



Report to: Cabinet Meeting - 21 February 2023

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Roger Jackson, Cleaner, Safer, Greener

Director Lead: Matthew Finch, Director - Communities & Environment

Lead Officer: Ben Stacey, Street Scene Manager, Ext. 5738

Report Summary	
<b>Type of Report</b>	Open Report, Key Decision
<b>Report Title</b>	Plans for a programme of playground improvement works
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To put forward a programme that will modernise a number of Newark and Sherwood's play areas and equipment provision. The programme will replace aging equipment for new, imaginative pieces of play equipment and include inclusive play equipment for all ability users where possible to do so. It also puts forward plans for consultation on exciting, new play facilities at one of Newark and Sherwood's award winning, Green Flag parks.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>That Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) approve the replacement and modernisation programme at the ten sites across Newark &amp; Sherwood that are identified in the report;</li> <li>b) approve, in principle, that a budget of £349, 201 is entered into the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account capital budgets for 2023/24, subject to approval from Cabinet;</li> <li>c) subject to the above, Cabinet approve that public consultation is sought on the plans to develop a new Castle-style playground and outdoor fitness zone at the Sconce and Devon Park, and on plans for improvements at the Turner Lane play park in Boughton and the Cleveland Square play park in Newark; and</li> <li>d) support the medium-term development of a formal play park and play equipment policy, together with a complementary asset register, to guide the future development and investment in play parks in its ownership across Newark and Sherwood.</li> </ul>

<b>Alternative Options Considered</b>	Given the age of the equipment, doing nothing was not deemed to be a viable option. The plan to develop a play park and play equipment policy, together with an asset register, will lead to a cycle of play park improvements at all sites over the medium and longer term.
<b>Reason for Recommendations</b>	The recommendations align with the Community Plan objectives in relation to health and wellbeing and the environment and in response to resident feedback as evidenced through the latest resident survey.

## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 Newark & Sherwood District Council has four award-winning Green Flag parks in its ownership – Sconce and Devon Park and the Castle Grounds in Newark, Sherwood Heath at Ollerton and Vicar Water in Clipstone.
- 1.2 In addition, the Council has a total of 30 play parks that it owns and maintains across the district, including some at the award-winning parks above, some in our local communities and some on the housing revenue account land.
- 1.3 Over recent times, the Council has been undertaking some improvement works at these play parks to ensure that they are fit for purpose. This has recently included a programme of re-surfacing several, to ensure that they are fit for purpose and are safe to use, and the inclusion of some accessible play equipment for the first time.
- 1.4 However, what became apparent, is that some aging equipment is now becoming costly to maintain and that it has become outdated not only from a perspective of finding replacement parts, but also as far modern, play parks are considered which offer inclusive equipment for all users.
- 1.5 Furthermore, with the current cost of living challenge, play parks and our wider park offerings have the ability to offer children and families engaging places to visit at no cost to them, whilst the Council’s latest resident survey showed the importance residents placed upon our parks and green spaces has risen over recent times.
- 1.6 Against this context and building on the priority works that have already been undertaken, in 2022 officers undertook an extensive assessment across those thirty sites, to develop an improvement programme – based upon the age of the assets, the need for inclusive equipment for all ability users, refurbishment requirements and, where possible, opportunities for exciting new developments based upon the space available and the fit with the Council’s wider aspirations within the Community Plan.

## **2.0 Proposal/Details of Options Considered**

- 2.1 Under the proposals that have been put together, the existing sites listed below would benefit from the investment programme:

### **Vicar Water County Park**

The proposals for Vicar Water Country Park will modernise the play area and equipment and included a more inclusive play offering. As well as being an award-winning Green Flag Park and a destination for many visitors as a result, it is also central to a large residential settlement in Clipstone who would benefit from the new offer. The cost associated with these works is £16,500.

### **Mead Way Play Park, Balderton**

This play area is located next to a large area of housing which could greatly increase with proposed new housing. The play park is aging and currently has no provision for inclusive play, despite being close to a school for children with special educational needs who may be attracted to use this modernised facility after school. The cost associated with these works is £31,923.44

### **Lincoln Road Recreation Ground Play Area, Newark**

This play area is located next to a large housing estate which is subject to re-development. The planning development does not include works to the play area which is in need of modernisation and does not currently have any inclusive play equipment. The cost associated with this site is £27,500.

### **Thorpe Oaks Play Area, Coddington**

The area surrounding the Thorpe Oaks play area was recently the subject of improvement works to mitigate the risk of unauthorised encampments accessing the site. The Council has also extensively planted new trees at the site as part of its successful bid to the Government's Urban Tree Challenge Fund. The proposed works will bring an inclusive play offering and update equipment in a large residential settlement at a cost of £24,626.88

### **Hillcote Drive, Clipstone; Old Tannery Drive, Lowdham; Grove Street Play Area in Newark**

These three sites would benefit from extensive refurbishment and new equipment at a cost of £24,620.86. These are small but very well used play areas in high residential areas. They are all around the same age and this has come up as an action in our independent full safety inspection.

### **Sconce and Devon Park in Newark**

Sconce and Devon Park in Newark is an award-winning Green Flag Park, attached to the edge of the largest settlement in Newark and Sherwood. Whilst the existing play area has benefitted over recent times from the inclusion of accessible play equipment, there is scope to add new, imaginative play equipment and go further in terms of the accessible offer. The cost of these works is £26,038.92.

### **Sustainable Future**

In this process we will seek to use materials that have been recycled to be used in the build. Using as little virgin material as possible in the manufacturing process, we will be looking to source equipment and materials such as post-consumer recycling such as ocean waste, used textiles, food packaging waste, or used plastic bags. Wood to be sourced from sustainable forestry operations.

- 2.2 In addition to the eight general fund sites above, the Council has additionally budgeted £100,000 from the Housing Revenue Account to undertake refurbishment and improvement works at two further play parks on HRA land.

**Cleveland Square, Newark, and Turner Lane in Boughton**

Both sites are aging and there is scope to undertake improvements at both sites. At Boughton, the works would build on the successful graffiti project completed in 21/22 and feedback from tenants about creating quality play space for a wider age group. The Council is proposing that a period of public engagement is entered into with users and nearby residents to understand how those communities would like to see the sites developed so they are fit for the future. A budget of £100,000 has been identified to fund improvement works, partly from pooling existing equipment replacement budget and an allocation from the efficiency savings achieved through bringing housing back into direct management. This project is clearly one to bring added value to both areas and an excellent opportunity for youth engagement and involvement.

- 2.3 As stated earlier in the report, the importance residents place upon the Council's parks and open spaces has increased over recent times, as evidenced by the latest resident survey. With the cost-of-living challenge, there is the potential that this may increase further.
- 2.4 Within the Community Plan, objectives are included which seek to enhance and protect the district's natural environment, as indeed there is to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents.
- 2.5 Within that context the programme also includes exciting plans for two major, new additions to the Green Flag Sconce and Devon Park:

**Outdoor Fitness Area at Sconce and Devon Park (Appendix 2)**

The park is already heavily used by those wanting to exercise – whether that be informal activities such as walking or through more structured activities such as the very popular park runs which now take place twice a week. Over recent times, the park has also become popular with personal trainers who use the site, to take small classes.

The proposals would see the inclusion of a dedicated outdoor fitness zone which would be free to use, tie in with the wider objectives of the park and the Council's community plan and be of benefit to users who, for whatever reason, choose not to go to an existing gym. The new site could also be used by the Sports Development Team within the Council's wholly owned leisure company, Active4Today. The cost associated with the development would be £44,000.

**A new Castle-themed play area at Sconce and Devon Park (Appendix 1)**

In undertaking the review of play area provision, officers came to the view that Sconce and Devon's existing play area provision was not of a comparable size and scale to the offer of the Green Flag Park that it sits in.

As such, a proposal has been put forward for a new Castle-themed play park to tie in with the Town's civil war history. As well as the historic Sconce earthwork on the site, the town boasts an extensive heritage offer and is looking to improve this still further with the development of the Castle Gatehouse project. However, due to the listed

nature of the Castle's grounds, there is no scope to develop a complimentary play park offer to the Gatehouse project and this therefore provides another rationale to developing a play park offer for children at the Sconce and Devon site.

A further aspiration of the development is that the play park would become an attraction in its own right, drawing more visitors into the Green Flag Park and into Newark and Sherwood with the potential economic benefits that could bring in terms of secondary spend and visitors learning more about what the town and wider place has to offer. The cost of this development would be £45,990.69.

In both of these proposed developments, it is recommended that a period of public consultation is entered into to test the desire for the two developments and shape the final proposals.

- 2.6 The proposals above have been put forward following an extensive officer review, looking at the age of the equipment, the cost and the ability to refurbish and the opportunity to improve the offer.
- 2.7 At present, there is no national accreditation on play parks and, as such, officers are proposing that the approach used to make the assessments in 2022 is now formally contained within a Play Park Plan for Newark and Sherwood. Alongside this, the aspiration is to develop a complementary asset register for all our sites which will then guide future investment over the longer-term. There may be scope for towns and parishes across Newark and Sherwood to apply that policy in making judgements about their own play park assets and in seeking local grants or funding support to ensure high standards of play equipment across Newark and Sherwood – irrespective of who owns the asset.

### **3.0 Equalities Implications**

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations officers have considered the following implications; Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding, Sustainability, and Crime and Disorder and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

During the roll out of these schemes full consultation will take place with user groups where appropriate. Consideration will be given to suitability of any inclusive play equipment.

### **Financial Implications (FIN22-23/5903)**

A completed Capital Appraisal Form was completed in October 2022, which was scored and agreed for inclusion in the 2023/24 Capital Programme to be presented to Cabinet in February for approval.

The projected project cost is £249,200.79 plus VAT which includes £8,000 of match funding from the Minor to Major Accessibility Project. Since the Capital Appraisal form, a further £100,000 Housing budget for two housing area Playgrounds as per paragraph 2 taking the total Capital Cost £349,200.79 plus VAT summarised below along with suggested financing.

<b>Playground Improvements</b>	<b>General Fund</b>	<b>HRA</b>
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>249,200</b>	<b>100,000</b>
<i>Financing:</i>		
Minor to Major Grant	(8,000)	
Major Repairs Reserve		(44,000)
HRA Efficiency Savings (RCCO)		(56,000)
Capital Reserve	(241,200)	
<b>Total Financing</b>	<b>(249,200)</b>	<b>(100,000)</b>

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None