

PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 4 September 2023

Title: Play Area Renewals

Contact Officer: Operations Manager

Background

Witney Town Council manages 10 play areas across Witney, annually these are inspected by ROSPA for health and safety failings. From the submitted report the council's maintenance team or contractors will action on the identified failings. These failings are rated on a risk level between 1 – 25, a rating of 12 or over generates a high-risk item. From this ROSPA will make recommendations that can potentially reduce the risk score. The only item across the 10 play areas scoring over 12 is the cableway at Burwell play area. The item received a score of 15.

A second consideration with the ROSPA reports is the play value of a piece of equipment. Although equipment can be safe it may be unrepairable and thus affect its enjoyment. ROSPA will identify when something is clearly unrepairable. The younger years multi-play at King Georges's play area scored a 7 on safety but has a bent slide which is unrepairable, and the link bridge is failing.

Current Situation

Due to the failings on the cableway at Burwell it has been decommissioned by removing the traveller so no one can use it. As the equipment was installed by council staff there is no solution to fix the failings as it would require the entire cableway to be removed. Cableways offer a large play value to users, and it is one of only two the council has.

Burwell Cable Way replacement specification

- Site preparation including removal of existing equipment.
- Installation of a 30m steel cableway with a single starting platform
- Utilisation of current loose fill bark surface

The younger years' multiplay at King George's recreation ground is an ageing piece of equipment. The slide has been bent down, not making it unsafe but definitely affecting its play value, and multiple points over the unit are close to the 40 per cent wear limit. The slide could be left as it is and the wear points could be covered with plate steel however this would only be a coverup and ultimately the unit will continue to degrade.

King George 4 years + multiplay replacement specification

- Site preparation including removal of existing equipment.
- Removals of wet pour surface
- Wet pour surface disposal
- Installation of 4+ year multiplay
- Rubber mulch surface

Surfacing

Bark has been the traditional surfacing preference for Witney Town Council but its maintenance cost is significant and its weekly maintenance is time-consuming. Newer wet pours have become easier to repair and instead, it is recommended that, where feasible, wet pour mulch be used as an alternative product.

Play areas renewal plan

There was a play area review by the Project Officer in September 2022, and the recommendation to the council was that a singular play area be refurbished each year. This was instead of the approach previously used of replacing just failed equipment. However, refurbishing a whole play area is a difficult approach as some equipment such as slides can be maintained for well over 30 years. But other equipment such as carousels may only last as long as the manufacturer's guarantee. Swings can be refreshed and easily refurbished with new chains and seats at a low cost.

Environmental impact

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

Rubber-based play area surfacing is hard to dispose of and hard to reuse, so the council have traditionally opted to use play bark at many of its sites.

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.

The play areas offer import free activities for the children in Witney, and should the council be found not maintaining them they council be open for criticism.

If the funds below are utilised, it would also remove the opportunity to install any accessible equipment in any play areas this year, a further recommendation of the Project Officer's renewal plan in September 2022.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- A reserve of £34,000 is held to cover the cost of replacement play equipment.
- Company 1: £38,651.00 excluding VAT
 - Burwell: £11,750.00 excluding VAT
 - King Georges: £25,561.00 excluding VAT
 - Other fees: £1540.00 excluding VAT
- Companies 2 and 3 are still to quote (in line with financial regulations).
- Any additional required funds will need to be funded from a further reserve or as a supplementary estimate from rolling capital (Officers will confirm).

Recommendations

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

1. Continue with the periodic replacement of failed or low-value play equipment and,
2. Allocation of funds as presented above up to a maximum of £38,651.00 from Company 1, delegating to Officers to choose the supplier offering the best value once all quotes have been received.
3. Delegating to officers to proceed with the replacement of the cableway at Burwell Recreation Ground.
4. Delegating to officers to proceed with the replacement of younger years' multiplay at King George's field with a similar style multi-play unit.