



Town Council Offices,
1 Park Road,
Shepton Mallet
BA4 5BS

t: 01749 343984

e: info@sheptonmallet-tc.gov.uk

w: www.sheptonmallet-tc.gov.uk

Meeting: Full Town Council Item TC 1.17

Date: 25th May 2021

Author: Matt Harrison, Chair of the Town Council

Subject: Investment In replacement Collett Park play equipment

1.0 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To give councillors an update on work done on previous considerations to develop the play equipment and assets in Collett Park and to propose that the Town Council invests existing monies and applies to grant matching funding bodies to upgrade the play equipment in Collett Park as a priority. Standing Orders Terms of Reference deem that requests for the provision of new play equipment and structural Improvements to Collett Park are deferred to full council. It will be necessary to call a meeting of the Collett Park Charity In due course, as the council is the corporate trustee of the charity.

2.0 Background information

- 2.1 The Town Council's strategic vision laid out in the town plan Investing in Shepton's Future 2020-2024 defines five areas of priority focus. These are: Play, Protected Environment, Placemaking, Promotion and People. In relation to Collett Park, the Town Council is responsible for Collett Park's regular maintenance and upkeep (by virtue of a scheme of regulation). This includes maintaining and repairing paths, walls, fences, gates, the pond, as well as managing its biodiversity and environmental value. Moreover, the park's Green Flag status requires a commitment to a rigorous management plan which is detailed in the Collett Park Management Plan.
- 2.2 In 2017 and 2018, the Town Council commissioned a landscape architect firm to design a Stage 1 Masterplan and part of a stage 2 Feasibility Study at a total cost of approximately £6K (c.f. Item CP20.5 Collett park Management Committee 09/10/2018). These documents included plans for new planting schemes, a tree strategy, changes to the layout of the stream and the creation of a number of features such as willow structures, a memorial garden, etc. A cost schedule for both soft and hard landscape works were provided and the overall budget was estimated at £171K.

This included items such as plants, tarmac and gravel paths and street furniture. It did not include any new play equipment or any changes to the facilities. At this point the council was asked to identify how it wished to proceed in delivering on some or all of what was proposed within the masterplan. Changes to both the staffing team and membership of the council have meant that this piece of work has not been progressed since.

- 2.3 At a prioritisation workshop which took place in Autumn 2020, the aim of which was to identify how councillors wished to prioritise delivering on the objectives of the town plan. A majority of councillors identified the 'development of Collett Park' as one of the main priorities for the council. The council has not defined in any more detail at this stage what specifically is meant by the 'development of Collett Park' but some ideas which have been voiced in the past include: the renewal and upgrade of the play equipment; improvements to the facilities (toilets and café); new landscape design and horticultural changes (new planting areas and schemes, naturalisation of the stream, etc.).
- 2.4 Collett Park is often described as the 'jewel in Shepton's crown'. A thorough ecology assessment was undertaken in 2020 and projects will develop from this, and every 2 years a tree survey and associated works is commissioned. However, there has not been any investment into other infrastructure for many years. Many residents cite two areas in need of improvement: the toilet facilities and the play equipment at the top of the park. The toilet facilities are generally considered dated, dark and unhygienic. The play equipment is simply too sparse. These are widely held beliefs by many residents and Councillors, backed up by significant public consultation undertaken during Collett Park Day and the Festival of Dogs in 2018. Appendix 1 shows qualitative feedback from the public consultations
- 2.5 Since completing fund-raising for the skate park and BMX track, FReSH turned its attention to the play equipment in Collett Park. Undertaking more public consultation (x2 sessions at the front of store in Tesco and undertaking an online survey) and meeting with 6 potential play park constructors, FReSH determined that there are 3 key issues with the current play provision:
- (1) there is not enough equipment for a geographically central park in a town with 11k residents, 21% of which are aged 17 or under and forecast housing growth of 18% in the next 8 years
 - (2) the current play equipment is not suitable for residents with physical or mental health disabilities
 - (3) the current play provision is only age appropriate to approx. age 7
- 2.6 Informal discussions with potential constructors, the Mendip District Council Neighbourhood Project Officer and other experienced parties determined that a budget that would enable a play park to be installed that would "put Shepton on the map" would be c.£200k.
- 2.7 FReSH worked with the then Town Clerk and Councillors to determine a proposed area which could be developed for new play equipment and invited potential constructors to propose a list of equipment and draft schematics within a £200k budget for the allotted area. In addition to the allotted space, potential constructors were given three further quote specifications: (1) new play

equipment needs to satisfy the play requirements of youths aged 0-15 (2) new play equipment needs to be provided to satisfy the requirements of people with physical and/or mental disabilities (3) new play equipment and overall play park 'finish' needs to reflect the natural beauty of Collett Park

2.8 Appendix 2 shows some of the draft proposals (to note that these are for illustrative purposes only and are out of date and will not be used if the council were to proceed).

3.0 Financial Information

3.1	Town Council excess In General Reserves	= £93,000*
	Shepton Mallet Community Recreation Trust donation	= £32,000**
	FReSH donation	= £15,155***
	TOTAL	= £140,155

Total match funding requirement = £59,845

*The Town Council underspent its projected budget for 2020/21 and moved excess into the General Reserves fund. It can afford to Invest £93k and still have one third of the precept as per Financial Regulations to meet any unforeseen expenditure.

**The Shepton Mallet Community Recreation Trust has also gifted the Town Council funds.

*** FReSH has now been wound up and its residual funds gifted to the Town Council to be spent on play equipment within 3 years of the date of the gift (20/10/2020). This figure is approximate since total donation was £21,705 but £6,550 is being invested in 'joining up' the BMX track at West Shepton playing fields.

3.2 The proposal therefore is to spend the above monies and apply for grant match funding to provide a £200k budget to install a new multi-age and ability play park in Collett Park.

3.3 The Town Clerk is engaging with the Neighbourhood Project Officer and the Economic Regeneration Officer at MDC to ensure that there is collaboration on any projects that could be delivered by new funds being made available post pandemic. There are early discussions taking place on a wider Masterplan for Shepton Mallet and therefore there should be a strong evidence base on which to apply for external funds.

3.4 Finally, whilst the above focuses on play equipment it is important to point out that any new scheme must consider other public realm matters at the same time: fencing, gates, hedging, litter bins, signage, proximity to existing paths, trees, drainage etc. This is an area of specialism and the officers wish to engage the services of a landscape architect again, in order to assist with the scope of the brief in advance of submitting any documentation through the formal tender process. There is an Earmarked reserve that contains £10,175 for a feasibility study into Collett Park to determine the viability of future projects.

4.0 Environmental Implications

4.1 Play equipment constructors will be selected with environmental policies taken into consideration and play park will be installed to required play safety standards as well as environmental standards. All existing equipment would be disposed of in such a manner that meets the aims of the environmental policy.

5.0 Town Plan Reference

5.1

Continue to encourage participation in play and physical recreation	Provide a range of play areas that satisfy the needs of a diverse community
Continue to improve the Parks and Play Areas and Open Spaces	Ensure that all play areas and public open spaces are safe, accessible and of a high standard and develop opportunities for increasing the number of play grounds, sports ground and other areas to undertake leisure activities

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Earmark the funds described in section 3.1 to be used for the installation of a new play park in Collett Park.

6.2 Apply for grant match funding to provide a minimum of £200k fund to be spent on the installation of a new play park in Collett Park.

6.3 To utilise the Earmarked Funds for the Feasibility study to purchase expert support to prepare documents for tender.

6.4 Delegate authority to officers to instigate a project plan that will ultimately result in the installation of a new play park in Collett Park by end of April 2023, and to provide reports to full council of progress made, as well as establish the position regarding permission that would need to be sought from the Collett Park Charity (of which the council is the corporate trustee).