



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Call-in pack

Thursday, 21st July, 2016

7.00 pm

Town Hall, Watford

Publication date: 13 July 2016

Contact

If you require further information or you would like a copy of this agenda in another format, e.g. large print, please contact Sandra Hancock in Democracy and Governance on 01923 278377 or by email to legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk .

Welcome to this meeting. We hope you find these notes useful.

Access

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Committee Membership

Councillor K Hastrick (Chair)

Councillor J Dhindsa (Vice-Chair)

Councillors J Fahmy, A Grimston, Asif Khan, R Martins, A Rindl, N Shah, D Walford, T Williams and K Collett

Agenda

Part A - Open to the Public

4. **Call-in: Investment in Watford's Adventure Playgrounds** (Pages 7 - 26)

The following decision taken on 4 July 2016 by Cabinet has been called in:

Investment in Watford's Adventure Playgrounds

The reason for call-in, signed by 3 Members, is as follows –

“A lack of consultation for residents and users of the Adventure playgrounds and other options and alternatives.”

The following documents are attached –

- (a) Report of the Head of Community and Customer Services
- (b) Appendix A to the report (Overview of the designs for the new Adventure Playgrounds)
- (c) Appendix B to the report (Outline timetable)
- (d) Appendix C to the report (Examples of some of the specific equipment proposed)
- (e) Extract of the minutes of Cabinet on 4 July 2016
- (f) Proforma requesting the call-in of the decision signed by Councillors Bell, Joynes and Mills
- (g) Call-in procedures to be followed

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Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 4 July 2016
Report of: Head of Community & Customer Services
Title: Investment in Watford's Adventure Playgrounds

1.0 **Summary**

- 1.1 This report highlights the investment the Council is making in its two Adventure Playgrounds at Harwoods and Harebreaks to create high quality, modern, creative and challenging Adventure Playgrounds with improved accessibility.
- 1.2 Funding for significant investment of up to £1.25 million into the Adventure Playgrounds has been made available by the Council for these new facilities, which will be open to all at all times.

2.0 **Recommendations**

- 2.1 To approve the outline design plans for the investment of up to £1.25 million into the two Adventure Playgrounds (Appendix A – Presentation Boards are also available at the meeting).
- 2.2 To approve the outline timetable for the investment at Appendix B.
- 2.3 To note the plans to communicate the investment and proposals to inform the Watford community of the plans for the future of the Adventure Playgrounds.

Contact Officer:

For further information on this report please contact:

Gary Oliver, Section Head, Culture and Play

Telephone extension: 8251, gary.oliver@watfiord.gov.uk

Report approved by: Alan Gough- Head of Customer and Community Services

3.0 **Detailed Proposal**

Background

- 3.1 It is recognised that play is an important factor to a child's development and considerable investment has been made in many local play facilities across the Borough. This investment is now being extended to the two Adventure Playgrounds (APGs), one at Harebreaks and one at Harwoods.
- 3.2 The current facilities at both APGs are in need of modernisation and current accessibility to the facilities is restricted to specific opening times.
- 3.3 The APGs are staffed at these opening times and these staff also provide Play Ranger services to the community at various locations throughout the year. Analysis of attendance figures show that the current take up of the facilities is focused on the local community with reach to other areas of the borough more limited.
- 3.4 The reduction and then removal of the Revenue Support Grant by Central Government means that the Council has to make savings of approximately £3m by April 2019. When this requirement is balanced against a Council desire to create an improved play offer that is high quality, modern, sustainable and more accessible, a transformational change is required.
- 3.5 It is acknowledged that this transformational change should not be seen as a reflection on the current Play Services provided.

The Proposal

- 3.6 A company called Southern Green was commissioned to provide design possibilities for the two APGs, with a brief including:
- making the Adventure Playgrounds accessible at all times, for ages 5 – 15 years
 - modern, innovative and challenging play experiences
 - designs to take into account health and safety guidance
 - play areas to be durable and sustainable and equipment to have a 20 year lifespan
 - providing a destination for families from across the borough
 - specifically in relation to Harebreaks to work with the existing natural environment
- 3.7 This has given rise to the outline designs shown at appendix A, and on the presentation boards available at the meeting. Please note that these are only outline proposals and are subject to change.

3.8 In summary:

Harwoods Adventure Playground will be a number of play zones which encourage different types of adventurous play opportunities in different environments:

- a welcoming space for families gathering together, seating, and play equipment for younger children so that there is a full family offer provided
- a climbing wall
- an iconic tower with aerial tunnel, slides, and bridge
- adventure trail challenges
- double zip wire
- exciting swing area and natural play areas

This all to be integrated and linked to the existing MUGA and other outdoor areas. The whole area will be connected by a landscaping scheme including new planting and walkways. It will be necessary to remove some trees from this site in consultation with the Council's Arboricultural Officer.

3.9 For Harebreaks Adventure playground the same design criteria remain, however the proposals are tailored to the existing habitat. The play zones will include:

- a welcoming space for families gathering together,
- woodland transition, to encourage and intrigue visitors to venture within the woodland
- adventure trail challenges
- some of the former play area reverting back to a more natural habitat.

Again this will be linked to existing outdoor areas such as the existing playground.

3.10 The above proposals are innovative, challenging and creative and represent an investment into play which continues to add value and experiences to children's lives. These proposals are transformational and can be enjoyed all year round by children and families. Examples of some of the specific equipment at each site are in Appendix C.

3.11 The proposals will deliver an exciting play offer for older children across the borough. In view of this, it is expected that there will be community interest in what is planned at the two sites and people will want to find out more. Currently, two initial information events are proposed for early July, should this report be approved by Cabinet. These will be 'drop in' and will give people an opportunity to view the plans, which will also be made available via the council's website.

3.12 The above investment of up to £1.25m creates APGs that are not restricted to specific opening hours and do not require staffing. It is proposed that in addition, play

activities will be commissioned for the 2 week Easter break and for 6 weeks in the summer. These activities will support use of the two new APGs, Watford's parks and open spaces, the Big Events programme and other locations.

3.13 Regular inspection and maintenance of the new APGs will become part of the contract with Veolia. Appropriate signage will be placed at the entrances to the APGs welcoming visitors and advising on use of the equipment.

4.0 **Implications**

4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 The Head of Finance (shared services) comments that resources have been allocated in the capital programme 2016/17 to deliver the investment proposals of up to £1.25 million. Savings of up to £250,000 per annum will be delivered from the Play Service revenue budget from April 2017. The costs of redundancies (where applicable) will be recovered from the savings within the first 12 months following the redundancies. Once agreed, service budgets will be adjusted to reflect the savings.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that a procurement exercise was undertaken to obtain the services of Southern Green. The Council will follow it's employment policies in dealing with the impact on staff.

4.3 **Equalities**

4.3.1 The new APGs will be accessible at all times. An equalities impact analysis is being developed alongside the proposals.

4.4 **Potential Risks**

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
Costs exceed budget	1	4	4
Future revenue savings not achieved	1	4	4
Designs not implemented in time	1	3	3

4.5 **Staffing**

4.5.1 All current play staff will be put at risk of redundancy. A post will be created to continue the commissioning of play activities and provide resilience to the Culture and Play section in responding to future challenges. It is proposed that the consultation processes and procedures detailed in the Council's 'Redundancy, Restructure and Reorganisation' policy will be followed.

4.6 **Accommodation**

4.6.1 There are no accommodation implications.

4.7 Community Safety

4.7.1 The play spaces will be available at all times, and, as with any other freely accessible play space any Community Safety issues that do arise will be dealt with swiftly and appropriately.

4.8 Sustainability

4.8.1 The equipment will have a 20 year lifespan.

Appendices

Appendix A – Overview of the designs for the new APGs

Appendix B – Outline timetable

Appendix C – Examples of some of the specific equipment proposed

Background Papers: There are none

File Reference: N/A

Harwoods APG

Proposed Play Zones

KEY - Proposed Features

- 1 Welcoming Space / Family Gathering Area**
Objective - to encourage visitors and create a welcoming meeting place
- 2 Urban Play Space**
Objective - to create an area which has a range of features including a climbing wall and DJ stand
- 3 Tower & Slides**
Objective - to create a landmark feature within the area and an exhilarating walkway
- 4 Adventure Trail**
Objective - to create an exciting linked trail offering a variety of challenges for all ages
- 5 Double Zip Wire**
Objective - to create an exciting aerial ride through the trees
- 6 Swing Area**
Objective - to provide exciting swings with different qualities

Existing Features

- Existing Circulation
- Existing Recreational facilities including:
 - Play Area
 - Outdoor Gym
 - Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)
- Residential Areas

New / Improved Entrance

Proposed Circulation

[Proposal numbers applicable to both plans and Feasibility Report]

WATFORD PLAY REVIEW - HARWOODS

southerngreen
chartered landscape architects

Harebreaks APG

Proposed Play Zones

KEY:

Proposed Features

- 1 Woodland Transition**
Objective - to create an exciting introduction to the woodland play area
- 2 Welcoming Space / Family Gathering Area**
Objective - to create a welcoming gathering area
- 3 Flagship Feature**
Objective - to create a large unit reflecting characteristics of the oak woodland
- 4 Rope / Adventure Trail**
Objective - to create a challenging trim trail to test balance and speed
- 5 Restoration of Natural Oak Woodland**
Objective - to remove the old play area and restore the oak woodland and habitats

Existing Features

- Existing Circulation
- Access point to Car park
- Existing Play area
- Residential Areas
- Cherry Tree Primary School
- Callowland Allotments

New / Improved Entrance

Proposed Circulation

[Proposal numbers applicable to both plans and Feasibility Report]

WATFORD PLAY REVIEW - HAREBREAKS

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Appendix B

Date	Action / Decision
04.07.16	Cabinet determine report recommendations
9 & 11.07.16	Community engagement on the proposals
31.10.16	Work on provision of new Adventure Playgrounds commences (including demolition and removal of old buildings / equipment)
May 2017	New Adventure Playgrounds open

Harwoods APG



WATFORD PLAY REVIEW - HARWOODS  



WATFORD PLAY REVIEW - HARWOODS  

Harebreaks APG



WATFORD PLAY REVIEW - HAREBREAKS



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WATFORD PLAY REVIEW - HAREBREAKS

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Cabinet

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4 July 2016

Present:

Mayor Dorothy Thornhill	(Strategic partnerships/external relationships and community safety)
Cllr Peter Taylor	(Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Client Services)
Cllr Karen Collett	(Portfolio Holder for Community)
Cllr Stephen Johnson	(Portfolio Holder for Property and Housing)
Cllr Iain Sharpe	(Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development)
Cllr Mark Watkin	(Portfolio Holder for Resources and Customer Service)

Also present:

Councillor Nigel Bell (Labour)
Councillor Kareen Hastrick (Liberal Democrat)
Councillor Sohail Bashir (Labour)
Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa (Labour)
Councillor Asif Khan (Labour)
Councillor Rabi Martins (Liberal Democrat)
Councillor Matt Turmaine (Labour)
Mr Ansar (to speak on item 7)
Ms Wilson (to speak on item 7)

Officers:

Managing Director
Shared Director of Finance
Head of Democracy and Governance
Head of Regeneration and Development
Head of Community and Customer Services
Communications Section Head
Partnerships and Performance Section Head

Property and Regeneration Section Head
Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks and Streets)
Culture and Play Section Head
Democratic Services Manager

18. Investment in Watford's Adventure Playgrounds

A report was received from the Head of Community and Customer Services. The report highlighted the investment the Council was making in the two Adventure Playgrounds (APGs) at Harwoods and Harebreaks. Funding of up to £1.25 million had been made available by the Council for the new facilities which would be open to all at all times.

Two members of the public, Mr Ansar and Ms Wilson, attended to speak to the committee.

Councillor Collett introduced the report and explained that it highlighted investment in two APGs to create high quality play facilities. The proposed change was about two things: to extend the opportunities for children aged 5-15 to access high quality play facilities everyday throughout the year. Secondly, the need to respond to the challenging financial situation of the council which meant there were difficult decisions to be taken requiring a transformational approach. The proposal would deliver the council's objective to protect areas for play and bring equipment up to a modern standard. There would be play activities commissioned for the Easter and summer breaks.

The Mayor invited Ms Wilson to speak.

Ms Wilson explained that she was giving a point of view from the parents of children who used the facility. She explained that APGs enabled children to have creative play and learn vital skills. The children would go to the playworkers for emotional support and learnt social skills at the APG. Money was being saved in the wrong place and instead was being spent on the town centre. The parents wanted to keep the staff and considered that the facilities had been run down. There were children who had been upset when they heard about the decision and who had made the banners which were brought to the meeting. She had reported anti social behaviour regarding the activities of older children in the young children's play areas to the police.

Ms Wilson continued that the reinvestment would mean that the current facilities were replaced with a sterile playground which could be subject to more antisocial behaviour. Once the decision had been made the current facility would be lost and there would be no going back.

Ms Wilson presented a petition to the Mayor and explained that in a week they had

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collected 2,500 signatures in support of the petition.

The Mayor invited Mr Ansar to speak.

Mr Ansar explained that he was born and grew up in Watford, he had attended Watford Grammar School for Boys and worked for Watford Borough Council on the play bus and APG. His family were still residents and his previous colleagues still worked for the youth services. There had been a lack of public consultation over the issue and he wanted to see more local democracy and representation. There should be a six month period to offer an opportunity to talk to residents as there was a great strength of feeling. The council was good at putting up buildings and there were very few green spaces left. The last public consultations regarding play had made a strong recommendation which was that APGs were a vital public asset. There was a budget of up to £1.25m but he was not sure if it was ringfenced. The council would be making savings, cutting staff and outsourcing to Veolia. There would be the cost of providing supervision on those sites for two weeks in Easter and six weeks in summer. There were concerns on the long term impacts on crime.

The Mayor responded that local government had been particularly affected by government austerity measures. The council had managed to protect the front line services and had kept council tax down.

Councillor Bell commented that more notice could have been given to staff. There was strong support for the playground. Despite figures on investment in playgrounds there was no history of investment in the APG site. The APG had provided supervised care for young people over so many years and this was not reflected in the report. He encouraged the Mayor to take up the offer of working with the community to find another solution.

Councillor Bell commented that the current facilities provided a place where parents could trust that their children were safe. The two new modern playgrounds were not what people were looking for. He continued that there had been a lack of consultation and that the proposed events were for information.

The Mayor responded that many councils did not have a staffed APG facility and similar ones had been closed across London. There would still be play facilities. She continued that she knew that people who used it valued the service. However, the council had to find another £3m of cuts between now and 2018. She explained that each service had been looked at for what they provided. There were other people in the town who did not use the APGs who were not heard at the meeting.

Councillor Watkin explained the difference between the council's capital budget, to be spent on capital projects such as the works to the top of the town and on new

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equipment for play areas. However, the revenue budget was being cut which meant that day to day expenditure had to be cut.

Councillor Collett commented that it was a very emotional situation and due to government cuts the council was being forced to make a decision it did not like. However, the APGs were staying open unlike in other areas of London. Play facilities were one of the top priorities in the citizen's survey and the current APG equipment was old and tired. The APG would be kept and would be open with new equipment which would fit into the natural environment; it would not be built on.

The Managing Director highlighted that financially over the last five years the council had had to produce efficiency savings of £4.5m. This process had led to the council reviewing every type of service it provided and assessing how it could be delivered differently to save money. There were no longer any decisions the council could make that did not involve difficult choices. In relation to APGs, if they were not part of reducing costs at this point, the council would have to look at other services e.g., housing, leisure centres, environmental health inspection. There was a way of preserving the service through the report's recommendations for the next 20 years.

The Mayor concluded that the council would provide new facilities as well as continuing to offer free swim and gym and play activities in the holidays. These services were not provided by other councils. A public consultation would not change the reality; there was not a compromise on the way forward.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. approves the outline design plans for the investment of up to £1.25 million into the two Adventure Playgrounds
2. approves the outline timetable for the investment at Appendix B
3. notes the plans to communicate the investment and proposals to inform the Watford community of the plans for the future of the Adventure Playgrounds

CALL-IN OF KEY DECISIONS

To: The Head of Democracy and Governance

We the undersigned call-in the following key decision:-

Title: Investment in Watford's Adventure Playgrounds

Date Decision taken 04/07/16

Decision maker (Cabinet/Portfolio Holder/Officer) Cabinet

Reason for Call-In:

(e.g. cost/consultation/policy/lack of clarity/other options)

Please feel free to state reasons more fully on the back of this form

a lack of consultation for residents +
users of the Adventure playgrounds +
other options and alternatives.

NB: If no reasons are given the Overview and Scrutiny Committee WILL NOT consider your request for call-in

Signed:

1. Councillor

Nigel Bell

2. Councillor

Anne Taylor

3. Councillor

Mo Mull

Date:

06/07/16

Note: Call-In does not include

- Urgent decisions of the Cabinet
- Decisions referred by the Cabinet to Council
- Decisions previously Called-In

**PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH CALL-IN BY THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The protocol for dealing with call-in was agreed by the Co-ordination & Call-in Committee at its meeting on 10 July 2002 and amended by Council at its meeting on 19 July 2006. Following Council's agreement to a revised scrutiny structure at Annual Council on 25 May 2011, call-ins are considered at Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that as a convention the Vice-Chair, a member of the opposition, would chair this part of the meeting, or in his/her absence another member of the opposition on Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The following procedure will be adopted at the meetings where a call-in decision is being considered.

- The Member who requested the call-in to present their case (including if they have already given advance notice any members of the public to speak if appropriate).
- The Scrutiny Committee and the Mayor/portfolio holder or officer whose decision is being questioned can ask questions of the Members requesting the call-in.
- The Mayor/portfolio holder/ officer to present the case for the Cabinet to explain the reason behind the decision.
- The Scrutiny Committee and the Member requesting the call-in can then question the Mayor/portfolio holder/ officer.
- The Scrutiny Committee will then deliberate and make its decision.
- If the Scrutiny Committee ratifies the Cabinet decision it can be implemented immediately.
- If the Scrutiny Committee decides to refer the decision back to Cabinet for re-consideration it will be required to send written notice of the reasons to the Head of Democracy and Governance within 3 working days of the meeting who will forward it to the original decision taker and the Mayor.
- Cabinet must give not less than 7 working days notice to the Head of Democracy and Governance and the Chair and Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the date and time it intends to re-consider its decision.
- Any member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is entitled to attend the meeting at which Cabinet re-considers the decision, unless they have a personal and prejudicial interest in the matter being discussed.
- Cabinet will be free to take whatever decision it sees fit on re-consideration and the decision will not be open for further call-in except as provided in the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, paragraphs 13.11 – 13.17 of the Constitution (pages Dvi-7 – Dvi-8).
- A member who has a personal and prejudicial interest in the matter being called in will not be able to be a party to the call-in request, neither will they be able to participate in the call-in meeting.

