

Agenda Item	8
Report No	CIA/30/22

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: City of Inverness Area Committee

Date: 24/11/2022

Report Title: Whin Park Redevelopment Update

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides details of a proposal for a feasibility study to be undertaken to support the redevelopment of Whin Park in Inverness. The report details that many features of the current park are reaching their end of life and therefore plans are required to consider how best to redevelop and transform the site into a sustainable and inclusive feature that complements the wider developments being undertaken in that part of the City.
- 1.2 The report details the proposed scope of the feasibility study and the wider engagement planned as part of that process. Any study would consider the potential funding options for the redevelopment of the site. The total cost of the study is £10,000 with half being funded from existing City ward budgets and it is proposed that the remaining £5,000 is funded by the Common Good.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. **NOTE** the proposal for a feasibility study to be undertaken to scope the necessary works and associated costs of refurbishing the Whin Park Play area;
 - ii. **NOTE** that the feasibility study and accompanying consultation is expected to take 3 months and that the study will look at identifying funding streams available for the full redevelopment costs;
 - iii. **NOTE** the risks and benefits of the redevelopment of the site and that if no action is taken it is anticipated that park equipment will require to be removed incrementally reducing the play areas left within the park.
 - iv. **AGREE** the contribution of £5,000 of Common Good Funds towards the costs of the feasibility study.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource implications: The project has identified a project team who will work with progressing the feasibility study and set the engagement required around the works. The costs of refurbishing the site, and potential funding options, will be considered as part of the feasibility study.
- 3.2 Legal implications: The provision of play areas is not a statutory service; however, where they are provided, the Council must comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 to ensure the safety and wellbeing of employees and members of the public attending and making use of the play areas. The Council must also comply with our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Fairer Scotland Duty.

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to relax and play, and participate in a wide range of cultural, artistic, and cultural activities. The Council's earlier approach to support these rights was set out in the Play Strategy 2016-20. This recognises the value of informal spaces for play as well.

- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) impact: The Council has focused on creating positive experiences for children and young people who use play parks across Highland and that provision is made to ensure access for all and meets the needs the equality duties placed on the council. This is in line with the Scottish Government's requirement that there remains an emphasis on play parks being as inclusive and valuable to children as possible, in line with the United Nation Convention Rights of the Child (UNCRC) duty.

Any redevelopment will ensure that the space is inclusive and accessible for all users.

- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications: In line with the Council's net zero targets, consideration will be given to the environmental impact of new pieces of play equipment, with natural play equipment being considered where appropriate.
- 3.5 Risk implications: Inspecting and maintaining and/or replacing play park equipment will prevent injury to children and claims being made against the council. The approach to engaging locally on play area options with Members and other community bodies and children will enable honest conversations about prioritising resources.
- 3.6 Gaelic implications: There are Gaelic implications for any new signage required to ensure it has bi-lingual content in keeping with the Gaelic language plan commitments.

4. Introduction

- 4.1 Whin Park has been a long-standing play park situated within the Bught area of Inverness. It is an important area of play park/green space which traditionally has been well used and offers a positive impact on the social and mental health benefits for families, children, and young people.
- 4.2 Currently Whin Park offers a snack bar, on-site toilets, and Highland Hospice-run miniature railway for visitors. Many play features have however been removed as they were no longer safe for use. With so many features within the playpark area coming to their end of life over recent years, a major improvement project is planned to be developed and costed for the park. The purpose of the development is to restore and

enhance this once great city asset. This would restore Whin Park to its status as a key destination park within the City of Inverness that is sustainable, inclusive for all users and with improved facilities. This is a strategic site given the connection to other city assets within its proximity and link with the other Inverness development plans for the area.

- 4.3 The latest data collected shows that the park has had high volume of visitors over the summer season. They are as follows:
- June 2022 -7735 visitors
 - July 2022 – 6669 visitors
 - August 2022 – 7086 visitors

5. Feasibility Study

- 5.1 It is proposed to undertake a feasibility study to ascertain the necessary works and associated costs of refurbishing the Whin Park Play areas, including other associated areas within the site, to ensure that they are compliant for all users of the park.
- 5.2 The cost of this study is £10K and, it is proposed this is made up of £5k Common Good Funding and contributions of £1,000 from the ward budgets of the main City wards - wards 13,14,15, 16 and 19.
- 5.3 Design, cost, and project management support is required including advice and guidance regarding CDM (Construction, Design & management) for project brief development and production of a costed feasibility report and recommendations to inform the for public consultation.
- 5.4 A Principal Designer is required to be appointed to assist with project brief development and preparation of a costed feasibility which will be required for project and for submission in support of funding applications.
- 5.5 Whin Park will require condition surveys of the toilet block and shop area along with the park infrastructure such as the drainage, structure conditions including boat house, bridges, pathways, and equipment that can be used in the new play spaces.
- 5.6 As part of the feasibility study, plans will be produced for:
- Newly refurbished toilet block that is fit for purpose and meets current standards
 - Improvements to the shop area for an enhanced visitor experience
 - Improved pathways
 - Improved drainage system to alleviate historical flooding issues
 - New way-finding signage
 - Covered outdoor area for users
 - Additional parking and appropriate co-ordination with the Riverside Way project plans (with Active Travel Team)
 - Improvements to the railway area, not including the track (Highland Hospice operated)
- 5.7 The study will also seek to link the site with other planned projects within the vicinity such as Riverside Way and Bught Stadium redevelopment and will identify co-ordination opportunities with investments already made such as the Hydro Ness, Gathering Place, Inverness West Link, Canal Park, and the existing facilities such as Inverness Leisure

Centre and Aquadome, Botanic Gardens, Inverness Skatepark, Inverness Mini Golf, and Inverness Ice Rink.

5.8

The project will look to make links through active travel and improved public transport so that the park is accessible across the city reducing carbon emissions but ensuring easy access and promoting maximum footfall.

5.9 Funding of the full construction works has yet to be determined and the feasibility study will consider potential options.

6. Planned Programme

6.1 The initial feasibility study will take an estimated 3 months and it is expected to be completed by March 2023.

6.2 A co-ordinated engagement plan will be developed to help shape the plans for the park redevelopment. This will be achieved by developing a plan and information sharing process for members and the public to engage with and consider any proposals that are prepared as part of the process. The engagement process will be wide, and will include engagement with Elected Members, key local representative groups, local schools along with the wider public.

6.3 The pond at the centre of Whin Park has been out of use since last year and the boats not operating. The Council is currently draining the pond to enable management and control of an invasive non-native weed species that has been found to be present in the pond. At the same time the pond will be fully cleaned with all debris removed. Once cleaned, repaired, and refilled, the popular Whin Park boating activity on the pond will resume its well-loved summer seasonal service with the Council seeking to agree a lease with prospective tenants. This work will be completed by end of November 2022 and will complement the redevelopment of wider park.

6.3 The full park development is targeted to be completed by June 2024, subject to funding. A full programme will be developed as project progresses along with the total cost of the project and be brought back to Members for consideration.

Benefits and Risks

Benefits of carrying out this Feasibility project:

- 7.1
- The opportunity is there so that a plan can be developed that will transform the space into to a city asset which will complement and augment the investment already made in the immediate vicinity.
 - Any new park development will be aimed at a more sustainable material and look to reduced maintenance liabilities.
 - With dealing with the pond and preparing for use for spring 2023 then it will enable the park to have more activities available for the public.
 - By planning and confirming costs of toilet refurbishment it allows the project to be spread over two financial years alleviating any pressure on sourcing funds.

7.2 Risks of not carrying out this Feasibility project

- If no action is taken there is a risk the play element of the park will in time become redundant as equipment that has reached the end of its life is removed, and it will become a gathering space with access to the railway and pond.

- This study will support redevelopment of the full area which will increase footfall into the area, without the other activities the park may suffer.

8. Next Steps

8.1 Should Members agree to support the feasibility study with Common Good funding, the aim is for the study to be complete by March 2023. This will include public engagement and potential options for construction funding. Prior to any progression of the works, agreement over funding for both construction and an assessment of maintenance liability will be established and brought back to committee for consideration prior to agreement to formally progress the works.

8.2 The aim is for the full park redevelopment to be completed by June 2024.

Designation:

Date: 03/11/2022

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