

REPORT TO COUNCIL

REPLACEMENT AND FUNDING FOR THE CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND AT FARNHAM COMMON SPORTS CLUB

Project Name	Replacement of Children's Playground at Farnham Common
Lead Project Manager	Marilyn Rolfe
Date	18 July 2023
Report To	Lead Councillor for Projects & Full Parish Council

BACKGROUND AND REASON FOR PROJECT

The equipment and surfacing at our playground in Farnham Common was installed 30+ years ago and does not provide an inspiring environment that encourages children to develop crucial physical, social, emotional and imaginative skills necessary to gain self-confidence, improve coordination, and advance critical thinking capabilities. It also fails to provide any opportunities for children with additional needs as there are no inclusive elements.



The comments in annual playground inspections and those received from parents have made it clear that a plan to replace the current surfacing and equipment at the playground is necessary and overdue, especially as the site is immediately adjacent to the secondary exit from the local school.

In addition to comments received, the Council is keen to support the physical and mental wellbeing of residents whilst helping to meet their social needs, irrespective of their individual circumstances, and strengthen the community as a whole and believes that replacing this tired and uninspiring playground will contribute to achieving this aim.

It is extremely important that the Council is recognising the needs of residents and this is even more important since the Covid pandemic as a significant number of children have, for much of their lives, lived behind closed doors and have not had the opportunity to experience different activities or socialise with other children which is an essential aspect of a child's life and development.

BENEFITS TO BE GAINED FROM PROJECT

Given the age and condition of the existing playground, installing new surfacing and equipment will almost be the same as creating a whole new play area. The fresh appearance of the site will be colourful and welcoming to all playground users and should provide a pleasant and fun experience.

The benefits to children of a safe but adventurous and inclusive, play area are well known and include:

- Strengthening social skills such as communication, listening, respect, sharing and taking turns, conflict resolution and compromise and teamwork.
- Providing an outlet for negative emotions such as stress and anxiety improving mental wellbeing.
- Improving emotional wellbeing by overcoming fear and gaining pride in themselves.

- Promotes physical activity by encouraging exercise through fun and games.
- Increases confidence and self-esteem by providing a safe place for independence and personal success to flourish.
- Boosts cognitive development by developing their capacity for creativity, decision-making abilities, problem-solving skills and co-ordination.
- Promotes creativity through imaginative play.
- Builds community ties by bring adult carers of all ages together to relax outdoors and build fulfilling adult friendships with other parents and caregivers.

This playground will directly deliver the above benefits to the youngest members of our community (up to seven years of age) and their parents and caregivers but by improving this space we will also bring benefits to the whole community and it will be a more inviting space, which may also attract visitors.

From a Council cost perspective, the cost of maintaining the new playground will be less than the cost of ongoing repairs to the existing playground for a considerable period.

HOW ARE THE BENEFITS GOING TO BE REALISED

The Council recognised how vital it was for the Council to fully engage with the community when progressing this project to ensure that the playground created meets the needs of residents.

To start the process, the Council met with a group of parents to discuss what they felt was needed in the playground. Following this meeting several playground providers were approached to provide their suggested designs. Five designs were received and these were shared at the Annual Parish Meeting and taken to Orchard Day, a community event attended by many children, parents and caregivers from the village. At these events, people were asked to provide comments on the pieces of equipment being suggested. These responses were then considered by the Council and formed the basis of a more detailed scope which was sent to the five playground providers. Following an onsite scoping session with four of the providers, four solutions were received. These were reviewed initially by the Council for practical considerations such as ongoing maintenance costs but were then shared with groups from the community such as the original parent group and residents who attend a playgroup in the village. The Council contacted the village schools to see if the designs could be reviewed by the children but the schools did not reply so it was not possible to carry out this part of the consultation strategy. The comments received were then shared with the Council prior to it making its decision. The comments were fundamental to the decision-making process.

Car parking arrangements are already in place for visitors who are unable to walk to the site through an agreement with Farnham Common Sports Club.

Throughout the process, progress with the playground project was also a feature in the Council's reports in the community magazine and on the Project Page of the Council's website.

FINANCING THE PROJECT, AFFORDABILITY AND RISK

The Council faces increasing budgetary pressures while trying to maintain its services and role as supporter of communities.

The total cost of the project is expected to be £100,000 and it is believed that currently, given the wider economic climate, the only realistic way of financing the project is through a loan. All loans for Parish Councils need approval from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and the recommendation received is to seek a loan from the Public Works Loan Board.

Given that the Council was already working on this project when the budget for 2023/24 was prepared, it provides for a sum of £12,000 to meet the annual loan repayment in that year and in future projections. The projections for future years also include a provision for a possible

second phase on neighbouring land, which may include an opportunity for a local mobile refreshment vendor.

As the total cost of the project is expected to be £100,000, the Council is applying for £105,000 from the Public Works Loan Board, which includes a 5% contingency to account for any inflationary pressure on the supplier's quotation and any unforeseen groundworks that may become necessary once the project starts. Based on the affordable annual repayment and current interest rates the loan details, as at the date of this report, would be as follows:

Loan Amount (£)	Term (Yrs)	Half Yearly Cost (£)	Annual Repayment (£)
105,000	12.5	5,853.27	11,706.54

A precept increase will not be required as the loan repayments can be met from the budget and projections prepared.

Given the expected lifespan of the equipment, it is unlikely that significant expenditure in respect of maintenance, repairs and replacements will be necessary before the loan term has finished.

If the Council were to face any future financial difficulty it would call upon its reserves and if required, would cut back on other expenditure to maintain the loan repayments.

TIMESCALE OF PROJECT

The project is anticipated to take approximately four to six months to implement.

Once the loan application and associated documents have been prepared, they will be forwarded to the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils who will review the application before the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities carries out its assessment prior to formal consideration. This process can take between two and six months depending on complexity.

Once the loan facility has been confirmed, the order can be placed with the chosen supplier and the installation of the playground typically takes eight weeks from order to completion ready for a community opening event.

NEW PLAYGROUND DESIGN & EQUIPMENT DESCRIPTIONS

A copy of the quotation, site design, equipment descriptions and warranty information are attached.