



# Mary Baily Management Plan

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Previous plan: Early 2022  
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Next review: March 2027  
Consultation: Public engagement  
November 2024



## Site description

**Location:** Mary Baily is situated approximately 0.8km to the southwest of Frome town centre, set between Somerset Road, Park Road and Victoria Park (ST 770 150). It is a square plot, defined by the line of Somerset Road. The western boundary is a footpath linking Park Road with Somerset Road and separating the park from adjacent Victoria Park. Abutting the northern boundary are the buildings of Longleat Court (a former technical college).

It lies within Frome Town Conservation Area (Character Area 9), which incorporates the park and the late 19th-century street of Somerset Road, lined by grand Victorian terraces and semi-detached villas overlooking the park.

**Size:** 1.4 hectares

### Geology

The underlying geology within the park, as with much of Frome, is that of the Forest Marble Formation. Forest Marble is a variant type of limestone sedimentary bedrock, formed between 168.3 and 166.1 million years ago during the Jurassic period, it has a greenish grey colouring and is widely used for local historic buildings and within the park.<sup>1</sup>

**Soil:** Lime-rich loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage.<sup>2</sup>

### Topography

Predominantly flat with some small undulations on the Western side. An elevation of approx. 115m in the western corner adjoining Somerset Road and a light slope along the Somerset Road boundary to the lowest point of 111m at the boundary edge.<sup>3</sup>

### Archaeology

No records on the Somerset Historic Environment Records and no archaeological findings in the English Heritage Extensive Urban Survey: Archaeological assessment of Frome.<sup>4</sup>

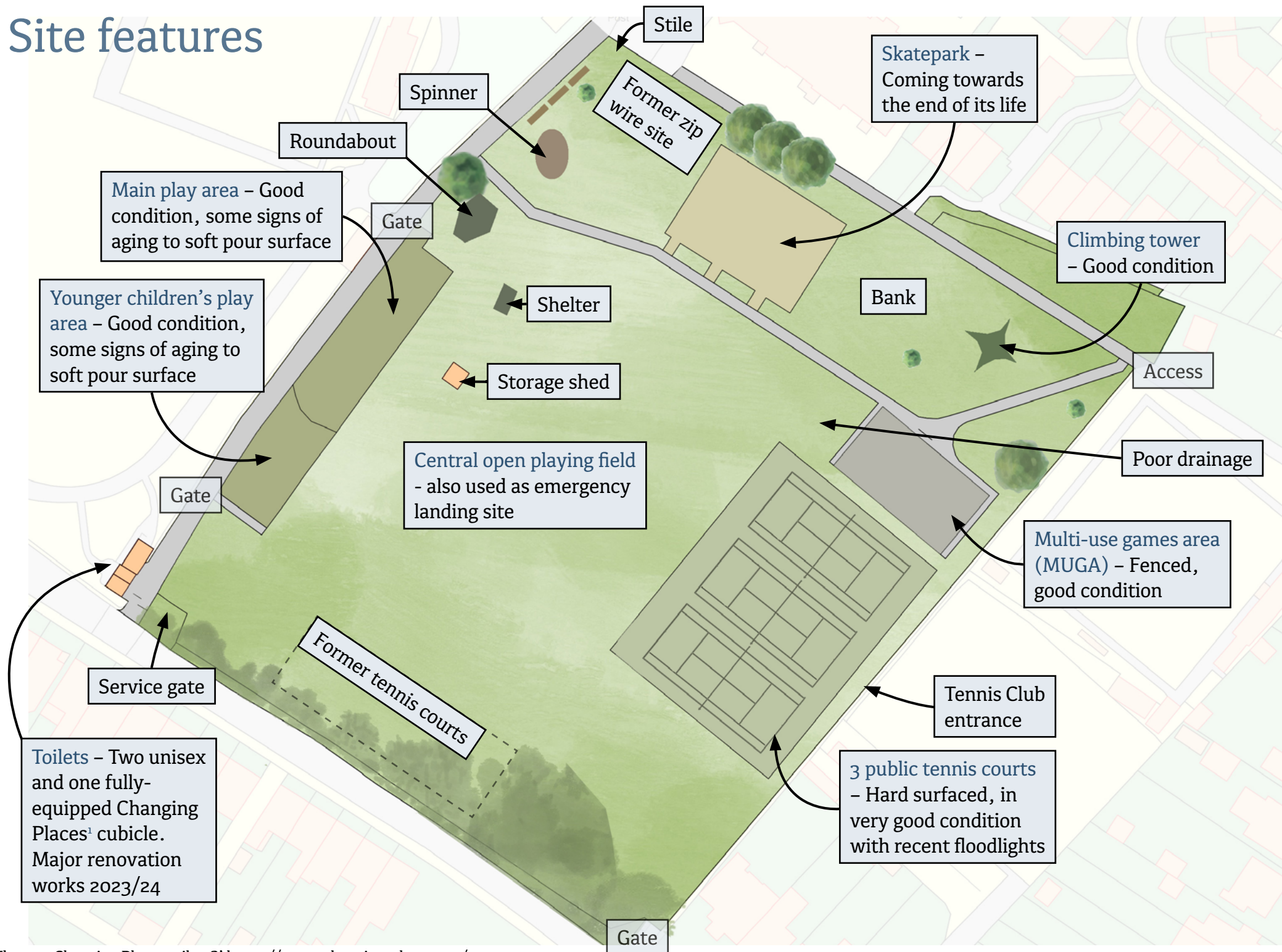
<sup>1</sup> British Geological Survey: <https://webapps.bgs.ac.uk/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?pub=FMB>

<sup>2</sup> Soilscape: <https://www.landis.org.uk/soilscales/>

<sup>3</sup> England Topographic Map: <https://en-gb.topographic-map.com/map-kb57/England>

<sup>4</sup> Clare Gathercole, 2003: [https://www.somersetheritage.org.uk/eus/frome\\_eus.html](https://www.somersetheritage.org.uk/eus/frome_eus.html)

# Site features



Main play area - Good condition, some signs of aging to soft pour surface

Younger children's play area - Good condition, some signs of aging to soft pour surface

Central open playing field - also used as emergency landing site

Multi-use games area (MUGA) - Fenced, good condition

3 public tennis courts - Hard surfaced, in very good condition with recent floodlights

Climbing tower - Good condition

Skatepark - Coming towards the end of its life

Toilets - Two unisex and one fully-equipped Changing Places<sup>1</sup> cubicle. Major renovation works 2023/24

Roundabout

Spinner

Shelter

Storage shed

Bank

Access

Poor drainage

Tennis Club entrance

Stile

Gate

Gate

Gate

Service gate

Former tennis courts

Former zip wire site

<sup>1</sup> 'What are Changing Places toilets?' <https://www.changing-places.org/>

## Ecology

The biodiversity at Mary Baily reflects its primary role as a recreational space, with management largely focused on amenities rather than conservation.

Unlike Victoria Park, which balances human use with biodiversity, Mary Baily playing field has limited wildlife-friendly habitats. However, the presence of species such as Wood Avens, Field Bindweed, and Wild Carrot suggests that some native flora persist, particularly in less disturbed areas.

In 2022, the Wild Bunch and FTC Rangers created a small wildflower patch to support pollinators. This initiative has been well received by the community, with local residents and visitors enjoying its vibrant summer display. More importantly, the wildflower patch provides a vital food source and habitat for insects such as the Vapourer Moth and Spotted Thintail. While non-native species like False Acacia and Common Box add to the park's greenery, their ecological benefits are limited compared to native trees and shrubs.

Expanding similar biodiversity-friendly efforts could further enhance the park's value for both wildlife and the community.

See Appendix for full list of species.



Photo: Chris Bailey



## Tenancies and control of space

Tenancies:

- Frome Selwood Tennis Club manage the tennis courts for public use

Control of space

Frome Town Council manage Mary Baily. Organisations, groups and individuals can use the space for events at no cost by submitting a request to the Events Administrator, Nykki Mehta. This process helps us avoid clashes and ensure that events are safe and have appropriate documentation.

## Main uses

Mary Baily is much loved for outdoor recreation. There is a wide appeal for children ranging from a group of play activities for younger children, general play equipment for children of all ages, and a skatepark whose appeal extends to older children. Ball games that benefit from a fenced in space are played in the MUGA. The tennis courts are available for all to hire and are managed by the Frome Selwood Tennis Club.

The open field is used for running and throwing games and by schools for sports days, when running tracks are often laid out.

To optimise the site as the town's largest playing fields, dogs are excluded from Mary Baily.

## Who uses Mary Baily?

Mary Baily's location and mix of features make it one of Frome's most popular spaces for children and families. In the Building a Picture of Frome report 2024<sup>1</sup>, 63% of people said they regularly use Victoria Park and Mary Baily, making them Frome's most popular open spaces.

During our engagement in Autumn 2024, reasons given for using Mary Baily reflected the appeal of the main features. Younger children pointed out play equipment like the big swing, spinner and spiderweb climbing frame as their favourite things. Older children and young people were passionate about the skate park.

Many people pointed out the value of having a large, dog-free playing field.



'Those swings used to go so high the chains went slack at the highest point of the swing ... we survived.'

'We used to rub candle wax on the slide to make it go faster. I spent so many happy hours in that park.'

◀ Looking from Somerset Road end of Mary Baily towards Park Road. Behind is the Red Triangle Hut, a youth centre supported by Mary Baily, which remained on-site until 1958. The building at the far end was a technical college and is now the site of Longleat Court. The giant slide was a well known and loved play feature.

## Cultural and aesthetic value

Mary Baily is one of the town's most popular and well-used green spaces, offering opportunities for play and recreation, as well as formal and informal sports. As a site dedicated to recreation, it is kept dog free. It is the town's quintessential family space and playground.

The skate park is an important cultural space for young people. Events like the Skate Jam in September 2024 have showcased the vibrant wheeled sports culture in Frome, which benefits young people by fostering a sense of community, resilience, and creativity.

The site has historical value too - having been open to the public for almost 100 years, several generations have fond memories to share. It also keeps alive the story of Mary Baily, a prominent woman in Frome history.

## Stakeholders

- Police
- Frome Selwood Tennis Club
- Selwood Bowling Club
- Residents of Park Rd and Somerset Rd
- YMCA (Youth outreach work)
- Community and school groups
- Frome Skatepark Project

## Site access and barriers for inclusivity

The site is principally accessed from the wide flat tarmac footpath running from Park Road to Somerset Road. There are two gates off this footpath into the park. There are also entrances from each of the corners: by Somerset Road at the corner past the tennis courts, near Selwood Bowling Club, and over a stile from Park Road. There is a vehicle service entrance from Somerset Road in the corner next to the toilets.

The site is mostly flat with two tarmac paths: one from Park Road to Somerset Road, the other through the park towards Butts Hill. The site has drainage issues in some areas, making access to some areas more challenging in winter.

There is a recently refurbished Changing Places toilet, making the site more accessible, however, the play areas have limited accessible installations which is a barrier to access for some park users.

<sup>1</sup> Building a Picture of Frome, 2024 <https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/frome-town-profile>

# History of Mary Baily playing field

## Origins and Mary Baily

In the early 20th century, the site was known as 'The Cricket Field'. It was owned by Mary Baily (1868-1928), a local supporter of good causes from a prominent local brewing family. She was a Justice of the Peace (becoming the first and only woman on the Frome Bench) and variously supported the Victoria Hospital, St John's Church, the Industrial Welfare Centre and the Red Triangle sports club house and youth club based on this site.

The nationwide need for extra urban recreational space was a requirement set out in the 1918 Education Act. Game playing was limited in Victoria Park at the time, but Frome Urban District Council had recently taken on the running of the park and did not have the funds to purchase more land.

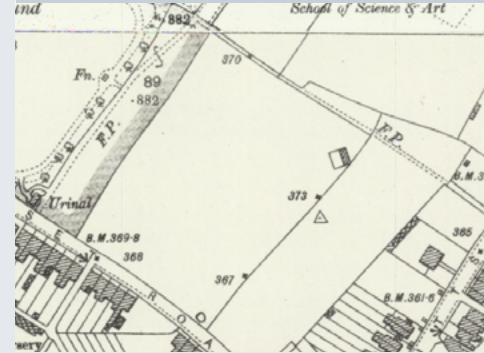
Recognising the importance of this unmet need to improve Frome's provision for children, Mary Baily bestowed this flat field adjoining the park in her will to the National Playing Fields Association. It was to be managed by Frome Urban District Council (which became Frome Town Council). The playing field was opened in May 1930 and quickly became the venue for many fetes and fairs in aid of local charities.

The bequest stated that it was to be managed forever for the community as a recreation field 'primarily for the children in the elementary schools of Frome'.

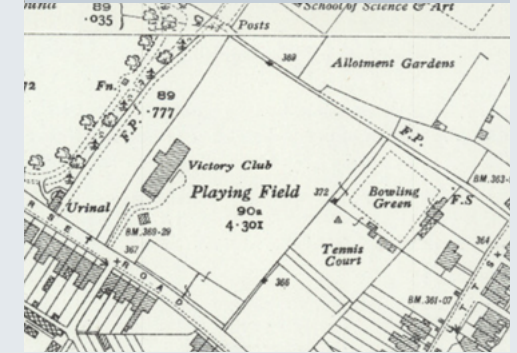
Mary Baily



OS 1906: the Mary Baily site is purely an open field, not yet opened to the public for recreation.



OS 1930: The year the playing field opened. The bowls club, tennis club and Red Triangle hut have appeared.



## From then to now

There was a large community hut in the space, just beyond the current play area. This was known as The Red Triangle Victory Club and was built during WW1 (labelled Victory Club on the map above). It was a part of the countrywide network of 600 huts set up by the YMCA to provide food, drink and basic comforts for soldiers.

After WW1 each hut became a HQ for 'Red Triangle Clubs' arranging sports and group events for young people, and this one became a base for a local Scout Group. It was used for concerts during carnivals and was home to a football team known as the 'Red Triangles'. In WWII it was a centre for first aiders and afterwards was used as an extra classroom for Oakfield School. It was leased to Somerset County Council in 1950 but was finally removed in 1958.

The main play area strip in front of the hut, next to the footpath, was originally purchased with two other fields in 1887 to create Victoria Park (field '966' on the 1886 OS map - a slim empty field with just a couple of boundary trees and a footpath). In the original Victoria Park design this slim strip was to be used for children's play featuring a 'swing and trapeze'!

In the period following WW2, Mary Baily playing fields acquired a giant slide, merry-go round, swingers and rocker (see photo below). In the 1990s this was upgraded and featured a tractor, climbing frames, four swings and a multi-play area. In 2007 a refurbishment took place and new play equipment was installed by Admiral. In 2012 further durable equipment was installed by Kompan, which remains in place in 2025.

## Current features, issues and opportunities

A current issue with the modern equipment is the accessible roundabout, which has failed several times. The issue is the recessed fixing point, which becomes waterlogged and affects the bearing. If the drainage cannot be fixed, it may be necessary to replace the roundabout.



In the 1990s the first skatepark was installed in Mary Baily. In 2013, following an extensive public consultation, this was upgraded to the current set-up. Now, 12 years on, the skatepark would benefit from a refurbishment or replacement. New designs have shown what is possible, with smooth lines of concrete bowls. A review of possible options with the skating community is under way. Once a costed project plan has been developed this will be considered for adoption by the town council.



In 2015 the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) was built. It is well-suited to ball games; however the Street Snooker element is rarely used and expensive, and will be removed.

In the post-war period there were tennis courts on the boundary with Somerset Road (as seen in the 1930 OS map) and the remaining flat area can still be seen today. More recently, tennis courts were located in Victoria Park.



◀ Swings for infants at the Park Road end of the Mary Baily footpath. At the time this was adjacent to the newly built hospital seen behind. This area is now a substation.

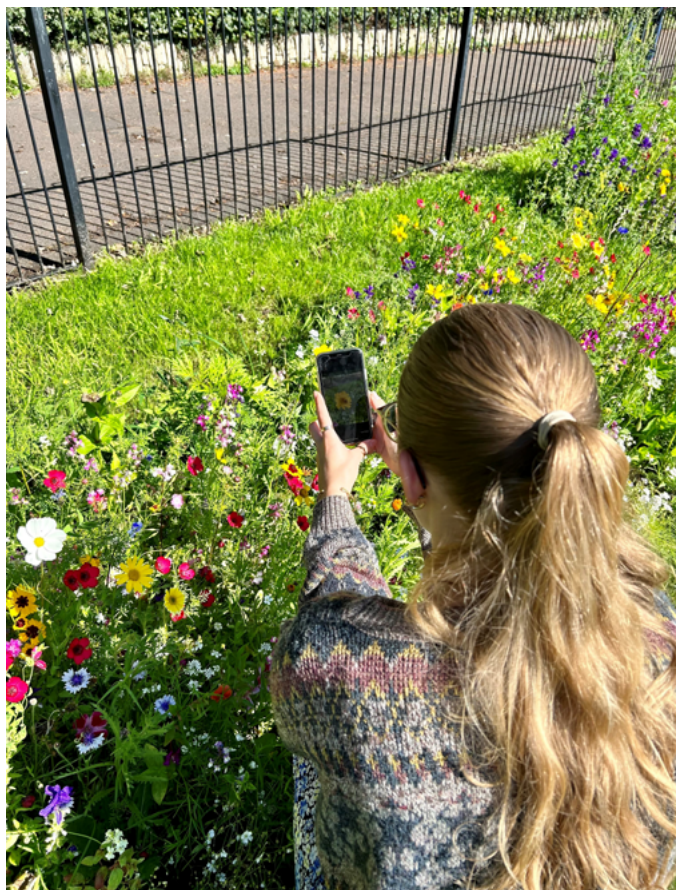


The new courts replaced a wall with hoops used for basketball and other ball games. Floodlights were added to the tennis courts in 2023.

By 2016 most of the current features in Mary Baily were present. Following a public consultation in November 2024, we have identified opportunities for refreshing some features, such as the skatepark, and bringing new areas to life such as the former tennis court area.

## Environmental or ecological concerns

Biodiversity at Mary Baily is constrained by the park's primary recreational function. However, expanding wildflower areas or incorporating additional native planting could further enhance its value for pollinators and other wildlife, creating a better balance between human use and nature. (See objectives on extending the wildflower meadow beds below.)



## Social concerns

During our engagement in Autumn 2024, park visitors and nearby residents mentioned some issues affecting their use of Mary Baily.

### Lack of lighting

Some residents mentioned feeling unsafe using the park when it was dark, especially in Winter when it starts getting dark soon after the end of the school day.

### Seating and shade

There was a lot of interest in more seating in Mary Baily, including sociable seating such as picnic benches, and seating in shade whether under a shelter or created by more tree planting.

### Noise and Antisocial Behaviour

Concerns expressed included:

- General noise from play, and sometimes loud music, affecting residents in properties next to the park.
- Groups of teenagers and young adults using inappropriate language, sometimes swearing or shouting at passers-by, and being noisy.
- Incidents or fears of harrassment or assault, including of passers-by, and bullying or fights within groups.
- Vandalism of the public toilets.

### Tensions between groups

Some respondents shared experiences of older children in the play areas playing too roughly or using language that wasn't appropriate for young children to overhear.

There was also frustration from young people about parents allowing small children to use the skate park equipment to climb and slide on, making it unsafe to do the wheeled sports it's designed for.

### Dogs

The entirety of Mary Baily is dog-free. Some people asked for dogs to be allowed on the playing field, feeling that neighbouring Victoria Park has reached a 'saturation point' for dog walking, and wishing to be able to bring their dogs while keeping an eye on their children playing. However, many others told us that Mary Baily being dog-free was a positive for them, not having to worry about related safety concerns.

## Council Plan

The Council Plan is reviewed periodically and sets the overarching framework for all that we do. The Open Spaces that the council manages are recognised as a much cherished and highly valued community asset.

The principles set out in the 2025-27 Plan, which guide management across all FTC land, are to enhance sites to be: inclusive, biodiverse, playful, active, connected and safe with a strong sense of local ownership.

## Vision

Taking into account the overarching Council Strategy and the SWOT summary, the Vision for the future of the site is:

*“To nurture Frome’s most-loved recreation ground ensuring it is vibrant, engaging and inclusive. A park that offers a range of activities that appeal to children of all ages while also serving the wider community.”*

*“A site that is kept refreshed and relevant while also safeguarding the original open natural character of the field bestowed by Mary Baily.”*

## SWOT assessment

### Strengths

- Loved
- Range of offer
- Mostly accessible
- Toilets and café nearby

### Weaknesses

- Lack of lighting
- Some spaces tired
  - Some anti-social behaviour
  - Inclusivity & gender balance
  - Drainage

### Opportunities

- More nature
- Refresh older equipment
- Better drainage and lighting
  - More inclusive play
    - Co-design

### Threats

- Cost of equipment
  - Site character could be compromised if it became too busy or there was no open space available
- Wetter weather

## Aims

Turning this Vision into principles guiding the management of the site in the near future, the aims are to:

- Refresh equipment that is starting to age.
- Consider designs that promote a family-friendly offer, enhance a sense of safety and help minimise antisocial behaviour.
- Improve drainage in key areas of park.
- Improve surfaced path access through wettest areas.
- Consider option of solar lighting.
- Review options for inclusive play.
- Consider a co-design project to promote young people’s creative input and ownership of the site.
- Enhancing natural features such as extending wildflower beds and adding trees along the paths.
- Consider any options that are educational and fun such as historic photos or trails.

# Site Objectives to 2027

🌟 = Priority objective

🌟 Extend wildflower bed and install tap

🌟 Plant trees along path

Refresh mural on back of mower shed

🌟 Add a number of historical photos along path

🌟 Review possibility of solar lighting

Review option of giant swing

🌟 Undertake a co-design space with young people

Former tennis courts

🌟 Add zip wire

🌟 4 metre community picnic table

🌟 Start project to consider replacement of skatepark

Hammocks or recessed seating in bank

🌟 Replace old bench

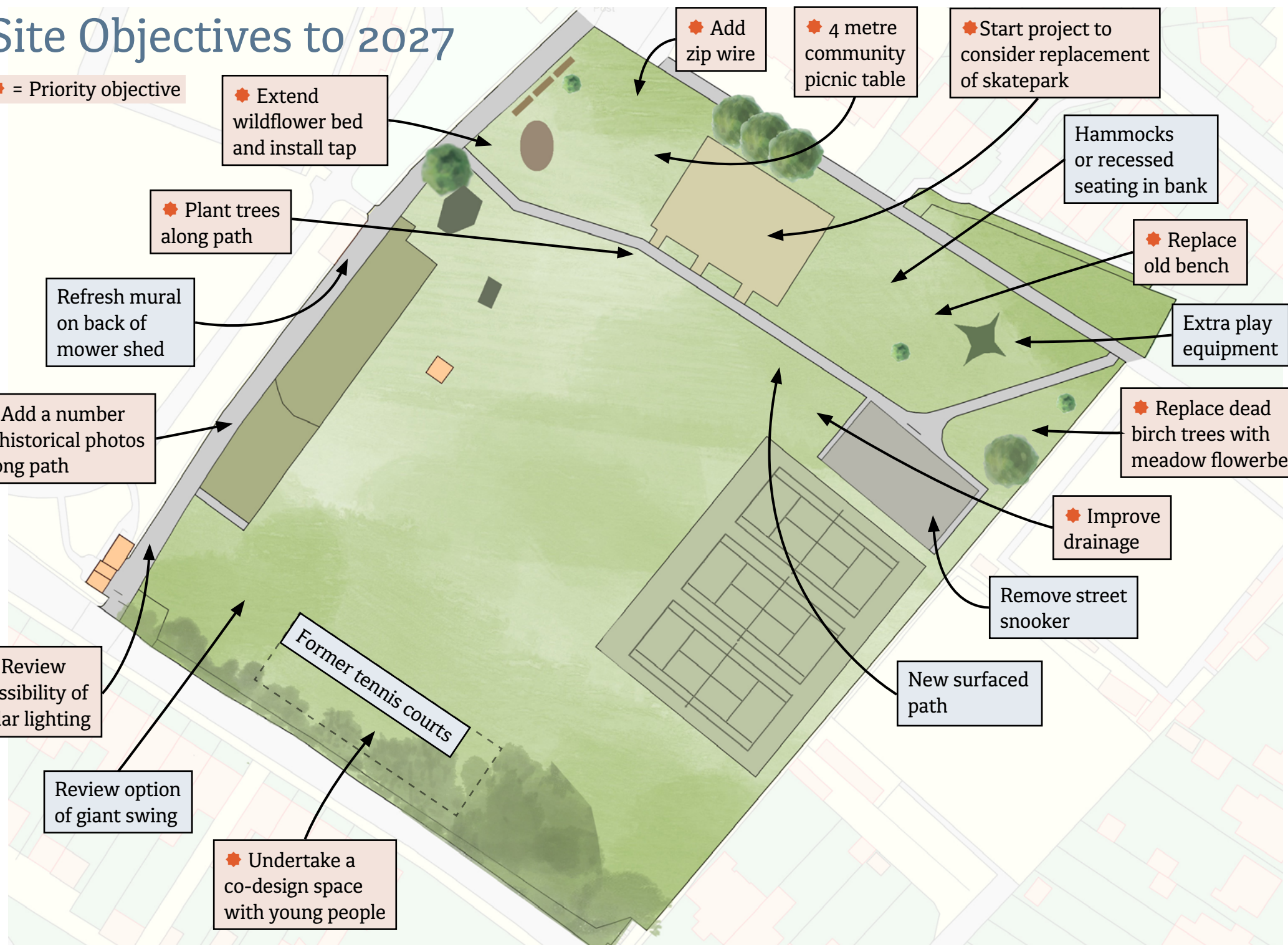
Extra play equipment

🌟 Replace dead birch trees with meadow flowerbed

🌟 Improve drainage

Remove street snooker

New surfaced path



## Objectives

Our **short-term** objectives (by April 2026) for achieving the above aims are to:

- Extend the wildflower bed by the park boundary and install a watering service tap.
- Install an extra-long (4 metres) community picnic table near the Park Road area.
- Replace bench by spider climbing tower.
- Add zip wire where former one was near Park Road entrance.
- Undertake a co-design project with young children to consider how the former tennis court area could be used.
- Change dead birch trees near Selwood Bowling Club for another wildflower flower bed.
- Improve drainage by path near tennis club.
- Plant an occasional avenue of trees along the main path through the field – see map in Appendix 1.
- Review option of solar lighting along path from Park Road to Somerset Road.
- Start project to consider option for skatepark refresh.
- Add historical photos with descriptions in-situ, approximately where the photos were taken.

Our **medium-term** objectives (by end 2027) for achieving the above aims are to:

- Install a surfaced path to connect the tarmac path to the public tennis courts.
- Remove street snooker in MUGA.
- Consider hammocks or recessed seating in banks by spider tower.
- Extra play equipment by spider tower.
- Mural refresh on back of mower shed.
- Review option of giant swing by Somerset Road field entrance.
- Replace or repair the accessible roundabout.
- Review costings and, if funds allow, install new accessible play features.

## How we will get there

**Work/action plans and finances:** The above objectives are considered as part of the annual planning process and go towards producing a costed Work Programme for the Open Spaces. This is reviewed annually and agreed at Council in January each year. The latest work programme and finances for all departments within the Council, including Open Spaces, can be found on our website: [www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/publications](http://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/publications)

**Work Programme:** The above objectives, with funding allocated from the Work Programme, are turned into actionable weekly and seasonal tasks and projects through ongoing review with the rangers.

**Shortfalls:** There are sufficient finances for the works planned in the coming financial year.

## How we know we've arrived

### Review frequency

- Vision: Rarely
- Aims & objectives: Bi-annually (Council)
- Costed Work Programme: Annually
- Work action plans: Weekly/Seasonally

### Review team

The Management Plan for Mary Baily is reviewed by the Environment Manager with the Communities and Engagement Team, the Marketing and Communications Team, key councillors and rangers with public/stakeholder input on major updates.

# Appendix 1 – Tree planting plan for Mary Baily



## Appendix 2 – List of species found in Mary Baily

Common name	Scientific name
Insects	
Vapourer Moth	<i>Orgyia antiqua</i>
Spotted Thintail	<i>Meliscaeva auricollis</i>
Plants	
Wood Avens	<i>Geum urbanum</i>
Field Bindweed	<i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>
Wild Carrot	<i>Daucus carota</i>
Ivy-leaved Cyclamen	<i>Cyclamen hederifolium</i>
False Acacia	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>
Common Box	<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>

# Appendix 3 – Timeline for Victoria Park and Mary Bailly

## Timeline for Victoria Park and Mary Bailly

Note: some dates are approximate

	Vic Park	Mary Bailly	National / Local
1885			Growing strains on urban poor living conditions
6			
7	Park land purchased		Queen Victoria Golden Jubilee
8	Park opened		
9			
1890			
5	Fountain installed		
6			
7	Tree planted opposite Café (shelter)		Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee
1900			
5	Fountain removed		
1910			
1	Planting ceremony with premier of New South Wales		George V Coronation
4			
5			
6		Red Triangle Hut for soldiers built	WWI
7			
8			
9	WW1 Tank installed		Eduction act stressing need for greater recreation space for urban children
1920			
9	Bandstand Opened	Tennis courts moved to Vic Park?	
1930			
	Pitch and Putt and Tennis Courts	Field bestowed for children's recreation and opened May 1930	
1	Bowls Club		
8	Tank Removed		
9			
1940			
1			
2	Mower shed built - possibly as a never completed air raid shelter		WWII
3			
4			
5		Play Area features Slide, Roundabout and rocker	
1950			
8		Hut used by Oakfield School Hut removed	
1960	War Memorial by Bandstand ?		
1970			
1980			
6	Fountain plinth removed Bandstand Fire		
1990			
		Play area features tractor and multi-play	
2000			
5	Pitch and Putt changed to childrens play area		
6			
7	War Memorial removed and space dedicated to twinning with Rabka, Poland	Upgrade of Play Area	
2010			
3		Major upgrade of Play area and Skatepark	
4	Shelter Converted to Café		
5	Tennis courts moved to MB	Muga Tennis courts installed replacing basketball wall	
6			
2020			
3		Zip wire retired	
	Toilets Refurbished	Tennis Courts Flood lighting	
4	Café shelter built		
5	Ranger base refurbished		