

REPORT TITLE: PARK PLAN FOR NORTH WALLS RECREATION GROUND

19 MARCH 2020

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Kelsie Learney, Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management

Contact Officer: Susan Croker Tel No: 01962 848419 Email scroker@winchester.gov.uk

WARD(S): ST BARTHOLOMEW,

PURPOSE

This report sets out the need for a Park Plan for the North Walls Recreation Ground (see appendix 1), which will provide the opportunity to consider how this vital open space in the centre of Winchester can meet the changing demands placed on it. It is being proposed by the North Walls Informal Members Group as the next step for achieving enhancements to the Recreation Ground, in light of the closure of River Park Leisure Centre (RPLC) and approval to replace the existing cricket pavilion.

The Park Plan will be developed through public engagement and discussion with park users and community groups.

This report also provides updates on the management of the Artificial Turf Pitches (ATP) and tennis courts following the closure of RPLC and the refurbishment of the play area at this site.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That Winchester Town Forum approves the procurement and development of a Park Plan for the North Walls Recreation Ground.
2. That Winchester Town Forum approves the retention of responsibility for the Artificial Turf Pitches and the tennis courts following the closure of the River Park Leisure Centre.

IMPLICATIONS:1 COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITIES

- 1.1 The creation of a Park Plan for North Walls Recreation Ground, will allow the City Council to identify and deliver ongoing maintenance and enhancement management options for the open space, including supporting the use of the sports pitches and recreation ground for the future. Therefore it will help to meet the priority of “tackling the Climate emergency and creating a greener District” within the Council Plan. In addition it supports the priority of "Living Well" which seeks to maintain and enhance open spaces and parks that support good mental and physical health for residents of all ages.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 Funding of £19,400 has been secured from a Central Government grant to identify and deliver improvements to parks. This funding will allow the Council to employ external consultants to create the Park Plan and undertake the necessary engagement work.

The financial implications of delivering the actions identified in the Park Plan will be considered individually as and when required. However, Winchester Town Forum has already allocated £150,000 to deliver the play area refurbishment in financial year 2021-2022.

The ATP and Tennis Courts which are due to move across to the City Council in early 2021 will have a financial implication to the Council. The current operator has indicated that income is currently around £92k per annum and based on current running and maintenance costs it is expected to be possible to operate at least on a cost neutral basis.

Officers are currently working with the existing facility managers and looking at options for the day to day operation of the site once it comes across to the City Council.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The procurement of a consultant to produce the North Walls Park Plan will be undertaken by the Winchester City Council’s Natural Environment and Recreation team is supported by the Procurement team and in accordance with legal advice, the City Council’s Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR2015).
- 3.2 Local authorities are have the power to undertake the relevant procurement and the process officers are mindful that the process requires that best value duty under s3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 must be reasonably obtained.
- 3.3 It may be necessary to enter into agreements with key users of the ATP and Tennis Courts to secure their continued use of the site. The Natural Environment and Recreation team are liaising with colleagues managing the

RPLC work to ensure that the facilities are handed over in appropriate condition and will collaborate with the Legal Team on negotiation of the heads of terms and development of all agreements

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The procurement of the Park Plan and its delivery will be undertaken within the existing resources of the Natural Environment and Recreation team and through the appointment of an external consultant to produce the plan. However, the team have taken on the management of a number of additional assets recently (including the Chilcomb sports centre) and will not be able to absorb the additional work involved in managing the ATP and tennis courts without some additional resource being identified.
- 4.2 Additional staffing resource will be required to ensure the effective management of the ATP and tennis courts. The additional resource is likely to be required to ensure the effective management and maintenance of the facilities, as well as managing the booking system and maximising income opportunities. .

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 North Walls Recreation Ground including the pavilion, tennis courts, ATP and play area is owned by Winchester City Council.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 In March 2019, an engagement event was undertaken at North Walls Recreation Ground which was attended by over 800 people. The key aim of this event was to provide some baseline information to better understand how this complex site was currently being used. In addition, the event aimed to gauge public opinion on the current facilities and identify issues and make recommendations for improvement.
- 6.2 The feedback from this event will be provided to the consultants as a starting point for the Park Plan. The development of the Plan will require further engagement and more detailed consultation with users groups, sports clubs, the local community and other stakeholders.
- 6.3 The closure of neighbouring RPLC in early 2021 is being led by the Head of Programme who is working closely with the Natural Environment Team, to ensure that all work streams are aligned and complementary.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.4 North Walls is a vital green space in the centre of Winchester which is greatly valued by local people and provides significant health and wellbeing benefits as well as sporting opportunities. The Park Plan will identify opportunities for improving this vital asset and broadening its accessibility as well as identifying opportunities for environmental enhancements.

7 The quotations will be evaluated based of a number of criteria including an environmental evaluation which will carry a 10% weighting. This has increased from 5% which has previously been used to assess tenders procured by the Natural Environment and Recreation Team to 10%, in response to the Councils Carbon Neutrality Action Plan and in line with the recent Procurement Strategy.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

8.1 Officers have had regard to the Council's duties under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equalities Act 2010. There are no identified adverse impacts to anyone with a protected characteristic under the Equalities Act 2010 or as regards to human rights.

8.2 The proposed improvements to the open space will improve accessibility and usability for all users.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 None required.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<i>Property</i>	The Council will have liability for additional facilities i.e. the ATP and Tennis Courts. However the projected income will be sufficient to cover any management and maintenance issues.	There is an opportunity to improve WCC property and facilities through identifying clear priorities and work programmes for enhancements going forward
<i>Community Support</i>	Ensure that WCC engages with known users, local residents and wider groups/individuals	There is a significant opportunity to build on the engagement already undertaken and encourage more people to value and use the North Walls Recreation Area.
<i>Timescales</i>	The ATP and tennis courts must be ready for transfer by early January 2021 i.e. when RPLC is predicted to close. Park Plan itself is needed to be completed by Dec 2021 to allow further actions to go forward	
<i>Project capacity</i>	There is insufficient capacity within the NER Team to undertake the Park Plan, hence the need to employ external consultants.	
<i>Financial / VfM</i> That the tennis courts / ATP require extensive	Liaison with Places Leisure in progress and this is being discussed as part of closure of leisure centre.	Funding of £19,400 has been secured from a Central Government grant to identify and deliver improvements to

remedial works		parks
<i>Legal</i>	Involvement of legal team particularly in relation to ATP and Tennis Courts will reduce any issues	
<i>Innovation</i>		This is the first time the Council has produced an overall Park Plan for North Walls. It will allow the council to identify areas for opportunity; areas for income generation; areas for improvement and provide support for key users
<i>Reputation</i>		Enhanced reputational opportunities as the Park Plan takes the initial work forward, allows for further engagement and ensures the Council is meeting customer needs and developing an open space fit for the future.

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

11.1 Background

11.2 North Walls Recreation Ground is the largest open, flat area of land owned and managed by Winchester City Council (see Appendix 1). Comprising an area of 12.4 hectares (30.7 acres), it is primarily used for formal sport including cricket and rugby, informal use such as dog walking and jogging, and as a route into and out of the city centre. It is the location for the adult and junior weekly park run; and is used for events such as the annual bonfire, Cheese and Chilli Festival and Hat fair. In addition, the site supports a canoe club; indoor and outdoor bowls clubs; a cricket pavilion; an Artificial Turf Pitch; tennis courts; a skate park and a play area. The River Itchen runs through the site, which sits adjacent to the Winnall Moors Nature Reserve on the edge of the South Downs National Park.

11.3 The site adjoins the existing RPLC building, which is due to be decommissioned early 2021.

11.4 The relocation of the leisure centre necessitates improvements to the open space, such as the provision of permanent toilets and this requires the development of an overarching plan to ensure these facilities are appropriately positioned and integrated into the design of the park. In addition, there are opportunities to enhance the area for all users, such as creating new paths (if agreed), increasing opportunities for biodiversity, improving signage and identity for the park, improving access and movement across the site and, looking at additional/enhanced facilities, as identified by an engagement event undertaken in March 2019.

- 11.5 The engagement event in March 2019 was instrumental in identifying user requirements and providing baseline information to better understand how this complex site is currently being used. This information alongside the visitor survey undertaken in 2018, discussions with existing users, individuals and groups has clearly identified the need for a co-ordinated approach to any enhancements made to the North Walls Recreation Ground. It is essential that this site continues to meet the needs of users and local residents; is fit for purpose going forward; is able to balance the needs of a variety of users; identifies opportunities for enhancements, accommodates organised sports groups; and helps the Council continue to deliver its wider aims as identified within the Carton Neutrality Action Plan, the Council Plan and other key documents.
- 11.6 In addition, it is essential that any enhancements made to the open space are in line with other projects currently underway within the City, including the proposals for the decommissioning of the existing Leisure Centre site (including ensuring the provision of key facilities such as toilets and utilities); the development of the new Sport and Leisure Park and the creation of the Vision for Winchester.
- 11.7 It is therefore proposed that the City Council develop a Park Plan for North Walls Recreation Ground.
- 11.8 The Park Plan for North Walls
- 11.9 The development of a Park Plan for North Walls Recreation Ground provides the opportunity to consider how this vital open space in the centre of Winchester can meet the changing demands of its environment. The closure of RPLC is the catalyst for this change but it brings forward opportunities for improvements which will benefit all park users and local residents.
- 11.10 The Park Plan proposed by the North Walls Informal Members Group will:
- Consider the results of the engagement event and the suggestions made for the site by the park users
 - Undertake a feasibility study to ascertain what can be achieved on the site
 - Undertake further consultation with stakeholders and users groups to develop the proposals
 - Consider options for income generation activities on the site
 - Review and consider options for additional facilities including the provision of permanent toilets and a café.
 - Ensure all proposals take account of environmental considerations and helps the Council deliver its Carbon Neutrality Action Plan.

- Produce a document detailing proposed layout and site provision for the recreation ground.

11.11 The Park Plan will be presented to Winchester Town Forum for approval prior to any improvement works being undertaken to the open space.

11.12 Funding

11.13 A grant of £19,400 has been received from Central Government for park improvements and it is proposed to utilise this funding to develop and produce the Park Plan.

11.14 It is recognised that some of the proposals within the Park Plan may require the identification of additional funding and a business case in order to proceed. It is essential that the Plan is realistic and achievable. The Park Plan will include phasing of any proposed improvements based on priority and deliverability.

11.15 Timescale

11.16 A draft timetable for production of the Park Plan is shown in the table below.

Tender for production of Park Plan	April
Appoint contractor	May
Consultation and development of Plan	June – September
Submission of Park Plan	October

11.17 Management of Artificial Turf Pitch (ATP) and Tennis Courts

11.18 The ATP and Tennis Courts are currently included within the RPLC management contract. In early 2021, when RPLC closes, these facilities will be passed back to Winchester City Council and be managed by the Natural Environment and Recreation Team.

11.19 The Natural Environment and Recreation Team is currently working on incorporating the management of these facilities into their existing work programme including:

- a) Review of existing fees and charges (this will be part of a wider fees and charges report to the June meeting of the Town Forum.
- b) Incorporating these facilities into the Council's existing online booking system for sports pitches.
- c) Engagement and liaison with existing users of the facilities.

- d) Ensuring effective operation and maintenance of the facilities. This will include the production of an operational plan for the site, identifying how the City Council will manage bookings and the site on a daily basis.
- e) Review of current usage and promotion to increase use where appropriate.

11.20 In addition to this, as part of the closure of the existing Leisure Centre, discussions will be held between the City Council and places Leisure on all issues relating to the termination of the contract. This will include handing the facilities across in an acceptable condition as per the terms of their contract.

11.21 Play Area

11.22 North Walls play area was included in year 2 of the 2020-2025 play area refurbishment plan approved by Winchester Town Forum in January 2020. The refurbishment will take account of the feedback from the March 2019 consultation and undertake further public engagement to develop a new play area that best meets the needs of the local community.

11.23 Cricket Pavilion

11.24 The decision on the replacement cricket pavilion was made at the last meeting of the Winchester Town Forum on 23rd January. The project to procure and install the new pavilion is in the process of being delivered by the NERT and Estates Team.

11.25 It is anticipated that the tender process will commence in June / July. Town Forum will be updated on the progress of this project as it moves forward.

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 The improvements to North Walls open space could be further delayed until a decision has been made on the future of the existing leisure centre site. This may provide opportunity to more closely link the sites. However, the future of the leisure centre site is a long term project and there is currently no timeframe for its completion. Delaying improvements to the open space project will have an adverse impact on the site and its users and it may not benefit from aligning with the leisure centre site.

12.2 It would be possible to undertake the necessary works as individual projects but the site is complex and there is greater benefit to be gained from an overarching plan rather than focussing on individual elements.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

WTF278, NORTH WALLS AND KING GEORGE V SPORTS PAVILIONS UPDATE REPORT, 23rd January 2020

WTF280, PLAY AREA IMPROVEMENT – 5 YEAR PROGRAMME UPDATE, 23rd
January 2020

CAB3031, WINCHESTER SPORT AND LEISURE CENTRE –
PROCUREMENT OF A CENTRE OPERATOR, 6th June 2018

CAB3093, RIVER PARK LEISURE CENTRE – FUTURE USE OF SITE, 31st
October 2018

CAB3190, RIVER PARK LEISURE CENTRE - FUTURE USE OF SITE, 23rd
October 2019

APPENDICES: Appendix 1 – Location plan