

Cabinet Decision	 TOWER HAMLETS
29 November 2023	
Report of: Raj Mistry, Corporate Director, Communities	Classification: Unrestricted
Parks and Open Spaces Improvement Programme	

Lead Member	Cllr Iqbal Hossain, Cabinet Member for [Post]
Originating Officer(s)	Catherine Boyd
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes
Reason for Key Decision	Financial threshold and Significant impact on wards
Forward Plan Notice Published	03/11/23
Exempt information	N/A
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	Priority 4: Boost culture, business, jobs and leisure Priority 7: A Clean and Green Future

Executive Summary

This report seeks approval of capital funding to support priority capital investment projects for parks and open spaces, including some housing estate sites. The investment will enable the Parks Service to improve parks and open spaces, existing outdoor sporting facilities (and provide some new facilities) and enable playgrounds at a number of sites to be upgraded and have a minimum of 50% accessible play equipment.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Parks and Open Spaces Capital Programme and the allocation of Capital funding from s106. The estimated amount requested is £5,246,000 (including £627,000 reallocation of budget provision within the existing programme) and is subject to funding being confirmed through the Capital Governance Process.

2. Authorise the Corporate Director of Communities, after consultation with the Corporate Director of Resources (or their nominee) to agree and enter into the terms and conditions of any agreements required to implement the programme.
3. To note the health and safety consideration in Paragraph 3.10 and risk management section in 5.5.
4. To note the Equalities Impact Assessment considerations as set out in Paragraph 4.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 From 2018 to 2023, a Parks Capital Programme was in operation to improve facilities in parks and open spaces. This has been particularly important as COVID-19 increased public use of parks throughout the period. This report requires approval to extend this programme to ensure the continued improvement of parks and open spaces for residents.
- 1.2 The borough is poorly provided with open space and has one of the highest levels of population growth in London. As a consequence, it is essential that Tower Hamlets makes best possible use of the open space we have, and where possible, invests in improvements to enhance our parks, gardens and open spaces.
- 1.3 The Council's Local Plan (September 2017) recognises that Tower Hamlets is a place of extremes and contrasts. While relative poverty has declined, deprivation remains widespread, particularly in central and eastern parts. The health of people in Tower Hamlets is significantly worse than the London and England averages, as are levels of physical activity. Rates of childhood obesity are also significantly higher in the borough than the London and England averages.
- 1.4 At the same time, the overall provision of publicly accessible open space is low compared to other inner London boroughs, as well as being below national standards. Critically, Tower Hamlets is amongst the most densely populated boroughs in London. It is experiencing the highest levels of population growth and is projected to experience continued housing and population growth over the Plan period.
- 1.5 The protection and enhancement of open spaces is therefore a key priority for the Council, which is further set out in the Open Space Strategy, September 2017- 2027. The aims of the strategy are to Protect, Create and Enhance parks and open spaces in the borough. This commitment is reflected in the Council's capital programme, which includes substantial funding for improving the quality, usability and accessibility of existing public open spaces.

- 1.6 This programme addresses one of the key aims of the Open Space Strategy: Enhance - Improving the quality, usability and accessibility of existing publicly accessible open spaces.
- 1.7 The programme links to the following strategic priorities and Mayoral Pledges:
- Priority 4: Boost culture, business, jobs and leisure including - *Maintain awareness that many groups rely on parks and other Council facilities to play sport and audit these facilities to ensure they are meeting need.*
 - Priority 7: A Clean and Green Future - *Look after our parks and other open spaces, ensuring that they are accessible for the whole community.*

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Not invest in parks and open spaces, which would have a detrimental impact on communities. Residents would not benefit from increased and improved access to sports, play and recreational facilities that support childhood development, the reduction of childhood obesity and the improved health and wellbeing of all residents.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The Capital improvement programme is split into four programme strands with an estimated £5,246,000 required from s106 funds (including the reallocation of £627,000 from the current capital programme budget provision for Quality Parks).
- 3.2 Table 1: Programme strands and estimated allocations:

Programme	Amount
Improving Sports Facilities in Parks	£2,300,000
Inclusive Playgrounds Programme	£1,456,000
Housing Estates Improvement Programme	£705,000
Park Improvements (Quality Parks extension)	£785,000
TOTAL	£5,246,000

Sporting Facilities in Parks overview

- 3.3 This programme will enable the Council to further enhance sports facilities in parks and open spaces, improving the offer to local residents. A sports facilities audit is being carried out and although not completed, there is a shortage of Council managed sports facilities. This project would also enable the first natural turf cricket pitch to be installed in Victoria Park. External match funding is being sought for a number of projects.

3.4 The Mayor is committed to improving sports facilities, particularly adding new activities targeted at women and introducing minority sports. This is evident in the manifesto and pledge to establish a ‘Mayor’s Cup’ borough-wide tournament, beginning with football but expanding to other sports such as badminton and cricket, with an ambition to ‘harness competitive spirit, promote active healthy lifestyles, and celebrate sporting achievement’. As such, the mayor is seeking to install additional astroturf pitches and improve cricket provision in the borough.

3.5 It is recognised that many groups rely on parks and other Council facilities to play sports, and it is necessary these facilities meet residents’ needs. The service has undertaken condition surveys of paved kickabout areas to identify sites in need of investment. The service is submitting a ‘Playzones’ programme bid, which will enable the Council to secure up to 75% match funding for sites to be resurfaced. The Council would have to fund 25% and undertake community consultation.

3.6 In collaboration with the Lead Member of Culture & Recreation, the Parks Service has prioritised the following sites that are most in need of upgrades for inclusion in the PlayZones funding application. Please note that the list below may alter pending feedback from Sport England and feasibility report outcomes:

- Ropewalk Gardens
- Ravenscroft Park (noting this has recently been refurbished)
- Haileybury Youth Centre
- Limehouse Youth Centre
- Mile End Leisure Centre (tennis courts and netball)
- John Orwell Leisure Centre (tennis courts and netball)
- Middleton Green (noting this has been recently refurbished)

3.7 The indicative sites and estimated programme costs are provided in table 2 in paragraph 3.8. It should be noted that all projects will be subject to planning permission (where required) and feasibility studies.

3.8 Table 2: indicative sites and estimated programme costs

Improving Sports Facilities in Parks		
Site / project	Estimated capital s106 allocation	Estimated external match funding
Playzones match funding. Indicative sites (final sites subject to feasibility studies):	£500,000	Potentially releasing £1.275m external funding via London Sport.
Stebondale Pitch – 9 v 9 astroturf pitch proposed	£350,000	Potentially releasing c£800k

		external funding from Football Foundation for pitch improvements.
King Edward Memorial Park 9 v 9 astroturf pitch proposed	£1,000,000	NA
Cricket practice nets at Millwall Park and Stepney Green Park, and natural turf cricket pitch at Victoria Park	£200,000	Potentially releasing £200k in external funding
Project Management and fees	£250,000	NA
TOTAL	£2,300,000	

Inclusive Playgrounds

- 3.9 This programme will improve the quality, safety and accessibility of parks, which will lead to an improved offer to all children and families, and reduced expenditure from general reactive maintenance budgets. Without this investment, as play equipment reaches its end of life, it will be removed and not replaced.
- 3.10 This programme is driven by health and safety and equality considerations. The sites identified have been chosen based on priority of improvements required against condition surveys and inspection reports and in line with the Parks Play Inspection procedure.
- 3.11 The programme will improve the quality and accessibility of parks across the borough, particularly those in areas with highest need and will include a minimum of 50% of accessible play equipment in parks and open spaces to support childhood development.
- 3.12 The indicative sites and estimated programme costs are provided in table 3 in paragraph 3.13. It should be noted that all projects will be subject to planning permission (where required) and feasibility studies.
- 3.13 Table 3: indicative sites and estimated programme costs

Inclusive Play	
Site / project	Estimated capital s106 allocation
Vallance Gardens	£100,000
Gosling Gardens	£100,000
Ropewalk Gardens Playground	£200,000
Bethnal Green Gardens Playground	£250,000
Mile End Playground interactive water feature	£500,000
Brickfield Gardens -refurbish the playground and install a new outdoor gym	£150,000

Project management and fees	£156,000
TOTAL	£1,456,000

Housing Estate Improvements

- 3.14 This programme will improve the quality, safety and accessibility of open spaces within five housing estates, which will lead to an improved offer to all children and families.
- 3.15 The sites identified will provide new play equipment for residents, a minimum of 50% of which will be inclusive. There will also be some improvements to gym equipment and general upgrades to some of the sites.
- 3.16 The Housing Team will be responsible for the associated revenue maintenance costs and safety inspections once the sites have been returned post-improvement works.
- 3.17 The indicative sites and estimated programme costs are provided in table 4 in paragraph 3.18. It should be noted that all projects will be subject to planning permission (where required) and feasibility studies.
- 3.18 Table 4: indicative sites and estimated programme costs

Housing Estate Improvements (former Tower Hamlets Homes estates)	
Site / project	Estimated capital s106 allocation
Chicksand Ghat (needs resurfacing and lighting)	£100,000
Kingward House (refurbish play area)	£150,000
Royal Mint Park	£100,000
Tarling Estate (gym, potentially also some playground upgrades)	£80,000
Trinidad House (playground upgrade)	£50,000
Will Crooks Estate	£150,000
Project management and fees	£75,000
TOTAL	£705,000

Park Improvements (Quality Parks)

- 3.19 This programme addresses one of the key aims of the Open Space Strategy: Enhance - Improving the quality, usability and accessibility of existing publicly accessible open spaces.
- 3.20 The indicative sites and estimated programme costs are provided in table 5 in paragraph 3.21. It should be noted that all projects will be subject to planning permission (where required) and feasibility studies.
- 3.21 Table 5: indicative sites and estimated programme costs

Park Upgrades (Quality Parks)		
Site / project	Estimated capital s106 allocation	Estimated external match funding
Shandy Park	£500,000	NA
Alton Street Open Space	£100,000	NA
Pennyfields Open Space	£100,000	NA
Project management and fees	£85,000	NA
TOTAL	£785,000	

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, in the exercise of its functions, to have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 4.2 The Council's Open Space strategy recognises the challenges that high population growth, high demand for housing and reduced public sector resources present for the provision and maintenance of publicly accessible open space; as well as the important role that access to green space plays in promoting health and wellbeing. Given the limited opportunities there are for creating new open space, the protection and enhancement of existing open space is of crucial importance.
- 4.3 The Parks and Open Spaces Capital Improvement Programme will provide all residents with increased access to high quality play, sports and recreation facilities.
- 4.4 The improvements resulting from the programmes will increase the quality and range of recreational facilities for children, young people and families and good quality open space is particularly important for lower income groups.
- 4.5 The Inclusive Play Programme will increase the amount of inclusive play equipment in parks and open space with a minimum of 50% of accessible play equipment being installed.
- 4.6 The Improving Sports Facilities in Parks Programme will increase the number of sporting facilities available to residents and improve existing facilities. A sports facilities audit is currently being undertaken. However, the Council's Open Space Strategy, based on modelling, identified that shortfalls of outdoor provision for football, 3G pitches, cricket, rugby union and hockey will increase as a result of population growth. Increased and improved provision will increase access for all residents and will, working in partnership with local sporting providers and national sporting bodies as part of the external funding that this capital programme will enable the Council to access, specifically lead to increased participation of underrepresented groups including women and girls.

Governance route

- 4.7 It is noted for a scheme to be included in the Council's Capital Programme it will need to progress through the Capital Governance Process. Funding Sources are identified by the Financial Assessment Group as part of this process.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications
- Consultations
- Environmental (including air quality)
- Risk Management
- Crime Reduction
- Safeguarding
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

5.2 Best Value Implications

The Green Team and Parks budgets are currently only able to address day-to-day reactive maintenance and high priority health and safety works. Therefore, these larger improvement and enhancement projects require additional capital funding to be provided. This investment will alleviate revenue budget pressures.

The budget will be monitored closely and reported on a monthly basis. If there are forecast overspends in excess of the tolerance boundary of 10%, they will be reported in accordance with standard reporting. Monthly highlight reporting will assist in ensuring that projects will be regularly monitored against quality, cost and timeframe. Any larger projects will have a built-in contingency of at least 10% or as appropriate due to the nature of the project.

The Council's procurement procedures will be adhered to ensure best value.

5.3 Consultations:

The programme features engagement with local stakeholders to ensure park improvements address the needs of residents. Resident and stakeholder involvement will help to increase local ownership of the park/ site in question, fostering community cohesion and ensuring that parks meet the needs of the local communities. Engagement will be done through onsite face to face consultation with park users, in conjunction with local user groups and national sporting bodies, resident tenant's associations, Friends groups and other interest groups. In addition, for projects that require planning permission, there is a statutory public consultation process. During any such

consultation period, the public can review proposed plans and make written representations about the proposal.

5.4 Environmental:

As part of the planning process for higher impact projects, biodiversity net gain will need to be considered as part of the planning application. Improved local facilities and amenities will encourage residents to walk or cycle to their local facilities, reducing vehicle use.

5.5 Risk Management:

Risks will be identified and reported to the project team, mitigations will be put in place, and risks will be properly monitored in line with the Council's risk management procedure. Issues will be extracted from highlight reporting and raised with the programme board for resolution.

Financial risk: the cost of the scheme is set at an early stage, and there are risks that costs may increase as the schemes are developed in detail, including through feasibility studies. All efforts will be made to ensure the costs are controlled, however in the instance that a significant change in plan, and consequently cost emerges during the scheme development, updated information will be provided for consideration by the AMCD board. Works will be procured competitively via the Council's RFQ system or via established frameworks.

Revenue budget pressures: the sports improvement programmes, including installation of new astroturf, Playzones and cricket facilities, will have revenue implications. Business modelling for covering maintenance and operational costs will be undertaken with some of the amenities generating income through pitch hire fees. All fees and charges will be agreed by Cabinet.

Project delays: there are inherent risks to the delivery of projects that could result from supply chain issues, planning permission or issues identified from feasibility studies and site assessments. Project management and works specification/ supervision will be undertaken by the Cultural Capital Delivery Team. Parks and Open Spaces will be the client. Monitoring and reporting will be by means of highlight reports from which scheme data will be extracted by Cultural Capital Delivery team for dashboard reporting, copied to the Capital Delivery Team using the agreed format for reporting through the Council's capital governance arrangements. Through this process potential risks to the delivery of projects will be identified early to minimise delays or increased costs.

Work not of satisfactory quality: works will be overseen by the Cultural Capital Delivery team, who will oversee site works and ensure works are completed to a satisfactory standard. All furniture or other equipment to be installed in line with the appropriate British Standard and inspected before handover.

Health and safety considerations: the Inclusive Play improvement programme will enable the Council to replace old equipment that is nearing end of use. The Parks Service, and Green Team, have an operating procedure through which regular safety inspections of play equipment is undertaken. As part of this risk management process, there is an annual external inspection survey and every three years there is an external condition report. Through this risk management process, the Parks Service has identified a number of sites which will be upgraded through the capital programme.

5.6 Crime Reduction

Upgrades to parks will help to reduce anti-social behaviour. Generally, the improvements will encourage more use of the sites by the general public, which will help make spaces feel safer to use by women, children, older and vulnerable residents.

5.7 Safeguarding:

There are no specific safeguarding issues attached to the capital delivery programme.

5.8 Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment:

Contractors will not manage sensitive data held by the Council. They are responsible for compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 (SI 2003/2426) via the terms and conditions of the contract award.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 This report is seeking approval for the Parks and Open Spaces Capital Programme and the allocation of Capital funding from s106 to fund it. The estimated amount requested is £5,246,000. £4,619,000 of this will be funded from s106 funds available and unallocated within the existing approved capital programme. The remaining £627,000 will be funded via a budget virement to reallocate s106 monies currently committed within the approved Parks programme, Quality Parks project budget. Post Cabinet approval the projects will need to have gone through the Council's capital governance process before spend is incurred.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 Financial contributions may be secured through a s106 agreement if such contributions are necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; directly related to the development; and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development. S106 agreements entered into by the Council ordinarily contain confirmation from all signatories that these tests have been met. Any resulting spend of financial obligations collected pursuant to a s106 agreement must be spent in accordance with the terms of the s106 agreement in question. It is understood that a preliminary check has

indicated that the s106 monies can be used for the purposes specified in the report. If there is any doubt on a particular project this should be checked with legal and finance prior to monies being utilised.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE.

Appendices

- NONE.

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE.

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A