

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	14 FEBRUARY 2022		
TITLE:	ESSENTIAL PLAYGROUND REFURBISHMENT WORKS 2022/23		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE, HERITAGE & RECREATION
SERVICE:	ENVIRONMENTAL & COMMERCIAL SERVICES	WARDS	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposal to allocate the approved capital budget of £891,000 in 2022/23 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 is proposed to refurbish the play areas highlighted in Appendix 1 in the 22/23 financial year.
- 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 Of the sites identified in 2018 as requiring full or significant refurbishment, four remain: Christchurch Meadows, Coley Recreation Ground, Victoria Recreation Ground (Gt Knollys Street) and Westfield Road Recreation Ground. Other sites identified in need of investment to remedy specific issues are Hills Meadow skate park, John Rabsons Recreation Ground and Robert Hewett Recreation Ground.
- 1.5 £350,000 has already been allocated to replacing in its entirety the playground at Prospect Park. Since costs were estimated in 2019, raw materials costs have increased considerably, for both rubber (for safety surfacing) and steel. In addition, submission for Planning consent has highlighted issues with access. Further funding is proposed to be allocated from the 22/23 capital budget to complete this scheme.

2 RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee approve spending the allocation of £891,000 capital on playgrounds as set out in this report in section 4 and in Appendix 1.

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 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.
- 3.4 A separate investment programme in leisure facilities sits alongside this investment in play programme as S.106 and CIL funded programmes, some of which are for play facilities.

4. THE DECISION

Current Position:

- 4.1 Reading Borough Council currently manages 58 equipped playgrounds.
- 4.2 An internal review of all playgrounds in the Borough in 2017, showed an estimated £3.8m capital investment was required in the medium term to refurbish the play areas reaching the end of their maintainable lifespan. 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 The Council is committed to providing accessible play areas for children with disabilities. Access to play equipment can also be a problem for able-bodied children with carers living with disability. The Council is aware of these issues and has been seeking to address this through its play area refurbishment programme.
- 4.4 In December 2018, a capital bid was submitted for £2.86 million investment in play facilities over 5 years. This was to be spent on the sites most urgently requiring refreshment and on providing better facilities for people with mobility issues.
- 4.5 To date, investment under this programme has resulted in the following schemes being completed or commenced:
Blagrave Recreation Ground junior and toddler play: £244,000
Palmer Park playground: £100,000
Amersham Road gym station: £24,000
- 4.6 Planning approval has been given for £350,000 to be spent on an entirely new playground in a new location at Prospect Park. Invitations to tender were sent out in December 2021.

Options Proposed

4.7 The approved capital budget for 2022/23 for essential playground works is £891,000. It is proposed that this is allocated as set out below.

- **Coley Recreation Ground (£200,000):** The last significant investment was Playbuilder funded in 2009. This site is well used and play equipment is aging. In particular, the loosefill safety surfacing needs to be replaced to improve access.
- **Victoria Recreation Ground (Gt Knollys St) (£275,000; £44,000 S.106 funding available, so £231,000 capital required):** The site is presently experiencing antisocial behaviour, and it is proposed to relocate the playground to the other side of the park close to the school to increase its visibility and security. There was some Playbuilder funded investment in 2009, but the older kit was installed in 2002 and is now 20 years old and has reached the end of its maintainable life.
- **Westfield Road (£200,000):** The existing equipment is in poor condition, offers low play value and is no longer maintainable. A complete overhaul is proposed.
- **Clayfield Copse skate park (£55,000):** This is a well-used teen facility, attracting users from all parts of Reading. One of the units is damaged and requires being replaced. The remainder of the facility is currently in good condition.
- **John Rabsons Recreation Ground (£25,000):** The safety surfacing requires replacement at this destination site. Equipment is currently in good condition.
- **Prospect Park (an additional £180,000):** £350,000 has already been allocated to replacing in its entirety the playground at Prospect Park. Since costs were estimated in 2019, raw materials costs have soared, for both rubber (for safety surfacing) and steel, in some cases by more than 50%. In addition, submission for Planning consent highlighted issues with access: the existing path needs to be resurfaced; a new link path is required, and a secure crossing from the car park needs to be made. The latter requirement requires removal of part of the bund to create a wider and level access point for buggies and wheelchairs, and then resealing of this access point against vehicles. In addition, it is not possible to re-use the fencing as originally intended, as consultees required a better-quality fencing in this Grade 2 listed landscape. For these reasons, further funding is required to complete this scheme.

Other options considered

4.8 Other playgrounds previously highlighted as being most urgently in need of investment, including Blagrove Recreation Ground, Dover Street, Lyon Square, Moriston Close, Oxford Road Recreation Ground, Palmer Park and Rivermead have now been refurbished or already have funds identified to achieve this. The playgrounds identified as priorities in this report are now equally in need of refurbishment as outlined above.

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 are to 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 are consulted on all projects within their ward.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 In general, the allocation of capital for outdoor recreational facilities includes features which will make a positive contribution to climate change and the local environment, including open space, tree planting, air quality, water absorption and sustainable transport.
- 7.2 The projects to which this proposal relates, although not directly addressing climate change, will promote physical activity within Reading and will provide facilities that reduce the need to travel for people in the local area.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 The installation of a synthetic safety surface 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.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

10 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 In relation to play and open space, the Council's approved Capital Programme (February 2019) details funding to complete a 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.

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

10.3 Funds reallocated from previous years include:
 Prospect Park: £32,000 spent and £318,000 carried forward
 Unallocated: £26,000

10.4 It is anticipated that any operational non-capital costs that are associated with individual schemes will be met within existing approved revenue budgets.

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

Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure	481	396	1,282
Of which new funding	394	250	891
Of which funds reallocated from previous year	87	146	347
Of which, allocated	481	370	321
Of which, S.106	-	-	44
Of which, unallocated	26	26	917
Funded by			
Grant (specify)			
Section 106 (specify)			44
Other services			
Capital Receipts/Borrowing	481	396	1,238
Spent	335	49	
Slipped forward	146	347	
Total Funding	481	396	1,238

11 BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Minutes of the Council meeting of 26.2.2019 - minute 45 refers

11.2 Report to NHL 3 July 2019, 'Update on the approved capital improvements programme for Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces, 2018-20'

Appendix 1: Estimated cost of proposals

Playground	Ward	Proposal	Capital estimate	Other
Coley Park	Minster, LEAP	Refresh play equipment	£200,000	
Clayfield Copse	Peppard, skate	Replace damaged unit	£55,000	
John Rabsons Rec. Ground	Church, NEAP	Replace safety surfacing	£25,000	
Prospect Park	Southcote, NEAP, major destination park	Complete scheme, including Planning obligations and covering cost increases	£180,000	
Victoria Rec. Great Knollys St	Abbey, LEAP	Replace entire playground in a new location, closer to the Academy on Great Knollys Street	£275,000 £231,000 capital	£44,000 S.106
Westfield Road Rec. Ground	Caversham, LEAP	A complete overhaul is required	£200,000	
TOTAL			£891,000	

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