

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND REGULATORY SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 21st July 2021

Ward: Southcote

App No.: 210644/REG3 & 210745/LBC

Address: Prospect Park, Liebenrood Road, Reading

Proposals: **210644/REG3** - New playground with reinstatement of existing playground back to informal parkland

210745/LBC - Listed Building Consent for new playground with reinstatement of existing playground back to informal parkland at Prospect Park a Grade II Registered Park and Garden

Applicant: Reading Borough Council

Deadline: 7th July 2021 (210745/LBC) and 30th July 2021 (210644/REG3) and an extension of time has been agreed to 30th July 2021

RECOMMENDATION:

GRANT subject to the following conditions and informatives

210644/REG3

Conditions to include:

- 1) TL1 - standard time limit 3 yrs.
- 2) AP1 - Approved plans.
- 3) Details of the play equipment and materials (to be submitted)
- 4) No external lighting
- 5) Arboricultural Method Statement to be submitted (to include the existing and new sites)

Informatives to include:

- 1) IF1 - Positive & Proactive
- 2) IF2 - Pre-commencement conditions
- 3) IF5 - Terms and Conditions
- 4) IF6 - Building Control
- 5) IF7 - Complaints about construction
- 6) I11 - CIL not liable
- 7) Associated Listed Building Consent

210745/LBC

Conditions to include:

- 1) LB1 - Time Limit Listed Building (works)
- 2) LB2 - Approved Plans
- 3) Details of play equipment and materials (to be submitted)

Informatives to include:

- 1) IF1 - Positive and Proactive
- 2) IF2 - Pre-commencement conditions
- 3) IF5 - Terms and Conditions
- 4) Associated Planning Permission

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The application site is within Prospect Park which is a Grade II 19th century Registered Park and Garden which forms the setting of the Grade II listed late 18th century Prospect House (now Mansion House). Prospect Park is located to the west of Reading between Tilehurst Road, Liebenrood Road, Bath Road and Honey End Lane. The park comprises a bowls green, grass sports pitches, tennis courts, multi-use games/5 a side courts, a children's play area, a wooded area and informal park land. An 85 space car park is located off the main vehicle access from Liebenrood Road with the Mansion House further up the drive.
- 1.2 The current children's play area measures 2,500sqm and is shown on the photograph below. In 2019 a healthy mature Oak tree fell just outside the area due to underground springs eroding the soil underneath. The junior and toddler play equipment is also at the end of its viable use and the safety surface is a mixture of sand and mulch. The current children's playground offers limited access both to the area and equipment for children with disabilities.



2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 During the course of the application the location of the proposed playground has changed following more detailed tree investigations. Whilst the location is in the same general area it has been moved further north which is now outside the canopy of existing trees and a safer distance from the main driveway. Both the original and amended locations are shown below.

Original Location of Proposed Playground



Amended Location of Proposed Playground



- 2.2 The proposal is for the relocation of the existing children’s playground to a new site to the northeast of the pavilion. The proposed playground will have the same floor area as the existing 2,500sqm. Other locations in the park were considered for the playground however these have been discounted due to various disadvantages. The chosen site has good access for people with mobility issues and this part of the site does not suffer from underground springs or pooling water and there are no tree related problems or encroachment onto existing areas used for football. The existing children’s playground will be reinstated to informal open space.

- 2.3 The new playground will be enclosed by a 1.2m high green bowtop metal safety fence and be laid out with a safety surface and new play equipment. The proposed play area will be connected by two 1.5m wide tarmac paths from the existing eastern and southern paths. Limited details of the proposed play equipment have been provided as the final design and installation will depend on the outcome of a tender process. However, an indicative plan has been provided to show how the play area could be laid out and details of the types of equipment that may be incorporated are shown at the end of this report. The emphasis will be on a design that is accessible to children of all abilities.

3. SUBMITTED PLANS AND DOCUMENTS:

The applicant submitted the following information, received on 26th April 2021:

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
Heritage Statement
Planning Statement
Arboricultural Impact Assessment
Location Plan
Block Plan

The applicant submitted the following information, received on 28th June 2021:

Planning Statement Addendum

The applicant submitted the following information, received on 1st July 2021:

Arboricultural Impact Assessment (including Drawing No: 03596P_TCP_01 - Tree Constraints Plan; Drawing No: 03596P_TCP_02 - Tree Constraints Plan; Drawing No: 03596P_TCP_03 - Tree Constraints Plan; Drawing No: 03596P_TCP_04 - Tree Constraints Plan; Drawing No: 03596P_TCP_05 - Tree Constraints Plan; Drawing No: 03596P_TCP_06 - Tree Constraints Plan; Drawing No: 03596P_TPP_01 - Tree Protection Plan; and Drawing No: 03596P_TPP_02 - Tree Protection Plan)

4. PLANNING HISTORY

There is numerous planning history for Prospect Park however the most recent is as follows (not including applications for the Mansion House):

06/00822/REG3 (Civica Ref: 060758) - Conversion of disused tennis courts into floodlit all-weather multi-use games area with 3m high fencing. Floodlighting to new games area and existing tennis courts. Permitted 02/10/2006.

07/00166/REG3 (Civica Ref: 070361) - Demolition of existing public toilet and new toilet to be erected in another location. Permitted 24/05/2007.

09/00577/NMA (Civica Ref: 090271) - Retrospective Minor Amendment to planning consent 07/00166/REG3 for demolition of existing toilet to be erected in another location. Agree 28/08/2009.

210647/REG3 & 210746/LBC - Provision of a play service venue at the existing park pavilion, converting a disused internal garage into an indoor low ropes activity course, providing an outdoor mini-golf zone, an outdoor

enclosed education and learning zone, with a small community cafe to compliment the activities. Pending consideration.

5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1 Statutory

Historic England

Do not consider it necessary for the application to be notified to Historic England.

The Gardens Trust (formerly known as Garden History Society) & Berkshire Gardens Trust

Thank you for consulting The Gardens Trust (GT) in its role as Statutory Consultee with regard to proposed development affecting sites listed by Historic England (HE) on their Register of Parks and Gardens. Prospect Park is a Grade II 19th century Registered Park and Garden which forms the setting of the Grade II listed late 18th century Prospect House (now Mansion House). The Berkshire Gardens Trust (BGT) is a member organisation of the GT and works in partnership with it in respect of the protection and conservation of historic sites and is authorised by the GT to respond on GT's behalf in respect of such consultations within Berkshire.¹

One of the key objectives of the Berkshire Gardens Trust (BGT) is to help conserve, protect and enhance historic designed landscapes within Berkshire. Our activities include research into Berkshire's historic parks and gardens and responding to planning applications which affect these important green lungs. As we stated previously in our comments on the pre-application submitted on 22nd October 2020, one of the key activities of the Berkshire Gardens Trust (BGT) is to help conserve, protect and enhance designed landscapes within Berkshire. Prospect Park is an important part of the history of Reading's parks and the richness of Reading's history in particular the environment of West Reading.

Having now considered the formal planning application, we note in particular that Paragraphs 2.1.22 and 5.2.3/4/5 all emphasise that the main entrance has over time become that from Liebenrood Road to the east, as well as the path from the SW corner up from Bath Road cutting across at an angle where there was historically no path. In addition we acknowledge the point made in Paragraphs 5.2.6 and 5.2.7 and especially in the concluding Section 6, that the proposal effectively clears up and reinstates something more akin to the original entrance area from the north whereas the path coming from Tilehurst Road is dominated currently by the playground area. However, while BGT understands why the Council have decided to relocate and update the playground and how this might work for the park as a whole, we reiterate that the proposed playground site is on a major contemporary and historic contemporary approach through open parkland to the Mansion and that every effort should be made to minimize the impact of these changes on the parkland setting and views of this historic Park.

¹

Therefore, while we welcome the ‘freeing up’ of - and improvements to - the northern entrance, we have some reservations about references within the document to the “municipal feel” of this part of the park and are concerned about this being reinforced by the proposals. As the proposed relocation of the playground and other proposals associated with the pavilion offer opportunities to improve this part of the historic park, we suggest strongly that the Council needs to ensure that the proposed playground and pavilion works include appropriate enhancements to surroundings of the retained playing courts, car park and pavilion areas, as well as the main pedestrian and vehicular thoroughfare in this area.

Attention also needs to be paid to the relationship between open parkland and these areas of more active recreation and steps taken to mitigate the impact of these changes on views across the Park with the inevitable loss of the semi-mature trees in this area which are wholly in keeping with the parkland character, have a long life expectancy and help to mitigate the intrusion of the nearby roads and housing. For example, provision of a better off-road, parallel and smoother green path for pedestrians should be introduced alongside the playing courts, with a long overdue re-surfacing of the route down from the Mansion and also the car-park area by the pavilion. Such improvements, alongside consideration of judicious future tree planting will hopefully reduce the potential safety and unsightly hazards of car parking up on the verge and people seeking a more level terrain than the undulating, rough ground to walk along. Such measures would also help enhance the Grade II landscape surrounding the main surviving routes to and from the Mansion.

5.2 Non-statutory

Reading Borough Council Conservation & Urban Design Officer (updated comments following the amended location)

The works are considered neutral and comply with the policies and planning constraints. The scheme is appropriate and supported, subject to a standard materials condition.

A Heritage Statement has been prepared by Avalon Planning and Heritage, and the comments are included below.

Section 6 - Summary and conclusion

6.1.1 This planning application is for works for a new children’s playground within Prospect Park in Reading, Berkshire. Prospect Park is a Grade II Registered historic park. The proposed scheme has the potential to affect the heritage interests of the park as well as the setting of the Grade II Listed Building Mansion House, which lies within the park c. 350m to the west of the application site.

6.1.2 The works will re-locate children’s play facilities from their existing location, close to the north entrance to the park, to a location within the application site. The site for new facilities has been chosen following a selection process undertaken by Reading Borough Council.

6.1.3 Prospect Park and Mansion House derive considerable heritage significance from the designed views across the park to the south. The routes into and across the park from the north and east contribute to this significance in that they have been routed around and away from the

sweeping views from Mansion House. Since the early 20th century the Prospect Park has been a public park. The path from the east entrance on Liebenrood Road has been modernised and is flanked by modern park facilities. It is predicted that the proposal to move the children's playground will have a neutral effect of the significance of the park.

6.1.4 It is considered, therefore, that the proposals will preserve the heritage significance of Prospect Park and Mansion House and that the works comply with statutory, national and local policy requirements.

Comments were also received from the Berkshire Garden Trust (04.06.2021):

"The proposed relocation of the playground and other proposals associated with the pavilion offer opportunities to improve this part of the historic park, we suggest strongly that the Council needs to ensure that the proposed playground and pavilion works include appropriate enhancements to surroundings of the retained playing courts, car park and pavilion areas, as well as the main pedestrian and vehicular thoroughfare in this area."

Conclusion

The site was inspected at the beginning of May 2021 and discussed with members of Reading Parks Team. It was recommended that a heritage statement be prepared by an independent consultant and the findings of this report are included in this memo. While the Berkshire Gardens Trust and Avalon mention green screening, the practicality of this was discussed with the Parks project manager and because the play area needs to be seen for safety reasons, this is not a realistic option. To ameliorate the impact of the relocated playground, on the significant views from the historic house the new playground has been located to the east and down the hill from the house.

A Planning Statement Addendum (June 2021), has been submitted. Prospect Park New Children's Playground Relocation. My original comments requested a standard materials condition. It is important that the new playground compliments and is an enhancement of the historic park. To this extent, natural timber and muted colours are preferred.

Generally, there are no objections to the proposal, as the play equipment will need to be upgraded to meet current needs. But examples of proposed materials need to be seen, to ensure the final installation is enhancement to the listed park.

Development Control Transport

No objection as this would be like for like given the existing playground is to be reinstated.

Natural Environment Trees

Following initial comments advising a more detailed Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) was required the location of the proposed playground was amended and a new AIA submitted on 1st July 2021. Updated Natural Environment Trees comments state:

I note the slightly relocated location for the proposed play area with indicative plan of play areas within it also shown.

In relation to the AIA:

5.4.1 states: *'The proposal requires no demolition works. In the event existing equipment will be moved to the new area or removed from the existing play area we should be advised to provide detail on tree protection measures to allow removal without compromising trees in this area'*

As stated in my previous memo, the description of the development includes *'reinstatement of existing playground back to informal parkland'*, which will of course include removal of existing equipment and fencing, hence I specifically stated that this element should be included in the AIA, however, it is not which is therefore disappointing.

However, the AIA demonstrated the acceptability of the proposed new play area and the tree protection measures for removal of the existing can and should be dealt with within an Arboricultural Method Statement covering the existing and new sites - this can be secured by condition.

The report assumes that no services are required hence this is not covered. If lighting is proposed, it should be secured via condition to ensure any tree or ecology aspects are covered.

In conclusion, I have no objections to the proposals subject to condition L7 (Arboricultural Method Statement).

Ecology

The application site is an area of grassland adjacent to Prospect Park Pavilion where it is proposed to demolish the existing play area and reinstate it closer to the pavilion and parking area.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP, March 2021) was undertaken to the appropriate standard and indicated the works are unlikely to affect protected species or priority habitats.

However, any increase of lighting through the proposed relocation of the playground may have an impact on bat roosts or a significant impact on bat foraging and commuting. Lighting should therefore be avoided, but if essential, the lighting should be designed to avoid impacts on bats and other nocturnal wildlife. As such, subject to a condition, there are no objections to this application on ecological grounds. *Officer Note - no lighting is proposed and a condition restricting lighting is recommended.*

Environmental Protection

No comments to make.

Reading Borough Council Leisure

No objections.

Berkshire Archaeology

No comments at the time of writing.

5.3 Publicity

Notification letters were sent to 24-62 (e) Liebenrood Road. One letter has been received in favour of the new playground and the reinstatement of the existing playground back to informal parkland but raising concerns about whether there is sufficient parking being available within the park grounds, matters of congestion and road safety along Liebenrood Road.

Amended plans letters were sent to all neighbours on 1st July 2021 giving them until 15th July 2021 to respond to the amendments to the location and shape of the proposed playground. An update will be provided if any comments are received.

6. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which states at Paragraph 11 “Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development”.

6.1.1 The development plan for this Local Planning Authority is the Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019). The relevant policies are:

CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
CC7: Design and the Public Realm
CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
EN2: Areas of Archaeological Significance
EN4: Locally Important Heritage Assets
EN6: New Development in a Historic Environment
EN7: Local Green Space and Public Open Space
EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
OU1: New and Existing Community Facilities

Relevant Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) are:

Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
Tree Strategy (March 2021)

7. APPRAISAL

The main matters to be considered are:

- Principle of development
- Design and impact on the setting of the historic park and garden
- Impact on neighbouring properties
- Traffic generation and parking
- Natural Environment
- Other Matters

Principle of Development

- 7.1 The NNPF states the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development with three overarching objectives; an economic objective; a social objective and an environmental objective. The social objective is to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring (amongst other things) that accessible services and open spaces reflect current and future needs and support communities health, social and cultural well-being.
- 7.1.1 Policy OU1 of the Local Plan states that “proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities will be acceptable, particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site”. Policy CC7 states development will be assessed to ensure “that the development proposed makes a positive contribution to.....meeting a wide range of needs”.
- 7.1.2 Policy CC7 continues that “development will also be assessed to ensure that it protects and enhances the historic environment and provides suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily”.
- 7.1.3 The proposal is to relocate the existing playground to a new location within the park with improved access and equipment suitable for children of all abilities along with the reinstatement of the existing playground back into informal open space. The principle of development is therefore acceptable however as Prospect Park is a Grade II 19th century Registered Park and Garden any development needs to be considered against its impact on this heritage asset.

Design and impact on the setting of the historic garden

- 7.2 As mentioned earlier in the report it is not possible to confirm the exact play equipment that would be installed in the new playground as the scheme will be offered for tender to specialist playground supplier companies with only one supplier selected. However, emphasis will be on a design that is accessible to children of all abilities. Because of the tender process the applicant is only able to provide details of the location, activity zones within the space, maximum height of the central play unit (9m) and examples of typical designs (shown at the end of this report). A 1.2m high safety fence around the site is also proposed. As the proposal is set within the grounds of the existing park, the height and type of the equipment is unlikely to be harmful to the character and appearance of the surrounding area and Officers are therefore satisfied that exact details of the proposed play equipment are not required to determine the application. However, a condition has been recommended requiring details of the proposed equipment to be submitted and approved in writing once the final design has been agreed.
- 7.2.1 However, Prospect Park is a Grade II 19th Century Registered Park and

Garden and the impact of the proposed playground needs to be considered against policies EN1 and EN4 of the Local Plan. EN1 states that “*historic features, areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings will be protected and where possible enhanced*”. EN1 continues “*applications which affect Historic Parks and Gardens will safeguard features which form an integral part of the special character or appearance of the park or garden. Development will not detract from the enjoyment, layout, design, character, appearance features or setting of the park or garden, key views out of the park, or prejudice its future restoration*”.

7.2.2 Paragraph 192 of the NPPF states in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

7.2.3 The NPPF requires the Local Planning Authority to give great weight to an asset’s conservation and any harm must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

7.2.4 The existing playground will be reinstated as informal open space and this is welcome and as stated in paragraph 5.2.3 of the submitted Heritage Statement “the scheme will open up the north entrance [*from Tilehurst Road*] and better reveal the park from the north”. Berkshire Gardens Trust are in agreement with this.

7.2.5 Berkshire Gardens Trust advise that every effort should be made to minimize the impact of the changes on the parkland setting and views of this historic park. Reservations were raised about references in the Heritage Statement to this section of the park having a ‘municipal feel’ and there are concerns about this being reinforced by the proposal (along with the proposed development at the pavilion which there is a planning application pending). Berkshire Gardens Trust suggested that appropriate enhancements to this section of the park be considered. It is not clear from the comments received by the Berkshire Gardens Trust whether they are not objecting to the proposal subject to securing enhancements and if enhancements are not forthcoming as part of the application whether an objection would be raised. The Berkshire Gardens Trust have been reconsulted on the amended location of the proposed playground and asked to clarify their position. An update will be provided should further comments be received.

7.2.6 Notwithstanding the comments from the Berkshire Gardens Trust in regard to enhancements to this area of the park it is recognised that the proposed playground will result in an intensification of public facilities to the east of the park. The submitted Heritage Statement highlights that “Prospect Park and Mansion House derive considerable heritage significance from the designed views across the park to the south”. The location of the proposed playground is to the east and also not far from the existing playground. As such the proposed playground to the east of the park is considered to

preserve the heritage significance and any harm from the proposal has been carefully weighed against the public benefits of the scheme by providing a safe and accessible playground for children of all abilities which the existing playground does not. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with policy and guidance and is acceptable.

Impact on neighbouring properties

7.3 Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) of the Reading Borough Local Plan states that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of:

- o Privacy and overlooking;
- o Access to sunlight and daylight;
- o Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;
- o Harm to outlook;
- o Noise and disturbance;
- o Artificial lighting;
- o Vibration;
- o Dust and fumes;
- o Smell;
- o Crime and safety; or
- o Wind

7.3.1 The relocation of the proposed playground will move the play area further away from residential properties than the current location and although there will be a change in outlook from properties facing the park on Liebenrood Road the proposed playground will be over 100m away. As such the proposal is not considered to be visually dominant or overbearing. There is noise associated with any playground but the proposal involves the relocation of the existing playground within an existing park environment (and further away from residential properties) and it is therefore not considered harmful to neighbouring properties in terms of noise and disturbance. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in terms of its impact on neighbouring properties and is in accordance with Policy CC8.

Traffic generation and parking

7.4 The proposal is for the relocation of the existing playground and therefore no objection has been received from the Council's Transport section given the existing playground will be reinstated to informal open space. A comment has been received with regards to whether there is sufficient parking available within the park grounds, matters of congestion and road safety along Liebenrood Road however as the proposal only relates to the relocation of the playground, the wider problems that may be associated with other uses within the park cannot be addressed within this application.

Natural Environment

7.5 The amended Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) has demonstrated the acceptability of the proposed new play area in the amended location however as it does not cover tree protection measures for the removal of the existing play area. A condition is recommended to secure these details. Two trees identified for removal in the AIA will be replaced.

- 7.6 Comments from the Council's Ecologist and Natural Environment Trees team have requested details of any external lighting however it has been confirmed by the applicant that no external lighting is proposed. To ensure that no lighting is installed a condition is recommended to restrict external lighting.

OTHER MATTERS

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

- 7.7 As no internal floor area is proposed the proposal does not trigger the CIL limits and will not be CIL liable.

Equalities Impact

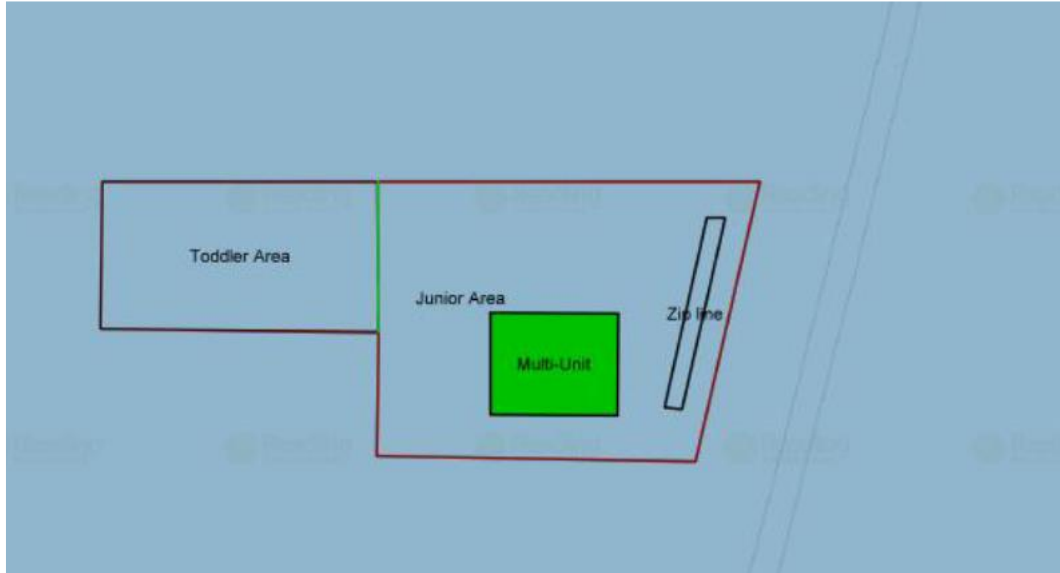
- 7.8 When determining an application for planning permission the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this planning application. Therefore, in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the proposed development.

8 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 This proposal has been carefully considered in the context of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and supplementary planning documents. The recommendation is shown above.

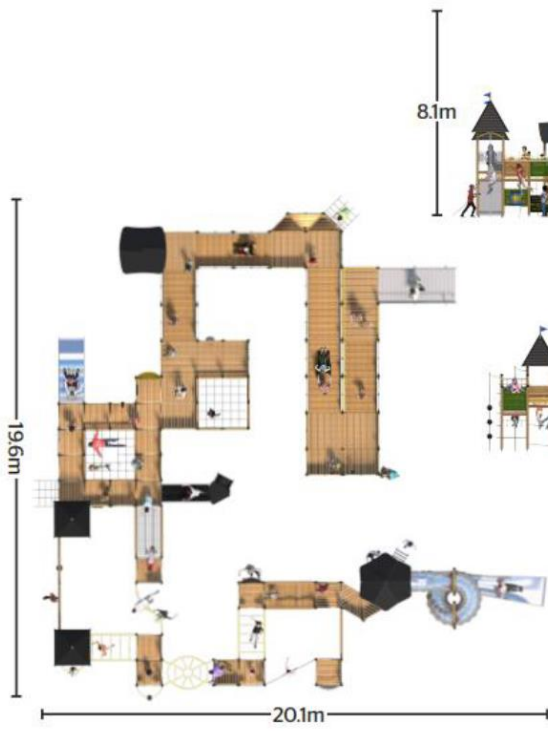
Case Officer: Claire Ringwood

Indicative Floor Plan For New Play Area



Examples of Accessible Multi-Units





Prospect Park
Concept Accessible Multi-Unit





Example of proposed 1.2m high fencing

