

UPDATE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 21st July 2021

ITEM NO. 21

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

RECOMMENDATION:

Grant 210644/REG3 and 210745/LBC

With conditions as set out in the main agenda report.

1. Consultation Responses

Berkshire Archaeology

- 1.1 This matter had been discussed prior to an application being submitted and the comments were that there would be no harmful impact on buried archaeology. This was based on two factors: one that there is little known archaeological potential in the area, and two that the playpark itself would have little impact on soil levels which might be archaeological in origin, having only shallow/minimal impact. The applicant has advised that there will be no significant excavation as part of the scheme.
- 1.2 A question was raised by a Councillor with regards to markings shown on the grass of an aerial photo in the location of the proposed playground (as shown below). Berkshire Archaeology stated they believe the markings are as a result of (relatively) modern activity. They do exist back as far as 2003 in the Google Earth imagery, and they look like lines made for sports pitches/training areas. There are a few lines that could conceivably be rather older, but they consider as long as that latter point above still holds true, that there are no plans for significant stripping/excavating in the course of the playpark construction, then their response would remain the same, of no impact on buried archaeology.



Aerial photo showing markings

2. Berkshire Gardens Trust

- 2.1 The Berkshire Gardens Trust were re-consulted on the amended location of the proposed playground and asked to clarify their position in relation to their initial comments that enhancements to this area of the park be included.
- 2.2 Berkshire Gardens Trust most recent comments refer to both the applications for the relocation of the existing playground and a separate application currently pending consideration (210647/REG3 and 210746/LBC) for the provision of a play service venue at the existing park pavilion (as noted in the Planning History in the main report).
- 2.3 Berkshire Gardens Trust commented “we welcome the protection recommended for the trees, as while we do not believe that many in that area are specimen or currently ‘veteran’ trees, they will mature to hopefully provide welcome shade and contribute to the setting of the nearby approach into the park. As to the ‘enhancements’ we mention, it would be good if these could be made a condition of planning, as the ‘track’, parking area and surrounds to them and the courts nearby are a real mess (potholes, verges and rubbish), which distracts from the enjoyment of visiting the park. However, there is obviously no sense in both the applications having the same requirements with duplication by contractors at extra cost to RBC and also disruption to all Park users, so we hope you can liaise with Ethne Humphreys and anyone else in RBC who needs to be involved in the improvements proposed for Prospect Park”.
- 2.4 The applicant has advised that the following works are proposed:

Main driveway

- Repair the potholes on driveway surface;
- Remarking of the driveway including a 10mile speed marking at the entrance from road;
- Create a new pedestrian crossing from the carpark to the new play area location; and
- Repair knee railing to the south side of the drive.

Paths

- Repair the existing path that runs adjacent to proposed new play area and driveway; and
- Remove the existing path behind the Astro turf pitches that leads to the tarmac tennis courts and realign so it will run outside the tree (T17) canopy.

Trees

- Replace the two trees (T2 & T4) that the tree impact assessment has identified for removal;
- Mulch around mature and semi mature oak trees (T13, T22, T32, T33); and
- The Parks Department routinely carry out work to ensure the maintenance of the landscape character of Prospect Park.

2.5 Although these enhancements are not to the level suggested by Berkshire Gardens Trust, Officer's consider that as the applications are solely for the relocation of the existing playground and taking into consideration the condition requiring the submission and approval of the proposed materials, the proposed works above are sufficient and any further enhancements are not required as part of the applications relating to the playground. Some further enhancements however may be justified as part of the proposal for the park pavilion and this will be addressed by the Officer dealing with that application.

3. Existing Playground area

3.1 A question has been raised with regards to the safety of the existing playground area once reinstated as open space following a healthy Oak tree falling due to underground springs eroding the soil underneath. The applicant has confirmed that the remaining Oak tree was heavily pollarded after the other Oak tree fell and they have no reason to suspect that the tree is dangerous. It is on an inspection schedule and therefore monitored by the Park's Arborist team. Parks have fenced off other veteran oaks on the site to protect the trees and they may consider doing the same to this remaining Oak tree as they state it is a magnificent specimen.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The officer recommendation remains to grant planning permission and listed building consent as per the recommendation in the main agenda report.

Case Officer: Claire Ringwood