

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE	
DATE:	20 JANUARY 2020	
TITLE:	ESSENTIAL PLAYGROUND WORKS 2019/20	
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO: CULTURE, HERITAGE AND RECREATION
SERVICE:	PARKS	WARDS: BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to allocate the approved capital spend of £200,000 in 2019/20 for essential playgrounds works.
- 1.2 The Council in addition to its own internal playground inspections, also instructs the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) to carry out an annual independent inspection of all of its play areas.
- 1.3 The annual RoSPA inspection in October 2019 recommended two items of equipment for immediate removal, and advised the monitoring of others that are at risk.
- 1.4 This report also addresses current accessibility issues identified at both Prospect and Palmer Parks, and will improve significantly accessibility for all.
- 1.5 Over the past few years, parts of the disabled unit on the former ERAPA site at Palmer Park have been removed as they have failed inspections, reducing significantly the play value for children in wheelchairs.
- 1.6 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. Proposals are being drawn up to move the play area away from the remaining large veteran trees that remain.
- 1.7 Spending to address these issues is proposed.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee approves the allocation of £200,000 capital spending in relation to the priorities, sites and programme set out in this report, in section 4.2.1 and the Appendix Table 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 In 2018 a full review of all playgrounds was carried out highlighting all investment needs and subsequently a £2.8million programme over five years was developed to fund the current investment gap. £1.6m has been formally approved for 2019-22. 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.
- 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, and include:
- Ivydene £100,000: the site was identified as requiring refreshing
 - Canal Way £100,000: this is a new site, intended to replace the Avon Place play area at the larger, safer green area at the Canal Way/Orts Rd junction
 - Cintra Park £95,000
 - Long Barn Lane Recreation Ground teen and sports facilities £155,000
 - Coley Recreation Ground £65,000: new outdoor gym
 - Prospect Park £88,000: general sports improvements

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position:

- 4.1.1 Reading Borough Council currently manages 56 equipped playgrounds, primarily on Leisure land, although 10 of these are on land owned by either Housing or Education.
- 4.1.2 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.
- 4.1.3 A review of all playgrounds in the Borough undertaken in 2017, and reviewed in 2019, shows an estimated of £3.8 million capital investment is 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.

- 4.1.4 Few sites provide for children with disabilities. This is true not only of children in wheelchairs, but of children with a range of physical and mental challenges. Access to play equipment can also be a problem for able-bodied children with disabled carers. The Council is aware of these issues and has been seeking consciously to address this over the past two decades.
- 4.1.5 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 February 2019, £1.6 million was approved for investment over the first three years of this programme.
- 4.1.6 In order to draw up detailed spending plans, officers are currently reviewing the Council's Open Spaces Strategy to ensure that the investment programme meets current needs.

4.2 Options Proposed

- 4.2.1 The capital programme includes an allocation of £205,000 to spend in 2019/20 for essential investment in children's playgrounds:
- Palmer Park £100,000: One large climbing apparatus and several swing units require replacement; investment in all-inclusive play is a priority
 - Prospect Park £100,000 (in 2019/20; £250,000 in early 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 disabled children is very poor for such an important park, and investment in all-inclusive play is a priority.
 - Christchurch Meadows £5,000: one of few sites with fully-inclusive play equipment. Significant use means that the site requires refreshing

4.3 Other Options Considered

- 4.3.1 Inadequate capital investment and further reductions in revenue will mean that, over time, the Council will need to choose whether to preserve the number of equipped play areas and to accept a general decline in the range of play items available at each site, or to close underused play facilities and concentrate resources on improving the larger sites.

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 Where appropriate, consultation and engagement with local communities and interest groups will be undertaken prior to investment.

6.3 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.

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

Capital Implications

Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line	2019/20 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure	200
Funded by Grant (specify) Section 106 (specify) Other services Health and Safety capital Capital Receipts/Borrowing	5 200
Total Funding	205

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Minutes of the Council meeting of 26.2.219 - minute 45 refers

10.2 Draft Play Strategy 2019

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

Appendix Table: Estimated cost of proposals

Playground	Ward	Proposal	Capital estimate
2019/20			£200,000
Christchurch Meadows	Thames, LEAP, major destination park	Replace disabled swings flagged as H&S risk	[£5,000 (H&S fund applic.n)]
Palmer Park	Park, LEAP, major destination park	Replace rope swinger, flagged as H&S risk; replace end-of-life multi-unit on Wokingham Road site with fully inclusive unit; improve access by replacing loosefill surfacing	£100,000
Prospect Park	Southcote, NEAP, major destination park	Commence moving play area away from large trees, to site less prone to flooding and better suited to disabled play	£100,000