

Subject:	Playground Refurbishment Programme 2021-2025		
Date of Meeting:	Environment Transport and Sustainability Committee – 19th January 2021 Policy and Resources Committee – 18th March 2021		
Report of:	Executive Director Economy Environment and Culture		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Paul Campbell	Tel: 01273 294507
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The Open Spaces Strategy 2017 consultation made it clear that the provision of playgrounds in our parks is a priority for residents.
- 1.2 A substantial number of council playgrounds require refurbishment. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for a playground refurbishment programme for the city.
- 1.3 In June 2019 the council allocated £0.200m capital to contribute towards the upgrade of playgrounds in the city. Some work to refurbish playgrounds has been completed. However, the programme has not been fully delivered and due to the heavy wear and tear during the pandemic the end of life of many more playgrounds has been accelerated.
- 1.4 The report sets out a new strategy for playground refurbishment and also seeks approval in relation to the funding and procurement of the programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**That Environment Transport and Sustainability Committee:**

- 2.1 Recommends to Policy & Resources Committee that it approve the playground refurbishment programme set out in appendix 1.
- 2.2 Recommends to Policy & Resources Committee that it approves borrowing of up to £0.539m to contribute to the refurbishment of playgrounds.
- 2.3 Recommends to Policy & Resources Committee that it delegates authority to the Executive Director of Economy Environment and Culture to procure and award contracts for up to £3m for playground refurbishment over a period of up to 4 years.

That Policy & Resources Committee

- 2.1 Approves the playground refurbishment programme set out in appendix 1
- 2.2 Approves borrowing of £0.539m to fund the refurbishment of playgrounds that do not already have funding allocated.
- 2.3 Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Economy Environment and Culture to procure and award contracts for up to £3m for playground refurbishment over a period of up to 4 years.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The council owns and maintains 55 playgrounds in the city of which 15 are owned by the Housing Department but managed and maintained by Cityparks. The seafront team maintain and manage 2 playgrounds and they are therefore not included in this programme. These playgrounds are a well-used resource for families. They are important for child and family health and wellbeing and also for childhood development and socialisation. The consultation carried out as part of the Open Spaces Strategy 2017 made it clear that the provision of playgrounds is a high priority for residents.
- 3.2 The last significant investment in council owned playgrounds was through the Playbuilder Grant scheme in 2010. Whilst this meant there was substantial investment in the cities playgrounds it also meant that a large amount of playground equipment was due to come to the end of life simultaneously.
- 3.3 In 2019/20 members allocated £0.200m capital towards the costs of refurbishing playgrounds that are not eligible for funding from developer contributions. A Play Development Officer was recruited and commenced in post in September 2020.
- 3.4 Playgrounds were closed during the first COVID lockdown from March to July 2020. Since they reopened the amount of use of the playgrounds has been substantially higher than normal due to the lack of other facilities normally available for children and their families. This has led to a significant amount of additional wear and tear on our playground equipment and shortened the life of some apparatus by several years.
- 3.5 Unfortunately, due to the age of the equipment and the accelerated wear this year a number of items have had to be removed in advance of the refurbishment programme. Cityparks are investing £0.110m this financial year to remove and repair play apparatus. At the Level it is anticipated that playground repairs will extend the life of the playground by at least 5 years. Wherever possible elsewhere play equipment is being repaired but where this is not possible and there is a risk to child safety they have been removed. Approximately 87 play items have been scheduled for removal since October 2020. It is anticipated that the last of these items will be removed by February 2021.
- 3.6 A new playground was installed at Stanmer Park in September 2020. This was inspired and largely funded by a local resident of Stanmer Village. St Nicolas playground is being refurbished and is anticipated to be completed in April 2021. Another new playground, Middle Park, in Whitehawk has just been procured and

is also anticipated to be installed in Spring 2021. Both sites are funded from Section 106 contributions.

- 3.7 Barn Rise Playground in Withdean was tendered in December 2020. With a budget of £0.060m of which almost £0.009m has been raised by My-First-Friend Nursery adjoining the playground. This site is anticipated to be installed in Summer 2021.
- 3.8 The first task for the Play Development Officer was to develop a 5-year refurbishment programme for our cities play equipment prior to end of life. The officer has established that 45 out of 53 playgrounds need some refurbishment. This could also be equated as around 150 of the 600-playground apparatus in our parks. However, it has become clear that a 5-year programme would leave a number of parks in some areas of the city without play equipment for too long meaning that some children would miss out on easy access to this recreation facility. Therefore, the refurbishment programme proposed accelerates this as far as possible to a 3 to 4-year programme for the 45 sites. It is intended that the procurement will be undertaken over the next 3 years but completion of refurbishments of all sites may run into 4 years.
- 3.9 The total value of this programme is estimated to be just under £3m. There are a range of sources of funding for this programme which are set out in paragraph 7.1. Of the £3m an estimated £0.466m will be funded by the Housing Revenue Account for housing owned playgrounds, subject to agreement by Housing Committee.
- 3.10 It is anticipated that the refurbishment programme will help to reduce maintenance costs in future years. However moving forward after the three year refurbishment programme of ongoing condition surveys and an annual replacement programme will be developed and presented to committee for consideration in order to try to ensure that in the future we do not have a large number of playgrounds requiring refurbishment and a high level of investment at the same time. .
- 3.11 Alternative sources of grant funding and other contributions will continue to be sought over the 3 years in order to minimise the financial pressure on the council whilst delivering the programme.
- 3.12 The programme prioritises the replacement of playgrounds primarily based on need (where there is the greatest deficit of play equipment). However, where there is funding readily available and where this needs to be spent within a specified timeframe, this has also been factored in. The proposed programme is RAG rated, (Red Amber Green) and set out in appendix 1.
- 3.13 It is recommended that in order to maximise efficiency and achieve the best value for money possible that the programme is tendered in Lots to be procured over the 3-year period.
- 3.14 The playground report varies from the previous committee report in June 2019. The primary reason for this is the comprehensive assessment undertaken by the new Playground Development Officer. Their expertise has ensured that our play areas are safe, and that future procurement process maximise sustainability,

durability and low maintenance. For instance, this should increase the lifespan of metal playground apparatus from 15 to potentially 25 years or more, in some instances.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 It is considered that not replacing/improving play equipment across the city due to the importance of play in the lives of the city's children is not an option. This was reflected in the Open Spaces Strategy Consultation 2017.
- 4.2 There remains an option to implement the playgrounds over a 5 to 6-year period reducing loan repayments. However, this would mean children living in locations at the end of the refurbishment programme would be without facilities for significant part of their developmental years. To mitigate this impact Cityparks are seeking to develop some of the larger visitor destination parks such as Preston Park and Hove Park earlier on in the process.
- 4.3 It would not be possible to deliver the improvements within a shorter period than two years due to the capacity of the commercial play industry and the council's procurement and Cityparks team.
- 4.4 It should be noted that this refurbishment programme is intended to replace all facilities to a good standard, using the most sustainable and robust items available within budget limitations. Any additional investment achieved over the next 3 years could be used to achieve a 'gold standard' for playground improvements
- 4.5 Playgrounds will mostly be grouped into Lots of five, as this is what the play industry have deemed most commercially suitable for their operations and therefore likely to encourage a good level of interest and competition when the work is tendered.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Through the Open Spaces Strategy 2017 consultation it was identified that playgrounds are considered to be third most important asset in our parks by the 3500 responders.
- 5.2 All Councillors were emailed in June and November 2020 about the playground challenges. Posters were added to all playgrounds in November and December regarding the removal and replacement programme.
- 5.3 The focus of Cityparks has been to firstly ensure all playgrounds across the city including housing sites are safe. The second priority has been to identify how the affected playgrounds can be refurbished.
- 5.4 Where Councillors, Friends Groups and residents have been active, Cityparks have met with them to update them on their work and discussed options. This will continue as part of the refurbishment programme.

- 5.5 In addition, given the specialist nature of the apparatus, there are limited people within or outside of the Cityparks team who can advise on what a playground needs regarding play-value and safety standards over the next 20 years.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Given the citywide challenge facing our playgrounds it is recommended that a 3-year refurbishment programme partially funded through borrowing will deliver a process in a feasible time for the department and the industry.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial implications

- 7.1 The General Fund playground investment programme is proposed to be funded as set out in the table below. This includes corporate borrowing that will need to be approved at Budget Council in February 2021 with the financing costs built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

	Lot 1	Lot 2	Lot 3	Total
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	
Planned programme	£1,663,000	£509,000	£275,000	£2,447,000
Less Section 106 funding	-£953,000	-£90,000	-£30,000	-£1,073,000
Less City Parks Car Parking net income	-£170,000	-£70,000	-£65,000	-£305,000
Less existing corporately held capital funding	-£200,000	£0	£0	-£200,000
Less additional corporate borrowing	-£230,000	-£239,000	-£70,000	-£539,000
Less City Parks funding	-£110,000	-£110,000	-£110,000	-£330,000
Balance to fund	£0	£0	£0	£0

- 7.2 The funding includes estimated net income from Parks car parking charges that could be higher or lower than forecast. The balance of funding for the programme will be met from existing budgets within the City Parks service totalling an estimated £0.330m over three years. The existing budget will either be used to fund this directly or be used to fund the financing costs of borrowing for this sum with an estimated annual cost of £0.026m per annum assuming a 15 year the life of the assets. The final split (revenue versus unsupported borrowing) will be assessed as part of a review of the projected ongoing maintenance requirements following the delivery of the investment programme.
- 7.3 In addition, there is also £0.466 million of proposed investment in Housing Revenue Account (HRA) playgrounds which will be funded by the HRA. The programme will be amended as tender prices are obtained and reflected in Targeted Budget Management reports to Policy & Resources as required

Finance Officer Consulted: James Hengeveld

Date: 06/01/2021

Legal Implications:

- 7.4 The council's Procurement Team and, where appropriate, legal officers will advise on the procurement process to ensure that the council complies with all

relevant public procurement legislation as well as the council's Contract Standing Orders (CSOs).

Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert

Date: 09/12/20

Equalities Implications:

- 7.5 Cityparks has won an award for its inclusive playground at the Level and always seeks to create sites which are accessible to all. This significant investment programme will improve on the standards already in place for accessibility.
- 7.6 Almost all playgrounds across the city will benefit from this investment and increased accessibility.
- 7.7 However, there will be some sites where playgrounds will not be improved for up to 3 or 4 years. The children's in these areas will have a reduced access to play equipment for part of their lives. This issue can be partially mitigated where large destination sites are improved earlier in the programme giving a secondary choice to parents and careers, albeit a little further away from their local site.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.8 The play industry has built within it a robust set of sustainability principles. This ensures that the majority of play equipment is recycled when it is removed. It also ensures that the whole life cycle of playgrounds is considered. The vast majority of components are either metal or wood and from sustainable Forestry Steward Certification schemes.
- 7.9 In addition, improvements in weather-proofing of materials such as wood and metal means that guarantees are now increasing from 10, to 15 and 20 years with some companies. This longevity point is being reflected in how Cityparks writes its tenders.

Brexit Implications:

- 7.10 It is still too early to predict the potential impact of Brexit but production/delivery delays and increased cost are some potential risk for the scheme.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.7 Due to the comprehensive citywide nature of the investment this programme of changes will ensure the wellbeing of the city's children is to be maintained in a timely manner and inequalities are minimised.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Playground Refurbishment Programme 2021 - 2025

Background Documents

1. Open Spaces Strategy 2017

