

CABINET	DATE 21 October 2020	ITEM NO 10
TITLE £1m Parks Improvement Fund Investment	WARD (S) All	
CHIEF OFFICER Director of Communities & Environment	CABINET MEMBER Culture, Communities and Equalities	
DECISION CLASSIFICATION - Key - Non-exempt	FINAL DECISION To be made on the recommendations of this report	

1. **Decision required**

This report makes the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- 1.1 To approve the initial allocation of investment from the £1m parks improvement fund, that takes account of feedback from residents following a public consultation exercise.
- 1.2 To authorise the Lead Member (being the Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Equalities) to decide how potential overspends and or underspends are managed within the scheme of works, in order to allow works to progress efficiently and remove delays that would be caused by having to seek additional approval from Cabinet.

2. **Links to the Royal Greenwich high level objectives**

2.1 This report relates to the Council's agreed high-level objectives as follows:

- **A Healthier Greenwich** – To provide more opportunities for residents of the borough to be more active in our parks and open spaces, reducing the number of children and adults who are currently inactive and to provide a green environment that supports mental wellbeing
- **A Safer Greenwich** – Improve our parks and open spaces and local community facilities providing opportunities to divert young people away from crime and anti-social behaviour and re-landscaping areas to design out crime

- **A Great Place to Grow Up** – Provide good quality parks facilities that encourage families, young people, and adults to enjoy the natural environment, places for play, to socialise and play sport
- **A Cleaner Greener Greenwich** – Improve the natural environment, creating new wildflower and meadow areas, additional tree planting and wildlife habitats, that contribute to mitigating the effects of climate change and improve walking routes in our parks and open spaces
- **Economic Prosperity for All** – Local people working on regeneration and of facilities
- **A Great Place to Be** – Improve the quality of the parks environment and facilities that contribute positively to the quality of life for local residents
- **Strong Vibrant and Well-Run Borough** - Work to deliver greater value for money, maximize the impact of investments on the health/wellbeing and lives of the residents of the borough

3. **Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 3.1 To inform the Cabinet of the findings of the consultation with residents on the £1m parks improvement fund.
- 3.2 To provide officer recommendations for the initial allocation of investment from the £1m park parks improvement fund.

4. **Introduction and Background**

- 4.1 Council agreed at the meeting on the 26th February 2020 to invest £1m in the Royal Borough's Parks and Open Spaces as part of the Greener Greenwich theme. This funding is to be used for capital improvement projects in parks and open spaces.
- 4.2 Central government budgetary reductions have led to a reduction in hard infrastructure maintenance investment in the borough's parks over a number of years. This has happened in conjunction with an increased focus on environmental and biodiversity issues from the public. In addition, the importance of parks for the community has increased during the COVID pandemic and our parks and open spaces have seen increased levels of use.

Our parks are highly valued by most residents, especially those that don't live in properties with gardens.

- 4.3 The historic reduction in investment in parks has created a situation in a few parks where there are redundant and/or derelict facilities that need investment to remove or repurpose. Officers in the Directorate of Communities and Environment recognise the potential of disused toilets and other buildings in parks and are working with colleagues in the Directorate of Regeneration, Enterprise and Skills to try to agree how these buildings could be brought back into use – either by Council intervention or by disposing on a long lease to provide café and toilet facilities. Many of the buildings were closed as a result of anti-social behaviour in our parks and this must be factored into any proposals for buildings. It is also important that there are no revenue implications for any proposals. Despite the budget pressures that the Council has faced, we have worked hard to invest in our parks across the borough and generally our parks are good: the Council has worked hard with local residents and Friends of Parks Groups to secure Green Flag recognition (the nationally recognised gold standard for parks). Last year we increased the number from 12 to 13 Green Flag sites.
- 4.4 The Council agreed to consult with residents regarding how the £1m parks improvement investment should be allocated and between the 9th of July and 6th of August 2020 residents were consulted on their priorities for improvement and views regarding how the £1m investment should be spent. Due to Covid restrictions, this consultation mainly took the form of an online survey via the Council's website, but this received 2,609 responses which is one of the highest response rates the Council has received to a consultation exercise. More information on the consultation findings are included in section 8 and appendix 2 of this report.
- 4.5 Whilst £1m is a reasonably large sum of money, there is in excess of £1m investment required to parks infrastructure and this means the allocation of the funding needs to be prioritised.
- 4.6 Park Friends Groups have previously secured funding from the Greenwich Neighborhood Growth Funding and Ward Budget and officers have worked with groups on park improvements using S106 funding.

5. **Available Options**

- 5.1 Chief Officers in DC&E, PEOS Managers and officers in DRES have met with Councillor Khaireh, Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Equalities to discuss and develop the investment priorities.

Option 1:

Works in 11 park sites are proposed as priorities for initial investment from the £1m based on a combination of and balance between the factors below:

- Priorities identified by residents in the public consultation
- Priorities identified by the Greenwich Parks Forum and Park Friend Groups (key stake-holders)
- Indices of Multiple Deprivation and areas of higher deprivation
- Detailed parks management knowledge of park site conditions and facilities requiring investment
- A consideration of parks that have previously benefited from Council investment

Details of the initial proposed investment are provided in appendix I. This appendix also includes maps that shows where there has been investment in parks from S106, GNGF funding and the parks budgets in the last 5 years, sites where the £1m park improvement investment is proposed and are presented with indices of multiple deprivation in the background.

- 5.2 All of the project proposals fall under one of the key priorities from the public consultations such as basic facilities improvements (paths, steps, gates, railings etc) removal of redundant features, nature and wildlife, play areas and sports facilities. However, at present no project is proposed for heritage (which was another priority from the consultation) as other works required to improve the poor condition of elements of parks infrastructure are considered more of a priority at this stage.
- 5.3 Unfortunately it will not be possible with the funding available to respond to the priorities of all groups and residents.
- 5.4 In addition, a limited amount of funding may be allocated from the planned maintenance budget to carry out works to basic facilities like paths, walls and railings in parks that are selected as priorities for investment. S106 funding has also been secured for a small number of projects that will also support improvements.

5.5 Once quotes have been received (for the scheme of works), it is recommended that the Lead Member, the Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Equalities is given delegated authority by Cabinet to decide how potential overspends and or underspends are managed within the scheme of works. This will allow works to be progressed in a timely fashion and will remove delays that would be caused by having to seek additional approval from Cabinet.

5.6 **Option 2:**
Spend all the funding on one theme for e.g. sport in parks. Whilst this would help increase improvements to facilities relating to one aspect of the parks setting it would mean other themes have no funding and would not reflect the priorities identified by residents and officers. This option would also not help to tackle the issue of redundant/derelict facilities in parks.

6. **Preferred Option**

6.1 Option 1, to initially carry out the range of works in 11 park sites is preferred. Details of the initial proposed sites and type of works to receive allocation from the £1m parks investment are provided in appendix 1.

6.2 This option spreads the initial allocation from the investment across a number of park sites, whilst not spreading the funding too thinly and will make a significant difference to the quality of the environment at sites or park facilities that are currently in poor condition.

6.3 This option also has strong links with the priorities identified in the residents' consultation, from officers' professional assessments, demographics and indices of multiple deprivation, has considered where investment in parks has been made in the last 5 years and spreads the allocation of the funding across the priority themes identified from the consultation.

6.4 This option is also preferable as it starts to deal with the issue of removing redundant and derelict features and will make a noticeable difference to the parks where the investment is allocated.

6.5 Assigning the Lead Member with delegated authority to decide how potential overspends and or underspends are managed within the scheme of works, will allow works to progress efficiently and will remove delays that would be caused by having to seek additional approval from Cabinet.

7. **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 7.1 This initial allocation from the £1m investment funding is recommended as it takes account of residents views, officers professional assessments and consideration of demographics, indices of multiple deprivation, has considered where investment in parks has been made in the last 5 years and will improve the condition and quality of 11 park sites, located in 7 Wards, will improve the wilding and biodiversity in 8 sites and will allow the works to be commissioned and to begin in the current financial year.

8. **Consultation Results**

- 8.1 The Royal Borough received received 2,609 responses to its online consultation exercise. A summary of the public consultation findings is provided in appendix 2 and separated out in appendix 3 is a summary of park specific improvement suggestions extracted from the public consultation responses.
- 8.2 The public consultation confirmed how valuable residents consider our parks and open spaces, with 90% of respondents stating that they consider parks to be either valuable or very valuable.
- 8.3 Unfortunately, despite efforts by the Council's Communications Team to encourage responses from hard to reach groups, there was under representation in responses from BAME residents, men, and young people. The demographics of respondents can be found in appendix 2.
- 8.4 The Greenwich Parks Forum and Park Friend's groups are key stakeholders with an interest in the Borough's parks and open spaces and were consulted directly via meetings held on Zoom. A summary of the views of the Forum are also included in appendix 2.
- 8.5 Consultation feedback was also received from the Dementia Reference Group and Quaggy Waterways Action Group (QWAG).
- 8.6 The consultation identified key priorities for the public which included maintenance of facilities, nature and wildlife, removal of redundant features, improving play facilities, heritage and sports and fitness.
- 8.7 There were some priorities identified by residents that have not been included in the proposed projects and these include for example:

- Park Friends Groups, Greenwich Parks Forum and some residents expressed the wish for an ecology/ biodiversity officer. This has not been included because the £1m investment is for capital works and not officer revenue costs.
- Many residents identified a need for more parks maintenance staff to tackle ASB. This has not been included because the £1m investment is for capital works and not officer revenue costs.
- A need for additional public toilets was identified to allow residents to stay longer in parks. However, there is no additional revenue funding to clean and maintain additional toilets.
- Bin maintenance came out as a priority, probably due to the increased number of park users during COVID at the same time as a reduced number of maintenance staff. Since this, an anti-litter campaign has taken place, additional bins have been allocated and staff numbers have returned to normal. This has mainly addressed this issue.
- Cafés and kiosks were also identified as important but creation of new café and kiosks would use a large proportion of the £1m budget and it was considered more important to improve the condition of the current facilities before adding new.

9. **Next Steps: Communication and Implementation of the Decision**

- 9.1 Subject to Cabinet’s approval and after the decision call in period, DRES will then commence detailed surveys of the works to provide actual costs. Following review of actual costs by Councillor Khaireh and officers the initial works will be commissioned. Start date of most works will be subject to lead-in times following commissioning but meadow creation and tree planting projects can commence by PEOS following the decision call-in period.

10. **Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications**

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Legal including Human Rights Act	Cabinet is asked to: (1) approve the allocation of the £1m parks improvement fund, which takes account of feedback from residents following a public consultation exercise; and (2) authorise the Lead Member to decide how potential overspends and or underspends are managed within the scheme of works.	Eleanor Penn, Assistant Head of Legal Services 07/10/20

	<p>Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives the Council a general power of competence which can be exercised anywhere and in any way, provided that any action is in accordance with any restrictions applying to existing powers that are overlapped by the general power. The proposed action should be reasonable in all the circumstances, be taken in light of all material considerations and be a proper and prudent use of the authority's financial and other resources.</p>	
<p>Finance and other resources including procurement implications</p>	<p>Cabinet is asked to approve recommendations for the initial allocation of investment from the £1m parks improvement fund, that takes account of feedback from residents following a public consultation exercise. Cabinet is also asked to authorise the Lead Member, the Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Equalities to be provided with delegated authority to decide how potential overspends and/or underspends are managed within the scheme of works. This will allow works to progress efficiently and will remove delays that would be caused by having to seek additional approval from Cabinet.</p> <p>The one-off funding for Greener Greenwich Parks was agreed as part of 2020/21 Medium Term Financial Strategy Report in February 2020.</p>	<p>Joanne Stark Accountancy Business Change Manager 06/10/20</p>
<p>Equalities</p>	<p>There are no significant equality impacts identified from this report, although improving basic park facilities will improve access for residents with disabilities and provide improved accessible free park facilities for all</p>	<p>Robert Goring, PEOS Strategy & Development Manager 10/09/2020</p>

	residents, including those on low incomes.	
Environment and sustainability	The recommendations in this report include proposals to create additional meadow and conservation grass areas within parks and open spaces, restore/create wildlife ponds and plant more trees. These proposals will improve the biodiversity and provide new habitats for a range of species.	Robert Goring, PEOS Strategy & Development Manager 10/09/2020
Community safety	The landscaping and improvement to facilities at the initial sites recommended to receive funding will remove some redundant/derelict features that create the perception of uncared for and unsafe spaces. Soft landscaping works at Plumstead Gardens in particular will remove hidden spaces that are being used for drug dealing/taking and by sex workers.	Robert Goring, PEOS Strategy & Development Manager 10/09/2020
Health and Safety	Improvements to basic park facilities that are part of the works recommended by this report will improve the safety of park users. Companies commissioned by DRES to undertake the recommended works will be required to provide their, method statements, Risk and COSHH assessments and other relevant health and safety documentation and work in accordance with Health and Safety at Work legislation.	Robert Goring, PEOS Strategy & Development Manager 10/09/2020
Health and wellbeing	The improvements recommended in this report will improve the condition of parks facilities, improve the condition of paths (walking routes), create improved play spaces and improve the condition of	Robert Goring, PEOS Strategy & Development Manager

	<p>some sports/ancillary sports facilities. These improvements will provide residents with opportunities to be physically active and will also support positive mental well-being.</p>	<p>10/09/2020</p>
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11. **Report Appendices**

11.1 The following documents are to be published with and form part of the report:

- *Appendix 1: Proposed initial allocation from £1m parks improvement funding and previous and proposed investment maps*
- *Appendix 2: Summary of Public Consultation*
- *Appendix 3: Summary of Park Specific Improvement Suggestions from Public Consultation*

12. **Background Papers**

Item 12 Full Council report dated 26th February 2020.

The link to the Full Council meeting/documents is:

<https://committees.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/CalendarofMeetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/2049/Committee/81/Default.aspx>

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