

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

## Agenda Item 76

**Subject:** Playground Refurbishment Programme

**Date of meeting:** 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023

**Report of:** Executive Director: Economy, Environment & Culture

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**Ward(s) affected:** All

**For general release**

### **1. Purpose of the report and policy context**

1.1 This report is to update the Committee on the Playground Refurbishment Programme which was agreed in January 2021.

### **2. Recommendations**

2.1 That the Committee notes the progress of the Playground Refurbishment Programme.

### **3. Context and background information**

3.1 The council has 55 playgrounds in the city, 38 of which are owned and maintained by City Parks, 15 are held by the Housing Revenue Account but are managed and maintained by City Parks. The Seafront Team maintain and manage two playgrounds and they are these are not included in the Playground Refurbishment Programme.

3.2 Playgrounds are a well-used resource for families and important for health, wellbeing, and childhood development. The consultation completed as part of the 2017 Open Spaces Strategy made it clear that the provision of playgrounds is a high priority for residents. The consultation found that playgrounds: ranked second highest for future investment for parks and open spaces, were voted as one of the top three features in parks and were one of the most visited open spaces with more than 56% of respondents visiting once a month or more.

3.3 Public Health Advice is that Active play is one of the best ways for children to achieve the recommendation of at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. Physical activity is good for physical and mental wellbeing, reducing the chances of ill health and supports a healthy weight. Playing in a playground provides social and development benefits for children of all ages. Spending time in green spaces in our parks, and close to where our

residents live is good for physical and mental wellbeing for children, their parents, family members and care givers

- 3.4 During the first COVID lockdown playgrounds were closed from March to July 2020. When they reopened, the use by the public was substantially higher, due to other facilities normally open not being available for children and their families and restrictions on flying. This led to a significant amount of additional wear and tear on equipment and shortened the life of some apparatus by several years. This factor in combination with the age of some equipment, led to over 100 play apparatus needing to be removed by March 2021.
- 3.5 It was the removal of so many items in one go, that became the catalyst for the Playground Refurbishment Programme. Following on from this, the primary driver was to a) identify funding to procure new playground equipment and b) replace the equipment as fast as possible recognising that a playground with significant items missing for several years, could have a detrimental effect on local children's development.
- 3.6 There has been some very positive feedback from residents but there has also been some criticism of the programme. The criticism has largely related to residents who feel that additional play equipment for certain age groups or children with specific needs have been missed, or where residents would like to see more equipment in a playground. Unfortunately it has not been possible to comprehensively replace every piece of equipment in each park and/or to provide additional equipment in every park as this is a refurbishment programme with limited resources. We have also sought to deliver the programme as quickly as possible so that children within a particular geographical area are not left without reasonable access to outdoor play equipment for an extended period of time. We are seeking to replace equipment that has had to be removed and provide a good distribution of play equipment across the city within a reasonable distance for most families. Play equipment for all ages and for a wide range of needs cannot be provided in every playground but has been put in place so that it is in reach in a range of geographical localities.

### **Implementation update**

- 3.7 City Parks completed 24 sites in the first phase during 2021-2022, valued at £2.190m. By winter 2023, another £0.820m will have been awarded and implemented for eight further sites. The sites completed and in progress can be viewed in Appendix 1.
- 3.8 The expenditure on Carden Park play area increased from a projected £0.100m to £0.440m to include a new Multi-Use Games Area and Outdoor Gym. This was because additional S106 funding for outdoor sports became available, so the project was delivered as one scheme. Carden Park also includes an area with sensory play equipment for children who particularly benefit from this kind of play.

- 3.9 In addition to the programme a Multi-Use Games Area and Outdoor Gym have also been installed and added into the programme in Wild Park using £0.300m of S106 funding transforming an abandoned tennis court at one corner of the park.
- 3.10 Officers are currently reviewing S106 allocations and other sources of funding for the next phase of the Playground refurbishment programme. This will be the subject of a further report in Spring 2023.
- 3.11 It is hoped that in the future the programme can be expanded to enable refurbishment of Multi - Use, Games Areas, Skate Parks and Outdoor Gyms. This will be dependent on future sources of funding which will primarily be from S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy.
- 3.12 It is important to ensure that the council has future financial capacity to maintain and replace play equipment installed. It is for this reason that only one completely outdoor facility has been installed in Wild Park and a considered approach needs to be taken to extending play facilities or introducing new areas even if funding becomes available.

### **Special Educational Needs and Disability Forum**

- 3.13 At Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021, an additional recommendation was agreed that: the Playground Refurbishment Programme is informed by consultation with disability groups in order to improve disability access to local playgrounds. It was arranged that the forum would meet at least every six months.
- 3.14 Prior to this group being formed, City Parks had achieved an Inclusive Play Area accreditation (known as [PiPA](#)), for the accessibility and inclusivity play standards at the Level Park. This site also includes a 'changing places' toilet that contains a hoist to move people with limited mobility.
- 3.15 City Parks also worked closely with the SEND community during the first COVID phase. They were able to identify three outdoor spaces across the city for children, which could be demarcated as quiet/safe spaces during certain times of the day.
- 3.16 The industry standard for playgrounds typically seeks to create spaces for all ages and all abilities. However, City Parks were encouraged to work with this new SEND group to go beyond the current best practice to achieve something higher. Following the committee approval, the first SEND meeting was set up on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021. In attendance were representatives from inclusion groups including: Amaze Sussex, Extratime, PaCC Brighton and the Council's SEND Assistant Director. Furthermore, representatives from the community with related SEND experiences were also present, alongside the council's Play Development Officer and the Head of the Parks Projects and Strategy Team.
- 3.17 Through discussion, the group identified the following opportunities to improve playgrounds for SEND children and their families:

- Design considerations for older children/young adults.
- Sensory play equipment being increase in proposals.
- Swings for wheelchairs to be considered noting the cost and maintenance limitations that would apply.
- Surfaces providing a sensory experience.
- Climbing facilities for all abilities and ages.
- Changing places toilets to be considered.
- Accessible wheelchair ramps to access more play equipment.

3.18 The steer provided from this forum influenced future briefs for the refurbishment programme. Many of these actions were progressed or implemented in playgrounds within the next 12 months. Consultants and contractors on the council's Play Framework (ESPO), were made aware of the greater accessibility aspirations and as a result, the following additional activities and outcomes have taken place:

- A more inclusive and accessible play site at Blakers Park, with the city's first wheelchair accessible jeep.
- A new wheelchair accessible large play unit at Blakers Park.
- The first wheelchair accessible seesaw in the UK at St Nicholas playground, which was installed in March 2022.
- Universal design principles used in all new tenders.
- Inclusion and accessibility placed higher in the scores on all tenders.
- 'Making space for girls' included as a high score question on tenders.

3.19 Furthermore, the following supporting activities occurred:

- Directing feedback from the SEND group to play equipment suppliers and challenging them to create more inclusive apparatus.
- City Parks agreed to additional meetings online and on site to discuss concerns of any SEND forum members.
- City Parks officers visited other sites and local authorities to widen their SEND knowledge, e.g. (Tower Hamlets – Weavers Field).
- Application sent to the government to fund seven 'changing places' toilets for the city of which three are to be located in parks.

#### **4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options**

4.1 The alternative to this Programme would be to not replace the play apparatus when it fails. This would save the council significant capital funding and future maintenance costs. The impact of this would be a negative impact on a number of children who would not benefit from outdoor play developmentally and in terms of health and wellbeing.

4.2 A variation to the above alternative would be to consolidate playgrounds and close sites. This would result in fewer locations but more transformative play spaces. This would also ensure that a high-quality number of sites would be maintained but further away from a percentage of children. This option does not reduce the amount of money spent but it would create an inequality pertaining to the distribution of playgrounds.

## **5. Community engagement and consultation**

- 5.1 The Playground Refurbishment Programme has been a huge achievement given it was formed during the pandemic and initially had no obvious funding pots to finance its realisation. Delivering so much infrastructure during a pandemic has had additional pressures that officers and contractors could not have foreseen, such as staff and material shortages. Most other options to change this programme would have caused delays. It is important to remember that the initiative was borne out of a critical loss of playground equipment, during a pandemic when play was essential to many children and their families.
- 5.2 When City Parks secured £2.000m from the Playbuilder programme ten years ago, more comprehensive consultations took place as there was no impending emergency. However, what is also apparent that more communication with the public is advisable to maximise support of future initiatives.
- 5.3 Following the deputation and petition, City Parks are now implementing consistent online consultations for all the remaining playgrounds. Furthermore, the Parks Projects Team has identified that greater communications are needed to proactively make the public aware of their past, present and future work programs. Therefore, the team will be partnering with the Green Spaces Forum to host periodical events every four months speaking Friends of Parks Groups all over the city and other related organisations.

## **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 The scale of the City Parks' Playground Refurbishment Programme should be considered in terms of its national context, i.e. the largest local authority play refurbishment programme in the country. The programme was borne out of a desperate pandemic situation when over 100 items of apparatus were removed, and officers worked diligently to find and deliver a solution.
- 6.2 The officers and industry in question were already experienced at delivering accessible playgrounds and supported the creation of a focus group for Special Education Needs and Disabled children as part of the initiative. A group was created, and evidence has been provided that much of the guidance from this forum was taken on board and implemented. The petition and deputation sought that more consistent consultation took place and ideally children should be involved. In response to this, City Parks have been offering online consultation to all remaining sites which can be utilised by a wide range of audiences, as a minimum standard.
- 6.3 The initiative is now in the fortuitous position to have identified additional section 106 investment to increase the Refurbishment Programmes profile, without needing to borrow more money.

## **7. Financial implications**

- 7.1 This report is an update report on the progress of the Playground Refurbishment Programme which is funded from existing resources. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendation of this report.
- 7.2 The Playground investment programme had agreed funding of £3.000m up to 2023/24 made up of Section 106 funding, corporate borrowing, City Parks Car Parking net income, other City Parks funding and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding relating to HRA playgrounds as set out in a report to this committee on 19th January 2021.
- 7.3 Any new Section 106 funding identified will be used to support the programme further or potentially be used as alternative funding to earmarked revenue resources for the programme in order to better support the current financial position. Any significant variation to budget will be reported as part of the council's monthly budget monitoring process.

Name of finance officer consulted: John Lack Date consulted: 04/01/2023

## **8. Legal implications**

- 8.1 Works contracts required to implement the Programme will need to be tendered in compliance with the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

Name of lawyer consulted: Alice Rowland Date consulted: 05/12/2022

## **9. Equalities implications**

- 9.1 Equalities issues are addressed in the main body of the report.

## **10. Sustainability implications**

- 10.1 This report relates to activity which will have limited impact on sustainability. However, the refurbishment programme has sought to undertake the following to uphold best practice:
- Select companies which have the longest warranties
  - Score tenders on companies sustainability credentials.
  - Ensure components are easy to replace so equipment can be repaired
  - Specify for quality so that items such as slides are stainless steels rather than plastic or fibre glass.
  - Request that no wooden post enter the ground but ensure they are shod or sleeved with metal to prevent them rotting.

## **11. Other Implications**

### **Social Value and procurement implications**

- 11.1 The procurement process for the Refurbishment Programme has, and will continue to, comply with Contract Standing Orders and the council's procurement policies.

## **Public health implications**

- 11.2 Improvement of play facilities that are accessible to all children will contribute to achieving the strategic objectives of the Brighton & Hove Health and Wellbeing Strategy, including
- Starting Well: The health and wellbeing of children and young people in Brighton & Hove will be improved, and
  - Brighton & Hove will be a place which helps people to be healthy: green & open spaces and sports & leisure facilities will be used effectively to improve wellbeing

## **Supporting Documentation**

### **Appendices**

1. Appendix 1: Playground Refurbishment Programme spending profile and locations

### **Background documents**

Open Spaces Strategy 2017 available at <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/migrated/article/inline/2017%20FINAL%20Approved.pdf>

Playground Refurbishment Programme Report presented to Policy & Resources Committee on 15th March 2021 available at <https://democracy.brighton-hove.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1020&MId=10410> (item 172)

