

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	14 MARCH 2018	AGENDA ITEM:	7
TITLE:	CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAMME FOR LEISURE, PARKS AND OPEN SPACES 2018-2020		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR HACKER	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE, SPORT AND CONSUMER SERVICES
SERVICE:	ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	LYNNE REYNOLDS	TEL:	0118 937 3276
JOB TITLE:	POLICY AND PROJECT OFFICER	E-MAIL:	Lynne.reynolds@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the request for scheme and spending approval for new capital projects for leisure, parks and open-spaces starting in 2018 to the estimated value of £786,700. These schemes will be funded from Section 106 receipts from developers that are secured through the process of granting planning permission.
- 1.2 A summary of the new capital projects is outlined in paragraph 4.3. A more detailed description of the individual projects is attached at Appendix 1. These improvements contribute to the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2018-21 by implementing a programme of parks and open spaces improvements across the Borough. This programme contributes to several corporate priorities, enhances Reading's environment and improves the quality of life for residents and visitors.
- 1.3 The Council's approved Capital Programme refers to funds in 2018/19 of £350k with an in year (2017/18) allocation of £317k. The £786,700 referred to in this report updates on these figures to take into account additional Section 106 funds that have subsequently been received.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That scheme and spending approval is 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 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 Reading's Core Strategy Document (January 2008 with Adoptions January 2015) has a number of specific open-space and recreation policies including:

- "To protect existing valuable areas of open space and recreation facilities in contributing to the character and biodiversity of the Borough and the quality of life of its residents"
- "To make provision for the improvement of existing open space and recreation facilities to serve the population of new development, to contribute to the aim of a green city, and to preserve areas of 'naturalness' as an important aspect of the urban area"

3.2 The Open Spaces Strategy (March 2007) affirms the importance of Reading's parks and open spaces and states that the Council will "Make improvements to the quality and facilities of existing public open space."

4. THE PROPOSAL

Current Position

4.1 Following the 2011 assessment of parks infrastructure, a prioritised programme of improvement work was developed. 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 June 2013 a further improvement programme was approved by Policy Committee, and in July 2014 and November 2015 additional programmes of improvement work were approved at Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee. Most of these schemes have been completed and some are still ongoing as outlined in paragraph 4.6.

Options Proposed

- 4.3 The proposed leisure capital programme for 2018-2020 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 LEISURE INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

2018-2020 Schemes	Estimated Cost £,000	Ward	Likely Commencement
Arthur Newbery Park	£26,500	Kentwood	Summer 2018
Balmore Walk	£6,900	Thames	Winter 2018
Blagrave Rec Ground - Play Area	£4,500	Tilehurst	Summer 2018
Cintra Park - Play and Sports Area	£70,000	Redlands	Summer 2018
Clayfield Copse	£1,800	Peppard	Spring 2018
Eldon Square	£7,800	Redlands	Spring 2019
Fobney Island Tree Work	£33,300	Whitley	Ongoing
Forbury Gardens	£50,000	Abbey	Ongoing
Katesgrove School Play Area	£19,500	Katesgrove	Completed
Kensington Road Recreation Ground	£5,000	Battle	Spring 2019
Longbarn Lane Recreation Ground	£4,900	Katesgrove	Autumn 2019
Palmer Park	£116,200	Park	To be agreed
Prospect Park Sports Pitches/Courts	£77,200	Southcote	Summer 2018
Rabson's Recreation Ground Play Area	£14,800	Church	Summer 2018
Robert Hewett Recreation Ground	£10,600	Minster	Summer 2018
Thames Parks	£294,100	Abbey, Caversham & Thames	Ongoing
Victoria Recreation Ground	£43,600	Abbey	Summer 2019
ESTIMATED TOTAL:	£786,700		

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

- 4.5 The timetabling for the commencement of the individual schemes may be subject to change. In some cases schemes are weather dependent and in others delivery timescales may also be affected by the availability of contractors.

Other Options Considered

- 4.6 The terms and conditions of the individual legal agreements are closely fettered and this therefore limits choices on where funding can be spent.

4.7 Ongoing Schemes

Of the leisure schemes previously approved at Policy Committee in June 2013 and at Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee (HNLC) in July 2014 and November 2015, a number are still ongoing. These include:

- Lousehill Copse (Policy Committee - June 2013)
Work to improve footpath surfaces is ongoing.
- Thames Parks (HNLC - July 2014 and November 2015)
Work is ongoing as part of the continued implementation of the Thames Parks Plan.
- Victoria Recreation Ground (HNLC - November 2015)
The work has been delayed until the completion of the school work (relating to the new Civitas Academy School) within the park.

4.8 Future Schemes

Looking ahead, there are a number of outline proposals being developed for future implementation. These will be subject to receipt of funding and will address the impact of nearby developments. Examples of proposals include:

- Coley Recreation Ground
Possible extension to the play area. New trim trail/outdoor gym facilities and associated infrastructure.
Estimated cost: £100,000
- Whitley Wood Recreation Ground
New outdoor sports facilities along with associated infrastructure.
Estimated cost: £132,000

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Improving the quality of open-space and recreational facilities is about both Reading as a place and delivering a better quality of life for residents. The

delivery of open-space and recreational facilities contributes to achieving the following Corporate Priorities:

- *Keeping the Town clean, safe green and active;*
- *Providing the best life through education, early help and healthy living;*
- *Providing infrastructure to support the economy.*

5.2 Better quality open-spaces and related facilities have the potential to increase participation in sports and physical activity with a direct impact on health and well-being of the population thereby contributing to improving achievement against the desired outcomes of the Public Health Outcomes Framework.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 Where appropriate, consultation and engagement with local communities and interest groups will be undertaken as part of the development of detailed proposals and prior to implementation.

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 require the appropriate use of Section 106 receipts, in strict accordance with the terms of the individual legal agreements.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 These capital schemes will be funded through Section 106 receipts.

9.2 The phasing of capital expenditure will be subject to confirmation of individual scheme project plans once tenders/quotations have been finalised so that all costs are contained within the s106 resources available.

- 9.3 Any ongoing operational revenue costs associated with individual programmes and schemes will be met from within existing approved budgets.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Core Strategy Document
- 10.2 Open Spaces Strategy
- 10.3 Report to Policy Committee June 2013
- 10.4 Report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee July 2014
- 10.5 Report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee November 2015

APPENDIX 1

Outlined below is a brief description of the schemes identified in the table in paragraph 4.3 of this report:

ARTHUR NEWBERY PARK (£26,500)

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 and well used children's play area in the hollow in the centre of the park. Additional equipment is needed to cater for the increased use arising from new developments in the locality.

BALMORE WALK (£6,900)

This site is both a through route used by commuters and school children as an off road route to school. It is also a very popular park for dog walking. The area makes a significant contribution to the townscape because of its elevated position and proximity to central Caversham. There is an opportunity to plant and establish trees to replace old and ailing trees before they fail.

BLAGRAVE RECREATION GROUND PLAY AREA (£4,500)

This medium sized site is a popular and well used local facility in the centre of Tilehurst village, next to Park Lane School. The recreation ground is managed by Reading Borough Council as Trustees for the Blagrove Recreation Ground. There are two separate play areas within the park which cater for differing age groups. The funding will be used to contribute towards new self-closing access gates safety surfacing.

CINTRA PARK PLAYGROUND AND SPORTS AREA (£70,000)

Situated a short distance to the south and east of the town centre, this park serves a large populated area, including local schools and community groups. The park has undergone a number of improvements over the last five years including landscaping, completion of a perimeter path and new outdoor fitness stations. The playground and sports area are now in need of investment.

CLAYFIELD COPSE (£1,800)

Clayfield Copse became Reading's first Local Nature Reserve in 1991. The ancient woodland was once part of the Caversham House Estate whose landscapes were designed by Capability Brown. It is a much valued local amenity and many dog owners drive to the site to walk. The funding will be used on new tree planting to replace dead and fallen trees and improvements to the car park.

ELDON SQUARE (ALSO KNOWN AS KING GEORGE V MEMORIAL GARDENS) (£7,800)

Eldon Square was Reading's first conservation area, designated in 1972. The Gardens, which are listed, are situated within the town centre area and are surrounded on three sides by Bath stone detached and semi-detached buildings. They are completely enclosed by Grade II listed railings and contain mature trees, shrubs and a large statue of the first Marquess of Reading who died in 1935. The Gardens are very well used by local residents, including students. Landscape

improvements are required to increase security along with low level additional planting.

FOBNEY ISLAND TREE WORK (£33,300)

Tree work, including coppicing, to improve access to Fobney Island Nature Reserve and its river habitat is ongoing.

FORBURY GARDENS (£50,000)

Capital investment is needed periodically at Forbury Gardens for the Council to meet its contractual obligation to keep the site for 25 years to the high standard to which it was restored in 2004. The fountain has been damaged and the sump and pond need cleaning. The pond also requires re-lining. Repeated damage is being done to the lawns with park users walking across the bull-nosed grass areas at path junctions. Where low fencing was installed, this problem does not occur. Matching low fencing needs to be installed, in a double line of granite setts, at the junction nearest the café where there is constant pedestrian traffic. The stone pillars at the main entrance require specialist stone and flint work and modifications are needed to protect these pillars into the future.

KATESGROVE SCHOOL PLAY AREA (£19,500)

This popular dual use facility is particularly heavily used. Throughout the term time, the school has exclusive use of the play area. During the evenings, weekends and holiday periods, the play area and adjacent hard court area is available for public use. New safety surfacing has recently been installed in the play area.

KENSINGTON ROAD RECREATION GROUND (£5,000)

This popular park has undergone a number of improvements in recent years including an extension to the play area, a new ballcourt, fitness stations and a perimeter path. Further infrastructure improvements including new furniture and boundary enhancements are required.

Longbarn Lane Recreation Ground (£4,900)

Situated to the south of the town, this recreation ground serves a population of higher than average deprivation. The surrounding area consists of high density housing and higher than average levels of anti-social behaviour amongst young people. The site has a history of abuse and any new infrastructure needs to be particularly robust. New furniture is required.

PALMER PARK (£116,200)

As Reading's second largest park and serving one of the most densely settled areas of the town, there is constant pressure to improve/extend facilities to meet the growing demand from users. Investment options will be developed with the proposals to invest in the Council's indoor sports facilities in mind, and the impact these may have on the open space.

PROSPECT PARK SPORTS PITCHES/COURTS (£77,200)

The sports pitches that double up as tennis courts at Prospect Park and which opened in 2007 have reached the end of their life and are in need of refurbishment. Last year the five 3G artificial courts (on the opposite side of the

main drive) were refurbished as they too, had been open for 10 years and had reached the end of their life.

RABSON'S RECREATION GROUND - PLAY AREA (£14,800)

In 2010 the playground underwent a complete refurbishment and extension. It is now the largest and most well used in the south Reading area. This small pot of funding will enable improvements to the retaining log feature in the play area.

ROBERT HEWETT RECREATION GROUND (£10,600)

This popular park along the Tilehurst Road is particularly well used by families. Since its refurbishment in 2009 it has attracted large numbers of children with their parents/carers. The internal path network needs resurfacing in places where the roots from some of the mature trees are breaking up the tarmac. In addition new railings along the front of the recreation ground are needed.

THAMES PARKS (£294,100)

The Thames Parks provide the largest single area of publicly accessible open space in the Borough - approximately 80 hectares - which border the River Thames as it flows through Reading. The Thames Parks Plan (adopted in March 2005) provides a strategy for the management of these riverside parks and identifies investment needs for the individual parks. As in previous reports, the ongoing implementation of the Thames Parks Plan remains a priority.

It is recommended that these funds are used to continue to implement the Plan including replacing the house footprint at Caversham Court.

VICTORIA RECREATION GROUND (£43,600)

Adjacent to the new Civitas Primary Academy, this valued open space is in need of significant landscaping and additional seating.