

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

|                         |   |                   |  |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------|--|
| <b>TO:</b>              | POLICY COMMITTEE                            |                   |  |
| <b>DATE:</b>            | 15 FEBRUARY 2021                            |                   |  |
| <b>TITLE:</b>           | CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY CENTRE AT PROSPECT PARK |                   |  |
| <b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b> | CLLR ROWLAND                                | <b>PORTFOLIO:</b> | CULTURE, HERITAGE AND RECREATION   |
| <b>SERVICE:</b>         | CULTURE                                     | <b>WARDS:</b>     | SOUTHCOTE  |
| <b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>    | DANIEL PETERS                               | <b>TEL:</b>       | 0118 9372636   |
| <b>JOB TITLE:</b>       | READING PLAY SERVICE MANAGER                | <b>E-MAIL:</b>    | <a href="mailto:Dan.peters@reading.gov.uk">Dan.peters@reading.gov.uk</a> |

**1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report outlines proposals to extend the recreational facilities at Prospect Park to include educational, chargeable and support activities for young people, children and families.
- 1.2 These facilities will allow The Reading Play Service to extend targeted services offered to vulnerable children both on site and in school.
- 1.3 The proposal enables Reading Play Services to both extend services and achieve savings originally identified through the development of facilities for young people on the site now being used to develop Riverside School.
- 1.4 This report seeks scheme and spend approval for the proposed project.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 To provide scheme, spend, and consultation approval for the development of the Children's Activity Centre at Prospect Park.
- 2.2 To make a planning application for the development of facilities at Prospect Park.
- 2.3 To delegate authority to the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation, the Lead Councillor for Children, the Lead Councillor for Corporate and Consumer Services, and the Assistant Directors of Procurement, Legal and Democratic Services, and Property and Asset Management, to enter into a contract for the works and equipment required for the development of the facilities at Prospect Park within the agreed budget and the land be advertised as a disposal of open space in accordance with S123 of the Local Govt Act 1972. This delegation to also include the letting of café space to an external operator within the premises.

### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The ability of Council services to generate and sustain income is an integral part of future budget planning. This contributes to ensuring continued delivery of non-statutory services such as those provided by the Reading Play Service in the face of financial challenges.
- 3.2 The Council has an obligation to ensure that the use of its assets demonstrably achieves best value. The proposal will increase leisure opportunities and in doing so improve the health and wellbeing for our community, through increased physical and social activity supporting Reading's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2020 to improve and protect Reading's health and wellbeing by increasing physical activity.
- 3.3 The expansion of commercial chargeable activity within the Reading Play service contributes towards service reduction costs and meets objectives identified in the Commercial Strategy 2020- 2023 and the following objective within the council's corporate plan (2018-21): "Promoting great education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading - Our ambition is for great education, leisure and cultural opportunities for all".
- 3.4 The Council are investing into Parks playgrounds improving the standard of this provision including at Prospect Park. The proposal within this report will complement the plans to improve the town's outdoor and leisure facilities for the benefit of the community and attract a diverse public audience to one of our most prominent green spaces, enhancing its reputation both locally and regionally.
- 3.5 The Council's approved capital programme (February 2019) includes provision for £0.566m funding for improvements at Prospect Park and extend services run by the Reading Play Service.

### 4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Reading Play Service's activity focuses on support for young people. The Service uses outdoor and recreational activity to both encourage participation in physical activity and as a tool to improve particularly vulnerable young people's social skills and wellbeing. This includes.
  - In School targeted educational support
    - Supporting young people with behaviour and development issues
    - Play ground games and sport to encourage physical activity
    - Transition support - into new schools/classrooms.
    - SEND - Support with educational attainment.
  - Running out of school play based learning programmes for children and young people who have no educational placement.
  - School travel training service - reducing reliance on RBC funded taxis and providing confidence to use public transport.
  - Respite provision - Young carers.
  - Mentoring young people through play.
- 4.2 The Play Service still provide after school and holiday childcare provision; however, this continues to decline in face of commercial competition and strong supply.
- 4.3 In addition to the core services identified above the Reading Play Service also provide
  - Community events-

- Family fun days (up to 2000 attendees, 6 times per annum)
- Public play and engagement sessions (E.g. soft play at Meadway)
- Active parks, (football and tennis facilities at Prospect Park).

- 4.4 The Reading Play Service relocated to the former leaderboard site in 2017 (next to Rivermead) preceding the development of a high ropes course to widen service offer and create a saving of £124.5k. The saving was built into budget but was unrealised when the site was identified for a new secondary school. The saving remains in budget.
- 4.5 Reading Play Service located to the recently vacated Prospect Park Pavilion offices and depot in 2018. This provides opportunities to redevelop the unused parts of the pavilion to increase the breadth of service offer; increase revenue to sustain the service and more effective use of staff resource.
- 4.6 A proposal has been developed to provide a range of recreational and educational activities and informal consultation has been carried out with Schools and Brighter Futures for Children to guide the designs.
- 4.7 Reading does not have a significant outdoor activity centre such as Wokingham's Dinton Pastures or Bracknell's Go Ape. These facilities act to encourage physical activity allied to the associated wellbeing benefits these challenging and team building activities bring.
- 4.8 In addition to the proposal to increase the service offer at Prospect Park pavilion, the main play area is due to be upgraded and relocated opposite the pavilion complimenting proposals made within this report. Proposals for the Playground are currently being developed and will be outlined within the pre planning consultation.

## 5. Proposal

- 5.1 The proposal at Prospect Park will provide a unique mix of indoor and outdoor facilities focused at the primary school age range. This will create outdoor attractions, generate commercial revenue for the Reading Play Service and enhance the play-based education offer the service provides schools and other clients. The proposal will be funded through a mixture of section 106 and CIL funding.
- 5.2 A range of facilities are proposed to compliment the broader park facilities such the play area and open space, enhancing the parks appeal as a destination including:
- Skytrail - An indoor adventure low ropes course for children up to 7 years old
  - Outdoor family mini golf designed to accommodate wheelchair access.
  - Multi-function space for hire, suitable for parties, meetings and outreach.
  - Space for a commercial café to complement the activities.
  - Outdoor enclosed education zone to support the outreach programmes. Features include archery, portable climbing structure and team building activities (Public access, hire and venue for support activity).
- 5.3 Redundant garaging is proposed to be converted into ropes and climbing wall, consolidation of offices to provide café and classroom. Plans showing current layout and proposed layout are included in Appendix 1.
- 5.4 Open space to the front of the building will be secured and converted into family mini golf course.

- 5.5 The redundant yard space behind the pavilion will accommodate space for an outdoor activity area including Terra Firma (Activity equipment designed for physical development) along with company or team building days.
- 5.6 Accessible activities are proposed catering for a range of physical abilities on site. The proposal also ensures that established support services for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people and children can be further developed, for example alternative education.
- 5.7 Subject to approvals the key milestones are set out below:

| Item   | Date         |
|--|--------------|
| Scheme approval / approval to appoint            | Feb 2021     |
| Planning exhibition on scheme proposals          | + 1 month    |
| Submit planning application                      | + 2 months   |
| Main contractor tenders issued                   | + 2 months   |
| Planning Applications Committee                  | + 4.5 months |
| Appoint contractor - 4wks lead-in                | + 4.5 months |
| Start on site - 8wks on site                     | + 5.5 months |
| Sky trail unit delivery to site - 16wks on order | + 8.5 months |
| Works complete                                   | + 9 months   |

- 5.8 Prospect Park is now being used as a walk through testing station with an initial contract of 3 months, should the testing station remain beyond July the timescale may be reviewed or delayed as a result.

## Business model

- 5.9 Many of the activities proposed are commonly provided as secondary/ancillary activities at other attractions with high existing footfall or captive markets, and are priced accordingly. The price structure used in this business case is based upon benchmarked average fees where competition is experienced. Therefore the proposed charges are affordable while covering the cost of delivery and supporting other targeted support activity.
- 5.10 The proposed admission charges will be:  
 Ropes Adventure area - £4.00 (£3.20 net of VAT)  
 Family Adventure Golf- £4.00 (£3.20 net) Family / Group tickets available.  
 Climbing educational area - £4.00 (£3.20 net) per user.

At the time of the report, Wokingham family golf at Dinton charge a set price of £4.50 for over 4 year olds per player. This is an 18 hole course. The expectation would be £4:00 allows two rounds per player of the 9 hole proposed course.

- 5.11 Estimates on demand and likely attendances have been derived from attendance at other similar attractions (Pre Covid) and experienced gained from running play activities within parks, holiday clubs and Meadway Sports Centre.
- 5.12 Industry standards have been used to estimate likely throughout considering local population size, demographic and demand.
- 5.13 The proposed activities will be targeting families and individuals that otherwise have limited access to physical activities in order to increase active participation and

contribute to healthy lifestyles. The education area will target children with SEND and support local schools, BFfC and nurseries to improve physical education and offer respite support or alternative education. Referral based packages would be priced per requirements and objectives in line with Reading Play fees and charges publication.

- 5.14 A café will provide a different offer to the Mansion House Harvester, letting the cafe will reduce risk and make best use of commercial skills in the private sector.
- 5.15 The current staffing resource at Prospect Park and some in the Reading Play Service team will be deployed to deliver both existing functions and new additional duties to deliver the new services. This maximises use of existing resources that are deployed and avoids lone working.

5.16 Other options considered:

Option A:

Do not proceed with the new facilities at Prospect Park and realign the budget to reflect actual operating costs of service. This would result in a budget growth requirement of approximately £84.5k.

Option B:

Do not proceed with the new facilities at Prospect Park and reduce breadth and extent of service to reduce operating costs. Most direct service provision recovers immediate front line cost but not service management and administration. To reduce service cost by 50% (£60k) will require 50% of the service offer to be withdrawn. In this instance Schools and BFfC will need to find alternative providers, which may be less competitive on price resulting in both service reduction and potentially increased overall cost to the Council.

Option C:

Do not proceed with the new facilities at Prospect Park and close the service. As with option B, Schools and BFfC would need to source alternative providers, which may be less competitive on price. This would require a change in operation of existing Prospect Park facilities for sports to either become free access (excluding club use and significant increase in maintenance costs), or seek an alternative operator.

## 6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 Generating income from the provision of new services forms part of the Council's strategy for addressing budget pressures.
- 6.2 The proposal contributes to the following objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan:
- Securing the economic success of Reading
  - Protecting and enhancing the lives of vulnerable adults and children
  - Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe
  - Promoting great education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading
  - Ensuring the Council is fit for the Future

- 6.3 The corporate plan sets out the need to ensure Reading is an attractive, safe and well-kept town. A key outcome of this is providing more culture, leisure and sporting opportunities, directly met by this proposal.
- 6.4 Increased participation in physical activity within our community, which helps support social and physical development of young people and families.

## **7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 7.1 The Proposal will require planning consent. The formal application process will be publicly advertised for comment.
- 7.2 Informal consultation has been undertaken with some service users to understand what sorts of facilities would be attractive to the target age groups. Informal discussions with Reading Play Service users have highlighted users appreciate the park and enjoy the location but would be supportive of additional activity and facilities stating it would improve the attraction. These users include play day users, sports users and active archery groups.
- 7.3 Once scheme approval has been agreed a consultation to guide design of facilities and improving accessibility will be commenced. This will include a clear communication of the vision and intended benefits and an invitation to provide ideas to guide further development or adaption of proposals.
- 7.4 There will be a further consultation as part of the planning process.
- 7.5 Further engagement with specific interest groups, such as the Reading family forum, disability and access forum and the local Primary & Secondary Schools that the Reading Play Service support will also be undertaken.

## **8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT:**

- 8.1 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 sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief. Approval of the facility would not have a negative impact on equality, the proposal will enhance and increase outdoor play access and facilities. See appendix 3.

## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 An allocation of £0.566m funding has been made to the Prospect Park Scheme in the approved Capital Programme. This funding is comprised of:
  - £0.478m of Section 106
  - £0.088m of CIL funding
- 9.2 The proposed development of the high ropes course at Leaderboard resulted in an improvement of net revenue budget of £137.5k between 2016/17 and 2017/18. The NET Play Service budget in 2017/18 was £13.5k.
- 9.3 This saving of £124k was not realised as the high ropes was not built, and the site allocated to the Riverside School development. The unrealised net improvement of budget remains.

- 9.4 External independent leisure consultants have reviewed the business plan and confirmed that the targets and forecast net performance are within normal business expectation.
- 9.5 Identified in the table below is the existing revenue budget and an illustration of how the proposed changes will deliver the unrealised improvement of net budget in the first year of full operation, achieving budget neutrality in year 3.

|                    | Reading Play Budget 2020/21 | Proposed full year combined budget (With Prospect development) |            |            |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|--|------------|------------|
|                    |                             | Total Yr 1   | Total Yr 2 | Total Yr 3 |
| Total Expenditure  | £581,200                    | £559,816   | £569,180   | £578,732   |
| Income             | -£524,200                   | -£525,600  | -£551,880  | -£579,474  |
| Net Budget         | £57,000                     | £34,216  | £17,300    | -£742      |
| Unachieved saving  | £84,500                     | £0   | £0         | £0         |
| Achievable Outturn | £141,500                    | £34,216  | £17,300    | -£742      |

For more detail by cost area see appendix 2

## 10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The proposed additional use of the site would require planning consent to be obtained. The process is publicly advertised and will invite comment from interested parties.
- 10.2 At its meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> May 2016 (Minute 10 refers) The Head of Planning Development and Regulatory Services was given Delegated Authority to enter in to lease agreements with a rental value of less than £50,000 pa. The Council will advertise the loss of open space under S123 of the Local Govt Act 1972 in a local paper for 2 consecutive weeks
- 10.3 The building works and equipment purchase will be procured in line with the Council's contract procedure rules and may include utilising frameworks where available.
- 10.4 In respect of the income generation referred to in this report the Council is able to charge users of the Service in accordance with s19(2) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 which confirms "A local authority may make any facilities provided by it in pursuance of the preceding subsection available for use by such persons as the authority thinks fit either without charge or on payment of such charges as the authority thinks fit" The facilities detailed in s19(1) of the act are:
- indoor facilities consisting of sports centres, swimming pools, skating rinks, tennis, squash and badminton courts, bowling centres, dance studios and riding schools;
  - outdoor facilities consisting of pitches for team games, athletics grounds, swimming pools, tennis courts, cycle tracks, golf courses, bowling greens, riding schools, camp sites and facilities for gliding;
  - facilities for boating and water ski-ing on inland and coastal waters and for fishing in such waters;
  - premises for the use of clubs or societies having athletic, social or recreational objects;
  - staff, including instructors, in connection with such facilities or premises as are mentioned in the preceding paragraphs and in connection with any other recreational facilities provided by the authority;

- (f) such facilities in connection with any other recreational facilities as the authority considers it appropriate to provide including, without prejudice to the generality of the preceding provisions of this paragraph, facilities by way of parking spaces and places at which good, drink and tobacco may be bought from the authority or another person.

Further, the Act provides the Council with powers to provide buildings, equipment, supplies and assistance of any kind.

## **11. Environmental Implications**

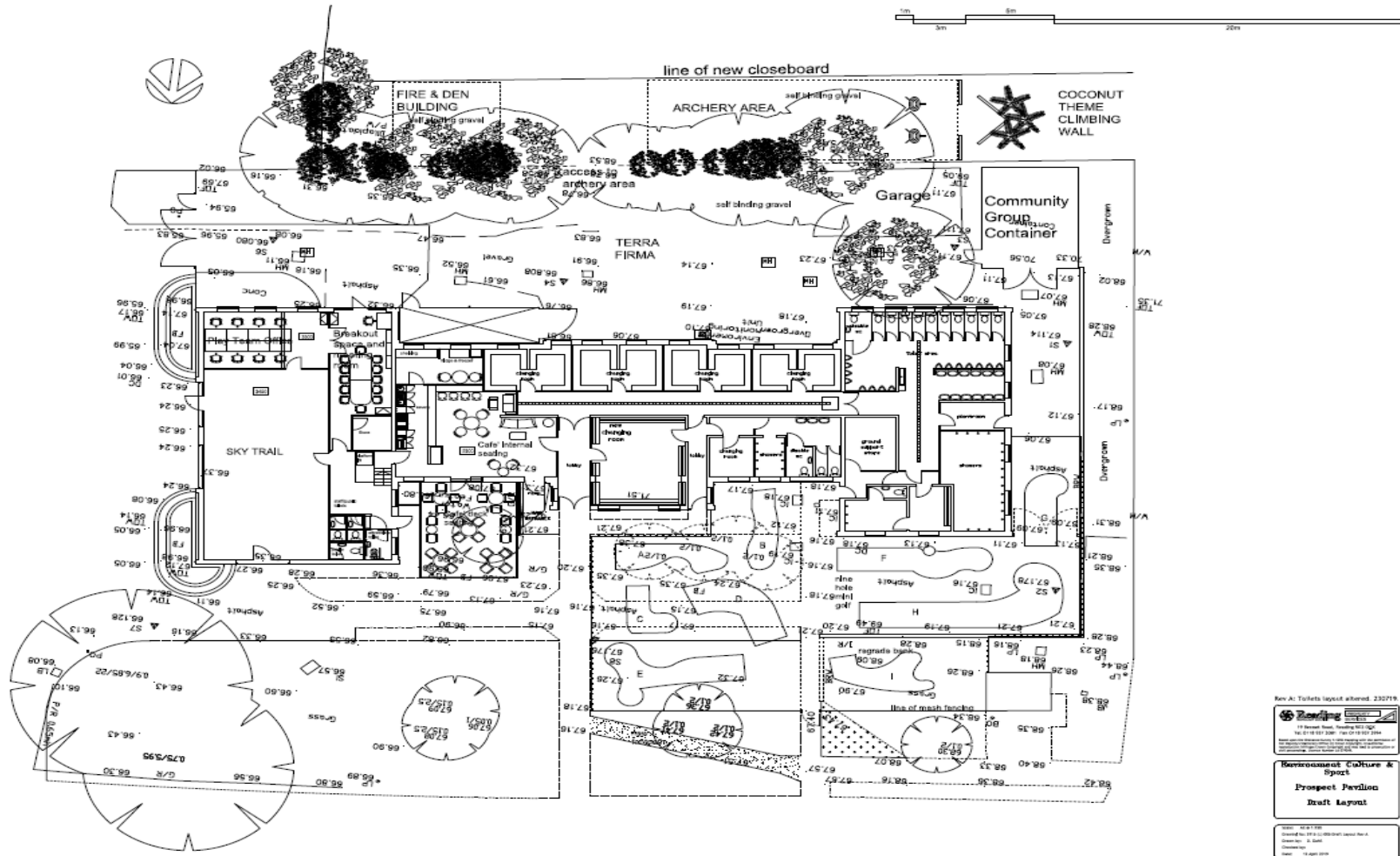
- 11.1 The environmental impact is limited as equipment being installed is not powered, there is no increase in heating requirement planned. Outdoor facilities are not planned to be lit. While the café will increase energy use the target audience is Reading based, which is likely to reduce travel to other facilities further afield such as Go Ape or Dinton Pastures. The overgrown Leyland hedge will be thinned, removing some plants to facilitate access. A native hedge a few meters to the South will be established.







# Proposed



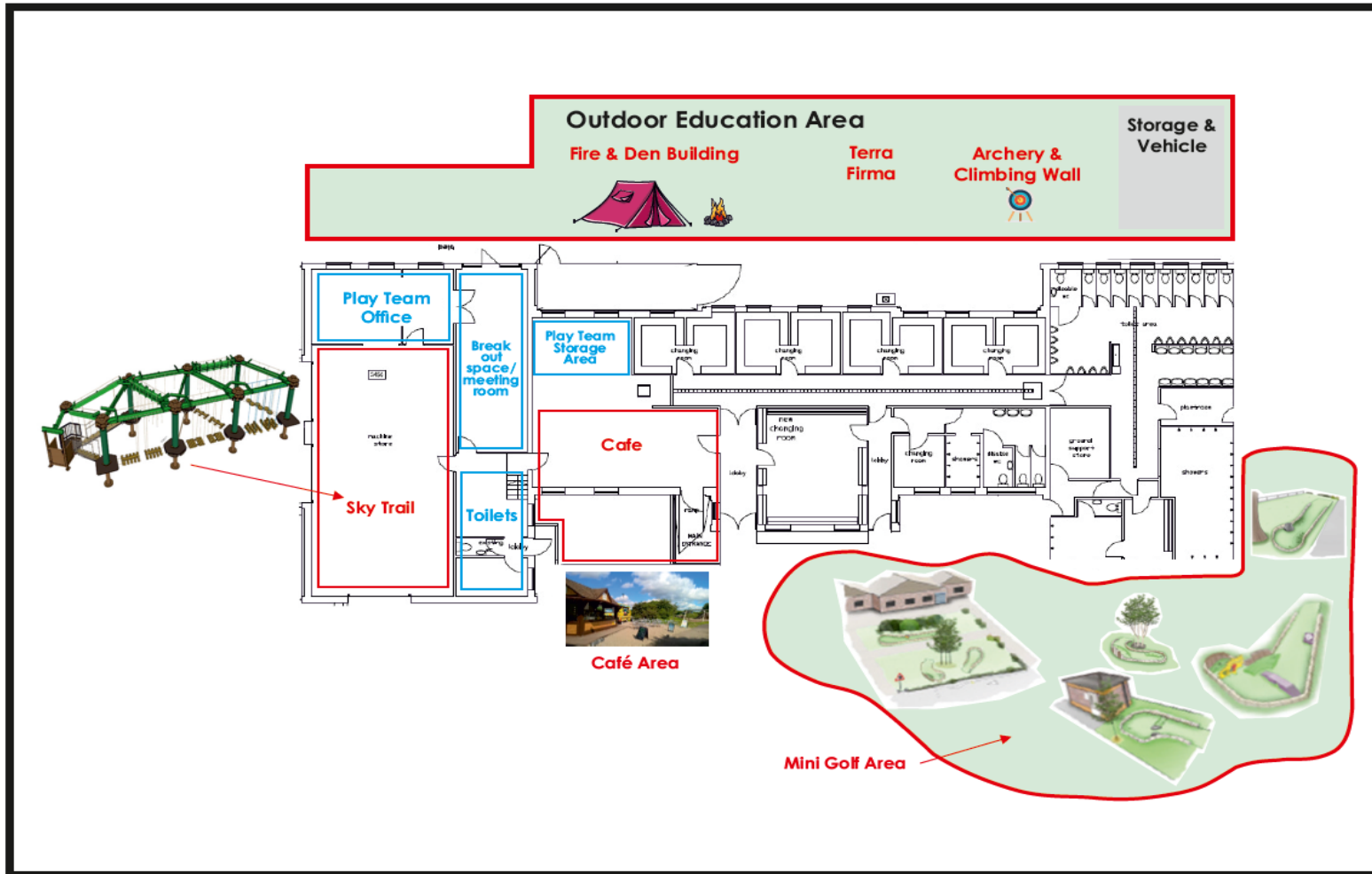
Rev A: Toilet layout altered: 23/2/19

**Environment Culture & Space**

**Prospect Pavilion**

**Draft Layout**

Scale: 1:200  
 Drawing No: ECSP-2018-000001-0001-Rev A  
 Date: 23/02/19  
 Author: [Name]  
 Check: [Name]



Concept: Example of product



## Appendix 2: Attendance and budget forecast

### Forecast demand.

Expected/target attendance has been categorised per activity. Using 10% of benchmarked penetration rate with 4 visits per annum per unique individual. Target base area equates to population within 20 minutes travel time.

| Activity               | Target age range | Target area base | Penetration rate | Visits per year | Rate per user | Total usage | Income*     | VAT         | Income less VAT |
|------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Low ropes course       | 0-9              | 41971            | 10%              | 4               | £4.00         | 16788       | -£67,153.60 | -£11,192.27 | -£55,961.33     |
| Family adventure Golf  | 5-15             | 39524            | 10%              | 4               | £4.00         | 15810       | -£63,238.40 | -£10,539.73 | -£52,698.67     |
| Climbing wall/ Archery | 10-15            | 14105            | 10%              | 4               | £4.00         | 7442        | -£29,768.00 | -£4,961.33  | -£18,806.67     |
| Hire and lettings      |                  |                  |                  |                 |               |             |             |             | -£18,000        |
| Total                  |                  |                  |                  |                 |               |             |             |             | -£145,466.67    |

\*For accounting purposes income is shown as a negative (-)

## Appendix 2: Attendance and budget forecast

### Budget Forecast

The table provided forecast of performance for the first three full years of operation for the Prospect centre.

|                           | Reading Play Budget 2020/21 | Proposed full year combined budget (With Prospect development) |                  |                  |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------|------------------|
|                           |                             | Total Yr 1   | Total Yr 2       | Total Yr 3       |
| Employees                 | £447,300                    | £468,216   | £477,580         | £487,132         |
| Premises                  | £60,200                     | £24,400  | £24,400          | £24,400          |
| Transport                 | £21,500                     | £22,000  | £22,000          | £22,000          |
| Supplies & Services       | £45,400                     | £38,400  | £38,400          | £38,400          |
| Third Party Payments      | £6,800                      | £6,800   | £6,800           | £6,800           |
| <b>Total Expenditure</b>  | <b>£581,200</b>             | <b>£559,816</b>  | <b>£569,180</b>  | <b>£578,732</b>  |
| <b>Income*</b>            | <b>-£524,200</b>            | <b>-£525,600</b>   | <b>-£551,880</b> | <b>-£579,474</b> |
| <b>Net Budget</b>         | <b>£57,000</b>              | <b>£34,216</b>   | <b>£17,300</b>   | <b>-£742</b>     |
| <b>Unachieved saving</b>  | <b>£84,500</b>              | <b>£0</b>  | <b>£0</b>        | <b>£0</b>        |
| <b>Achievable Outturn</b> | <b>£141,500</b>             | <b>£34,216</b>   | <b>£17,300</b>   | <b>-£742</b>     |

For accounting purposes income is shown as a negative (-), offsetting the cost of provision. The proposal will generate a surplus, offsetting the cost of providing Play and Parks Activity Services. An improvement of £107k is anticipated in the first full year of operating the Prospect Park Activity Centre, reducing the service cost to £34k. Over the subsequent 2 years this will improve by a further £35K to make the service budget neutral (£1K surplus) protecting the support services provided.



## Appendix 3: E I A

### Equality Impact Assessment

#### Provide basic details

**Name of proposal:** Development of play facilities and Activities at Prospect Park to extend services provided by the play team.

**Directorate:** DEGNS

**Service:** Culture and Sport

**Name and job title of person doing the assessment**

**Name:** Ben Stanesby

**Job Title:** Leisure & Recreation Manager

**Date of assessment:** 04/11/19

#### Scope your proposal

##### What is the aim of your Proposal?

To provide a combination of activities are proposed, each is designed to attract its own audience, while the combination of the elements alongside the existing extensive park facilities will provide an attractive local outdoor based visitor destination. The services that it is proposed to provide include:

- Skytrail - An Indoor adventure low ropes course for children up to 7 years old.
- Multi-function room for parties, meetings and teaching, including space for those with SEN or excluded from mainstream education.
- A commercial Café to compliment the activities and provide a focal point and meeting destination for general recreational users. It is intended to let out this opportunity with the intention of attracting a café franchise such as an independent business. This will provide a greater attraction drawing larger audiences and generating rental income. The park has a Harvester restaurant on site however no similar café operator to the proposed franchise exists in the immediate catchment area.
- Outdoor family mini golf featuring challenges and designed to accommodate wheelchair access and includes specialist putting equipment.
- Outdoor enclosed education zone to support the outreach programmes delivered by the Play service. Features include Archery, portable climbing structure and team building activities such as den building and assault course.

##### What outcomes will the change achieve and for whom?

A variety of leisure opportunities for primary school age children will become available.

Facilities to support educational support currently provide by the play team to children finding full participation in their school setting difficult.

Café facilities for visitors to the park



**Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?**

Play and leisure services are proposed to cater primary school age children. The facilities will complement free to use play facilities adjacent to the pavilion in which the pay to play facilities will be located. This will provide additional recreational activities that families may choose to use.

The outdoor educational/outward bound facilities/activities will provide a permanent location for services currently taken to other venues or events. This will increase their availability increasing an existing service. Services to schools are often restricted due to lack of availability.

**Assess whether an EIA is Relevant**

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc)

**No**

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, feedback.

**No**

If the answer is **Yes** to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If **No** you **MUST** complete this statement

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because:

The Café will be accessible with step free entrances and exits. A lift is provided internally where there is a change in floor level.

A range of facilities are being provided most of which are full accessible There are some elements that are less accessible such as the ropes course requires a physical dexterity along with some outward bound activities such as archery also requiring dexterity but may be accessed with the aid of a helper.

The golf, free to use play facilities and many other park activities are accessible and may be used by a broad range of abilities. All facilities may be accessed with a helper.

Services such as the educational support are provided to students with a need for support which may be for one of a number of reasons.

While some elements of facilities may have some restriction as to who may access them these are just part of a range of activities and facilities, many of which are being used to support a range of disabilities many users may face. The proposals do not disadvantage or have a differential impact on racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief.

Signed (completing officer)

Date

Signed (Lead Officer)

Date