

Subject:	Whitaker Park Masterplan Update	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	18 th September 2024
Report of:	Head of Environmental Services	Lead Member:	Environment and Corporate Services
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required: No	Attached:	N/A
Biodiversity Impact Assessment:	Required: No	Attached:	N/A
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1. RECOMMENDATION

1.1 This report is to provide an update on progress made against the Whitaker Park Masterplan to date.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The visual Masterplan was finalised in 2023 after extensive public engagement.
- Projects were prioritised based on views and concerns of park users and information held by Officers.
- Funding for projects is to be obtained from a variety of sources as set out in the report.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Whitaker Park is one of the Council’s two Park’s which the Authority is working hard to ensure becomes a destination site, along with Stubblelee Park in Bacup. Like with Stubblelee, the Masterplan approach has been utilised to identify key areas and projects for improvements over the next decade to ensure the Park has the quality facilities that will draw in visitors.

3.2 The Council has been working with the local community, Councillors and Proffitts on the Masterplan since 2022. The steering group have met several times and includes members of Civic Pride Rosendale and Incredible Edible Rosendale, local Councillors, Council Officers and RLT Officers. The process for this began with a public consultation exercise to gain people’s opinions on the Park, its facilities and areas for improvement.

3.3 This initial consultation was used to create a draft visual Masterplan with the realistic ideas received from the Community as well as Officer knowledge. This draft was then put out for further consultation before being finalised in June 2023. This was done through press releases, articles on websites of Proffitts and RBC, letters to schools and drafts being displayed within the park. The current Masterplan is attached as Appendix 1.

3.4 The consultation responses were used to create priority projects to pursue, and from this funding plans, where necessary, were created.

4. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PRIORITIES

4.1 The consultation produced a variety of responses which covered all aspects of the park. The priorities for creation or improvement were as follows:

1. Better drainage- One area improved May 2024
2. New play for older kids- External funding bid submitted

3. Path improvements- Some key areas completed 2024, further work to be done
4. Woodland walk- This was created by the Team in October 2023
5. Upgrade existing play area- Funding bids submitted
6. New wheeled sports facilities- To be explored 2025/26
7. Tennis court improvements- Completed 2023
8. Car parking improvements- Lower car park improved May 2024
9. MUGA improvements- To be explored 2025/26
10. Entrance improvements- Upper entrance was tidied in October 2023
11. Outdoor education space- To be explored when interest is shown from a group
12. Community storage- In situ early 2024

4.2 These priorities were discussed by the Masterplan Group and it was decided that the first projects to focus on would be improvements to drainage and to offer play facilities for older children whilst refurbishing the current facility. This will build on the improvements made to the two tennis courts through LTA funding in the summer of 2023.

4.3 The park drainage system was installed in the Victorian era and is not sufficient to deal with the surface water. Many drains have collapsed or have been blocked by tree roots. This has forced water up to the surface and it has eroded path surfaces as a result. Current play facilities are 15 years old and are getting tired, whilst there is an obvious lack of things to do for youths in terms of play equipment.

4.4 These projects form the main physical improvements for delivery in 2024/25.

5. PROGRESS 2024/25

5.1 A drainage specialist was consulted regarding the path on the upper west side of the park as this was where some of the worst surface water issues were experienced. This information was used to draw up construction drawings for improvements to the drainage system and lower car park.

5.2 Following a tender exercise, the Council appointed GroundInc to carry out the work, which began on 11th March 2024. The work was completed on 17th May 2024.

5.3 The design will encourage more of the surface water to flow into larger gully or soakaways rather than running down through the park at surface level. This will reduce flooding issues and reduce damage to path surfaces, making the park safer for visitors.

5.4 The play project has been out to consultation with the public and this has helped developed designs and cost estimates for the refurbishment of the current area with additional facilities for youths. The cost estimate for all of the works is £300k and funding bids will be submitted to various external funding bodies to go with UK Shared Prosperity Funding allocated to the Park. If bids are successful, the funding will cover the entire cost of the project.

5.5 The target date for completion of the play improvements is 31st March 2025, to fit in with funding deadlines and to ensure it is ready for the late spring and summer.

5.6 There are also other priorities on the list that have been addressed over the past 12 months. A new Community storage facility has been located in the Park by Friends of Whitaker Park, who are a sub-group of Civic Pride Rossendale, to help with their projects, and the Green Spaces Team have cleared an old route through the woodland at the top of the park to create a walking route which is now well used.

- 5.7 Civic Pride Rossendale and the Green Spaces Team continue to work well together on small projects within the park, And CP Rossendale have taken ownership of the formal beds on the front lawns. This has resulted in imaginative and attractive new displays for visitors, and the presence of Civic Pride is making a real impact on these areas.
- 5.8 The Green Spaces Team focused resources in the Park over the winter to carry out much needed 'big hits' on previously neglected areas. This approach coincides with the introduction of a dedicated Parks Team which focuses on Rossendale's main parks and memorial gardens, with the overall aim of raising standards in our key sites. Work carried out included path clearance, drain and gully clearance, shrub pruning, entrance tidying and extensive tree work which focused on diseased Ash trees.
- 5.9 As a result of working alongside LCC and the Environment Agency (EA) whilst looking at sustainable drainage solutions for the park, Whitaker Park will rehome a garden from Tatton Flower Show commissioned by the Environment Agency. This is due to its links to the work going on within the park to capture surface water naturally and it is due to be installed in August 2024. The maintenance of this feature will be carried out by Civic Pride and the Friends of Whitaker Park.

6. FUTURE PROJECTS

- 6.1 The drainage system is defective in other locations within the parks so this will remain something that will be consistently monitored and where possible improved. Additional gulleys and inspection chambers have been identified as being required below the pump track and around the kiosk area. This will be carried out once an idea on costs has been obtained and budget identified. The drainage will remain a high priority over the next several years.
- 6.2 There is strong support for a new wheeled sports facility in the park that will cater for the needs of BMX, scooters and skates. The old pump track is in a state of disrepair and will at this point be repurposed as a wet garden soakaway area to compliment sustainable drainage plans. The wheeled sports facility is proposed for the grassed area directly above the MUGA. This would be subject to successfully obtaining external funding.
- 6.3 The public toilets within the park are currently not serviced, since the Green Spaces Team were relocated out of the park as part of the Whitaker developments. Park users are strongly in favour of getting these reopened and serviced on a daily basis, so this is being explored. The kiosk is regularly mentioned by visitors and the new caterers in the Whitaker will be opening this in summer which will be an asset to the park.

7. FUNDING

- 7.1 As with the majority of projects within a park setting, the council strongly relies on being able to draw the majority of the project budget in from external sources. The main sources for Rossendale are from Landfill providers such as Valencia, Lancashire Environmental Fund, and FCC. Each funder has 3 or 4 funding rounds per year, and with many projects being pursued in Parks around the borough, these must be submitted in a manner where Rossendale's Parks are not competing against each other.
- 7.2 Any successful grant application requires a 10% 3rd Party contribution to be paid by the council, which then releases the funding. For larger projects this can eventually amount to a contribution of anything up to £30,000. This is usually sourced from either capital sources or any Section 106 contributions that may be available. Both are finite resources and for this reason the projects within Masterplans can happen only when these come available.

7.3 The Green Spaces Team have an excellent track record of obtaining this funding over recent years and have been able to deliver 1 or 2 of the larger projects from each Masterplan each financial year.

7.4 The recent availability of UK Shared Prosperity Funding for Whitaker and Victoria Park have helped kick start the Masterplans at both locations. This is due to end at the start of 2025/26, but will have contributed to Play improvements at Whitaker and Wheeled Sports at Victoria, as well as other improvements. As the drainage works were directly related to Health and Safety of park users and the wider public, this has been funded through the Council's Capital Programme.

8. RISK

8.1 All risks are managed in accordance with the project risk register.

9. FINANCE

9.1 There are no financial implications arising as this is a report for noting by Cabinet.

10. LEGAL

10.1 There are no legal implications arising as this is a report for noting by Cabinet.

11. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no /policy implications arising as this is a report for noting by Cabinet.

13. REASON FOR DECISION

13.1 To provide an update to Cabinet members.

No background papers