

# Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 11 May 2023

## Response to motion by Councillor Thornley – Parks and Greenspace Investment following 2023 Council Budget

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive All
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### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee approves the proposed allocations of funding, as set out in paragraph 4.3, to utilise the additional capital investment of £3m which was agreed as part of the Council budget for 2023/24 for parks and open spaces.

**Paul Lawrence**

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## Response to motion by Councillor Thornley – Parks and Greenspace Investment following 2023 Council Budget

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 This report responds to an adjusted motion from Councillor Thornley on Parks and Greenspace Investment following the approval of the Council's budget for 2023/24. The motion requested a report setting out proposals to spend additional funding of £3m additional capital funding for parks and open spaces that was agreed at the meeting of Full Council on 23 February 2023.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 Parks and open spaces throughout the city continue to adapt to changing use patterns and demands from increased use post-pandemic, as well as functioning as places that are essential to modern life in the city. As usage patterns have changed increased demand has arisen for investment in publicly accessible toilets along with calls for improved lighting in parks and open spaces.
- 3.2 The low level of condition of infrastructure (such as steps, paths, and handrails) in some parks and open spaces can present access difficulties for some people. Wear and tear, natural degradation, and other forms of deterioration to infrastructure can escalate and lead to priority works. Signs of undesirable behaviour (such as vandalism, graffiti, and damage) can impact people's image of safety and result in people spending less time engaged in healthy outdoor activity and make spaces less attractive to spend time in. Making issues safe bides time, but often necessitates works for proper reinstatement. Capital investment in priority works can reduce or delay the need for subsequent revenue expenditure.
- 3.3 Temporary toilets have been provided at Inverleith Park, the Meadows, and Leith Links over the summer for the last two years at a cost of around £140,000 per year. While this has provided much needed amenity for park users and visitors and helped address some areas of anti-social behaviour, it is not considered investment in permanent, long-term solutions.
- 3.4 Park lighting, alongside investment in public toilets and other parks infrastructure, can help towards encouraging people to make best use of the health benefits of being outdoors, make visits to parks and open spaces a more enjoyable experience, as well as safer places for everyone.

- 3.5 Investment in path upgrades and new path works can make more public parks and open spaces more accessible for everyone, as well as provide suitable surfaces for cycling. Some routes through parks and open spaces will benefit from carrying out path works and installing lighting at the same time to maximise the impact of investment and improve the visitor and user experience.

### **Approved Motion**

- 3.6 On 7 March 2023, Culture and Communities Committee approved an adjusted motion by Councillor Thornley. The motion welcomed the outcome of the Council's budget setting process, part of which included an additional £3m of capital investment for parks and open space improvements and requested a outlining how best to prioritise spending with a focus on, but not limited to:
- Priority 1 and 2 repairs outlined in the Parks and Greenspace Investment report considered by Committee on 13 December 2022;
  - Lighting in both Premier Parks and other parks; and
  - Accessibility, including public toilets.

## **4. Main report**

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- 4.1 Committee considered a Parks and Greenspace investment update report on [13 December 2022](#). This report highlighted progress in respect of the ongoing infrastructure surveys in parks and works undertaken to date.
- 4.2 It also identified that whilst the service is working towards tackling Priority 1 works there remained concern that, at that point in time, there was insufficient budget to address all outstanding Priority 1 and 2 works. Subject to market prices, Priority 1 works were estimated to cost £4.271m.

The following section of this report recognises that, whilst the £3m allocated for capital investment in parks and open spaces could be allocated to tackling Priority 2 works alone, the motion specifically requests consideration be given to parks lighting and accessibility (particularly public toilets) as well.

### **Spending Proposals**

- 4.3 Officers have considered how the additional funding could be utilised most effectively and have suggested the following allocations (a more detailed summary of how these monies would be spent is provided in the following paragraphs):
- 4.3.1 £400,000 for park lighting improvements;
  - 4.3.2 £500,000 for general accessibility improvements to paths;
  - 4.3.3 £600,000 for permanent, publicly accessible toilets in Inverleith Park, the Meadows, and Leith Links; and
  - 4.3.4 The remainder will be allocated for priority 1 and 2 works.

- 4.4 It is recommended that £400,000 is set aside for park lighting improvements. This will supplement £100,000 carried forward from 2022/23 to create a £500,000 fund to progress lighting initiatives. Further detail on proposals around lighting is subject to a separate report to this committee.
- 4.5 £500,000 is proposed for general accessibility improvements across the parks and open space estate. This will enable investment in path networks, including improving accessibility for people with disabilities and/or physical and visual impairments. External funding will also be sought to increase the available investment (as was the case recently for example at Gyle Park, where £89,000 of funding was awarded to improve and widen the path network within the park).
- 4.6 £600,000 is recommended for allocation towards the establishment of permanent publicly accessible toilet facilities in key park locations, following on from temporary toilet provision during the pandemic. It is therefore suggested that the provision of toilets is focused on Inverleith park, the Meadows, and Leith Links. The approach to be this will be more holistic than just establishing the toilets themselves, with potential to explore the development of a café and/or community space alongside facilities and storage for on-site grounds maintenance teams. In addition, there are some existing buildings in Leith Links and Inverleith Parks which will undergo a condition survey to assess feasibility of these facilities being made publicly available for the 2023 summer period.
- 4.7 The temporary rental of toilets may be required for the 2022/23 summer period, subject to the assessment of building conditions.
- 4.8 The remaining funding is proposed to supplement the remaining funding available to tackle priority 1 and 2 works across the estate.
- 4.9 Committee is asked to note that these are currently indicative allocations and, subject to Committee approval of the proposed use for this funding, it is proposed to use the allocations flexibly within the overall £3m.
- 4.10 It is also proposed to seek other funding (both from internal sources (e.g. Active Travel investment) and external sources (e.g. Paths for All)) to supplement the proposed funding allocations wherever possible.

## **5. Next Steps**

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- 5.1 Subject to Committee agreeing the spending proposals outlined in this report, the proposed initiatives will commence being progressed.
- 5.2 Progress updates will be provided to Committee as part of the wider parks and open spaces investment reports.
- 5.3 Internal discussions are already underway with colleagues in respect of the potential to secure additional funding to support the activities outlined in this report.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 The Council approved additional capital funding of £3m for parks and open spaces within the Council budget for 2023/24. The main report sets out proposals for how this funding could be allocated to improve the city's parks and open spaces.
- 6.2 Wherever possible, the intention is to use some of the allocated budget to assist with making applications for match funding against external grants and assist with developing designs to support bid applications.
- 6.3 Ever increasing construction costs, procurement challenges, and availability of contracting resource may hamper project delivery.
- 6.4 Where capital outlay relates to investment in or creation of café/community space and accessible toilet buildings, financial options will be considered to find the most attractive funding solutions.
- 6.5 It is important to note that, while capital funding can be used for infrastructure investment, there may be longer term associated revenue costs associated with general maintenance and cleaning once new infrastructure is in place. These on-going revenue costs will be identified at the appropriate time and action taken to ensure that sufficient funding is available to meet these costs.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 7.1 Investment projects for paths, park lighting, and café/community use buildings will greatly improve the visitor experience. A focus on accessibility will ensure proposals meet equalities requirements. Design of buildings, for example, will also need to comply with current regulations.
- 7.2 The report outlines broad suggestions on improvements. It is intended that individual site proposals will be subject to local community engagement appropriate to the proposal and where appropriate may require planning and other permissions to be sought.
- 7.3 Changes to buildings and park lighting installations, for example, will recognise the need to reduce carbon emissions from energy use and sustainable use of resources, and implement climate change adaptations to reduce rainwater run-off, minimise heat loss, conserve energy and water use, as well as integrate renewable power sources, etc.

## **8. Background reading/external references**

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- 8.1 None.

## 9. Appendices

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9.1 None.