



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

## DECISION BOOK

**Issue: 623      Date: 2 FEBRUARY 2021**

Decisions set out in the book have been made under delegated powers by the Chief Executive, Executive Directors or the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, in consultation either with the relevant committee or Lead Councillor.

The Decision Book process has been altered to suspend the current Councillors' call-in arrangements within the 10-day period after its publication and replace it with the ability during that period for three Councillors to request a retrospective review of the decision in writing to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

The decision book can be accessed on the Council's website - <https://democracy.reading.gov.uk/mgListOfficerDecisions.aspx?bcr=1&BAM=0>

The officer reports accompanying the decisions are attached.

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## DECISION BOOK - ISSUE 623 - 2 FEBRUARY 2021

### 1. ESSENTIAL PLAYGROUND WORKS 2020/21

<u>DECISION</u>	<u>LEAD COUNCILLOR(S)</u>	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>PAGE NO.</u>
1. ESSENTIAL PLAYGROUND WORKS 2020/21	COUNCILLOR ROWLAND	TILEHURST AND SOUTHCOTE	1

This report sets out the decision to allocate a portion of the approved capital budget of £494,000 in 2020/21 for essential playground works.

It is the decision of the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture and Recreation that an allocation of £244,000 capital spending be approved in relation to Blagrave Recreation Ground as set out in this report, in sections 4.6 and Appendix 1.

It is noted that spending of £350,000 was approved for Prospect Park during 2020/21 and 2021/22 by Policy Committee in January 2020.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR ROWLAND		
DATE:	2 FEBRUARY 2021		
TITLE:	ESSENTIAL PLAYGROUND WORKS 2020/21		
SERVICE:	PARKS	WARDS:	TILEHURST; SOUTHCOTE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the decision to allocate a portion of the approved capital budget of £494,000 in 2020/21 for essential playground works.
- 1.2 The Council carries out regular detailed playground inspections, which have highlighted H&S issues in respect of aging equipment. Spending to address these issues at two well-used sites is required urgently.
- 1.3 Expenditure on new playground equipment also seeks to address current accessibility issues identified across the Council's play areas, to improve accessibility for all.
- 1.4 In 2019 a tree fell next to the play area at Prospect Park. Although the tree was in good health, the ground underneath was eroded by an underground spring in spate after the wet winter. Spending to move the play area to a different location was approved in 2019/20. This included £100,000 in 2019/20 and £250,000 in 2020/21.
- 1.5 Play equipment for juniors and toddlers was installed at Blagrove Recreation Ground in the 1980s. This is now some of the oldest equipment in the Borough, and it has reached the end of its life. The play areas are intensively used, given the location of the Recreation Ground in the centre of Tilehurst close to schools. Full replacement is necessary.

2 DECISION

- 2.1 It is the decision of the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture and Recreation that an allocation of £244,000 capital spending be approved in relation to Blagrove Recreation Ground as set out in this report, in sections 4.6 and Appendix 1.
- 2.2 It is noted that spending of £350,000 was approved for Prospect Park during 2020/21 and 2021/22 by Policy Committee in January 2020.

### 3 POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2018 - 2021 'Shaping Reading's Future' sets out the Council's priorities which include keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe and promoting great education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading.
- 3.2 Reading's Open Spaces Strategy includes objectives that together continue to protect and improve the choice, quality and accessibility of public open space.
- 3.3 In 2017 a full review of all playgrounds was carried out highlighting all investment needs. This was updated in 2019 and 2020. A £3.8 million programme over six years has been developed to fund the current investment gap. The majority of this funding is specifically intended to improve further access for all to the Council's playgrounds.
- 3.4 The Council's Capital programme was approved as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy in February 2019. The programme includes the allocation of £1.6 million over three years to carry out improvements to the open space and play provision in the Borough, with a particular focus on inclusive facilities. This is currently being reviewed in the light of additional financial constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.5 A separate investment programme in leisure facilities sits alongside this investment in play programme: £1.4 million S.106 and CIL funded programmes, some of which is for play facilities. These schemes were approved by HNL Committee in March 2018.

### 4. THE DECISION

#### Current Position:

- 4.1 Reading Borough Council currently manages 56 equipped playgrounds. Except at locations where S.106 funding has been available, there has been no significant refreshment of leisure infrastructure generally, and play specifically, since 2010. Where play equipment reaches the end of its safe life and is removed, there has not always been funding available to replace it.
- 4.2 A review of all playgrounds in the Borough in 2017, showed an estimated of £3.8 million capital investment required over the next 5 years simply to hold constant the historic play value of equipped play facilities. A growing population is adding to the demands made on leisure infrastructure, increasing pressure to refresh and augment facilities, particularly in larger parks.
- 4.3 Access to play equipment can be a problem both for disabled children and for able-bodied children with carers living with disability. The Council is aware of these issues and has been seeking consciously to address accessibility over the past two decades. It is the Council's aspiration to provide good quality play opportunities for all children in the Borough.

- 4.4 In December 2018 a capital bid was submitted for £2.86 million investment in play facilities over the next 5 years. This will be spent on the sites most urgently requiring refreshment and on providing better facilities for people with mobility issues. In August 2020, £494,000 was approved for investment during FY 2020/21.
- 4.5 In January 2019, approval was given to invest in Prospect Park as follows:
- Prospect Park £100,000 in 2019/20; £250,000 in 2020/21: The playgrounds needs to be moved away from its current location, which is affected by underground springs. The remaining veteran oak in the playground was reduced as a precaution after an oak tree nearby collapsed in 2019. Any viable equipment will be moved, but most of the junior equipment and all toddler kit requires refreshing. The present offer for children is outdated for such an important park, and heavy use means that old equipment is wearing out. Investment in all-inclusive play is a priority. The Council is seeking to create a premier play facility in a new location at Prospect Park.

#### Options Proposed

- 4.6 It is proposed that the balance of £494,000, i.e., £244,000, be allocated as follows:
- Blgrave Recreation Ground: This is a heavily used site in central Tilehurst close to schools. Junior play facilities and toddler equipment was installed in the late 1980s and most equipment has reached the end of its life. Given the age of the equipment, piecemeal replacement is not economical, as no remaining equipment is fit-for-purpose, and all needs replacing. The Council is seeking to install both challenging and inclusive equipment in this community hub location.

#### Other Options Considered

- 4.7 Limited capital investment and further reductions in revenue will mean that, over time, the Council will need to review the investment approach in all of its playgrounds and to explore the options available for funding improvements.

#### 5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Improving the quality of active play facilities supports a number of Corporate Plan aims mainly:
- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe.
  - Promoting great education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading.

- 5.2 Better quality play facilities have the potential to increase participation in children's 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 An 'Accessible Play Task and Finish Group' was established following a focus workshop of the Access and Disabilities Working Group (ADWG) held on 26 June

2019. This group is composed of parents/carers of disabled children as well as disabled parents/carers of able-bodied children. Meetings will be co-chaired by the Lead Member for Culture, Heritage and Recreation and the Chair of the ADWG, and will be attended by Council Officers charged with play provision in the Borough. The group will advise the Council during the five-year investment period planned for play improvements in Reading.

6.2 Consultation and engagement with local communities and interest groups will be undertaken prior to investment. 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, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.2 The installation of inclusive play equipment will not have a differential impact on people with any distinguishing characteristics. It is targeted at providing access for all. It is not considered that a further Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is required related to the information presented in this report.

## 8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 All procurement of equipment will follow the Council's relevant standing orders

## 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 In relation to play and open space, the Council's approved Capital Programme (February 2019) details funding to complete an extensive programme of replacement and upgrade of playground equipment as well as a programme of improvement works to parks and open spaces planned for 2019/20 and future years.

9.2 The funds and allocations set out in this report is part of a larger programme spanning a number of capital years.

19-20 actual	20-21 budget	21-22 budget	22-23 budget	Total
13k Palmer Park	100k Prospect (Policy Jan 20 approval 4k spent at 12-11-20)  87k Palmer (Policy Jan 20 approval with 69k spent at 12-11-20)  294k - detailed	250k - - detailed spend approval not yet given	891k - - detailed spend approval not yet given	1635k

spend approval not yet given			
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9.3 It is anticipated that any operational non-capital costs that are associated with individual schemes will be met within existing approved budgets.

#### 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Minutes of the Council meeting of 26.2.219 - minute 45 refers
- 10.2 Report to NHL 3 July 2019, 'Update on the approved capital improvements programme for Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces, 2018-20'
- 10.3 Decision book report spending plans for 2019/20 under Approved Capital Programme 089 131219

#### 10.4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications arising from the proposals set out in this report are set out below:-

##### Capital Implications

Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line	2020/21 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure	494
Funded by Grant (specify) Section 106 (specify) Other services Capital Receipts/Borrowing	494
Total Funding	494

Appendix 1: Estimated cost of proposals

Playground	Ward	Proposal	Capital estimate
2020/21			£494,000
Blagrave Recreation Ground	Tilehurst, LEAP	Replace entire junior and toddler play areas	£244,000
Prospect Park	Southcote, NEAP, destination park	Commence moving play area away from large trees, to site less prone to flooding and better suited to disabled play	£250,000

LEAP - Local Equipped Area for Play  
 NEAP - Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play