

3 October 2019		ITEM: 7
Cleaner, Greener & Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Park Improvement Programme Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Jahur Ali, Recreation & Leisure Services Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Daren Spring, Assistant Director, Street Scene and Highways.		
Accountable Director: Julie Rogers, Director of Environment and Highways		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

In July 2017 CGS O&S Committee received a Clean it, Cut it Update report which included an appendix entitled '*Parks, Play and Open Space Improvement Plan Phase 1,*' The Committee requested updates of progress in relation to the improvement of parks, play and open spaces in Thurrock.

Thurrock is bucking the trend with investment in parks, at a time when nationally it is being reported that there is insufficient investment in parks, despite the important health and wellbeing benefits this brings to local communities.

Investment in our parks is complimented by the Active Parks programme, which was designed to encourage residents to "get out, get active and enjoy Thurrock's parks and open spaces."

The Park Improvement Programme identified 11 priority parks across the borough requiring investment over a three-year period. A programme of community consultation and stakeholder engagement aimed to ensure the parks are improved in line with local priorities, increased usage and encourage exercise and activity.

This report highlights progress to date.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
 - 1.1 Cleaner, Greener & Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to note progress of the Parks Improvement Programme.**
- 2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 The council allocated funds to improve the provision of parks, play and open spaces in Thurrock across a three year programme, £500,000 in 2017/18, £725,000 in 2018/19 and £125,000 in 2019/20.
- 2.2 The programme was specifically intended to support the Council's priorities of:
- a) To "promote and protect our clean and green environment"
 - b) The Health and Well-being Plan objective of 'creating outdoor spaces that make it easy to exercise and be active'.
- 2.3 The first phase of the project identified a robust methodology to establish priority for investment. The second phase was a more detailed review of the areas identified and a rolling programme of individual plans developed for the sites prioritised. In some instances, where simple and immediate improvements could be made, they have been. In other areas where redesign is required, plans continue to be developed and consulted upon.
- 2.4 As previously outlined to CGS O&S, cross service Officers reviewed the approach and developed a methodology for prioritising investment in the parks and open spaces based on the following criteria:
- Quality and value findings from the Active Place Parks and Open Space needs assessment
 - Parks and Open Space public consultation
 - Residents survey
 - Health data
 - Known operational requirements and issues
 - Areas of Vandalism and Anti-Social behaviour
 - Health and Safety Issues
 - Physical Activity Levels (Adults)
 - Deprivation
- 2.5 Where significant works are required they are scheduled, where possible, for the winter and early spring when parks are less busy.
- 2.6 Below are illustrations of some of the conditions seen in play areas prior to the commencement of the investment programme.



2.7 Improvements have been made in Dilkes Park. Following a comprehensive consultation and design process with local Councillors, residents, community forum and other stakeholders, the key requirement identified was to improve fencing, lighting and footpaths. The fencing was completed in spring 2019 and the other works will take place during the winter, when the park is quieter.

2.8 The improvement works were complemented by a range of activities by the Active Parks team. This enabled a positive community spirit around the park and further dialogue on other long-term improvements that need to take place. Please see pictures below



2.9 Prior to any works commencement in the parks, the team ensure that the community are consulted, work closely with local friends of groups, and inform the local Councillors and other stakeholders.

2.10 Due to health and safety issues, identified through routine monitoring of the parks, the 30-year-old Log world play equipment at Horndon Recreation ground was removed. The Active Park team prioritised the park, working tirelessly to ensure this project was fast tracked. With the support of the local forum the new play equipment was installed in time for the children to enjoy it during the school summer holidays. Local school children submitted over 200 designs and their ideas were integrated within the final scheme.

Residents and visitors at the opening also enjoyed a range of activities including a sports day, as part of the Active Parks summer programme.

Well done and thank you to all involved, who made the event special for the community and involving local schoolchildren within the design process.



2.11 Similar to Horndon, a consultation with community groups/young people and local residents informed the location of new play equipment for Purfleet. Instead of investing in replacing the damaged equipment within Spiderfield Park, there was overwhelming support to improve the small play areas within the Garrisons estate at Marine Court, Saladin Drive and River Court.

2.12 At Gobions Park the entrance gates were replaced. The Big Project at Gobions Park is a new skate park that will replace the old one that was vandalised and burnt. Working with the Friends of Gobions Park, a consultation was completed to identify the priorities for the new skate park and other improvements required within the park. The Active Park Team also involved a representative of the Friends of Gobions Park on the procurement panel to ensure they were involved in selecting a contractor who could deliver on their aspirations. The new skate park will be completed by December 2019.



2.13 The parks have seen improved safety surfacing beneath play equipment. This was one of the key areas requiring attention to bring unsafe equipment back into safe use. Please see below pictures of areas that have been improved from Grays Town Park and Aveley Rec.



- 2.14 In addition to the 11 parks that have seen improvement, the council have supported community groups applying for funding to improve parks that have not been prioritised. The council has supported Grays Beach Riverside Park with the play equipment and safety surfacing within the Tot's Corner area of the park. Grays Phoenix community group successfully secured funding from CEDF to develop a new toddler's play area along the Wharf riverfront, along with two new outdoor gym areas to enable people to exercise and stay fit.
- 2.15 A timeline of the 11 parks improvement activity is attached in Appendix 1.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Park Improvement programme has shown a greater and wider community impact when new equipment is installed, Community groups have reported a reduction in anti-social behaviour, they feel that their parks are much nicer environments to take their families to and there are spaces which can improve their health and wellbeing.
- 3.2 The Park Engagement Officers have a pivotal role to play in the consultation of the development of the parks being improved by the inclusion of community groups, friends off park groups, sports clubs and local forums as well as local residents and children, helping to shape new play equipment required and the overall park improvements. Part of the consultation will ensure access for all and the ability to maximise use of our open spaces for recreation and leisure and form part of everyday health and wellbeing for our residents. A more detailed report of the Park and Engagement Officers was considered by CGS O&S on 4th July 2019.
- 3.3 Thurrock are bucking the national trend with no park closures and continued investment in our 64 play areas within Thurrock, which are inspected weekly. A continuous review of the equipment is required, to ensure when equipment reaches end of life there are plans in place to refresh and or replace as appropriate.
- 3.4 Due to soil composition some parks require re-laid footpaths, which are cracked due to movement of the clay soil, this is essential to ensure accessibility. Further investment will be required to improve all the footpaths within parks to ensure they can be used safely by people of all abilities.
- 3.5 A survey was commissioned to assess the play value of each park and the life expectancy of the equipment. Most of the parks within Thurrock will need play equipment replaced over the next 4-8 years; further funding bids will be submitted to ensure this work can take place.
- 3.6 It is vital that investment is phased to ensure a timely replacement programme can be undertaken and equipment is replaced naturally and prior to health and safety concerns being raised.

3.7 Park improvements, sports, recreation and leisure form part of the Health and Wellbeing agenda, with a key objective to encourage increased activity in our open spaces and parks. Park Engagement Officers will continue to work with local communities, sports groups and forums to provide training and support to enable more community led activity going forward. The sports and leisure strategy is currently being refreshed and will come to CGS later in the municipal year.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 To inform members of the Greener Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee of progress to date.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 N/A

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 Please see section 2.2

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rosie Hurst**
Interim Senior Management Accountant

This project is funded as part of an overall £1.3m capital programme scheme.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Acting Head of Law, Assistant Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities

This programme positively affects members of the Community in that activities are free and accessible to all members of the community. This community led approach helps to bring communities together and assist with cohesion.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked after Children)

This programme supports Section 17 activity to drive down ASB and support the community. The staff will work closely with enforcement colleagues to report and tackle negative issues.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

Cleaner Greener Update to Cleaner, Greener & Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee report 13 July 2017, 4 July 2019

9. **Appendices to the report**

Appendix 1 – Park Improvement Schedule

Report Author:

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