

Queens Park Improvements Project

Community Services Committee Tuesday, 23 November 2021

Report of: Executive Head of Communities

Purpose: Information

Publication status: Open

Wards affected: Queens Park Ward

Executive summary:

- This report is to inform Committee about the proposed Queens Park Improvements Project
 - The project arises from the actions within the Open Spaces Strategy, which was adopted by this Committee in March this year.
 - The proposed improvements will also support the Council's Strategic Priorities, for example the ambition to improve opportunities for health and wellbeing, build resilience to flooding and increase biodiversity.
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This report supports the Council's priority of:

- Creating the homes, infrastructure and environment we need
- Becoming a greener, more sustainable District

Contact officer Kate Haacke Asset Management Specialist
KHaacke@tandridge.gov.uk –

Recommendation to Committee:

That the Committee supports the progression of the Queens Park Improvements Project and notes its aims, objectives and draft timetable.

Reason for recommendation:

The Community Services Committee is responsible for formulating and reviewing the Council's policies in respect of the leisure, cultural, environmental health and amenity needs of the District including the provision and maintenance of leisure facilities including formal parks, pavilions and open spaces. Officers seek the Committee's support to take forward the Queens Park Improvements Project, which will:

- Build resilience to flooding in Caterham on the Hill
- Improve biodiversity in the park
- Improve the facilities within the park

Introduction and background

- 1 The Open Spaces Strategy (OSS) was adopted in March 2021. It sets out how the Council will manage and improve open spaces across the district until 2025 and identifies priority actions for each year of the Strategy. The District-Wide Objectives of the Open Spaces Strategy were:
 - To encourage a diverse network of sustainable open space of high quality which helps fulfil the health and wellbeing needs of those living and working within the district
 - To protect, manage and enhance our open spaces for the benefit of biodiversity and to mitigate the effects of climate change
 - Explore opportunities to make more of our open spaces through commercialisation, educational and cultural events
 - Ensure equipment and grounds are of high quality, safe, well maintained and suitable for its users
 - Work with local communities for opportunities to manage, improve and deliver appropriate open spaces
2. In addition to District-wide actions, there were actions for each open space within the control of the Council. The action for Queens Park was:

“To upgrade Queens Park (Field in Trust) and investigate improvements.”
3. The improvements to be investigated were wide-ranging and are set out in Appendix A.

4. In addition to investigating the possible improvements that were recommended in the Open Spaces Strategy, Officers would like to ensure that councillors are aware that:
 - The playground equipment at Queens Park is nearing the end of its life and requires replacement
 - Surrey County Council's Flood Resilience Project recognises that Queens Park lies at the top of the water catchment and that storing excess surface water in Queens Park during heavy rainfall, would be a significant contribution to improving flood resilience in Caterham on the Hill. Recent flooding events occurred in winter 2013/14, June 2016, Dec 2019 and Feb/March 2020 and flood risk modelling identified more than 200 properties at risk. The aspiration for the design solution is to create storage for around 1500-2000m³ for a 1:30 year event. The aspiration is to remove the above volume of water from the downstream network, and some infiltration will be feasible, together with some flow control back into the sewer network.

Next Steps, Consultation & Project Programme

5. In order to take forward this important work, Officers have appointed landscape architects and a drainage engineer who will help design some options that can be shared with the community. Officers are aware that Queens Park is an extremely well-loved park, and that any changes will need the support of the local community. To that end, officers met with local ward and parish councillors in July 2021 and carried out a pre-design engagement exercise with the local community in August and September 2021. The engagement was a very open exercise (see Appendix D). The aim of the exercise was to find out what is most important to local people and groups who regularly use the park. The findings of this early engagement are shared in Appendix E. The landscape architect is now progressing initial design options that will be shared with councillors and the local community in due course, and subject to a more formal consultation. The proposed timing for this consultation is early 2022 (estimated Jan/Feb/March). Other consultations are being procured to assist, as required, e.g. cost consultants and an architect. A DRAFT project programme is shown below:

Inception Meeting & Site visit	June 2021
Councillor initial pre-design meeting	July 2021
Initial engagement with local community	Aug & Sept 2021
Initial design work	Oct, Nov, Dec 2021
Meeting with councillors – early design work	Dec 2021
Public consultation/engagement on options	Jan/Feb/March 2022
Refine options	March/April 2022
Report and recommendations to community services committee	April/May 2022
Planning application	May/June 2022
Funding applications	April/May/June 2022
Construction	2022/23

Project Finance & Resources

6. The budget for early design work is £50,000. This is being paid for from the parks and open spaces capital works budget. We are very pleased to report that Surrey County Council are contributing £20,000 to this important work.
7. We have assumed that total project costs are likely to be in the region of £1m. However, this is subject to design and subject to the availability of funding. Finance for the works element of the project will need to be sought via grant funding applications. Potential sources of funding include the Community Infrastructure Levy, Surrey County Council (for the flood attenuation element), National Lottery Heritage or Other National Lottery Funds, Surrey County Council's Your Fund and so forth. External grant applications tend to score more highly if an element of match funding can be demonstrated. TDC could demonstrate match funding by committing the equivalent of the amount that would be required for the refurbishment of the playground.
8. Officers will need to advise on the ongoing maintenance cost implications of all design options, as the project progresses
9. Staff resource is key to the success of the project. At present the project is being driven the Asset Management Team with the assistance of colleagues in Parks, Strategy & Finance.

Income generation

10. The Council provide services which keep our parks open and accessible for public enjoyment. These services are provided at considerable cost, given the need for regular grass cutting, hedge trimming, landscaping, play equipment, tree surgery, building maintenance, footpath maintenance and so forth. Our parks and open spaces provide numerous public health, wellbeing and environmental benefits and the Council recognises the value that our parks service makes to these wider health benefits.

11. However, given ever tightening Local Authority budgets, it is important that we generate income where appropriate, to assist with the high cost of providing parks services and to help the Council to continue to provide a good quality parks service across the District.
12. Officers will, when evaluation the advantages and disadvantages of design options, take into account potential for revenue generation as one of the assessment criteria. Opportunities for revenue generation might include a café paying a market rate, hiring or letting a pavilion to an appropriate user, ensuring appropriate facilities are available for sports associations, who would pay an appropriate fee in return for the use of the space.

Key implications

Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

It should be noted that any financial implications to do with this report will be funded by the capital programme and/or grant funding we are to seek from third parties. It is not expected that significant revenue costs will be incurred.

Comments of the Head of Legal

The proposed infrastructure investment at Queens Park is needed to ensure that the basic infrastructure at the park is fit-for-purpose, whilst also enabling the park to develop and adapt to reflect the changing needs of the public and future tenants, recognising the importance of our critical green spaces. A range of contracts will need to be procured pursuant to delegated powers to undertake proposed works and Legal Services will need to be involved once appointments have been made.

Equality

Any improvements will need to carefully consider the impact on groups with protected characteristics. The OSS consultation included groups such as Age UK and Disability Forum. Appendix 4 of the OSS provided a list of requirements/suggestions that would help ensure Accessibility for All. These will be taken into account in the design of any improvements to Queens Park. And we will seek the views of groups such as Age UK and Disability Forum with respect to the specific proposals within this project.

Climate change

Parks and open spaces and blue spaces have a role to play in aiding the regulation of temperature, water flow, noise and air pollution. This is partly because trees & shrubs help to capture CO₂ and other pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide and particulates. Urban green and blue spaces can also reduce the 'Heat Island Effect' in built-up areas. For example, trees and woods can help to reduce midsummer temperatures in urban areas through shading and evaporative cooling from leaf surfaces. Green and blue spaces, including trees,

help absorb water and capture runoff from heavy storms both through the water absorbent effects of roots and soil. Our aspiration is that any improvements to Queens Park should have a positive impact on TDC's carbon footprint and should improve sustainability and biodiversity. For example, this might be achieved by:

- Planting more trees
- Replacing trees that are reaching the end of their life
- Creating new habitats e.g. as might be achieved if were to create a pond
- Supporting creation of wildlife corridors
- Improving park buildings in accordance with sustainability best practice e.g. maximising opportunities for rainwater harvesting and renewable energy use
- Utilising all of the above to help educate and inspire the public
- Considering and promoting active travel i.e. walking cycling to/from the park

Additionally, it is important to note that the possibility of creating storage capacity for surface water within Queens Park will improve our resilience to the impact of climate change.

Appendices

Appendix 'A' – Extract from the Open Spaces Strategy - Actions for Queens Park

Appendix 'B' – Photographs of surface water in the park

Appendix 'C' – Flood modelling

Appendix 'D' – Presentation from public engagement exercise

Appendix 'E' – Feedback from initial public engagement exercise

Background papers

TDC Open Spaces Strategy

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