

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Consideration of Options for Mile Oak Recreation Ground</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>17 March 2015</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Director of Environment Development and Housing</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Jan Jonker</b>	<b>Tel: 29-4722</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>North Portslade</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE****1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 In October 2014 a petition was debated at full council calling for improvements to be made to Mile Oak Recreation Ground. Following the debate Council resolved that the petition be noted and referred to this Committee for consideration. The petition was submitted by Mile Oak Action Group (MORAG).
- 1.2 It was also resolved that this committee be requested to consider having an improvement plan for the site drawn up in consultation with users of the play area, and that these proposals are reported to this committee without delay.
- 1.3 On 25 November 2014 the petition was debated at this committee and it was resolved that an officer report considering options for improvement and refurbishment of Mile Oak recreation ground would be produced.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the Committee notes that the Open Spaces Strategy and supporting action plans will set out recommended priorities for the future management of play areas in the city
- 2.2 That the Committee notes that officers are working with MORAG to make some improvements to landscaping and the installation of a 'Wild Gym'
- 2.3 That the Committee agrees that officers will support the local community in exploring sources of grant funding to secure capital funding for more significant improvements.

**3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 On 23 October 2014 a petition signed by 1,388 people regarding improvements to Mile Oak Recreation Ground was debated at full council. The petition, submitted by Mile Oak Rec Action Group (MORAG), called for suitable and safe play equipment for the site so that it was comparable to other play areas across

the city. It was stated that the current provision of equipment was not suitable and was in need of replacement, and that the refurbishment which took place in 2010 resulted in a loss of equipment and space.

- 3.2 Mile Oak Recreation Ground is one of 45 play areas across the city. It is located to the north of Chalky Road in North Portslade. The site is very popular with the local community who would like to see it improved.
- 3.3 Between 2009 and 2010 the council received a £1.1million 'Playbuilder Grant' for investment in play areas. A review of all play areas was carried out and the money allocated to 21 sites based on a number of factors including condition surveys, proximity to alternative sites, accessibility and demographics. The plans were agreed by the Council's Cabinet on 23 April 2009. Seven further sites already had other funding allocations, mainly s106 funds, and these site did not receive and Playbuilder grant. A copy of the Cabinet report is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.4 Mile Oak was allocated £63,000 of Playbuilder funding with an additional £7,000 worth of council funding. At the time a lot of the large pieces of play equipment at the site were at the end of their useful life and the available funding was used for the removal of old equipment and installation of new equipment and features.
- 3.5 The grant funding required new guidelines to be followed in the design of play areas, increasing adventure play and moving away from traditional play equipment. The site was designed within the limited budget available and was informed by consultation with local children. The consultation event took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2009.
- 3.6 The Playbuilder grant provided one off capital investment to upgrade many of the city's play areas. Section 106 funding is the other main source of capital funding to improve play areas in the city.

### ***Budgets for Maintenance of Playgrounds***

- 3.7 The council's budget for playground maintenance is £156,000 per annum. This funding is used for routine maintenance and repairs and things like replacement of sand and surfaces. The cost of new play equipment is significant and refurbishing sites, depending on their size typically costs from £60,000 to in excess of £150,000. The existing budget is insufficient for complete site refurbishments.
- 3.8 All of the city's play areas are regularly inspected to ensure they are maintained to a safe standard. All sites have recently been inspected and this review has identified £207,000 worth of play equipment maintenance work required to maintain all sites to the minimum standards. This does not include any preventative maintenance. A summary of this review is attached as Appendix 2. This schedule forms the expenditure plan for the revenue budget.
- 3.9 In the absence of any significant investment, the maintenance costs will increase in future years as the Playbuilder and other sites will increasingly show wear and tear. It will not be possible to maintain all sites to the minimum standards with the existing budgets.

- 3.10 Improving playgrounds involves time to design proposals, carry out site visits, engage and consult with local people and procure and deliver the works. Officers often receive requests from councillors, community groups and residents to improve play areas or support grant applications. Examples of recent requests have included works to Hove Lagoon, Manor Road play area in Whitehawk and Hangleton Park. While some of these sites do have s106 funding available officers have had to delay making progress with these requests due to other priorities including the Stanmer Park Project, maintaining the Green Flag Parks, working with planning to maximise s106 contributions, developing the Open Spaces Strategy, and ad hoc, one off projects, like controlling parking in parks and the Fields in Trust and Centenary Field applications.
- 3.11 In October 2014 this Committee approved work to progress an updates Open Spaces Strategy for the city. This work is now underway and the strategy will identify priorities for play in the city taking in to account available resources, the distribution of play areas, and their condition. It will explore more affordable types of play and potential funding sources. The strategy will be supported by an Action Plan which will prioritise play areas for improvement based on clear criteria. It is anticipated that these recommendations for play areas will be available for members to consider by October 2015.

### ***Options for Mile Oak***

- 3.12 For reasons set out in this report, there are no resources available within existing City Parks budgets to carry out significant improvements to Mile Oak Recreation Ground. However officers have met with 'MORAG' to identify some immediate improvements to landscaping and the installation of a bee bank, which is underway and installation of 'wild gym' consisting of fitness equipment made from locally sourced materials. Funding for this equipment has been provided by the Healthy Neighbourhood Grant funding (HNF) agreed and distributed by Portslade Community Forum (PCF) from NHS funding to local communities via Trust for Developing Communities administering it on behalf of BHCC.
- 3.13 In order to carry out more significant improvements to the play area, officers will support the local community in looking for alternative sources of funding either through fund raising or grant applications.

## **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 Existing resources do not allow for the level of investment in Mile Oak Recreation Ground that the local community would like to see. It is recommended that fundraising opportunities and grant applications are explored as alternative funding sources

## **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Officers from City Parks, including the rangers are already working with MORAG and local residents. This work will continue to support the group to pursue funding opportunities.

## 6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The play area at Mile Oak Recreation Ground is popular and would benefit from improvements. There is a significant call on the City Parks budget for play areas and there is not the scope to use the existing budget for large scale refurbishments of existing sites such as Mile Oak. The existing budget is targeted at the most immediate maintenance priorities for play areas across the city to keep them safe.
- 6.2 Council officers will support MORAG and local residents in fundraising and applying for other sources of funding.

## 7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The existing revenue budget for playground maintenance is approximately £156,000 per annum. The costs of officer time associated to the recommendations in this report will be met from existing revenue resources within the City Infrastructure service.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Steven Bedford*

*Date: 23/01/15*

### Legal Implications:

- 7.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

*Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert*

*Date: 23/01/15*

### Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 Ensuring play areas are accessible to children and their carers and contain play equipment that is accessible to children with physical impairments is critical. Investment in play areas in recent years including Playbuilder funding has been subject to assessments to ensure that as far as possible these issues were addressed. Any future investment in Mile Oak Recreation Ground will be subject to similar assessment.

### Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 None

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Committee Report Approving Playbuilder Spend
2. Responsive Repair Cost Schedule for all Play Areas