

Parks Improvement Programme

CIL Main Fund Application

The Parks and Open Spaces Team are currently developing a 10-year plan for regenerating parks and open spaces in Southend-on-Sea with the following vision:-

A Parks and Open Spaces Vision for the City of Southend-on-Sea

*Southend will have a network of accessible, high quality
and highly valued parks and open spaces to be proud of,
promoting sustainability, health, and well-being,
supporting biodiversity
and extensively contributing to the economic,
social and environmental aspirations of the city.*

As part of this process, we have been auditing and assessing many of our parks, play areas and open spaces to enable us to prioritise what works are required as and when funding becomes available.

Cabinet are now hoping to approve the allocation of £1million funding towards improving parks and play areas across the city – specifically:-

Up to, but not to exceed £1m – to support **CHILDREN'S PLAY FACILITIES** aim, as set out in the Council's Infrastructure delivery plan, in particular 11.7, "In light of the number of parts of the Borough identified in the Play Strategy as lacking good accessibility to equipped play areas, it is likely that there will be other needs which must be addressed. In addition, Policy CP7 of the Core Strategy identifies the need for four equipped play areas to address the needs arising from growth. It will be important that the location for these additional needs is determined; ideally this should address existing deficiencies as well as the need arising from growth."

It is Cabinet's wish that this sum is spent on improving and enhancing our Children's Play Provision in our City, to promote healthy lifestyles and to support families at time of the Cost-of-Living Crisis.

The 'Borough Play Strategy' is dated and was adopted in 2007 but many of its findings are still relevant. As part of the audit process, many play areas in Southend are low quality and of low play value and very dated. Recent refurbishments have included Shoebury Common North, Shoebury Park, Blenheim Park and Eastwood Park. Many play areas in our most popular parks are very poor, and include Priory Park, Southchurch Park, Chalkwell Park and Belfairs Park, these being Green Flag Parks, though Priory Park lost this status in 2022, partly due to the poor quality of the play area.

To date (13/10/2022), 25 play areas have been audited based on a number of criteria which include:-

- Play Value
- Equipment available
- Accessibility

- Safety and Security
- Condition of play equipment
- Management and Maintenance
- Other adjacent facilities.

Others remain to be audited and will be over the next few months. However, we have focussed on the most popular and visited play areas in several of the most important parks, considering condition, play value, location, whether in a Green Flag Award winning park and wider accessibility. This has given us a % score for play quality and the play value of the site. It is therefore the parks teams intention to initially focus on the following play areas:-

- Priory Park
- Bournes Green Park
- Chalkwell Park
- Belfairs Park
- Milton Gardens (to be funded by Levelling up Funding)
- Oakwood Park
- Friars Park
- Southchurch Park

Priory Park

Quality: 45%

Play Value of site: 72%

Works required - a full redesign of the site is required, with a replacement of most of the equipment which is dated and in poor condition. Some items can be restored or reconditioned. The site offers many opportunities due to its location within the park, its landscape setting for formal and more informal play opportunities.

This will include:-

1. New signage
2. Access improvements from the main park and the bridge
3. Removal of old play equipment where it has reached the end of its useful life – see images below as example – to include see saw, climbing frames, multi play unit.
4. Replacement with new inclusive multi-play units, rotating equipment, and more challenging items for all ages.
5. New and improved safety surfacing to all areas – recommending Grassmatt.
6. Landscaping – to include tree planting, long grass areas to the periphery, mounding with boulders, with a more natural setting.
7. Repainting of existing swings with refurbishment



See saw, climbing frame in Priory Park, dated and of low play value

Budget required: £200,000

Bournes Green Park

Quality: 28%

Play Value of site: 74%

Works required - a full redesign of the site is required, with a replacement of most of the equipment which is dated and in poor condition. Location is central to the park with mature trees so offers a good scope for a more naturalistic setting.

This will include:-

1. New signage
2. Removal of derelict and broken fence which serves no purpose
3. Removal of most of the play equipment where dated, including climbing frames and skate features (subject to consultation on the skate features)
4. Refurbish swings and repaint
5. New inclusive play equipment to include iconic central multiplay unity eg ropeplay item that will be the main draw for young people
6. Enhancement of the landscape setting with limited groundworks
7. Street furniture adding – better seats and bins
8. Creation of a footpath to connect to path network (if affordable).



Dated equipment and redundant fence



Existing skate facilities to be removed or enhanced subject to consultation

Budget required: £160,000

Chalkwell Park (upper and lower play areas)

Quality: 64%

Play Value of site: 71%

Works required: Some improvements have been carried out here already with equipment replaced but only with a limited budget. The play space is quite barren and uninspiring and requires considerable improvements to the setting with other items replaced. The main Hags unit is past its best and needs replacing.

Works to include:-

1. Signage improvements
2. Accessibility improvements, especially to hard surfaced areas
3. Removal of the large Hags play unit and mound and replacement with iconic inclusive multiplay unit (subject to condition survey of the main item). If retained, mound area to be resurfaced
4. Improvements to safety surfacing to existing equipment.
5. Lower play area – dated items removed and continued focus on younger children.
6. Accessibility improved



Hags Unit – can this be restored? Mound to be improved. Subject to condition survey. Current position is to remove and replace it.

Budget required: £200,000

Belfairs Park

Quality: 57%

Play Value of site: 72%

Works required: There has been some debate as to whether this play area is in the right location or whether it should be relocated to the proximity of the Woodland Centre. This would require a greater budget, planning and an approach based on an agreed masterplan. The intention is to focus on renewing the current play area, making it more accessible and attractive to visitors and nearby residents. Dated equipment to be replaced and accessibility and boundaries improved.

Works to include:-

1. Accessibility improvements, in particular signage. The location of this play area is well suited to the adjacent residential area, but for park visitors, is deemed, quite remote and out of the way.
2. Replacement of the chain link fence which is in poor condition and a more suitable boundary. Access feature where main gate is eg an archway or gateway structure.
3. Removal of all dated equipment eg see saw, spring units, small modular climbing frame.
4. Replacement with new inclusive equipment that is iconic, challenging and visually as well as physically challenging.
5. Improvements to safety surfacing
6. Refurbishment and repainting of existing swings.
7. Planting to the boundary edge





Dated equipment and poor boundary

Budget required: £50,000

Milton Gardens

Quality: 66%

Play Value of site: 81%

Works required: A very small site that requires minimal works but is an important space within the ward as it is the only green space and play facility. These works include resurfacing, replace some equipment and basic enhancements of the setting. These will be funded by the £85,000 from the recent Levelling up Fund.



Poor quality play surfacing

Budget required: £85,000

Oakwood Park

Quality: 54%

Play Value of site: 84%

Works required: A good setting in a popular park but could be enhanced replacing dated equipment and possibly extended. Accessibility to it is very poor and needs to be improved. The skate ramp is legendary but could be moved to a better location.

Works to include:-

1. Accessibility issues, for those less able. New footpath and access point from the adjacent industrial estate
2. Relocation of the skate ramp to a more central location with additional skate feature.
3. Addition of extra equipment where space permits
4. Signage
5. Removal of dated equipment and replacements added that are inclusive.



Dated equipment, opportunities to increase play

Budget required: £75,000

Friars Park

Quality: 48%

Play Value of site: 68%

Works required: Probably one of the worst play areas that we have within parks, with limited play and where it exists is badly vandalised in a hidden setting. It requires a complete redesign of the site taking advantage of its setting.

Works to include:-

1. Signage – the park itself has little identity with no obvious entrance, no signage, waymarking and as a result the play space is lost within the park. New signage and improvements to the park entrances will be incorporated into the design – gateway features and directional signage.
2. Removal of dated and vandalised equipment including fitness tower.

3. Introduce iconic but inclusive play item eg large ropeplay unit or similar.
4. Enhance the setting of current play units with landscaping.
5. Basket swing introduced



Limited play within this popular park

Budget required: £100,000

Southchurch Park

Quality: 63%

Play Value of site: 76%

Works required: Another dated play area with poor quality play equipment and surfacing, much of it dated. A number of items can be retained and improved eg swings, but some of the units are so old they need replacing. Hard surface areas are also very poor in some areas. The play area is popular but needs an identity and a greater focus. It lacks excitement.

Works to include:-

1. Improve signage
2. A number of items have been removed over the years and need to be replaced with new exciting as well as inclusive items.
Repaint and refurbish the existing swings.
3. Removed very dated units including smaller Record Play multiplay units and replace with more challenging exciting play equipment.
4. Improve safety surfacing within the play area
5. Additional seating and litter bins



Dated equipment, missing items

Budget required: £150,000

Many of these play areas have dated equipment that now offer little in play value. The settings that many of these play areas sit within are of high value, due to existing trees, places to run around, landscaping etc, but the play value of the equipment and quality is very low.

Our intention is to replace with equipment such as below:-



Kompan Galaxy range, robust and exciting



Kompan DOME unit, iconic and will cater for large numbers of children



Inclusivity is important



Proludic Range is modern and exciting

TOTAL ON PLAY AREA REFURBISHMENT £1,020,000

Other proposals to include the following:-

Southchurch Park Lake – installation of an aeration system to combat water quality issues

Leigh Library Gardens – footpath improvements as well as play area enhancement

Budget required: £120,000 estimated – funded by existing capital programme

Procurement and methodology

The team have carefully considered this and, subject to Cabinet approval, will procure 2 contracts to deliver these improvements:-

1. Landscape architect consultancy to design, procure and oversee the delivery of these works.
Fees included in the above costs – expected to be between 8-12%.
2. Landscape contractor to deliver the on site works to full practical completion.

We are already discussing with the procurement team the process and have drafted a tender specification for the ITT for the landscape architect. The budgets required are:-

- CIL - £1,000,000-00 (Play improvements)
- LUF - £85,000 (Milton Gardens) – approved and already received

We are also intending to add in other ‘to be approved’ Neighbourhood CIL projects such as Churchill Gardens, Southchurch Hall Gardens and East Beach Tree planting.

Timescale (subject to procurement process and availability of contractors and Cabinet approval)

Mid Nov - Out to tender for the landscape architect

Early Dec – tender return

Mid Dec – appoint landscape architect

Late Dec – Early Feb – design process

March 2023 – out to tender for main contract

April – May – appoint contractor and commence works

Paul Rabbitts

Head of Parks and Open Spaces

27/10/2022