

Meeting:	Executive Member
Meeting date:	16/01/2025
Report of:	Director of Environment, Transport and Planning
Portfolio of:	Executive Member for Finance, Performance, Major Projects, Human Rights, Equality, and Inclusion

Decision Report: 14 New Lane and West Bank Park

Subject of Report

1. This report seeks approval to
 - a) Not to rebuild 14 New Lane as park keeper accommodation.
 - b) Remove the security fence surrounding 14 New Lane and make accessible to the rest of West Bank Park.
 - c) To allocate the remaining insurance funds from the 14 New Lane insurance payment to future projects within West Bank Park.

Benefits and Challenges

2. Incorporating the grounds of 14 New Lane into West Bank Park reunites two physically separate sections of the original Backhouse estate, out of which West Bank Park evolved. 14 New Lane was originally a coach house / motor garage and would have been integral to the operation of the estate. For over 30 years it has been cut off from the park by a 1.8m high metal fence.
3. With the final demolition of the property and clearance of associated debris it is now possible to remove the old security fence and “new” land be made available for the public to enjoy. The line of security

fence line forms a rectangular intrusion into the park which creates a pinch point blocking sight lines across the park. See annex 1, West Bank Park is bounded in red, 14 New Lane in orange. Removal of the fence and old domestic privet hedging will create a more open and visually appealing setting, and in so doing aid a sense of security.

4. Excluding the above works the remaining budget from the insurance settlement is £83k. The fund presents the opportunity to address several investment needs including toilet facilities, Friends / community tool storage, older children's play facilities and pergola redevelopment without having to call on core council funding.
5. It also creates an opportunity to explain the history of the park in more detail. All of which will help ensure the park maintains its reputation as a quality local amenity and continues to meet the Green Flag Award standards. (see <https://www.greenflagaward.org>)

Policy Basis for Decision

6. The policy basis for this recommendation includes contributing to the City of York Council – Council Plan 2023-27 and achieving the standards and aspiration set out in the Local Plan Open Space and Green Infrastructure 2014.
7. Providing more land and investing in West Bank Park contributes to the following Council Plan 2023-27

priority f) Sustainability: Cutting carbon, enhancing the environment for our future. Specially Improve the physical environment
 - Make the most of our green and blue infrastructure, to increase biodiversity, improve health and wellbeing and support nature recovery, understanding the impact and the difference we make.
 - Increase investment in our natural assets and climate change projects.
8. The City of York Local Plan Evidence Base – Open Space and Green Infrastructure September 2014 records West Bank Park is a strategic city park; 14 New Lane is shown as developed land. The incorporating the 14 New Lane into the park will increase the site of

this strategic park by some 700m² – approximately the same size as two tennis courts.

Financial Strategy Implications

9. Incorporating the land back into the publicly accessible park will have minimal day to day revenue implications. Possible future uses included grassland and expansion of the adjacent orchard, both of which are low maintenance activities. The local community has a long tradition of assisting with the maintenance of West Bank Park and will be heavily involved in the design and use of the additional land.
10. At the beginning of this financial year the remaining budget from the insurance settlement was £103k. After final demolition of the property, clearance of associated debris and removal of old security fence estimated remaining available budget will be £83k.

Recommendation and Reasons

11. The Executive Member is asked to approve not to rebuild 14 New Lane as park keeper accommodation.

Reason: Changes in employment and management practices for parks no longer required Council employees to live on the premises.
12. The Executive Member is asked to approve the removal the security fence surrounding 14 New Lane and make accessible to the rest of West Bank Park.

Reason: To reconnect 14 New Lane with the wider Park, in so doing increasing the amount of green space available to the residents of Holgate and surrounding areas.
13. The Executive Member is asked to allocate the remaining funds from the 14 New Lane insurance payment to future projects within West Bank Park.

Reason: To fund investment into the park without calling on Council resources.

Background

14. For much of the 19th century the site of what is now West Bank Park, including 14 New Lane was part of the nationally renowned Backhouse Nurseries. In 1921 the Backhouse firm was bought by Sir James Hamilton (head of the Yorkshire Insurance Company) and used as the family home. Following the death of Sir James Hamilton the City purchased 'West Bank' for £3,500 with the express intention of creating a park. The estate included a large Victorian villa, (subsequently demolished) and the old stables / garage at 14 New Lane with living accommodation above. See annex 1 for plan of West Bank Park and 14 New Lane.
15. Following the sites acquisition by the council 14 New Lane was used as tied accommodation for the park keeper. (Similar arrangements were in place for Rowntree Park and Hull Road Park.) With changes in employment and working practices in the 1980s' this need ceased, and the property was let to a local social housing provider for family accommodation until 2007 after which time the property was unused. Throughout this time the area remained allocated to the General Fund.
16. In 2016 the property was damage by fire and over the following years the building was partially demolished, and the site mothballed. Final demolition and site clearance took place in Autumn 2024 to avoid any risk to nesting birds and bat roosts (ref. 23/00038/DMNOT).
17. The current boundary arrangements date back to the early 1990's when a new metal fence was installed around the park, this included 14 New Lane effectively separating the building from the surrounding park. Therefore, to fully incorporate the site into the wider park the perimeter fence will need to be removed, (part of which can be reused to secure a neighbouring property boundary), along with a section domestic privet hedging and several small self-seed trees. This work is on hold pending the Executive Members decision.

Consultation Analysis

18. Over the last few years consultation has taken place with Ward Councillors, the Friends of West Bank Park via Ward Councillors, and Council departments about the future use of the site.

19. Holgate Ward Councillors have requested that the area should become a green and natural part of the park without any structures. This both allows use of the area now and retains the opportunity for further complimentary recreational uses at a point in the future.
20. They have suggested that the balance of the insurance settlement could be used for modest improvements to the pavilion/toilet area, improved play opportunities and increasing biodiversity.
21. The Friends of West Bank Park wish to see the area brought back into use and ongoing investment into the park.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

22. As there is no requirement to provide tied accommodation, incorporation of the land back within the main body of the park best fits with core council objectives and retains the historic boundary of the park.
23. This use would comply with the covenant contained in a Conveyance dated 27th February 1922 “that no noisy noisome or offensive trade or occupation shall be carried on upon the [Property]”.

Organisational Impact and Implications

24. **Financial.** As stated in the Financial Strategy Implications the recommended option may lead to a small maintenance cost going forward. This can be met within current resources. There are no financial implications to allocate the remaining budget from 14 New Lane insurance payment to future projects within West Bank Park.
25. **Legal** The property is considered to be part of the General Revenue Fund and, as such, can be incorporated back into West Bank Park to be used as park land.
26. **Health and Wellbeing, Affordability, Equalities and Human Rights, Environment and Climate action, Equalities and Human Rights, Human Resources (HR) and Procurement, Data Protection and Privacy, Communications, Economy** none

Risks and Mitigations

27. The risk is considered low, and all actions are mitigated by oversight from the Director of Environment, Transport and Planning.

Wards Impacted

28. West Bank Park is in Holgate ward which would be most impacted, with Acomb, Westfield, Dringhouses and Woodthorpe, and Micklegate wards to a lesser extent.

Contact details.

For further information please contact the authors of this Decision Report.

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Background papers: None

Annexes

Annex 1 - Plan West Bank Park and 14 New Lane
Annex 2 – Equalities Impact Assessment