

PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 9 January 2023

Title: Leys Play Area Surfacing

Contact Officer: Operations Manager - Angus Whitburn

Background

The leys play area surfacing is made up of grassed areas for pedestrian traffic and the equipment is surfaced with either grass mats or bark infill. The bark infill is easy to maintain by refilling with fresh bark yearly and weekly raking in displaced material. The grassed areas have received limited maintenance over their history simply just leaf clearance and grass cutting.

It is always hard to evaluate in the winter month the condition of the leys play area however in recent years the poor condition has carried over into the spring and summer months. The real problem with the area is much like a football pitch the huge amount of footfall creates compaction and thus kills off the root zone of the grass leaving just the earth.

Current Situation

Last year the Operations and Estates Advisor & Operations Manager looked at some possible solutions to the problem. One was to create a barked path leading to each piece of equipment. However, although this would have been in keeping with the play area design it would have had accessibility problems. The best and most cost-effective solution was to perform renovation work yearly to alleviate compaction ready for the high football summer months. The drawback of this would be sections of the play area would have to be closed for a short period to allow grass seed to germinate.

Renovation work would have to be scheduled each year meaning parts of the leys play area would be closed in early spring each year. The whole play area wouldn't be shut but a new temporary entrance would be put in place and certain pieces of equipment would be inaccessible.

The area around the splash pad is also a major issue and officers are finding the best solutions to report back to the council with.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Closing any part of the leys play area would be removing a free play facility from residents which could always attract a negative reaction. However, the condition of the leys play area surfacing is something that is raised on social media.

There's also no guarantee that renovation of the current grassed surfaces will be successful, but should be tried before a complete resurfacing project is undertaken.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- Equipment procured as part of the council bringing its grounds contract back in-house can be used for the renovation process at no additional cost apart from fuel.
- There's a sufficient budget available to cover the cost of any additional ground matting, seed, top dressing, and fertiliser.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. To complete ground renovation works in early spring, closing the main entrance of the leys along with both triple swing sets from the 20th of March until the 17th of April. All other equipment would be left usable and a new temporary entrance would be opened.
2. Complete only basic aeration work keeping the leys play area open but risking it not making any notable improvement