norse, East Suffolk Services, Ipswich Borough Council and David Bracey.

The Current Situation

The entire Field is currently inspected four times a year by David Bracey Play Inspections. David is an independent Outdoor Playground and Leisure Inspector, qualified to the highest standard on the Register of Play Inspectors International (Rpii). David undertakes an 'annual inspection' at every inspection as he always determines the compliance to the relevant standard each time he inspects. David's reports are then published on the website.

David is retiring at the end of this year, and completed his final annual inspection in October. The Council will therefore need to decide whether to employ the services of another independent inspector, whether to reply on village volunteers to inspect the Field, or whether to not inspect the Field at all.

Why inspect the Playing Field equipment?

Playground health and safety standards in the UK are **not** legal requirements. However, inspections are recommended by the European Playground Standards (EN1176) and are endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive. EN1176 states that a competent person should carry out Operational Inspections once every one month to three months. A routine visual inspection does not legally have to be undertaken by anyone trained, however it is strongly recommend that they are a qualified professional.

Regular inspections show good practice and ensure we comply with our duty of care. Regular inspections by a fully qualified playground inspector will help reduce accidents. It will also ensure that safety hazards are promptly identified, and equipment faults can be reported to the installer (NGF) and repaired quickly. By assessing the maintenance needs we can also better ensure the lifespan of the equipment. Independent play safety inspections are expected by insurance companies and can reduce premiums as well as improve our situation during any possible litigation.

Relying on an unqualified lay-person to inspect the equipment may result in problems being missed which could result in any number of problems. The responsibility of such an important task is an unfair burden and potentially dangerous.

Recruiting Volunteers to undertake inspections

I have contacted 30 residents of the village to enquire as to whether they would be willing to help undertake inspections on the Field as part of an team. The residents I contacted are regular users of the Field, people whose children use the equipment, or FOPS who have already offered to help manage the Field in other ways.

My request informed the residents of the idea that if enough people came forward to join the team, inspecting the equipment at some point within a set week, it would only be necessary for them to take their turn once every few months.

The take-up was very low. Some residents replied that they would not be willing to take on such an important task as they felt it was a huge responsibility and they did not feel suitably qualified. Some did offer to litter pick.

Only 2 of those 30 people contacted said they would be willing to undertake regular inspections of equipment. Only 2 Parish Councillors volunteered to join the group. With only 4 people in total offering to be part of the team of volunteers, it would be necessary for those volunteers to take a turn once every 4 weeks.

Quotes from qualified inspectors

I have sought to find alternative qualified inspectors and detail their quotes and costings below. I include the current costs of David Bracey for comparison although because of his impending retirement he is obviously not up for consideration. VAT can be reclaimed so costs are without VAT.

Company	Cost per quarterly operational inspection (plus VAT)	Cost of Annual Inspection (plus VAT)	Total Cost per year (plus VAT)
David Bracey	£175	£175	£700
Newton Ford NCN Leisure	£120	£225	£585
RoSPA	£536	(£118*) £354 plus £4**	£1,950 plus any items over 5
East Suffolk Services	£49.98	£96.90	£296.82
NPGI	£290	£650	£1,810

*per area, and RoSPA consider the field is split into 3 areas (play equipment, sports equipment, bike jumps)

**PLUS £4 for each play equipment item over 5 items (Field has 11, if Trim Trail is counted as 1 piece)

Conclusion

Qualified inspectors are trained by Rpii to inspect all different types of equipment and have the correct insurance to do so. If the Council decides to rely on unqualified volunteers to inspect the equipment it leaves itself open to all sorts of issues.

I strongly recommend that the Council considers the implications if regular inspections of the Field are not carried out by a qualified play inspector. I would recommend the services of East Suffolk Services and hope that the Council are in agreement with this. I would also recommend that those residents who did volunteer are asked to litter pick on a regular basis but are not requested to inspect the equipment.

Ruth Johnson October 2026

Clerk to the Council

clerk@buckleshamparishcouncil.gov.uk 54 Levington Lane, Bucklesham 07854 712 734