

This Report will be made public on 13 May 2025

Report Number **C/25/04**

To: Cabinet
Date: 21 May 2025
Status: Key Decision
Responsible Officer: Andy Blaszkowicz
Director - Housing and Operations
Cabinet Member: Councillor McConville, Cabinet Member for Assets and Local Government Reorganisation

SUBJECT: Lower Leas Coastal Park - Play Area Refurbishment

SUMMARY:

This report informs Cabinet of the works proposed to the Lower Leas Coastal Park play area and seeks approval to proceed with the proposed refurbishment project. The report also seeks approval to make applications for grant funding towards the new play equipment and associated infrastructure to support the existing allocated project budget.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet is asked to agree the recommendations set out below to authorise Officers to proceed with the Lower Leas Coastal Park play area refurbishment project.

Approval is also required to apply for, accept, enter into any grant agreements, and spend any grants awarded to the Council should the applications be successful.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/25/04.
2. To approve commencement of the project to refurbish the Lower Leas Coastal Park play area.
3. To approve the total project budget of £750k as detailed in section 3 of this report.
4. To note that the current approved budget in the Medium Term Capital Programme is £559k.
5. To authorise officers to submit a report to Full Council to seek authority to add the additional budget of £191k to the Medium Term Capital Programme for the project.
6. To authorise officers to apply for grant funding to support the project.
7. To provide delegated authority to the Director of Housing & Operations to accept and enter into grant agreements should the applications be successful.

- 8. To note that any successful grant funding applications will be used to minimise the capital resources required for the project and the project budget will remain at £750k.**
- 9. To note the results of the extensive public consultation carried out which received over 1000 responses.**
- 10. Provide delegated authority to the Director of Housing and Operations to undertake any actions required to deliver the project within the available resources.**

1. BACKGROUND

Introduction

- 1.1 The Green Flag award-winning Lower Leas Coastal Park (Coastal Park) is located on the Folkestone coastline, lying at the foot of Folkestone's West Cliff. The Coastal Park is home to the Council's premier destination play area in the district. The 1.2km linear park, consists of formal gardens, 'wild' zones and play space, it boasts extensive tree coverage, ecological habitats and public open space.
- 1.2 Since the Coastal Park play area's construction in 2000, it has attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors year-round to the district. The main piece of play equipment currently within the play area is a multi-tower timber structure. It was constructed from pressure treated softwood which typically has an expected lifespan of between 20 and 25 years in perfect conditions.
- 1.3 Due to the coastal environment, extensive tree cover and the sand safety surfacing wearing the timbers, the equipment, now 24 years old, is beyond economical maintenance and repair. Though now at the end of its life, the existing equipment was of exceptional quality when installed, the design was bespoke and sat in harmony with its location.
- 1.4 This project proposes to replace the existing timber structure with an improved structure, designed with consideration for improved accessibility for users with a range of disabilities. This project aims to replicate and enhance the quality and experience visitors expect at the Lower Leas Coastal Park.

Recent works in the Lower Leas Coastal Park

- 1.5 In 2022, the play area's original timber shipwreck was replaced with a new timber Pirate Ship, maintaining the standard of high-quality play equipment expected in this location.
- 1.6 In June 2023, a new concessions kiosk and toilet block was opened in the park to complement the existing facilities. The new building is sited near the foot of the zig zag path has 4 additional individual toilets including one disabled facility. The building was designed sustainably with solar panels and a green roof.
- 1.7 Most recently, in March 2024, a new Changing Places facility has been opened. This is situated at the eastern end of the Coastal Park adjacent to the Lower Sandgate Road car park (opposite the Leas Lift). This opens up opportunities for visitors reliant on enhanced disabled toilet facilities to visit the area where it may not have been easily possible for them to do so previously.

Link to Corporate Priorities

- 1.8 The replacement play equipment is linked to the following corporate objectives within the council's new Corporate Plan:

Improving people's health

- *Welcoming everyone and removing barriers to services*

- *Promoting community engagement, activity and creativity*
- *Supporting improvements to people's health, wellbeing and safety*
- *Support walking, cycling and public transport*

The new play area is to be designed with accessibility in mind, to enable all users to enjoy the new play equipment equally and alongside one another, whilst promoting both physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Community engagement has been undertaken by way of a public consultation, and further opportunity to comment on the final design for the play area will be managed formally through the planning application submitted in due course.

Through the provision of cycle parking and the addition of the improved play equipment, it is anticipated that more visitors will be attracted to the Coastal Park, and travel by more sustainable means will be promoted when the new play equipment is opened to the public.

Growing the economy

- *Providing new infrastructure*

The replacement play equipment at the coastal park will help retain its green flag status in the future helping to attract tourists to the District.

The play area will continue to encourage our residents to the area and will support spending locally.

Addressing climate change

- *Reducing climate change and adapting to our future climate*
- *Delivering high-quality developments that respect local character*

The tender brief will set out the Council's requirement for sustainable procurement and supply chain management and components and products. The tender assessment will ask play equipment providers to demonstrate both the products sustainability criteria and its suitability for the current and future climate where it is to be located.

The new play equipment will aim to replicate the quality and stature of the existing play area and sit respectfully in its location of the unique Coastal Park.

2. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

- 1.8 A public consultation was carried out, via an online questionnaire. This was launched on 18 December 2024 and closed on 24 February 2025. The consultation was advertised at the Coastal Park, and online through the Councils website and social media pages.
- 1.9 Officers sent information advertising the consultation to the headteachers of all primary and secondary schools within the district. Further in person consultation is planned with The Beacon School and Primary schools located near the coastal park.

1.10 A total of 1129 responses were received via the online questionnaire. The results of which are being used to understand user views and requirements and are being incorporated into the emerging design. The responses from the questionnaires highlighted the following:

- The need for the play equipment to cater for a wider age range of children, with specific elements for younger children and toddlers, alongside more challenging equipment for older children.
- To allow opportunity for all children to play alongside each other no matter their abilities.
- The new play area should encourage children to spend time outside to promote health and wellbeing.

The consultation results will be published on the Council's website.

3.0 OPTIONS

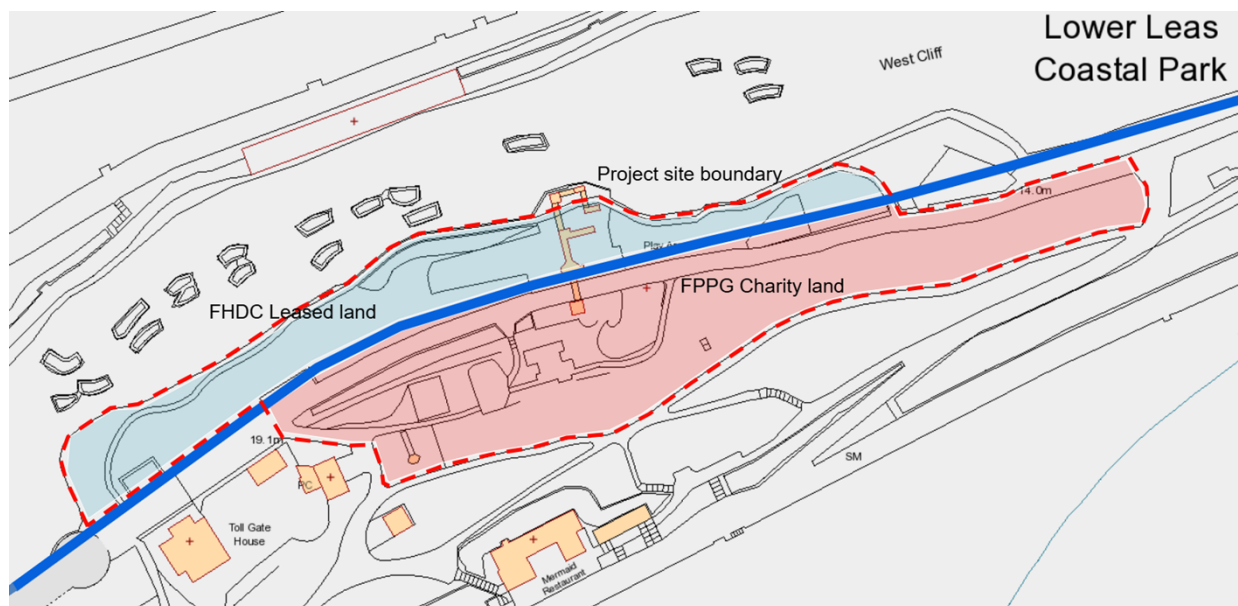
Proposed Project

- 3.1 The current play structure is formed of seven approximately 8-metre-high timber towers, which are all interlinked via bridges, rope nets or steel tunnels. The equipment is bespoke in its nature and when constructed was of an exceptional quality and unique design. The new play equipment would wish to replicate these achievements, the stature, qualitative design and materials, and sit respectfully within its environment, while minimising any impact on the ecology and aesthetics of the park.
- 3.2 Over the last few years parts of the play structure have been removed as they have deteriorated beyond economical repair. The bridge spanning the road has also been removed. The accessible play section of the park was removed last year due to significant deterioration of the structure and the replacement of this was subject to a £40,000 capital application coded to NJ27. The bid was approved however, it was felt that this should be incorporated into the larger project.
- 3.3 The existing condition of the structure currently requires high maintenance and lends itself to repeated vandalism increasing the requirement for ongoing reactive repairs to keep the play area open. The continued deterioration of the remaining structural parts will soon inhibit the safe use of the equipment.
- 3.4 An initial zoning and concept design for the new play area, informed by the public consultation outcomes, will inform the brief for the tender to procure a contractor to design, supply and install the new bespoke play equipment. The successful tenderer will be selected based on their responses to the design criteria set out in the project brief. Further contractors may be appointed to carry out any additional infrastructure works required to support the play area such as landscaping, paths and drainage.

- 3.5 Officers aspire to make the play area as accessible as possible for all users. Consideration will be given to the new play equipment, and access to, from and around the play area.

Constraints

- 3.6 Vehicular access to the park is restricted, the Sandgate entrance is accessed via Radnor Cliff which is a narrow single lane road with parking on one side necessitating road closures for significant vehicles. The Folkestone entrance is accessed via the harbour. While the Folkestone entrance is easier on approach, the vehicle access through the park from this end is restricted due to significant low hanging tree branches preventing large vehicles from approaching.
- 3.7 Part of the site (South of the road) falls within Folkestone Parks and Pleasure Grounds Land and proposals for the project will need to be approved by the Charity Trustees.



- 3.8 There will be a requirement for a Planning Application for the approval of the new play structure. It is anticipated that this will be submitted in due course by the successful contractor and will form part of their appointment.
- 3.9 The park is exceptionally well used during the summer months which will restrict working periods. A phased approach to the installation of the new equipment is preferable to allow areas of the play area to remain open for use where possible.
- 3.10 Following a significant landslide last year, there is also a requirement to carry out some geotechnical engineering works to the cliff to the rear of the play area. Prior to the cliff stabilisation works, the main timber play structure will need to be removed to allow the geotechnical contractors access to the base of the cliff face. These works will need to be programmed alongside this project, (to replace the play equipment), due to the space constraints.

- 3.11 A Communications Strategy has been agreed with the Communications Team. The strategy will be updated throughout the duration of the project and include social media, press releases and public consultation as required. This strategy will ensure residents and visitors are kept informed of the projects progress and the period of closure of the main play area.

Financial considerations

- 3.12 The new play equipment will be procured through a competitive tender process to ensure best value is achieved for the Council. Officers will utilise the ESPO framework agreement to assist with the procurement process. The contract will be tendered as a fixed price contract and scored primarily on the quality of the submissions received.
- 3.13 There is funding of £559k already allocated to the project, please see breakdown in the table below.

Allocated Budget	Source
£300,000	CIL funding allocated in IFS
£50,000	S106 developer contributions (£12.2k received to date – see para 3.20 below)
£59,000	Approved allocation in the MTCP (NJ27)
£50,000	Grant Funding
£100,000	Capital bid approved for 25/26 budget
£559,000	Confirmed Total Project Budget

- 3.14 The current approved budget of £559k will be supplemented by an additional £100k from the CIL fund, and an additional £141k capital budget (from capital receipts) to ensure there is sufficient budget to deliver the projects aspirations and objectives. The 'Grant funding' line above has been removed and folded into the 'Capital Receipts reserve allocated' line below, which will be flexed as required; the capital receipts budget amount will be reduced by the amount of any external grant received following successful applications. Please see the proposed budget breakdown outlined in the table below:

Proposed Budget	Source
£300,000 (Confirmed)	CIL funding allocated in IFS
£50,000 (Confirmed)	S106 developer contributions (£12.2k received to date – See para 3.20 below)
£59,000 (Confirmed)	Approved allocation in the MTCP (NJ27)
£100,000 (Confirmed)	Capital bid approved for 25/26 budget
£100,000 (Confirmed)	Additional CIL funding requested
£141,000 (Confirmed)	Capital receipts reserve allocated – to be reduced by any grant amount and/or S106 contributions received.
£750,000	Anticipated Total Project Budget

- 3.15 Cabinet are asked to approve the total project budget of £750k.
- 3.16 Cabinet are also asked to approve that officers submit a report to Full Council to seek authority to add the additional budget of £191k to the Medium Term Capital Programme for the project.
- 3.17 Further approval is sought from Cabinet to enable officers to apply for grant funding for the project, and if grant applications are successful, approve officers to accept, enter into grant agreements, and spend the grant/s on the project.
- 3.18 Any grants awarded will form part of the £750k budget, and the capital budget allocated to the project will be reduced by the grant funding figure.
- 3.19 Grant applications are to be submitted to The Roger De Haan Charitable Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Informal conversations have taken place with the Rodger De Haan Charitable Trust that have been positively received. Officers intend to submit a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to support the infrastructure, such as cycle parking, picnic areas and paths, adjacent to the play equipment.
- 3.20 Whilst £12.8k of s106 developer contributions have been secured and allocated for this project, further S106 contributions and other external grants may also be available throughout the project timeframe; a maximum of £50k will be allocated from s106 contributions. Should the project fall short for the remaining £37.2k of s106 funding, this relatively modest amount could be covered by an increased capital receipts budget. The additional grant funding currently being sought is summarised below:

Additional grants being sought	
Up to £100,000	Roger DeHaan Charitable Trust
Up to £100,000	The Heritage Lottery Fund
Additional funding (£ unknown)	Application for other grants and S106 contributions if available

3.21 Grant exit strategy:

- Local Authorities are not obliged to accept any grant that may be offered should there no longer be a need for the funding.
- If grant funding is accepted, and the project is stopped at a later stage, the Council would be required to return any grant to the awarding body.

Indicative Project Programme

3.22 The current programme has an indicative completion date of Summer 2026.

Item	Date
Landscape Architect appointment and design work	October 2024 - April 2025
Public consultation	December 2024 - February 2025
Landscape design review	April 2025

Tender for contractors	June 2025
Tender award	August 2025
Planning submission (by appointed contractor)	September 2025
Planning determination	December 2025
Removal of existing play equipment (date dependent on adjacent cliff stabilisation works)	Autumn 2025
Construction starts on site	Winter 2025/6
Project completion	Summer 2026

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

4.1 A summary of the perceived risks follows:

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
Delays due to cliff stabilisation works or planning timescales.	High	Medium	Regular liaison with Engineering and Planning teams. Contractors to be kept updated on progress.
Project delivery unable to be delivered within existing budget.	Medium	Low	The supplier contract will be based on a fixed price, to include a small contingency. Effective project management and cost control including change control mechanisms will be implemented.
Grant funding is unsuccessful.	Low	Medium	Project is not dependent on grant application success. Any grant received will reduce the capital requirement from the council reserves.
Adverse publicity over play area closure.	Low	High	Extensive communication with the public throughout the duration of the project. Works to be phased to allow parts of the play area to remain open throughout the duration of the construction works where possible. Contractor to set out a detailed site operations and phasing plan to demonstrate this, and comply with all Health and Safety regulations to ensure protection of the public at all times.

5. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

5.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. If grant funding is successful legal services can assist with any grant agreements that may be required.

5.2 Finance Officer's Comments (JS)

The main financial implications of the project are outlined in the financial considerations section of the main report (from paragraph 3.12). There is currently £59k approved as part of the 24/25 MTCP and a further £500k has been approved for 25/26 – see report A/24/20, appendix 5 from 26 February 2025.

The £50k of 'grant funding' set aside in the original £559k budget has been removed and reallocated in the proposed budget to the 'capital receipts' line. The rationale here is to ensure that if any grant funding bids fail, there is still sufficient allocation of funding in capital receipts to complete the project. A further £100k has been agreed to be funded by CIL. This will increase the overall project budget to £750k. These modifications in the proposed funding sources are set out in paragraph 3.12.

As highlighted in paragraph 3.20, grant funding is being applied for and if successful it will replace the funding currently allocated from the capital receipts reserve; it will not increase the total budget which will remain at £750k total. The grant will offset the amount of capital receipts required for the project and thus allow for allocation elsewhere in the General Fund Capital Programme.

It is highlighted in the report at 3.7, that some of the land in the Coastal Park falls under the Folkestone Parks and Pleasure Ground Charity ('FPPG' / 'Charity'). Whilst the funding of the project does not require a capital contribution from FPPG, the Charity will continue to fund the ongoing maintenance of the equipment on its land via the annual recharge from the Council to the Charity for the Charity's use of Council resources.

5.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

There are no negative equality and diversity implications directly arising from this report. The project focuses on improved accessibility for all to the Coastal Park Play area, and as such diversities and equalities will be considered throughout each and every stage of the project.

5.4 Climate Change (AT)

The impact of the recommendations on climate change are likely to be positive as it presents the opportunity through the procurement process to focus on sustainability credentials of the new play equipment and landscaping materials when tendering for works, plus embodied carbon through the supply chain.

5.5 Communications (DK)

There will be significant interest in this project. It is, therefore, important to provide regular updates on our website and social media channels. We anticipate residents to be largely supportive but proactive communications will be key in keeping people on side in the face of any unexpected delays. A communications plan has been developed with support from the project team.

5.6 Ecology (LV)

An Ecological Impact Assessment for the project has been carried out by Lloyd Bore Ecologists. The report classes the site as having low ecological importance, no additional ecological surveys are required. To deliver ecological enhancement to the site, it is recommended that native species are planted as part of the landscaping, and any tree and shrub removal will be completed outside bird nesting season.

6.0 CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report: None