

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 13 December 2018

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community & Resources

PORTFOLIO: Physical Environment

SUBJECT: Masterplan Strategy for improvements at Town Park, Runcorn

WARDS: Halton Castle, Halton Lea, Norton North, Norton South, Windmill Hill

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval on a proposed Masterplan Strategy for a comprehensive set of improvements to Halton's largest park and seek approval to deliver the project in line with the Masterplan, including making any suitable grant applications that may be required.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board

- 1) **approves the Masterplan; and**
- 2) **gives delegated authority to the Strategic Director for Enterprise, Community & Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member for the Physical Environment, to progress the Town Park project and prepare all necessary information for suitable grant applications.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Town Park was created as an integral part of the original Runcorn New Town development with the aim of forming a central landscape feature for local residents. The creation of Town Park preserved nearly 157 hectares of existing woodlands and undulating grassland, retaining a countryside feel within the New Town. The park was planned to link the New Town centre with local centres via green corridors and included large areas of open grassland and woodland as well as buildings for recreational and cultural activities. Other features included were an artificial lake, footpaths, cycleways and playgrounds. Some facilities such as the large arena for open air exhibitions although partially built were never fully realised to their full potential.
- 3.2 Currently the park fulfils the original concept as a substantial continuous open space central to the New Town character, and includes Norton

Priory, Haddocks Wood playing fields, 3 formal playgrounds, a skate park, an artificial ski slope, a miniature railway, together with numerous ponds and 15 km of footpath walks through open meadow, grassland and woodland areas. (See Appendix 1 for map of extent of Town Park and Appendix 2 for images of current condition.)

- 3.3 Many of the features and assets date to the original layout and design, with some piecemeal additions and alterations which have lessened the overall scale and character of the original Town Park design.
- 3.4 The main aim of the Town Park Masterplan (See Appendix 3 plan and example images in Appendixes 3-6) is to preserve a strong landscape identity for the future as well as provide a setting for sustainable leisure and recreational needs for Halton residents. Sustainable routes will be enhanced North to South connecting the different character areas together, providing enough interest for visitors to extend the time they spend in the Park and repeat visits to further explore different areas.
- 3.5 Entrances, boundaries and signage will all be rationalised and better defined improving access and circulation and path connections for park users and better access for management purposes.
- 3.6 Proposals have been discussed with the Planning Dept., and are in accordance with the principles set out in Halton's Core Strategy, for the enhancement of Green Infrastructure.
- 3.7 It is proposed that these general park improvements are carried out over a 4-5 year period as funding becomes available and this investment will raise the overall standard of the park to that of Halton's other major open spaces such as Runcorn Hill Park and that any further future additional features and facilities are only added if they are in keeping with the nature and character set out in this Masterplan.
- 3.8 A key element of the proposals will be the development of 3 visitor/activity hubs. Individual hubs will be developed as separate projects in accordance with the Masterplan and are not set out in detail as part of this report. However, they are summarised as follows.
 - 3.8.1 Northern Heritage Hub – Norton Priory & Walled Garden.
Currently Norton Priory is very well established with good facilities with potential to improve still further. This will comprise of further improvements to the approach and arrival facilities, including access approach, arrival and car parking to a standard expected of a regional / national tourist attraction. There will also be improved access to footpath / cycle route connections, for instance improving links to Halton Castle.
 - 3.8.2 Central Activity Hub – Phoenix Park.
Currently Phoenix Park is fairly well established with good facilities. There is potential to improve this area still further. This location already contains extensive play and youth provision, as well as angling on the

lake and will be further enhanced as the primary site for local youth activities.

3.8.3 Southern Adventure Hub – Ski Slope/miniature Railway.

Currently the Ski Slope has poor facilities and is the least up to date of the three hubs and requires substantial investment. It has the potential to extend the facilities to improve the existing ski provision by adding an outdoor pursuits centre, café and improvements to the miniature railway and themed playground; making it an attractive location for families to visit. There is an existing group of volunteers who run the miniature railway and plans will include working closely with the group as proposals for this area are developed.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposals are in accordance with policy CS21 - Green Infrastructure, supporting the delivery of programmes and strategies to protect, enhance and expand green infrastructure across the Borough.
- 4.2 The proposals are in keeping with policy CS15 - Sustainable Transport by improving important East to West routes, for instance via the Bridgewater Canal; which connect off road pedestrian/cycle routes from the Silver Jubilee bridge through Runcorn in to Warrington. As well as introducing improved North to South connections for example from Astmoor industrial area to Palacefields and Murdishaw residential areas.
- 4.3 Improvements in Town Park will also link to the Mid-Mersey Estuary Park concept delivering important destination attractions for visitors.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Much of the current infrastructure dates back to the original laying out of the New Town, which at the time included remnants of original lanes, paths, fences, walls etc. The Masterplan Strategy seeks to rationalise, update and renew this infrastructure which will not only provide safe and effective routes but will reduce ongoing management costs of old assets and allow more efficient management of the site in the future.
- 5.2 It is anticipated that improvements to the whole Park infrastructure in order to bring the Park up to standard (items 1 - 3 & item 6 on The Masterplan - Appendix 3) will cost circa £1.4m. This can be phased over a 4-5 year period, which will help to avoid major disruption for park users, but still allow sufficient scope for a contract sum to benefit from economy of scale. This would be equate to circa £280k of capital expenditure per year over 5 yrs. Funding would be sought from a variety of external sources (see 5.4). Funding of £339k has been sourced in 2018/19 which will allow a first phase of works to be completed. Should

funding not be available in any particular year then the programme would simply be extended (to cover a 5-6 year period for example).

5.3 The following shows the budget requirement for the scheme:

• Replacement and improved boundary treatment	£160k
• Improved entrances and access points	£355k
• Repaired, Improved, new, paths	£491k
• Renewed and improved signage	£89k
• Vegetation clearance/hedge laying, planting	£73k
• Ponds, ditches, ditch/brook crossing	£193k
• Site furniture renewal/refurbishment	£45k

5.4 A typical annual funding package could be made up from the following possible sources: s106 monies, The Energy from Waste INEOS fund, external grants such as Landfill tax credit scheme (WREN/Veolia). There may also be opportunities through City Region tourism initiatives.

5.5 Proposals for further development of hub facilities (item 4 on The Masterplan - Appendix 3) will be funded separately and are not included in the above costs. These proposals will be the subject of separate reports as these detailed areas are further refined.

5.6 The Masterplan approach allows proposed infrastructure improvements to the wider park area and hub facilities to be undertaken either separately or in combination with each other, with the minimum of disruption or abortive work as and when funds become available.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Town Park offers a wide range of different habitats, recreational areas and play opportunities, which are well suited to a wide age range for young people to enjoy. As well as providing a massive educational resource. Proposals will further enhance access to these opportunities.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

The Town Park hubs offer opportunities for local employment, related to the running of attractions; Norton Priory, cafés and small businesses associated with running of the leisure facilities and attractions will further promote employment opportunities. Proposals will also promote the availability of natural resources for educational opportunities.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Improved facilities and access to over 15km of footpaths and extensive cycle and equestrian routes will encourage more recreation and exercise

in the area, helping to combat obesity, to encourage cardio vascular and muscular activity to promote mental well-being for local communities.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Access and gateway improvements, together with increased user numbers will help deter anti-social behaviour, reduce crime and encourage more use of the Park by a wider range of people. Proposals will include improved information and interpretation boards as well direction signage to help people navigate the park.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Improvements to Halton's green infrastructure, cycle and pathway network will further improve the image of the borough and help retain and attract residents, businesses and visitors in to the borough.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 The Park infrastructure is at a stage that requires major intervention in order to maintain safe routes and retain site boundaries, entrances, ponds, drainage ditches etc., in a serviceable condition. Combining a comprehensive programme of refurbishment works with a rationalisation of assets helps focus Council resources in the best locations for long term benefit avoiding costly repairs on assets no longer required.
- 7.2 The proposals build on the recent investment at Norton Priory which attracts visitors from a wide area, and seeks to capitalise on this by providing further opportunities for repeat visits to other attractions planned as part of the Town Park project.
- 7.3 The Masterplan proposals do not present any serious risk to the Council. Individual proposals for the hubs will be subject to a separate project risk assessments as they develop as individual projects.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

No significant Equality and Diversity implications have been identified.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Runcorn Development Corporation, New Town Master Plan (report) 1967	Picow Farm Depot	Nick Martin