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<b>Meeting</b>	Place Scrutiny Committee
<b>Meeting Date</b>	Tuesday 24th June 2025
<b>Report of</b>	Ian Hoult Head of Environmental Services
<b>Portfolio of</b>	Executive Member for the Environment and Climate Emergency (Cllr J Kent)

## **£500k Parks Investment Fund**

### **Summary**

1. This report seeks feedback from the Committee on the recommended criteria to be used in allocating £500k parks investment fund. Feedback from the Committee will be incorporated in the report on the criteria scheduled for the consideration by the Executive on 15th July 2025.

### **Background**

2. The Council Plan 2023-2027 which sets a clear vision for the council - *by working with the city we will establish the conditions that would make the city healthier, fairer, more affordable, more sustainable and more accessible*. As part of delivering this Plan, Budget Council in February 2025 approved a two year £500k investment into the Council parks.
3. Consideration of how the fund will be used commenced at the April meeting of the Executive Member for the Environment and Climate Emergency. It was stated in the report *“that improving green spaces, parks and play-areas that are freely available, whilst enhancing the biodiversity and increasing pollinators to ensure the spaces are more sustainable, is directly aligned to the council’s vision. In addition, residents have told the Council in petitions, the development of the Local Plan, and throughout consultations that they value the city’s unique character and how it is enhanced through well-maintained green spaces. Investing in the protection and development of public spaces leaves a lasting and positive impression of a city residents are justifiably proud of”*.

4. The report also noted the following indicative criteria could be used to allocate the investment fund:
  - A. Sites within communities which score higher on Indices of Multiple Deprivation,
  - B. Projects which address long standing maintenance issues e.g. footpath rebuilding,
  - C. Play areas where the equipment is over 15 years old, (in some cases the council has equipment which is nearly 30 years old),
  - D. To support the expansion of Green Flag standard e.g. Hull Road Park, and,
  - E. Where projects have or potential for 3rd party funding contributions
5. The views of Scrutiny Committee are now being sought on the recommended criteria below and on what, if any, weighting should be given to each criterion.

### **Consultation**

6. As noted in the Public Realm Service update report presented at Executive Member decision session in April 2025, this report is part of the consultation for the Parks Investment Fund.

### **Options**

7. Members have the option to
  - A. Agree the criteria detail below in Paragraphs 8 to 20
  - B. Add to or amend the criteria in Paragraphs 8 to 20
  - C. Suggest an alternative approach to allocating the fund

### **Criteria**

8. The suggested criteria for use are detailed below. Some sites and projects are likely to qualify under several criteria, whilst others will be discounted due to more recent investment. To aid decision making it is suggested that the criteria are weighted to develop a scoring matrix to rank sites and projects in most need of investment.

A. Sites within communities which score higher on Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).

9. IMD are a composite score of a range of separate indicators, grouped into seven distinct domains: Income, Employment, Education, Skills and Training, Health and Disability, Crime, Barriers to Housing and Services, Living Environment. Each Index represents a different aspect of deprivation.
10. The Council's Business Intelligence Unit has provided IMD scores for the area in a 300m radius surrounding Yorks open spaces and play areas. Scores range from 30 to 2, the higher the score the higher the level deprivation.

B. Projects which address long standing maintenance issues to key infrastructure.

11. Key infrastructure includes such assets as footpaths, buildings and play area safety surfacing. Investment that will extend the life of the existing asset for several years or decades. Whilst it is possible to fund such work from the revenue budget, the scale of the work required means that some schemes are just too large for this funding source. Footpath and bridge work projects would contribute to Council's Active Travel ambitions.

C. Investment into play areas with a priority to improving those sites with the oldest equipment or would benefit from relandscaping

12. There are in the region of 90 equipped play areas across the city, with around half provided by the city council. The rest are provided by a mix of parish / town councils, housing association, Ministry of Defence and estate management companies. The age of the equipment is generally new to 15 years old due to successive national and local funding rounds, 106 driven investment, local fund raising and the construction of new play areas within recent housing developments. Despite this there remain a few play areas where a large proportion of the equipment is 20 or more years old and several sites which have specific pieces of equipment which are even older. It is recommended that that priority be given to the investing into these sites.
13. Not all sites are laid out in a coherent way due to historical land ownership issues and piecemeal development around the site. By removing old fencing, improve paths or creating more open aspects the opportunity exists create a greater sense wellbeing and security

#### D. Support the expansion and retention of Green Flag Award standard

14. Over the last 20 years a range of Council parks have achieved the Green Flag award standard – see <https://www.greenflagaward.org/>. Sites are general assessed every two years and at present Clarence Gardens, Glen Gardens and West Bank Park hold the award. Rowntree Park is awaiting the outcome of this year's judging (having missed last year due to repeated flooding) and Rawcliffe County Park is on hold pending the completion of the Environment Agency flood protection work the local area.
15. Work has been under way at Hull Road Park this last few years to improve the quality of the site (for more detail see <https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=870&MId=14599> Item 27 Paragraph 85), and this park currently has the most potential for achieving additional Green Flag status. Investment over the next 18 months would put the park in a good position to enter for the award.
16. The fund could also be used to support the retention of the award at existing sites. Clarence Gardens pavilion for example needs internal rearrangement and upgrading so that it can accommodate community uses now that it is no longer needed as a bowls pavilion. Community involvement being one of the themes the Green Flag judges consider when assessing a site for the award.

#### E. Projects which have or have the potential for 3rd party funding contributions

17. In support of the fund the Council will seek to maximise other funding opportunities and use the fund to leverage external assistance in both cash and kind. This will include exploring National Lottery or other grant opportunities and partnership work with other York organisations and networks.
18. Best use will be made of Section 106 development payments in accordance with the Planning Obligations. This may include delivery of fully funded projects from S106 payments to topping up schemes to maximise the value of the project.

#### F. Investment into War Memorial maintenance and restoration

19. The Council is responsible for the care of a several memorials including War Memorial Gardens, Duncombe Place Boer War Memorial, Acomb Green Memorial and Rowntree Park. Rowntree Park is a memorial to those of who *fell and suffered* from the Rowntree Cocoa works in WW1

and contains two listed structures in the dovecote and Terry Avenue gates.

20. 2014-18 was the last time that any significant work took place to the memorials, prior to that it was 2000-02 for the Rowntree Park memorials. It is suggested that a new assessment is undertaken of all the memorial structures which would inform a possible programme of work.

### **Analysis and weighting**

21. The suggested criteria target the investment at those communities in most need, as defined by IMD, and enable schemes from across the city to be considered. It recognises that there are some key infrastructure issues which could be addressed and that there are opportunities to invest in those play areas where the equipment is some of the oldest to be found in the city. In some cases, best use of the fund could be through partnering with other city organisations or seek an external contribution towards a scheme. Finally, there is the opportunity to expand the number of council sites which hold the Green Flag award and to invest in the city's war memorials.
22. It is suggested that a weighting could be applied to the criteria to produce a shortlist for expenditure. A possible approach would allocate points based on this order of priority.
  1. Sites with higher IMD
  2. Replacing play equipment over 20 years old
  3. Key infrastructureThen equal weight to
  - = 4 Green Flag award
  - = 4 Availability of external funds
23. An alternative approach would be to select one criterion as a driver for investment, for example, expenditure would be restricted to play areas.

### **Council Plan**

24. This investment supports two of the Council's Core commitment:

**Equalities and Human Rights-** Equality of opportunity. We will create opportunities for all, providing equal opportunity and balancing the

human rights of everyone to ensure residents and visitors alike can benefit from the city and its strengths.

**Health-** Health and wellbeing - We will improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.

### **Implications**

25. At this stage there are limited implication; a full analysis will be included in the report to the Councils Executive.
- **Financial** *Budget council approved investment of £500k over 2025/26 to 2027/28. This report identifies the criteria that will be used to allocate the funding.*
  - **Human Resources (HR)** *At the time of writing, we were still waiting comments but comments will be added to the Executive report.*
  - **Equalities** (Contact – Equalities Officer) *At the time of writing, we were still waiting comments but comments will be added to the Executive report.*
  - **Legal** (Contact – Head of Legal) *At the time of writing, we were still waiting comments but comments will be added to the Executive report.*
  - **Crime and Disorder** (Contact - Senior Partnerships Support Officer, Community Planning & Partnerships) *At the time of writing, we were still waiting comments but comments will be added to the Executive report.*
  - **Information Technology (IT)** *There are no IT implications*
  - **Property** (Contact – Property) *At the time of writing, we were still waiting comments but comments will be added to the Executive report.*
  - **Other** *There are no other implications*

### **Risk Management**

26. There are no risks with this decision; the report will inform the planned report to the Councils Executive on 15<sup>th</sup> July where any risks will be reported.

## Next steps

27. Depending on the recommendations from the Executive in July officers will apply the criteria and weighting to know locations and issues to produce a list of possible schemes. This will be presented for approval at a later meeting of Executive.
28. Following review of the criteria, the selected parks and green spaces will be shared with the Public Health and Communities team to review proposed impact. In addition they will consider the community capacity available to support additional planting, or maintenance actions in identified areas.

## Recommendations

29. Members are asked to

- 1) Comment on the suggested criteria detailed in Paragraphs 8 to 20

Reason: to guide the investment of £500k in the city parks and open spaces

- 2) Comment on the weighting approach detailed in Paragraph 22

Reason: to help prioritise investment.

## Contact Details

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### Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

**Patrick Looker**  
**Assistant Director Finance**

Report  
Approved



Date 16.06.2025

**Wards Affected:** *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

**All** ☒

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:**

Budget Council 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=331&MIId=15004>

Meeting of the Executive Member for the Environment and Climate  
Emergency 29<sup>th</sup> April 2025

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=870&MIId=14599>

**Annexes**

**None**

**Abbreviations**

IMD Indices of Multiple Deprivation