



Report to: Cabinet Meeting – 19 December 2023

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Emma Oldham, Biodiversity and Environmental Services and Councillor Paul Peacock, Strategy, Performance & Finance

Director Lead: Matthew Finch, Director - Communities & Environment

Lead Officer: Ben Stacey, Street Scene Manager, Ext. 5378

Report Summary	
<b>Type of Report</b>	Open Report, Key Decision
<b>Report Title</b>	Sherwood Avenue Park
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To put forward proposals that would lead to significant investment and improvement in Sherwood Avenue Park in Newark
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>It is recommended that Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) formally supports the development of the scheme as set out in the report and appendices, and in line with the cost plan;</li> <li>b) agrees that Section 106 monies from the Arkwood development on Lord Hawke Way are allocated to the scheme;</li> <li>c) approve the Capital Programme budget of £520,400 financed by Section 106, Shared Prosperity Fund, Capital Receipt and Newark Town Council Contribution;</li> <li>d) supports a short period of public consultation in the new year, to ensure the plans align with community feedback and aspirations for the site; and</li> <li>e) subject to no material changes being required from the consultation exercise, the scheme and its packages are formally tendered and the scheme is progressed through to delivery.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Alternative Options Considered</b></p>	<p>Given the age of the park, its prominence in the town centre and the links to the Council’s Community Plan objectives, doing nothing is not deemed to be a viable alternative. Scope does exist to reduce the scope of the intervention, but this is not deemed desirable given the funding package that has been put together and the community desire for improvement that has been expressed to date.</p>
<p><b>Reason for Recommendation</b></p>	<p>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, which placed growing emphasis on parks and play areas. It is also in line with the strategy for increased town centre living, whilst the park and all of its proposed improvements are free to access.</p>

## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 Newark & Sherwood District Council has five award-winning Green Flag parks in its ownership – Sconce and Devon Park, the Castle Grounds and the Queen Elizabeth Memorial Gardens 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 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 recently included a decision to invest £350,000 in improving ten sites across Newark and Sherwood, including the development of a new fitness zone and Castle-style play park at Sconce and Devon Park in Newark.

### **Sherwood Avenue Park**

- 1.4 Sherwood Avenue Park is owned by Newark Town Council, following the devolution agreement between the Town and District Councils. However, it continues to be maintained by the District Council as part of a service level agreement.
- 1.5 The park is in a prominent town centre location but is beginning to look tired. It features a multi-use games area in a sunken part of the park which once housed the town’s former lido. Additionally, there is a skate park at the site, which is now in need of regular repair. The park lost its status as a Green Flag Park a few years ago.
- 1.6 Earlier this year, the District Council was approached by the Town with a view to helping it develop new plans for the park alongside possible funding bids to third party organisations. This way of working in collaboration is formalised in an agreement signed by both parties at the time of the devolution agreement and NSDC therefore agreed to support.

- 1.7 In the view of officers, there are significant opportunities presented by Sherwood Avenue Park. The district already boasts five green flag parks and this could be another. It is in a town centre location where play space is at a premium and the Council recently committed to significant investment in play parks in its ownership, following the resident survey which showed how the importance of parks and play spaces has grown over recent times. In addition, there is an increasing need to think about the changing role of town centres and the role new housing can play in their regeneration. Easy town centre access to green spaces align with that strategy, as well as potentially bringing benefits to 'urban cooling' from trees and the shade they provide.
- 1.8 However, in order to maximise the potential, there was need to re-think the park in its widest sense, not least because of its age, but because many of its facilities, such as the skatepark, are available at the YMCA but at a cost to the user. There was also a need for the facilities to align with the changing role of town centres and align with other corporate objectives such as reducing crime and Anti-Social Behaviour and addressing Climate Change and improving biodiversity.
- 1.9 Finally, there was the pressing challenge to put together a significant funding cocktail to bring the scheme to fruition.

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

### **Background - Vision and Planning**

- 2.1 In order to develop a new vision for the park, the Town and District Councils entered into a period of formal engagement with the community and park users about the park. We wanted to know what worked well, what did not and how they would like to see it developed into the future. This also included those who did not currently visit the park to understand why they did not and what might entice them to do so in the future.
- 2.2 The culmination of this work was an open event in the park in late May, which was attended by Extreme Wheels, who put on a BMX and skateboarding exhibition as well as bringing smaller scale machines for visitors to try free of charge. Officers were on hand to ask attendees what they thought of the park, whilst other activity took place with key stakeholders and residents, to gain their views on the future of the site.
- 2.3 This also included an online survey, which had 317 responses with overwhelming support for investment in the park, which residents felt had become run down, outdated and in need of investment. The inclusion of new/improved facilities were supported with most support coming for an updated and improved children's play area and the least for a new skate park. However, 59% of respondents were in favour of a new skate park.
- 2.4 This feedback has been turned into a concept design with the detail set out in the appendices to the report. In precis, a re-imagined Sherwood Avenue Park will be made up of four new zones. They are:

### **A Welcome Area**

Visitors will be greeted into the park through this area featuring a range of planting, including meadow-style and a new avenue of ornamental trees and native species. This area will also be capable of hosting local, pop-up traders, or local performers and entertainers

### **An Active Zone**

All ages and abilities will be able to enjoy this new zone for fun and fitness, including:

- A new, skate park in the site's former lido. Plans for this element have been developed with the help of local skate groups
- A skater's rest area
- Multi-use sports pitch
- A free ride area for biking and skating
- A fitness trail with a selection of outdoor exercise equipment
- A spiralling grass staircase-like trail for visitors to walk up and view across the park, with a mounted plaque to show the direction and distances to local sites such as the Castle

### **A Nature Zone**

A Silver Birch avenue will lead park visitors into the Nature Zone along a wheelchair friendly path made from recycled materials such as brick, slate, wood and gravel. Visitors will be able to enjoy nature peacefully tucked away on a bench or with friends on one of the recycled tree log seating areas.

The area has been designed with biodiversity and wildlife at its heart, with new habitat areas such as log piles, insect houses, bat boxes and hedgehog hides all included. An extensive planting programme will also take place to benefit pollinators and foraging wildlife including the creation of 500 square metres of wildflower meadow and the planting of 40 new trees, 250 metres of hedgerow, 5000 bulbs and a fruit bearing orchard.

### **A Play Zone**

Designed with creative play and fun in mind, this area will be a place for children to enjoy the outdoors. New features will include a zip-wire underneath a canopy of trees and a splash area with a water rill and water play equipment. A new and refurbished play area will include ten pieces of accessible play equipment, whilst parents will be able to relax in seated areas with a full view of the zone.

- 2.4 A cost plan for a re-developed Sherwood Avenue Park has also been forecast, with the plans making use of existing features within the park, such as pathways and the sunken, former lido, to enable more of the budget to be focussed on new features and equipment.

### **Funding Make-Up**

- 2.5 Newark Town Council is in the process of selling the former toilet block and snack bar on London Road. As this was an asset devolved to the Town Council through the devolution agreement with NSDC, the district is due an overage of 50% of any sale price. The Town Council has indicated that their 50% would go to Sherwood Avenue and previous Portfolio Holder decisions at Newark and Sherwood have agreed the Council's would too.

- 2.6 In addition to the money above, the Council has received significant Section 106 monies from the Arkwood Development at Lord Hawke Way in Newark. With Arkwood's formal permission, a sum of £170,395 will go towards Sherwood Avenue, subject to approval and decision by Cabinet.
- 2.7 Finally, the Council successfully bid for £250,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, to make up the remainder of the funding package. The money has to be spent by the end of the financial year 2024/25 and this is the timescale the project is working to.
- 2.8 The investment of more than £500,000 in Sherwood Avenue would be in addition to the £350,000 play park improvement programme across 10 sites in Newark and Sherwood that the Council delivered in 2023.
- 2.9 The Council's latest resident survey showed the increased emphasis that residents are placing on parks and open spaces post pandemic and in the midst of the cost of living challenge and the need to re-think and regenerate town centres.

### **Delivery**

- 2.10 Subject to Cabinet approval of the scheme, the project would be led by Newark and Sherwood District Council, inclusive of procurement, project management and coordination, cash flow and budget monitoring and commissioning and handover.
- 2.11 The Council has produced a cost recovery plan for delivering this work which has been agreed by the Town Council, with 60% of those costs being met by the Town Council and the remaining 40% from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The UK Shared Prosperity element is in addition to the £250,000 identified for the works.
- 2.12 A partnership agreement is being drafted to formalise the arrangements between the parties. Upon completion, liability for the future maintenance of the park and its equipment will pass to the Town Council. However, new equipment would be under warranty whilst ongoing maintenance would be provided by NSDC under the SLA. This should help mitigate the need for substantial ongoing maintenance over a period of time, which is in contrast to the current position with repairs being required on a regular basis and being footed by the Town Council.

### **Future Consultation**

- 2.13 Having asked residents, users and non-users of the park for their views, it is now proposed that the design and the drawings are shared with the community to ensure the proposals accurately reflect what they wanted to see.
- 2.14 It is proposed that both the Town and District Councils undertake a timed piece of consultation in the New Year and subject to no responses requiring a material change to the plans, work would commence on the tender packages to ensure the work is delivered within 24/25 as per the funding requirement of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

### **3.0 Implications**

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, I have considered the following implications: Equality and Diversity, Financial, Safeguarding and Sustainability, and where appropriate I have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment below where appropriate.

#### **3.1 Equalities Implications**

During the planning of the scheme to date, consultation has taken place with user groups and residents and ten pieces of accessible play equipment have been included within the design. The police have also been a key consultee to try to mitigate ASB and crime and a new CCTV camera has been included whilst sight lines into the park will also be improved as well.

#### **3.2 Financial Implications (FIN23-24/4808)**

The budget required to improve Sherwood Avenue Park is £520,400. This is due to be financed by £250,000 from the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), £170,395 from S106 monies received in relation to the development on Lord Hawke Way and the remainder to be financed by the District Council share of a capital receipt for the the sale of the former toilet block and snack bar on London Road and a contribution from Newark Town Council.

The above financing would mean there is no additional revenue implications as a result of the project.

Within the SPF bid, there is a request for revenue funding to cover the one off costs of the Council managing the project. This has been calculated to cost c£50,000 based on the project lasting approximately 4 months, which is still to be determined. As per paragraph 2.11, Newark Town Council have agreed to contribute 60% of this cost with the remaining 40% from the SPF monitoring and evaluation budget.

#### **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