

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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| DECISION |
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meeting date: TUESDAY, 25 MAY 2021
 title: PLAY AREAS
 submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
 principal author: MARK BEVERIDGE, HEAD OF CULTURAL AND LEISURE SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To outline details about the Council's play areas, together with a proposal for improving two of the sites which the Council owns and manages.
- 1.2 To seek approval for an increase to the budget for the Play Areas Capital Programme budget of £62,660 for 2021/22 due to funding for two specific sites where S106 funding has been received.
- 1.3 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
- Corporate Priorities – To ensure a well-managed Council providing efficient services based on identified customer needs.
 - Community Objectives – To help make people's lives healthier and safer.
 - Other Considerations – Encourage the development of new artists.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council owns and manages 18 play areas across the borough, they range in size from large areas such as The Clitheroe Castle and Kestor Lane sites to very small ones such as Colthirst, Clitheroe. Much of the equipment stock in them is quite old having been in place for several years.
- 2.2 The Council currently has a capital programme budget for Play Area Improvements as shown below, covering:

| Originally relating to: | 2021/22 Budget £ | 2022/23 Budget £ | 2023/24 Budget £ | 2024/25 Budget £ | Total for Current Capital Programme £ |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Play Area Improvements – In Year Allocation | 40,000 | 45,000 | 45,000 | 46,000 | 176,000 |
| Play Area Improvements for 2020/21 <i>(moved to 2021/22 at the time of setting the revised estimate for 2020/21)</i> | 40,000 | | | | 40,000 |
| Play Area Improvements for 2019/20 <i>(Unspent slippage from the 2019/20 financial year)</i> | 16,500 | | | | 16,500 |
| Total Resources Available for Play Area Improvements | 96,500 | 45,000 | 45,000 | 46,000 | 232,500 |

- 2.3 This budget provides for small scale improvements to some play areas each year, once ad hoc equipment replacement which arising from, maintenance and general wear and tear, plus the impact of vandalism are dealt with.
- 2.4 The play areas are well used; any injury arising from their use can result in potential insurance claims. The Council inspects on a monthly basis and the insurers annually. The Council as owner and operator, has a duty of care to ensure the play areas are safe and replace, repair or remove worn out or broken equipment.
- 2.5 When the opportunity arises, s106 funding is sought from developers to improve a Council play area, because generally the play areas which a developer locates on their housing estates are limited in size and scope. As a result of this the Council will be able to improve both Longridge Kestor Lane this year and the Castle site.
- 2.6 S106 funding has been received for this purpose and this work will need to be added to the council's Capital Programme budget for play areas, with £30,000 towards the Longridge Kestor Lane site (in addition to existing capital budget for this work) and £32,660 towards the Clitheroe Castle site.
- 2.7 An additional capital programme budget approval is therefore sought as part of this report for a total of £62,660.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 It is not possible to have a strategic replacement programme currently for play area equipment, because annually it is unknown what sum will be left after the essential maintenance elements have been dealt with. For example, at Proctors Field, Whalley, a rope bridge element of one of the main play pieces must be replaced because of vandalism and wear and tear. That cost alone is around £3k plus vat.
- 3.2 The approximate value of all the existing equipment in the 18 play areas including the safety surfacing is £950k.
- 3.3 Following a recent issue with Whalley Woodland Play Area, a review of the maintenance and inspection regime has been undertaken. That case highlighted shortcomings in an inspection system that had been unchanged for many years.
- 3.4 The play equipment is only one element of the cost of providing the play areas. The safety surface adds a significant cost to any play area, as a rule of thumb the surface will add between 50% - 75% of the cost of the play piece to install from scratch, with ongoing maintenance costs that are sometimes amplified as a result of vandalism.
- 3.5 Most of the play areas would benefit from investment and fortunately this year there is an opportunity to improve the main sites in Clitheroe and Longridge as a result of s106 contributions for both totalling £62,660. The scope for the other sites is dependent on the availability of capital budget in year after allowing for other reactive works. Alternatively, a scheme specific capital bid could be submitted for a future capital programme and this would be considered against what other priorities the Council faces for the budget available at that time. This would give a new capital programme for play areas as shown below:

| Originally relating to: | 2021/22 Budget £ | 2022/23 Budget £ | 2023/24 Budget £ | 2024/25 Budget £ | Total for Current Capital Programme £ |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Play Area Improvements – In Year Allocation | 40,000 | 45,000 | 45,000 | 46,000 | 176,000 |
| Play Area Improvements for 2020/21 <i>(moved to 2021/22 at the time of setting the revised estimate for 2020/21)</i> | 40,000 | | | | 40,000 |
| Play Area Improvements for 2019/20 <i>(Unspent slippage from the 2019/20 financial year)</i> | 16,500 | | | | 16,500 |
| Proposed Additional Approval for Longridge Kestor Lane Site | 30,000 | | | | 30,000 |
| Proposed Additional Approval for Clitheroe Castle Site | 32,660 | | | | 32,660 |
| Total Resources Available for Play Area Improvements | 159,160 | 45,000 | 45,000 | 46,000 | 295,160 |

3.6 It is proposed to put both the Clitheroe and Longridge sites together to form one tender package, so that the work would be undertaken by one supplier. The intention is to call off an existing framework agreements if possible (these are lists of companies which have been already been approved to be on public sector buying groups). The rationale being that the Council will achieve better value for money from one supplier and a higher play value as a result.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – The council currently has a budget of £232,500 available for investment in play area improvements over the four years to 2024/25. The capital programme is developed using a 'bidding' process where schemes are submitted by Heads of Service and are then considered together against council priorities and available resources.

Additional S106 monies have been received towards the improvement projects at Clitheroe and Longridge and the proposed additional budget of £62,660 towards these schemes would be fully funded from these S106 monies. In respect of the Longridge Kestor Lane scheme, there are also other existing resources in the capital programme for this scheme.

- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Council has a duty to ensure that the play areas are safe for use, this means equipment must be repaired, replaced or removed depending upon the budget available at the point the equipment is deemed unsafe, and could be held liable were someone to be injured as a result of unsafe play areas and/ or equipment.
- Political – Play areas are a popular amenity for residents who invariably involve the Ward Councillors when they feel there is an issue to be addressed.

- Reputation – Play areas are a key part of many communities and especially following the various lockdown periods, their use has become even more significant. Our experience after removing equipment from the Whalley Woodland site and the failure of a piece of equipment at Proctors Field, shows clearly how the Council’s reputation can be impacted by the state of our play areas.
- Equality & Diversity – The service generally provides equal opportunity to all sectors of the community, although more equipment specifically designed for disabled children would be welcomed in every play area.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Although there is little doubt that there is room for improvement in our play areas to improve their play value, even a substantial capital programme would only address the regular pressure on the annual repair and maintenance budget. However, officers will continue to explore ways of getting better value from available resources.

6 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 6.1 Note the report.
- 6.2 Approve the additional capital budget of £30,000 in respect of Longridge Kestor Lane and £32,660 in respect of Clitheroe Castle Site for the 2021/22 Capital Programme and refer this to Policy and Finance Committee for final approval.
- 6.3 Authorise the Director of Community Services to procure new play area equipment as detailed above for play areas at Kestor Lane, Longridge and Clitheroe Castle playground, Clitheroe.

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