

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	8 JULY 2014	AGENDA ITEM:	10
TITLE:	IMPROVEMENTS TO READING PARKS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAUL GITTINGS	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE, SPORT AND CONSUMER SERVICES
SERVICE:	PARKS AND OPEN SPACES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	BEN STANESBY	TEL:	0118 937 3029
JOB TITLE:	PARKS MANAGER	E-MAIL:	Ben.stanesby@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the request for scheme approval for new capital projects starting in 2014-15 to the estimated value of £188,000. It is anticipated that the majority of these schemes will be funded from Section 106 receipts identified within the Council's approved 2014-15 Capital Programme.
- 1.2 A summary of new capital projects is outlined in paragraph 4.3. A more detailed description of the individual projects is attached at Appendix 1. These improvements align with the following proposed activity in the approved Corporate Plan: **Implement a programme of parks and open spaces improvements across the Borough.**

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That scheme approval be given for the Capital Projects outlined in paragraph 4.3 and detailed in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the relevant Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services and Head of Finance, be given delegated authority to finalise details of individual schemes and programmes within the overall approval given.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council's Cultural Strategy affirms the importance of Reading's parks, open spaces and waterways, and sets the objective of protecting and maximising the potential of the Thames and Kennet rivers. A series of area - or facility specific plans - have also been produced to help deliver this strategy, including:
- *The Playing Pitch Strategy which looks at future provision and management of sports fields;*
 - *The Allotments Strategy which recommends the consolidation of existing allotment sites, and an improvement in their quality;*
 - *The Thames Parks Plan which provides a strategic plan for the eight Thames side Parks.*
 - *The Open Spaces Strategy which provides the contact for the future management of and investment in recreational public open space.*
- 3.2 The Sustainable Community Strategy is a long term vision for the town working with key partners from both the private and voluntary sectors. There is recognition of the importance of environmental assets, in particular our parks, gardens, open spaces, and waterways.

4. THE PROPOSAL

Current Position

- 4.1 Following the 2011 assessment of parks infrastructure, a prioritised programme of improvement work was devised. The factors considered during the assessment included:
- Condition
 - Pressure on existing facilities and increased demand from new housing
 - Service deficits
 - Accessibility
 - Economic sustainability
- 4.2 An assessment of available funding at the time and geographic fettering of Section 106 receipts was undertaken and cross-referenced with identified needs to produce an improvement programme. This was approved by Cabinet in March 2012. In 2013 a further improvement programme was approved by Policy Committee in June. Most of these schemes have been completed and some are still ongoing as outlined in paragraph 4.6.

Options Proposed

- 4.3 The proposed capital programme for 2014-2015 for which spending and scheme approval is being sought is tabled below. This programme lists the schemes in alphabetical order and indicates the contributions currently available and earmarked to fund each scheme. Appendix 1 provides a more detailed description of the individual schemes.

PROPOSED PARKS INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

2014-2015 Schemes	Estimated Cost £,000	Ward	Likely Commencement
Arthur Newbery Park	£13,000	Kentwood	Autumn 2014
Bear Wharf/County Lock	£15,000	Abbey	Autumn 2014
Blagrove Recreation Ground	£2,000	Tilehurst	Summer 2014
Cintra Park	£58,000	Redlands	Autumn 2014
Coley Recreation Ground	£2,000	Minster	Winter 2014
Prospect Park	£56,000	Southcote	Ongoing
Thames Parks	£42,000	Caversham + Thames	Ongoing
ESTIMATED TOTAL:	£188,000		

- 4.4 The overall cost of a complete scheme may exceed the value identified in some cases and therefore schemes will be phased to align with available funding.

Other Options Considered

- 4.5 The Terms of the individual legal agreements are closely fettered and therefore limits choices on where funding can be spent. The one exception to this is play facilities around Cintra and Hexham Road.
- 4.6 Rather than extending play facilities at Cintra Park, work could be undertaken close by at Hexham Road. However, there has been significant investment into Hexham Road play facilities over the last twelve months which has effectively limited the ability to make further improvements at this facility.
- 4.7 **Ongoing Schemes**

Of the schemes approved by Cabinet in March 2012 and at Policy Committee in June 2013, a number are still to be completed. These include:

- 4.7.1 Caversham Court Garages (Cabinet - March 2012)
The refurbishment of the garages and stable block at Caversham Court is identified as part of the Thames Parks Plan. The tendering process is now under way with work expected to take place during the financial year 2014-15.
- 4.7.2 Forbury Gardens (Policy Committee - June 2013)
Restoration and enhancement work within the Forbury Gardens is ongoing as part of the Council's contractual obligations following the Heritage Lottery Funding.
- 4.7.3 Lousehill Copse (Policy Committee - June 2013)
Work to improve the footpath surfaces is ongoing. With the enlargement of the pond, which was carried out by the Highways Department to reduce the risk of flooding on the Dee Road Estate, other infrastructure works have been delayed.
- 4.7.4 Palmer Park
A number of improvement works have been carried out at Palmer Park within the last year as planned. The remainder of the funding will be spent during 2014-15.
- 4.7.5 Rabson's Recreation Ground (Policy Committee - June 2013)
Work to improve the drainage to the football pitches will be taking place when the improvements at The Cowsey (see below) have been completed.
- 4.7.6 Robert Hewett Recreation Ground (Cabinet - March 2012)
The legal dispute regarding the boundary wall with Lima Court has recently been resolved and work to stabilise the wall commenced at the end of January 2014. The rest of the hard landscaping will take place once the work to the wall has been completed.
- 4.7.7 The Cowsey (Policy Committee - June 2013)
Landscaping work around the pond area (which is to be created as part of a flood relief scheme) is due to take place during spring 2014.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The proposed improvements fully align with the Sustainable Community Strategy and following strategic aims:
- To Develop Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley
 - To establish Reading as a learning City and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit
 - To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all
- 5.2 The approval of capital schemes contained in this report is consistent with the Council's approved priorities, Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plans.

5.3 Equal Opportunities:

5.3.1 Being mostly free to use and open every day, parks are particularly important to people with limited income and limited open space at home. There is little barrier to use, whether by ethnic origin, social background, physical or financial means. Consequently, parks and open spaces in general are the most frequently used Council service by choice.

5.3.2 Enhancements to the town's leisure facilities will encourage greater and safer use by the local community. Access to improved local facilities is essential in order to provide everyone with an opportunity to improve their quality of life.

5.4 Sustainability Implications:

5.4.1 Parks and open spaces are a key contributor to a sustainable and healthy environment whilst encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle of those participating.

5.4.2 Well-designed and well-maintained public open spaces contribute to social well being and help reduce the fear of crime.

5.4.3 Safe, good quality, off-road rights of way contribute to reduced vehicle use.

6. **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

6.1 Where appropriate, consultation and engagement with local communities and interest groups will be undertaken prior to each of the projects.

6.2 Ward Councillors will be consulted on all projects within their Ward.

7. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must consider whether the decision will or could have a differential impact on: racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief. Approval of the decisions to carry out any of the improvement work will not have a differential impact on any of the above.

7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant to the decision in this instance.

8. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The funding of the capital schemes will include the appropriate use of Section 106 receipts, in accordance with the terms of the individual legal agreements. Final application and approval of individual Section 106 receipts will be made in the normal way, as part of the financial year-end process.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The individual capital schemes are likely in the main to be funded through Section 106 receipts. The expenditure has been identified within the Council's approved 2014-15 Capital Programme.

9.2 The phasing of capital expenditure during 2014-15 will be subject to confirmation of individual scheme project plans once tenders/quotations are in place.

9.3 Revenue Implications

It is anticipated that any operational costs associated with individual programmes and schemes will be met within existing approved budgets.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 The Council's Cultural Strategy

10.2 Playing Pitch Strategy

10.3 Allotment Strategy

10.4 Thames Parks Plan

10.5 Open Spaces Strategy

10.6 Reading Sustainable Community Strategy

10.7 Report to Cabinet April 2011

10.8 Report to Cabinet March 2012

10.9 Report to Policy Committee June 2013

APPENDIX 1

Outlined below is a brief description of the schemes identified in paragraph 4.3.

ARTHUR NEWBERY PARK

Originally known as Hare Moor, this 26 acre site was gifted by Arthur Newbery to the mayor of Reading as an open space for the people of Reading in 1932. It is one of Reading's oldest parks and was once part of Kentwood Common. The park slopes steeply down to the north with far stretching views across the valley and River Thames. There is a large children's play area in the hollow in the centre of the park. The play equipment is old and in need of replacement. There are also other infrastructure requirements including new footpaths, furniture and landscape improvements.

BEAR WHARF AND COUNTY LOCK

Environmental improvements approaching Country Lock and Bear Wharf are required and may include safety improvements such as new sections of railings, lighting or landscaping.

BLAGRAVE RECREATION GROUND

This is a very popular facility in the centre of Tilehurst village, next to Park Lane School. It is well used as a through route for residents on their way to the nearby shops and library and for parents taking their children to and from the school. The Section 106 contribution will fund new furniture in the park.

CINTRA PARK

Cintra Park is in close proximity to Hexham Road play area. The area to the south of this is well served by facilities at Rabson's Recreation Ground and the newly refurbished Ambrook Road. Having high quality play facilities at Cintra, Hexham Road, Ambrook Road and Rabson's, will ensure the area bound by Christchurch Road, Shinfield Road and Basingstoke Road to the M4, will be effectively served.

There has been an ongoing programme of improvements over recent years at Cintra Park with adult fitness, perimeter path, some play equipment improvements and removal of the old bowls green. It has been identified that provision can be extended including a dog free picnic area, additional furniture and play equipment, landscaping and boundary improvements.

COLEY RECREATION GROUND

Coley Recreation Ground is a medium sized park (6.33 hectares) situated within a large housing estate to the south west of the town centre. There is a perimeter road running around the park and the whole area is overlooked by housing. A number of mature trees have been lost over recent years following adverse weather conditions and the Section 106 contribution identified will fund the replacement of some of these trees.

PROSPECT PARK

Situated to the west of the town centre, Prospect Park is approximately 50 hectares in size and is Reading's largest park which serves the whole of the borough. It is listed as Grade II in the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens and the Council has an obligation to safeguard the features and

qualities which make the landscape of national importance. In addition to the historical improvements to increase capacity, general improvements to infrastructure and landscaping are required.

THAMES PARKS

The ongoing implementation of the Thames Parks Plan remains a priority. Further funding is required for the preservation and restoration of the garage and stable block at Caversham Court Gardens along with improved pedestrian access to Thames Promenade from Richfield Avenue. Infrastructure improvements to Christchurch Meadows are also needed to cope with the increasing levels of use, particularly during the summer months.