



REPORT of DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY

to
**STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
24 NOVEMBER 2020 (SPECIAL MEETING)**

PROMENADE PARK GARDEN PLAY SCHEME

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members of the revised designs for the Play scheme proposed for Promenade Park, following public consultation as required by the Community Services Committee decision on 20 November 2018 (Minute No. 627 refers).
- 1.2 To seek Committee approval of the overall layout designs and to progress with procurement of a suitable contractor.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That the revised Garden Play area design proposals (attached at **APPENDICES A** and **C**) be agreed;
- (ii) That Officers proceed with procurement of all elements of the play site and associated works based upon this design via existing supplier Framework agreement;

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 Maldon District Council (MDC) received a £52,000 Section 106 (S106) payment from the development of Lightermans Place, Maldon in February 2017 to be used *“towards the improvement and enhancement of the Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) in Promenade Park”*.
- 3.1.2 Through internal application to the Capital budget programme, MDC assigned an additional £48,000 to improve the provision of accessible play in conjunction with the enhancement of the LEAP.
- 3.1.3 A report was submitted to the Community Services Committee meeting on 20 November 2018 with draft designs and seeking permission to proceed to Public Consultation (see **APPENDIX B**). Members agreed that recommendation to proceed.
- 3.1.4 Since the 2018 Committee decision - primarily due to changes in staff, the ‘Future Council’ process and latterly Covid-19 impacts - this project has effectively been “on

hold” with the capital budget commitment carried forward each year and reflected in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The S106 ‘clawback’ period runs until 2027, so it has not been at risk at any time.

3.1.5 Officers reviewed the project and Committee decision in April 2020, then re-visited the draft designs with the commissioned Landscape Architects in June.

3.1.6 Officers worked with the Landscape Architects and MDC Communications, Marketing and Engagement team to develop on site consultation materials and an online questionnaire for collating public responses.

3.1.7 The public consultation ran for the recommended six weeks from 14 August until 25 September 2020.

3.2 **Public Consultation feedback**

3.2.1 The public consultation included an interpretation design, artist impression and suggested play equipment ideas. A webpage on VisitMaldonDistrict is dedicated to the project and held the online form provided for feedback.

3.2.2 During the six weeks, 28 social media posts about the consultation were scheduled across the Councils various platforms (*Maldon District Council, VisitMaldonDistrict and MaldonPromPark, Twitter and Facebook*) Physical signs were positioned in the locality of the site within Promenade Park, to raise awareness amongst visitors / users alongside a standard press release.

3.2.3 The combined “reach” to the public was reported via the Social media analytics as over 30,000. Shares to other local pages and groups are in addition to this figure.

3.2.4 Questions were designed to give a mix of quantitative and qualitative feedback.

3.2.5 There were 67 completed feedback forms received. Almost all gave a level of detailed ‘open text’ answers and some also then followed up with emails and suggestions / photos / examples from other play sites they had visited and enjoyed (additional comments on social media were monitored for interest but are not included within the formal analysis of responses).

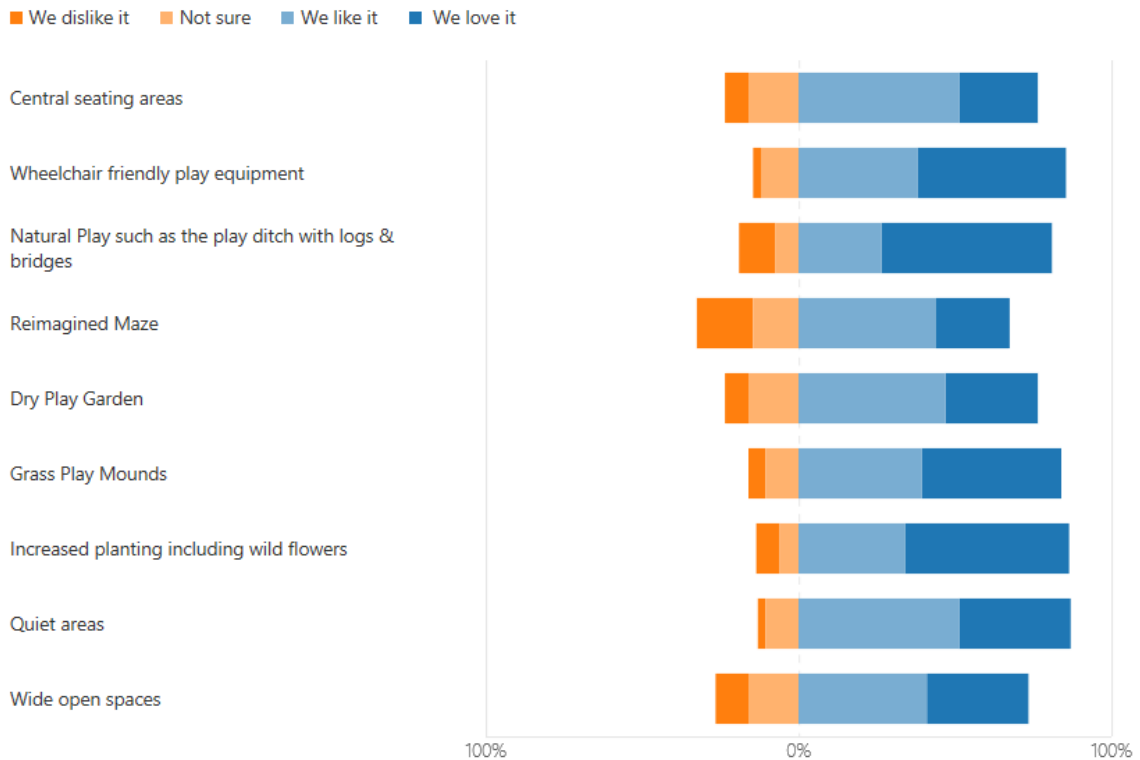
3.2.6 Overwhelmingly the public responses were positive, constructive and supportive of a project intended to improve and enhance this currently underutilised area of Promenade Park.

3.2.7 80% said “yes” to liking the overall designs (simple “yes / no” answer format).

3.2.8 When asked about elements of the design, all of them were positively received with every element response being either “we like it” or “we love it” (*see figure below from completed surveys*):

- Seating - 76.5%
- Wheelchair friendly - 85.3%
- Natural Play - 80.9% (*of which 54.4% 'love'*)

- Re-imagined Maze 67.6%
- Dry Play garden - 76.5%
- Grass play mounds - 83.8%
- Increased planting - 86.7% (*of which 52.9% 'love'*)
- Quiet Areas - 86.8%
- Open Spaces - 73.6%



3.2.9 An overview of the comments received is below (the detail of all the comments can be made available on request, however some responders included personal details in their responses which cannot be included in this report).

3.2.10 The points below are a summary of the thematic responses or concerns that responders expressed via the ‘open text’ answer options in the questionnaire, compiled and condensed from all the responses by the Countryside and Coast Manager.

3.2.11 General Clarifications:

- The existing early years play elements currently on the site will not be removed as part of this project. All aspects of the scheme are outside of this existing area with the accessible roundabout including in drawings as a point of reference.
- The whole project site will remain fenced and a dog-free area as it is currently.
- Existing mature trees within project area will remain except for the Cedar in the Millennium garden, the conifer Maze hedges and the ornamental shrub

planting in the wildlife garden. Established fruit trees within the current wildlife garden are also to be retained.

- The Coronation shelter building has been identified for refurbishment (subject to suitable funding) as part of a separate scheme of works and as such is not included within the scope of this project.

3.2.12 Thematic responses included in revised designs:

- Very strong support for focussing on Early Years. Many responses showed that the existing play site is highly valued *because* it allows safe play for very early/pre-school age children. Several comments also reflected that the Valley area is not as ‘play friendly’ for this age group.
- Inclusive and accessible play elements are also highly recognised and strongly supported.
- Requests / support for inclusion of ‘traditional’ play elements in the design too in the form of swings and slides.
- Removal of circular hedge as it presents a visual barrier (note: the circular shape retained as part of design, but planting beds now all low-level and not hedge species)
- Better use of entire open space was supported.
- Natural play, wildlife planting and sensory aspects all strongly supported.
- Additional seating required, not just centralised but to enjoy other aspects / be closer to children as they play in certain areas.
- Some responders advocated keeping the Maze as it currently is. There were a similar number that raised their concerns over the height of the hedge maze and child safety. Almost all those that wished to retain it as-is also indicated that the general users are older children / teens and adults – this reinforces officer opinion that the current maze is not appropriate for the target early years visitor audience.

3.2.13 Question six also asked respondees to indicate where they live according to three very broad categories: within Maldon & Heybridge = 70%, within Maldon District = 22%, and outside of Maldon District = 8%.

3.3 **Revised Garden Play scheme design proposal**

3.3.1 The draft design consulted upon is attached at **APPENDIX A**.

3.3.2 Detailed revisions to this design considering the feedback from the public consultation are set out within **APPENDIX C**, however the overall design remains generally the same and as such there is no need for a revision to the overall scheme drawing.

3.3.3 The Landscape design descriptions include example play element types for specific locations. These examples are only representative and the specification for future procurement allows for “... **or equivalent**” as suppliers will have differing designs or may be able to offer bespoke services which would be of benefit to this scheme.

- 3.3.4 **APPENDIX C** also includes planting proposals for the whole area, including trees and formal beds. The plants proposed are in keeping with the existing park environment, plus the natural theme of the playscheme as well as sensory and native plant choice to maximise wildlife benefits. Species selected are low-maintenance and sustainable wherever possible without compromising the thematic needs.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The draft Garden Play site designs have now been revised to incorporate feedback and input from the public consultation, as required by the previous report to the Community Services Committee.
- 4.2 The Landscape Architects have provided technical drawings and a specification as a basis upon which a procurement exercise can be carried out within an existing Framework Agreement.
- 4.3 The revised play proposal is within budget and achievable. It fulfils the original brief and subsequent development discussions between officers and commissioned consultants, for the provision of an improved inclusive play area within Promenade Park.
- 4.4 If the recommendations in this report are approved, Officers are estimating a 1 May 2021 target date for completion of this project (subject to suitable weather conditions and procurement process).

5. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 5.1 This report and scheme supports the Council's Strategic Themes.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Improved play facilities, increase in accessible inclusive space and equipment. Customer consultation carried out and incorporated into the final designs.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out following agreement of the Play design.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – There are no corporate risks associated with this report.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – £48,000 Capital budget contribution in addition to £52,000 S106 developer contribution allocated to Promenade Park.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – None, the proposal could be managed within existing resources.

- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – Physical minor re-landscaping of area of Promenade Park. Removal / redesign of some existing features to facilitate improvements.

Background papers: None.

Enquiries to: Matt Wilson, Countryside and Coast Manager.