
**Decision Session – Executive Member for
Culture, Leisure and Communities**

21 October 2019

Report of the Assistant Director (Transport, Highways and Environment)

Improving York’s Play Areas

Summary

1. This report sets out proposals for improving York’s play areas by a) carrying out a quality assessment of City Council and local councils’ play areas, b) using the assessment to inform investment, and, c) creating a fund to be used to contribute to large scale investment in partnership with community activity.

Recommendations

2. The Executive Member is asked to:
 - a) Agree the multi-strand approach to using the new budget as set out in paragraphs 8 to 12.
 - b) Agree the criteria for allocation of the community challenge fund set out in paragraph 11.

Reason: To ensure York’s play areas are kept in a good condition.

Background

3. At Council on 17 July 2019 a new capital fund of £250k was approved for play area investment.

Context

4. Equipped children’s play grounds in York are provided by a range of organisations, including the City Council, parish / town councils, housing associations, the Ministry of Defence, housing developers and private housing management companies.
5. As part of the Local Plan process all sites have been mapped at a ward level and generally there is good geographical coverage across the city. See City of York Council Local Plan Evidence Base: Open Space and Green Infrastructure Final Report September 2014

(Updated September 2017).

[http://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/16040/sd085 -
_city_of_york_local_plan_evidence_base -
_open_space_and_green_infrastructure_update_september_2017](http://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/16040/sd085_-_city_of_york_local_plan_evidence_base_-_open_space_and_green_infrastructure_update_september_2017)

When large developments sites come forward seeking planning permission equipped play areas are regularly included as a condition. This caters for the new residents needs and helps “fill in the gaps” for example Lowfields, The Chocolate Works.

6. Whilst the number and geographical spread of equipped playgrounds is therefore generally good, their play value is more varied. This is a reflection of their age and sporadic local and national investment that has been available.
7. All playground providers have a duty of care to ensure that the site is safe. This is provided by regular health and safety inspections by suitably qualified inspectors or organisations.

Proposals

8. It is proposed that the available budget be split into two complementary uses. The first part of the budget will be used to address specific smaller scale site-based investment needs e.g. replacement swings, seats, surfacing repairs. These needs will be identified by an independent quality audit of the condition, play value, access to and within the site, suitability of and options for disabled users and finally investment needs. This will cover all City Council and parish / town council sites (with the approval of the relevant parish or town council). Annex 1 lists the play areas provided by the City Council, parish and town councils.
9. It is proposed that £150k is allocated to this work. This funding will cover the cost of the survey work as well as the repair and replacement programme itself.
10. A tender for the survey work will be issued in December with the requirement to report back by the end of March 2020.
11. The second part of the budget will be used as a “challenge” or “community” fund to match or contribute to larger refurbishment schemes or new build in areas deficient of play area provision. This will be open to sites managed by the City, Parish and Town Councils and Housing Associations. It is proposed that the following criteria are adopted for allocation of this funding:

- Is based on consultation with users, parents / carers, local residents, or a commitment to carry out such consultation as the scheme progresses.
 - Provides a lasting improvement to the play area.
 - Local community activity in fundraising towards the project. (Recent examples of such community activity can be found in connection with the £100k refresh of Poppleton Community Centre in 2018 and £30k worth of planned investment at West Bank Park play area.)
 - Contributions to, and compatibility with, the quality audit findings.
 - Has landowner's permission.
 - Clarity over future care and maintenance.
12. It is proposed that £100k is allocated to the community challenge fund. The fund will open for applications in April 2020. This will enable the quality audit to be used as part of the assessment process. Once schemes have been assessed against the above criteria, recommendations for funding will be brought back to the Executive Member for approval.

Options

13. It is open to the Executive Member to agree to the proposals set out in Paragraphs 8 to 12 or to suggest a different allocation of the budget between the two uses.

Analysis

14. The proposal would create for the first time since 1996 a detailed audit of play value of the Council and local Council play equipped plays areas. In an unbiased way it will inform spending decisions and highlight future spending needs. The allocation of part of the budget to a community fund also opens up the prospect of local community energy and expertise to improve local play areas. With local children being given a say in choosing what happens to their play area.

Council Plan

15. The investment in play areas contributes to the Council plan themes of:
- A Better Start for Children and Young People
 - Greener and Cleaner City
 - Safe Communities and culture for all

Consultation

16. Consultation has been a key component of delivering previous play area improvements. Consultation takes place with local users and stakeholders e.g. Friends groups to inform the tender specification. A second round of consultation then takes place with the community to choose the winning design. This same approach will be a requirement for the challenge fund and where there is a genuine choices for the general repairs.
17. Any proposals for a new play area are likely to need planning permission and be subject to the necessary consultation requirements.

Implications

18. **Financial:** Use of the budget will be monitored through the normal monitoring arrangements. Any tenders for work will comply corporate procurement arrangements. Where money is passed to a local council a formal agreement will be in place to control its use. A small degree of flexibility will need to be exercised between the proposed funding split once a final programme has been confirmed.
19. **Equalities:** A Better Decision Making Tool assessment has been carried out and the paper amended to reflect this.
20. There are no **Human Resources, Crime and Disorder, Legal, Information Technology, Property** or **Other** implications.

Risk Management

21. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified associated with the proposals contained in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives and to deliver services, leading to damage to the Council's reputation and failure to meet stakeholders'

expectations. The level of risk is assessed as “Low”. This is acceptable but means that regular monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

Contact Details

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|-------------|----------|
| Author: | Chief Officer responsible: | | | |
| Dave Meigh Operations Manager Public Realm dave.meigh@york.gov.uk | Neil Ferris Corporate Director of Economy and Place | | | |
| | Report Approved | ✓ | Date | 11.10.19 |
| Specialist Implications Officers: | | | | |
| Wards Affected: | | | | All ✓ |
| For further information please contact the author of the report | | | | |

Annexes

Annex 1- List of Council and local council play areas

Annex 2 - Better Decision Making Tool