

REPORT TITLE: BUDGET REVIEW: PLAY REFURBISHMENT PROGRAMME –  
INITIAL DRAFT OPTIONS

14 SEPTEMBER 2023

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Kathleen Becker, Cabinet Member for  
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WARD(S): ALL TOWN WARDS

PURPOSE

The council owns and maintains 24 play areas located within the town area, with exception of one and that will soon be transferred to a parish. Play areas are important and provide multi benefits for residents and visitors to Winchester. Each site is bespoke to the area taking account of the wider landscape and setting and encourages links to other places via pedestrian and cycle paths. They provide interesting and varied equipment that challenge children to be inventive and encourage imagination. They not only meet the play need but also deliver a range of benefits including biodiversity, flood prevention, pollution mitigation, urban cooling, and amenity value. There is a commitment to provide safe, high quality and accessible play areas which has been achieved through a planned five-year programme of programme of refurbishments funded from the Town Account.

As part of its medium-term financial strategy planning the Town Forum has requested reviews of areas of its expenditure to identify ways in which costs could be reduced. One such area was the play area refurbishment programme, so a review has started and this report sets out the initial options for, and likely implications of, reducing expenditure on the refurbishment programme. This is likely to result in cost reductions and deferral of costs until a later date, but more detailed work on options will be brought to the Forum in November 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Forum notes:

1. The work undertaken to date to review the play area refurbishment programme;
2. That a detailed options papers will be provided at its meeting in November 2023.

## IMPLICATIONS:

### 1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

- 1.1 Tackling the Climate Emergency and Creating a Greener District
- 1.2 Provision of play areas in residential neighbourhoods supports the ambition of ensuring that everything most residents need is in reach by foot, bike or public transport.
- 1.3 Homes for all
- 1.4 Access to high quality play opportunity helps to achieve the ambition of diverse, healthy and cohesive communities - not just homes.
- 1.5 Living Well
- 1.6 The provision of high-quality play opportunities directly supports a number of Council Plan ambitions:
  - (i) Attractive public spaces where people feel safe and secure.
  - (ii) Well-used and maintained public facilities and green spaces with space to play.
  - (iii) A wide range of physical and cultural activities for all ages and abilities.

### 2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 There is a long-term programme of refurbishment and replacement of play equipment, with a 5-year funding requirement included within the council's capital programme. The programme currently includes 8 play areas and the total programme value is £714k, with the current 5-year spend profiled in the table below. Funding for the programme of works is entirely from the Winchester town reserve and so there is reliance on there being enough balance available to fund the programme of works alongside other town account priorities.

<b>Current 5 Year programme</b>		<b>Town Account</b>	<b>General Fund</b>	<b>Total</b>
Yr 1	2023/24	£274k		£274k
Yr 2	2024/25	£160K		£160k
Yr 3	2025/26	£80k		£80k
Yr 4	2026/27	£80k		£80k
Yr 5	2027/28	£120k		£120k
	<b>Total</b>	<b>£714k</b>		<b>£714k</b>

Note: Figures exclude skate parks, outdoor gym equipment, MUGAs and trim trails

- 2.2 The review of the programme is intended to reduce the capital cost of the programme and also defer costs where possible until a later date. This will result in a revised 5-year programme, reducing the overall programme cost and which can be updated annually to form a rolling 5-year programme. No target has been set for cost reduction and a detailed proposal will be brought to the next meeting in November.
- 2.3 A cost of £415 has been incurred this financial year to expand the scope of the annual play area inspections for the sites. The inspections are commissioned from an external provider each year and highlight any issues in need of rectification. With this review in mind, the scope of this year's reports was extended to include an estimation of the life-expectancy of each piece of play equipment. It would be appropriate to include this expanded scope in the future annual inspection which would result in a small increase to the cost of these inspections to be met from existing budgets.
- 2.4 The suggested approach of extending the life span of some equipment, rather than replacement, will result in an increase in the cost of reactive maintenance as more equipment will need to be repaired. This means that the reduction in capital replacement costs will need to allow for a small increase in reactive maintenance costs. Further work will be undertaken to assess the likely cost implication.

### 3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 All works that form part of the current play area refurbishment programme are procured in accordance with the council's Contract Procedure Rules and where applicable The Public Contract Regulations 2015.

### 4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Delivery of the play area refurbishment programme is part of the ongoing work of the Natural Environment and Recreation Team, so there are no additional workforce implications.
- 4.2 Should the approach change to one of increased retention and/or renovation of equipment, there should be less time required for public consultation in comparison to the full refurbishment previously planned. However there will still be a need for staff resources to procure and contract manage the repair and renovation works which may be more frequent.

### 5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The proposal to retain equipment for longer than was previously the case may result in an increase in costs for reactive repairs and maintenance. This will be factored into the overall budget proposal when presented to the Forum in November.
- 5.2 New play equipment comes with warranties, but these vary depending on the type of equipment. Future decisions are unlikely to have warranty implications, but we will need to consider this when making decisions on whether to retain equipment for a longer period.

## 6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 Options for reducing the cost of the play area refurbishment programme have been discussed at two meetings of the Forum's Parks and Recreation Informal Group, in July and August 2023.
- 6.2 Consultation has always been undertaken with the local community around the brief for each site, and views are factored into the proposal for the refurbishment before the procurement for work is issued. A need for community consultation would remain, although the format and timing of this may change based on the scale and extent of the scheme.

## 7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 Renovation of existing equipment rather than replacement would have positive environmental benefits by avoidance of upstream carbon emissions in the supply chain in new equipment and reduction from waste disposal.
- 7.2 Bidders as part of the procurement exercise for a play area refurbishment are required to indicate how they intend to minimise environmental impact through their design including materials sourcing, manufacturing location, packaging, transportation impacts and disposal of existing equipment and materials. This represents a minimum of 10% of the scoring in the assessment process.

## 8 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

- 8.1 It is important that the council's play area provision is suitable for all ages and abilities. The specification of all new play equipment is developed with the aim to maximise accessibility and inclusion - in practice this means:
- (i) The use of inclusive and fully accessible equipment as well as consideration of site layout, proximity to toilets and car parking
  - (ii) Inclusion of equipment that encourages children to take risks within a controlled environment.
- 8.2 A recent development has been the installation at Abbey Gardens of a communication board to assist non-verbal users. This has been very well received and similar boards will be installed in future at the larger, higher footfall sites.
- 8.3 It will be important that any changes do not compromise accessibility and inclusion, so an equalities impact assessment has been undertaken as part of this project - see appendix 3. This identified potential impact on users in respect of disability or age, but measures are taken to ensure this does not happen.
- (i) The specification for new play areas includes a requirement to provide equipment that is appropriate for all users, irrespective of any disability. The need to ensure an appropriate amount of inclusive play provision on the site will be a key consideration when planning replacement items in future.

- (ii) Adults can use the play equipment, but it is not designed or targeted for adult use. This is to ensure that children are provided with healthy and appropriate learning play places.
- (iii) Most play areas include a mix of equipment to ensure that there is appropriate provision for all ages. In cases where the provision is more targeted towards a specific age of child, there is always another play area in the near vicinity that meets the needs of other age groups.

8.4 An impact assessment is also completed for each play area refurbishment or replacement scheme, based on the detailed proposals for that scheme.

## 9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 None.

## 10 RISK MANAGEMENT

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<u>Financial Exposure</u> Cost of refurbishment exceeds approved budget.	Procurement documents set out available budget and seeks proposals that can be delivered within budget.	The options discussed in this paper provide opportunity to reduce the cost of the refurbishment programme.
<u>Exposure to challenge</u> Play areas are not inclusive of the needs of all children.	Procurement documents include specific requirement for inclusive equipment.	
<u>Innovation</u> Play areas do not keep pace with industry developments in play provision.	Regular and scheduled replacement of equipment ensures nothing becomes too dated, although this could become more of a problem if equipment is retained for longer in future.	
<u>Reputation</u> Reduced investment in play provision could be criticised.	Regular inspections ensure that equipment is not retained beyond its safe or useful life.	Retention or reuse of equipment is consistent with the council's climate emergency commitments.

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Injury to park users.	Options include increased investment in reactive maintenance to deal with problems as they arise.  As above.	
<u>Achievement of outcome</u> Cost of refurbishment exceeds approved budget.	Procurement documents set out available budget (with contingency held back) and seeks proposals that can be delivered within budget.	The options discussed in this paper provide opportunity to reduce the cost of the refurbishment programme.
<u>Property</u> Equipment becomes dangerous.	Regular inspections ensure that equipment is not retained beyond its safe or useful life.	
<u>Community Support</u> Residents oppose reduced investment in their play areas.	Resident engagement would continue on a site-by-site basis and would allow clear communication of the council's approach.	Potential for community support to increase through their opportunity to influence decisions.
<u>Timescales</u> Deferred replacement of some equipment may not be possible.	Annual inspections ensure early understanding of likely replacement date for equipment.  Flexibility within the programme to delay work on some sites, if other sites become a higher priority.	Inspections may show that replacement can be deferred even longer than initially thought.
<u>Project capacity</u> Insufficient capacity to effectively manage the refurbishment	Dedicated role with responsibility for this work.	

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
programme.	Programme managed to ensure work is spread evenly across each year.	

## 11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- 11.1 When approving the Winchester Town Account budget for 2023/24 (report WTF314 refers), the Forum identified four key areas for review to both achieve the medium-term financial strategy and deliver on the aims of the Forum. One of the areas for review was the play area refurbishment programme.
- 11.2 Maintenance of good quality play areas is a high priority for the Town Forum, but it was recognised that a review of the current refurbishment programme is required in order to fully understand the options for delivering a good quality programme. The review was to focus on ensuring the right mix of facilities are available and also give a detailed refresh on how this can be delivered.
- 11.3 The council owns and maintains 24 play areas located within the town area, plus one other that is located elsewhere in the district but will soon be transferred to a parish council. One of these sites (Abbey Gardens) is paid for via the General Fund, in recognition of its strategic function within the city serving residents from a wide catchment and visitors to the city. All other play areas are paid for via the Town Account and form the basis of this review – see appendix 1 for all a list of all play areas.
- 11.4 Excluded from the review are skate parks, outdoor gym equipment, MUGAs and trim trails. These items generally require reactive repair and maintenance rather than wholesale replacement, so are managed through the revenue budget rather than capital refurbishment programme. This work is funded from the Town Account. They are inspected annually by the Play Inspection Company
- 11.5 The refurbishment programme has traditionally seen all play equipment within a site removed and replaced with new after 20 years. The capital programme shows indicative figures with assumptions on life of equipment and largely assuming the current approach is maintained. There are three alternative approaches that could enable the Forum to reduce its expenditure on the play area refurbishment programme. It is likely that the final approach will be a blended mix of all three depending on the play area, its equipment and the intensity or frequency of use (its wear and tear).
- A. Retention and or renovation of equipment, rather than replacement.
- This would see equipment retained and repaired following inspection to assess its life expectancy. This requires a more detailed regular

assessment of the state of the equipment and would be a more complicated approach to manage.

B. Deferred replacement.

This would keep the current approach of a full replacement of all equipment on the site but with the replacement date pushed back so that a longer period of time elapses before replacement happens.

C. Decommissioning

This would see all equipment on a site removed without replacement at the end of its life span.

11.6 The review work has focussed initially on six of the sites included within the current 5-year funded programme between 2023/24 to 2027/28. The two sites being replaced during 2023/24 have been omitted, as the work on these has already begun. The initial review assessed whether any of the equipment has potential for retention or restoration, rather than replacement, as described in approach A above.

11.7 A study was conducted to estimate the financial implications of four different levels of retention and restoration. This was done using a 'bill of quantity' format:

- (i) Full replacement: Based on replacing equipment like-for-like, including all surfaces and ancillary equipment when required.
- (ii) Refurbishment: Replace play equipment with a life expectancy of less than 10 years and ancillary equipment (benches etc.) only where unserviceable. Resurface wet pour surface (wearing course) only, keeping the same footprint.
- (iii) Maintenance Plus: Replace play equipment with a life expectancy of less than 10 years and remove ancillary without replacement if unserviceable. Repair wet pour surface only around replacement equipment i.e. patching.
- (iv) Maintain: Basic maintenance, with replacement of play equipment with a lifespan of less than 5 years and remove ancillary without replacement if unserviceable. Minimum repair of wet pour only when essential.

The cost estimates associated with each of the four options is summarised below, which reflects the costs for all six sites in the funded programme. An example of the methodology for one of the sites is presented in appendix 2.

	Total cost	Saving or (overspend)
5-year programme - current budget	£440,000	-

Option 1 – Replace	£620,000	(£180,000)
Option 2 – Refurb	£460,000	(£20,000)
Option 3 – Maintenance Plus	£330,000	£110,000
Option 4 – Maintain	£80,000	£360,000

- 11.8 The programme budget estimates had not been increased over time to reflect the effects of inflation. This has now been factored into the costs of options 1-4, which explains why the costs appear higher in comparison to the budget but further increases the challenge in reducing the already challenging budget.
- 11.9 There are other factors that must also be considered when reviewing these cost estimates. All of the factors below mean that the estimates are purely indicative and not the basis of a revised budget:
- (i) The methodology is based on equipment at catalogue price, which is never the true cost due to variables such as the competitive nature of the procurement process and inflationary cost pressures.
  - (ii) We never tender for specific items of equipment. Instead we set out a brief that allows the providers to use their experience and creativity to provide a high-quality design to fit our available budget.
- 11.10 This assessment was informed by an enhanced annual inspection report of the six sites in question. A report was commissioned to identify the life expectancy of the equipment on those sites, which allowed us to identify which equipment is likely to last for a significant length of time. Commissioning such a report more frequently would incur a small cost, but would allow us to plan a more efficient refurbishment programme that maximises the use of each piece of equipment.
- 11.11 This exercise demonstrates it is possible to reduce the play area refurbishment programme to a level that will significantly assist the Town Forum to manage its financial challenges. What it doesn't provide is a detailed budget estimate for the programme going forwards – further work is required to achieve that.
- 11.12 Option 1 (continuing as we are) is clearly too expensive and option 4 is probably too extreme a reduction in the programme, with a risk of the quality of play reducing. Options 2 and 3 are similar in principle and a mix of the two would seem to balance the need to reduce costs and maintain play quality. However, combining this with the approach of also seeking to defer work on certain sites (approach B) may provide the best overall outcome, so further work will be undertaken to develop a more detailed proposal for the coming years based on a hybrid of the approaches.

11.13 The ultimate objective of the review is to identify ways to reduce the overall cost of the 5-year play area refurbishment programme, while minimising the reduction in play value and resultant impact on play quality in the town area. The initial work demonstrates this can be achieved and work will continue, in consultation with the Forum's Parks and Recreation Informal Group, to develop a revised 5-year programme that can be updated on an annual basis. Further work and recommendations on the options will be brought back to the Forum at its November meeting.

## 12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 Continue with the current programme – this has been rejected as the mid-term financial strategy has identified there is a future budget deficit. Planning now for the more effective and prudent approach to how the town play areas are maintained will ensure saving are made without compromising quality and safety of provision.

12.2 Discontinue the five year programme of refurbishment and decommission equipment at the end of its useful life. This was rejected as play areas form an important function bringing social, health and educational benefits to residents in the across the town. The play areas need to be safe and accessible, so in order to remain open and in use they require investment in the equipment and grounds.

### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

#### Previous Committee Reports:-

WTF314 WINCHESTER TOWN ACCOUNT BUDGET FOR 2023/24; 26 JANUARY 2023

WTF280 PLAY AREA IMPROVEMENT - 5 YEAR PROGRAMME UPDATE; 23 JANUARY 2020.

#### Other Background Documents:-

None

### APPENDICES:

Appendix 1	Current play area 5-year refurbishment plan
Appendix 2	Example methodology of budget cost reduction options
Appendix 3	Public Sector Equality Duty – Impact Assessment