

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Customer and Digital (Introduced by Cabinet Member (Finance, Property and Assets))	Cabinet	Wednesday, 19 January 2022
	Council	Wednesday, 26 January 2022

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	Yes
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Savings or expenditure amounting to greater than £100,000	Significant impact on 2 or more council wards
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Birch Avenue Playground Refurbishment Budget

Purpose of the Report

1. Birch Avenue Playground is one of the borough's playground sites identified for improvement this financial year. A budget of £75,000 has been included in the approved capital programme however, as a result of public consultation feedback and an updated survey of the site's condition, a budget uplift of £70,000 is requested providing a total budget of £145,000.

Recommendations to Cabinet

2. That, subject to Council approving the changes to the capital programme, the changes to the refurbishment works detailed in the body of the report be approved.
3. That recommendation is made to Council to approve an increase of £70,000 in the capital programme in respect of this scheme.

Recommendations to Council

4. That an increase of £70,000 in the capital programme is approved in respect of this scheme to allow the additional works detailed in the body of the report to be carried out.

Reasons for recommendations

5. Birch Avenue Playground is the 10th playground site identified for refurbishment under the current capital improvement programme. The sites refurbished up to now were generally last improved in the late 1990's and were not upgraded under the previous improvement programme requiring a complete re-build to bring them in line with contemporary standards

and best practise. The scope of required works has generally required budgets of £175,000 - £225,000 per site.

6. The playground at Birch Avenue is the first site in the current improvement programme listed for a partial refurbishment having been refurbished in 2005 under the previous programme. A budget of £75,000 was included for the replacement of some equipment with the modern equivalents, entrance gates, the safety surfacing under the equipment and repainting of the metal railings.
7. The public consultation highlighted that some of the proposed replacement equipment and existing items proposed to remain were not popular and alternative equipment was requested. It is therefore proposed to replace items with alternative equipment in line with the most common consultation responses with safety surfacing areas amended as required to accommodate these. In addition, more seating was requested by many respondents and therefore additional seating/picnic tables and associated hard surfacing is recommended for inclusion in the scheme. An additional £20,000 is requested for the alternative equipment and seating and £10,000 for safety surfacing extensions/amendments.
8. As well as the changes recommended due to consultation feedback, a recent survey of the existing play area has found the deterioration of the bitmac has accelerated in recent months, much faster than other sites of this age, where the surface remains in good condition. The existing bitmac has become very open textured and susceptible to frost damage potentially as a result of the way it was originally laid. It is likely that significant patching will be required within the next 5 years and therefore, with the new equipment proposed to have a design life of at least 20 years, it is suggested that the existing bitmac surface is removed and re-laid with a denser surface finish as part of the refurbishment project. An additional £40,000 is requested for this work – an amount sufficient to replace all of the bitmac and also to swap the bitmac to safety surface where this is appropriate to the designs received for playground improvement.

Other options considered and rejected

9. The option of sticking with the originally suggested replacement equipment was considered and rejected as this would go against much of the consultation feedback received and potentially undermine the feeling of community ownership in the site and may undermine confidence in future public consultation exercises.
10. The option of patching the worst areas of the bitmac surfacing for now is not recommended as, although this would initially cost much less, the majority of the surface area is now rapidly deteriorating and therefore regular patching will be needed over the next five years, requiring temporary closures of the play area and potential damage to adjacent surfacing and equipment. Although the resurfacing of the whole area is more costly, doing it in a single operation during the refurbishment while the playground is already closed is considered to maximise efficiencies and get the best rates for bitmac laying.

Corporate priorities

11. The report relates to the following corporate priorities: (please bold all those applicable):

An exemplary council	Thriving communities
A fair local economy that works for everyone	Good homes, green spaces, healthy places

Climate change and air quality

12. The work noted in this report impacts on the following areas of climate change and sustainability targets of the Council's Green Agenda:
- Reducing waste production.
13. The following remediations have been undertaken to limit the environmental effect:
- Waste materials arising from the demolition of the existing playground features including timber, metal, stone and rubber, will be reused and recycled where possible minimising the amount of material disposed of at landfill.

Equality and diversity

14. The new play area will be more inclusive and accessible by design.

Risk

15. A number of risks linked to the current site designs will be addressed through the improvement proposals. The project risk register identifies other key risks, the majority of which will be mitigated by the procurement process followed.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

16. The current budget of £75k is funded by £13k of section 106 receipts and £62k borrowing. The requested increase in the budget of £70k would be financed through further borrowing. The revenue costs associated with this, through MRP and interest, would be around £5k per year and would be factored into the upcoming budget setting process.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

17. There are no concerns with this report from a Monitoring Officer perspective.

There are no background papers to this report

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