

24 April 2024



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
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<b>Title</b>	<b>PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT</b>
<b>Ward</b>	Abbey
<b>Planning Application Reference:</b>	240073/REG3
<b>Site Address:</b>	Victoria Recreation Park, George Street, Reading RG1 7HL
<b>Proposed Development</b>	Relocation of an existing children's play area within Victoria Park and the reinstatement of the existing children's play area to an informal open space.
<b>Applicant</b>	Reading Borough Council
<b>Report author</b>	Marcie Rejwerska
<b>Deadline:</b>	26/04/2024 (Extension of time)
<b>Recommendations</b>	Grant planning permission, subject to conditions as follows:
<b>Conditions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Time Limit Standard</li><li>2. Approved Plans</li><li>3. Details of play equipment and materials to be submitted prior to commencement – height not to exceed 8m above ground level.</li><li>4. Arboricultural Method Statement (as specified) prior to commencement</li><li>5. Landscaping and planting details for 38 new trees to be submitted to secure Biodiversity Net Gain as outlined in submitted calculations prior to commencement</li><li>6. Contaminated land assessment to be submitted prior to commencement</li><li>7. Contaminated Land remediation scheme to be submitted and implemented prior to commencement (or in accordance with timetable).</li><li>8. No external lighting</li></ol>
<b>Informatives</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Terms</li><li>2. Pre-commencement conditions</li><li>3. Building Control</li><li>4. Complaints about construction</li><li>5. Archaeology</li><li>6. CIL not liable</li><li>7. Positive and proactive - approval</li></ol>

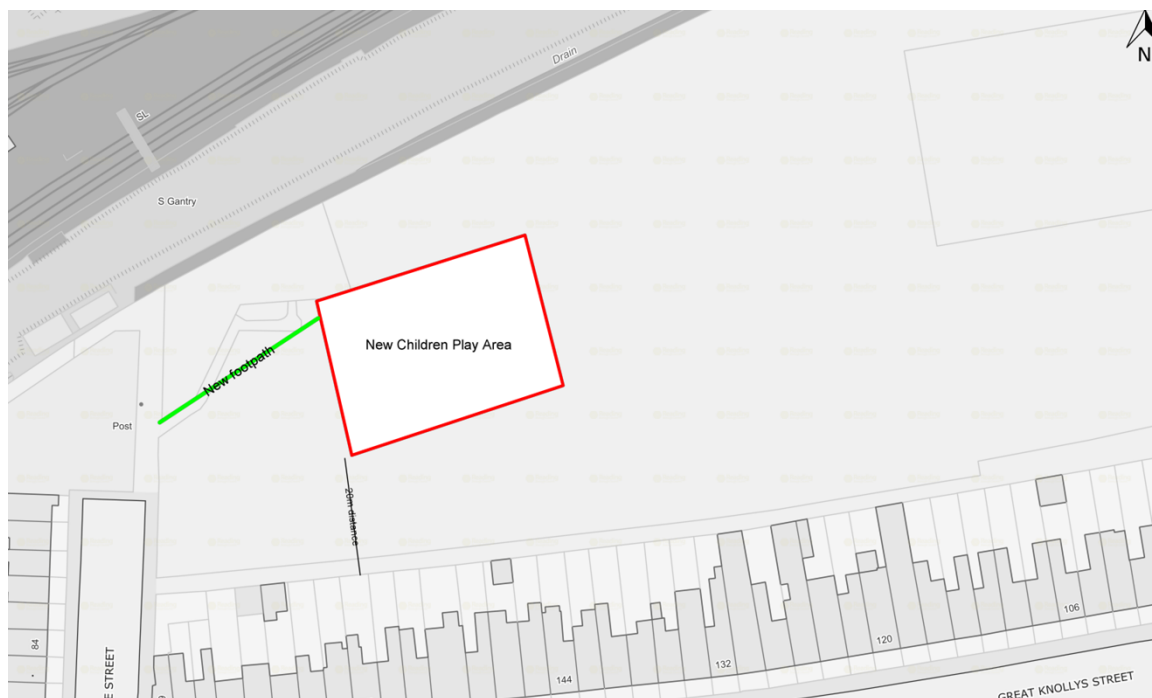
## 1. Executive summary

- 1.1. This report refers to the proposals for replacement and relocation of the playground at Victoria Recreation Park. The existing playground is nearing the end of its viable use and is made unsafe due to ground lifting as a result of the roots of the mature Lime trees in the park. The proposal includes the relocation of the playground away from the mature trees with new play equipment, and the existing playground area to be reinstated as grassland.

## 2. Introduction and site description

- 2.1. The application is referred to Committee owing to it being works to land owned by the Council, and the application has been submitted by the Council's Environmental & Commercial Services team.
- 2.2. The application site comprises the public park north of Great Knollys Street, accessed from George Street to the west, and Hodsoll Road to the east. The park is bounded by railway tracks to the north. The park is identified within the Local Plan as a public open space under Policy EN7Wh. There is an existing playground in the north-west corner of the park, which is the subject of this application, and a MUGA field on the east side of the parking which is used by the neighbouring Civitas Academy.
- 2.3. The surrounding area is predominately residential, with the park bounded by properties on Great Knollys Street to the south, and George Street to the west. Civitas Academy is located on the east side of the park.
- 2.4. The current play area measures approx. 468.5m<sup>2</sup> and contains play equipment appropriate for small children. There are a number of mature Lime trees within the playground which are causing uplift of the hard surface creating a trip hazard. The play equipment itself is at the end of its life cycle and requires replacement.
- 2.5. There is play equipment to the east of the playground outside the hard-surface area, for bigger children including a zipline. This area is maintained as grassland. This informal play area measures approx. 750m<sup>2</sup>.

Site location plan:



### **3. The Proposal**

- 3.1. Planning permission is sought for relocation of the formal playground and installation of new playground equipment. The location of the existing playground is to be reinstated as grassland/mulch to improve the conditions for the existing trees. The proposal also includes realignment of the footpath from George Street to the playground.
- 3.2. The area of the proposed playground combines the area of the existing formal and informal play areas and will have a total area of 988m<sup>2</sup> and will provide play equipment for toddlers and juniors.
- 3.3. 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. Some indicative information has been provided, such as that the ground surface is to be permeable tarmac, and the play equipment would be made of recyclable materials.
- 3.4. Submitted plans and documentation:
  - Planning Statement, dated January 2024, received 19/01/24
  - Flood Map for Planning, dated 22/11/23, received 19/01/24
  - Flood Risk Assessment, received 19/01/24
  - R3624/c Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, John Wenman Ecological Consultancy, dated February 2024, received 08/02/24
  - Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment, Habitat Condition Assessment, John Wenman Consultancy, dated 23/02/24, received 26/02/24
  - Site Layout Plan, dated 01/03/24, received 01/03/24
  - 03596Rv4 Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement, Tamla Trees, dated March 2024, received 27/03/24

### **4. Planning history**

- 4.1. 141490 – Demolition of existing light industrial units on the land to the east of Hodsoll Road and construction of a new 2FE Primary School including 200m<sup>2</sup> of community facilities along with the demolition of two temporary buildings and associated hard standings on Victoria Park – Application approved by Planning Applications Committee
- 4.2. 151304 – Application for approval of details reserved by condition (141490) – Split decision
- 4.3. 200881 – Application for approval of details reserved by condition 22 (surfacing and ground works for junior multi-sports playing pitch) of planning permission red. 141490 – Conditions discharged
- 4.4. No other relevant planning history.

### **5. Consultations**

- 5.1. Non-Statutory
  - RBC Environmental Protection – The proposal is closer than the existing playground to residential dwellings therefore minimum buffer zone must be achieved as per Fields in Trust guidance. Recommended pre-commencement conditions relating to contaminated land.
  - RBC Natural Environment – No objections to Rev4 of the submitted AIA/AMS subject to compliance condition.

- RBC Access Officer – No objections
- RBC Leisure Services – No comments received.
- Ecology – Biodiversity Net Gain calculations accepted but detailed of the scheme of landscaping is required; pre-commencement condition recommended to secure this.
- Network Rail – No objections raised.

## 5.2. Public

- The following neighbouring properties were consulted by letter:
  - 74-94, 61 George Street
  - 92-172 Great Knolly's Street
  - Civitas Academy
 No letters of representation received.
- A site notice was erected on site on 31/01/2024.

## 6. Legal context

- 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) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).
- 6.2. In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan 2019 according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).
- 6.3. Accordingly, the latest NPPF and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

### Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

#### Policies:

- CC1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CC7 Design and the Public Realm
- CC8 Safeguarding Amenity
- EN7 Local Green Space and Public Open Space
- EN12 Biodiversity and the Green Network
- EN14 Trees, Hedges and Woodland
- EN17 Pollution and Water Resources
- OU1 New and Existing Community Facilities

## Appraisal

- 6.4. The main considerations are:
  - I. Principle of development
  - II. Design and appearance

- III. Amenity
- IV. Trees and biodiversity
- V. Other matters

#### **I) Principle of development**

- 6.5. The NPPF (para. 7) states that 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.
- 6.6. 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".
- 6.7. Policy CC7 continues that development will "address the needs of all in society and are accessible, usable and easy to understand by them, including providing suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily".
- 6.8. 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 reinstatement of the existing playground back into informal open space. The principle of development is therefore considered acceptable and in line with locally adopted policies.

#### **II) Design and appearance**

- 6.9. As outlined 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 location, the ground surface, and the maximum height of the central play unit (8m). The proposed playground would be enclosed by a fence, the details of which are also to be confirmed by the applicant at a later stage.
- 6.10. As the proposal is set within a park which has existing play areas and an existing formal playground, the height and type of equipment is unlikely to be harmful to the character and appearance of the surrounding area and Officers are therefore satisfied that the exact details of the proposed play equipment are not required to determine the application at this stage and that the matter can be dealt with by condition. A condition recommended requiring details of the proposed equipment to be submitted and approved in writing prior to commencement.

#### **III) Amenity**

- 6.11. Policy CC8 states that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties in terms of:
  - Privacy and overlooking;
  - Access to sunlight and daylight;
  - Visual dominance and overbearing effects of development;
  - Harm to outlook;
  - Noise and disturbance;

- Artificial lighting;
  - Vibration ;
  - Dust and fumes;
  - Smell;
  - Crime and safety.
- 6.12. The proposed playground would be located closer to the residential dwellings on Great Knollys Street than the existing playground. The Fields in Trust guidance outlines that playground of up to 1000m<sup>2</sup> should have a minimum of 20m buffer distance from the nearest residential sensitive receptor (ie. habitable rear façade of dwellings). The proposed layout of the playground has been amended to achieve this buffer distance, which is now in excess of the recommended 20m from properties on Great Knollys Street.
- 6.13. The maximum height of the equipment is not considered to raise any concerns of visual dominance as the south side of the park is lined by mature trees, screening the park from view of the properties on Great Knollys Street. The location and max. height of the play equipment is therefore considered to have minimal impact on residential amenity.
- 6.14. On this basis, the proposal is not considered to result in harm to the amenity of nearby residential properties, in accordance with Policy CC8.

#### **IV) Trees and biodiversity**

- 6.15. The amended Arboricultural Impact and Method Statement demonstrates that no existing trees require pruning or removal within the existing playground area. An existing stump has already been removed by the RBC Arborist team due to public safety concerns. The proposal is wholly outside the Protected Root Area of the retained trees, save for the new footpath which is not considered to put the trees at risk.
- 6.16. Biodiversity net gain calculations were also submitted to demonstrate that the new playground location is a low-value grassland, and that a 10.18% net gain will be achieved through biodiversity enhancements including the planting of nine new trees on the northwest and south boundary hedge lines. The full details of the proposed planting are to be secured via pre-commencement condition.

#### **V) Other matters**

- 6.17. The existing and proposed play areas are within Flood Zone 2 (likelihood of annual fluvial flooding is between 0.1% and 1%). Environment Agency data also shows the site to be at Low Risk of surface water flooding (likelihood of 1% annual probability). As such, all new hard surfaces are proposed to be permeable tarmac. This is considered sufficient and acceptable.
- 6.18. Council Records show that the site lies within contaminated land from a historic oil spill on the northeast corner of the park. Conditions are recommended to secure a contaminated land assessment to give an indication as to the likely risks and to determine whether remedial action is required.
- 6.19. The proposal provides replacement facilities in a similar location and therefore there it is not considered that there is likely to be a significant increase in traffic generation in the area.
- 6.20. The applicant contacted Berkshire Archaeology directly prior to submission of the application to confirm that an informative is sufficient in this instance to state that in the event of any potential archaeology finds they should be immediately reported to Berkshire Archaeology and all works ceased until an assessment can be made.

### **7. Equality implications**

- 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 key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation. It is considered that the proposal will improve the current playground provision to allow children of all abilities to enjoy the facilities and is therefore an improvement on the current playground design.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 9.1 As with all applications considered by the Local Planning Authority, the application is required to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, as per Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 9.2 Officers consider that the proposed works are acceptable as they would not harm the amenity of neighbouring residential properties, would preserve trees and secure additional tree planting and would improve the playground facilities for the local community.
- 9.3 As such, this application is recommended for approval for Planning Permission subject to the recommended conditions.

## **Plans & Appendices**

1. Existing access from George Street





2. Existing playground



3. Pre-development ecological map





4. Post-development ecological map

