

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.

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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