

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 18 FEBRUARY 2020

TITLE: PADDLING POOLS/SPLASH PARK REVIEW

LEAD OFFICER: JANE GREER, HEAD OF COMMUNITY WELLBEING (01279) 446406

CONTRIBUTING OFFICER: CHRISTINE HOWARD, YOUTH AND CITIZENSHIP MANAGER (01279) 446192

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** Councillors note the outcomes of the review; consider potential cost implications for the council as set out in this report and make recommendations to Cabinet in respect of next steps following the public consultation.

BACKGROUND

1. On 4 December 2018 a Scoping Report (attached as Appendix A to the report) was presented to Scrutiny Committee outlining the terms of reference, purpose and methodology for a review of the five paddling pools and one splash park in Harlow.
2. In January 2019 a report setting out an overview of health and safety regulations for splash parks and paddling pools was received. This report identified a number of considerations to be taken in to account by the Council to ensure safety at its water play sites. Page 5 of the health and safety report sets out approximate costs in relation to undertaking repairs and improvements to existing paddling pools at the Town Park and Staple Tye. Indicative costs for the introduction of new splash park facilities at these two sites are also shown. The full report is attached as Appendix B to this report.
3. On 19 March 2019 an Interim Report was presented to Scrutiny Committee to update Councillors on progress with the review and to seek approval of the brief for consultancy support for a public consultation exercise in regard to options for the existing paddling pools and splash park in Harlow. Councillors took the decision at this meeting to work with an independent consultancy firm to undertake an extensive public consultation.
4. In June 2019 Hall Associates was commissioned to undertake a safety review of the five paddling pool sites and one splash park. This review produced a number of recommendations in relation to access control to water play sites; water quality/contamination; floor surface; signage/information/education; supervisory capability and operating standards. The Hall Associates report is attached as Appendix C to this report.

5. Following the decision made by Scrutiny Committee on 19 March 2019, 'Leisure and the Environment' were commissioned to undertake the paddling pool/splash park consultation which took place between 12 August 2019 and 20 September 2019. Along with an on-line consultation open to all members of the public, consultants also engaged a range of local agencies that deliver services to children and families; community and voluntary groups; Harlow Youth Council and the local resident that had initiated a petition against closure of the paddling pool sites which received 1549 signatures. In addition, consultants attended a number of local events such as National Playday and Harlow School Readiness Project activities as well as having stands in the Harvey Centre and Civic Centre in order to obtain people's views and preferences for the water play sites.
6. On 10 October 2019 staff from Leisure and the Environment attended Scrutiny Committee to give an overview of findings from the community consultation. This presentation is attached as Appendix D to the report.
7. The full and final report from Leisure and the Environment was received in late October 2019. There was a much higher response to the survey than anticipated with 1376 households completing the community consultation survey. The consultant's findings states that 76 per cent of respondents strongly agree, and a further 16 per cent agree, that the paddling pools are an important part of Harlow's heritage. A majority (56.5 per cent) of respondents supported the view that the Council should retain all the facilities as they currently are, making improvements and necessary repairs to bring them up to standard. In terms of individual areas, other than for Potter Street, a majority of respondents noted that their preference was for a paddling pool facility, most notably for Harlow Town Park (70 per cent) Norman Booth (65 per cent) and Sumners (61 per cent). For Potter Street there is a clear preference to retain the Splash Park. The most visited water play sites are recorded as Town Park paddling pool (34.8 per cent), Norman Booth paddling pool (34.3 per cent) and Sumners paddling pool (26.8 per cent). The observations, conclusions and recommendations from this report are attached as Appendix E to the report.
8. The Council's Community Safety Team has operational responsibility for each of the five paddling pools and one splash park. In November 2019, to assist the review, the team produced a summary of perceived operational risks for each of the water play sites. The team hold a view that each water play site has its own pros and cons and that a site-by-site approach should be taken to identify, assess and address risk in order to continue to ensure delivery of a safe service. These operational risks are attached as Appendix F to the report.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

9. The community consultation highlighted people's desire for toilets and changing facilities at all of the water play sites. In particular, to ensure inclusivity, there were requests from individuals and agencies for dedicated changing facilities for children and young people with a disability. These are highlighted in paragraphs 13 – 17 below.

10. The independent safety review by Hall Associates indicates that the three main areas of risk relate to access control, water contamination and signage (for example, on water depth). In addition, the condition of pump room equipment and access to the pump room at the Town Park paddling pool which involves staff having to climb down in to the pump room via a very steep ladder. There are also access issues to the pump room at Norman Booth which has steep external steps leading to the entrance door that can pose a safety risk to staff and service users.
11. Each water play site is unique in terms of location, usage, design, accessibility and current condition. It appears that all paddling pool sites require some work to address age related dilapidation of surface concrete; underground pipework and fixtures and fittings. As such, in terms of undertaking immediate repairs and future development, a site-by-site approach would be required and the cost of improvements could vary greatly across all sites.
12. In January 2020, indicative costs were received for provision and installation of railings with gated access to separate the paddling pool from the play park equipment at Sumners and Norman Booth paddling pools along with indicative costs for perimeter railings at the Town Park paddling pool to reduce opportunities for water contamination. The finance table is attached as Appendix G to the report.
13. There are numerous factors to be taken in to account when considering introducing either permanent or mobile toilet facilities at water play sites. Considerations include:
 - a) Location;
 - b) Site surfacing and level;
 - c) Aesthetics;
 - d) Potential for vandalism;
 - e) The need or not for electricity on site or the use of generators;
 - f) Adequate water supply or any risks associated with the use of chemical toilets;
 - g) Removal of waste;
 - h) Cost of regular cleaning and provision of items such as toilet roll and hand sanitiser;
 - i) Whether toilets should be gender specific or accessible for use by all; and
 - j) The provision of adapted facilities for those with a disability.

14. The Community Safety Team estimate a cost of around £10,000 per water play site to provide and maintain mobile toilet facilities for the school summer holiday period thus totalling a potential cost to the council of around £60,000 per annum (five paddling pools and one splash park). The finance table is attached as Appendix G to the report.
15. At the time of writing, estimates for the provision of permanent brick built toilet facilities at water play sites are not available but this approach would also require many of the factors listed in paragraph 13 above to be taken in to consideration. Additional considerations would include initial costs for the build along with installation of water, electricity and sewerage and the cost of year round cleaning and maintenance.
16. Full planning permission is required for the provision of both mobile and permanent toilet facilities at water play sites.
17. Where appropriate, consideration could be given to liaising with local service providers such as the Norman Booth Centre and Great Parndon Community Association to see whether, perhaps for an agreed fee, they would be willing to allow access to their toilet facilities during the school summer holidays. This could prove to be a cost effective solution at the Old Harlow and Staple Tye water play sites.
18. Indicative costs for repairs and maintenance to pump rooms are unavailable at the time of writing but it would appear that, with the exception of Town Park and Norman Booth paddling pools, costs could be met from the annual paddling pool budget. A scoping and costing exercise is required in terms of addressing significant concerns around safe access to the pump room at Town Park and Norman Booth.
19. In January 2020, Councillors and Officers of the cross-party Paddling Pool/Splash Park Review Working Group undertook site visits at Staple Tye, Town Park, Norman Booth and Potter Street water play sites to gain better understanding of access; repairs and maintenance and health and safety issues at these sites. The following issues were noted as being of most concern:
 - a) Access to pump rooms at Norman Booth and Town Park;
 - b) Lack of toilet/changing facilities at all sites;
 - c) Service user's unrestricted movement between the paddling pool and playground areas at Norman Booth and Staple Tye.
20. In addition, Councillors highlighted concern about some deterioration around the edges of the surfacing at Potter Street splash park.
21. The Working Group conclude that consideration should be given to a range of options for a programme of works to include necessary repairs and maintenance to existing water play sites (short term objective); desired improvements to individual water play sites on a site-by-site basis (medium term objective) and

the delivery of a pilot scheme to introduce a splash park facility to at least one of the paddling pool sites (long term objective). Indicative costs are attached as Appendix G to the report.

22. The Working Group recommends that the following action is taken at the earliest opportunity.

- a) Address health and safety issues in relation to staff access to the pump rooms at Norman Booth and Town Park.
- b) Install railings at Norman Booth, Sumners and Staple Tye to prevent unrestricted movement between water play and playground equipment thus reducing the risk of accident or injury to service users.
- c) Install perimeter railings at Town Park paddling pool to prevent water contamination mainly from domestic and wild animals, particularly at times when the pool is 'closed' and therefore unsupervised.
- d) Consider, on a site-by-site basis, opportunities for the provision of either mobile toilet/changing facilities sited for the duration of the school summer holidays or the provision of permanent toilet/changing facilities where possible.

23. The Working Group further recommended a pilot scheme, utilising the capital funds available, to undertake repairs and improvements to the Staple Tye paddling pool site including the provision of mobile or permanent toilet/changing facilities and the introduction of a splash park facility alongside the pool that is fully accessible for service users with a disability.

IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)

As set out in the report.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning

Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)

The report sets out the financial implications of the proposals being made by the review and consultation results. Funding has been set aside as a result of the Cabinet decision in July 2018 of at least £750,000 with additional funding available from capital receipts should they be required subject to the final scope of the works agreed.

Author: Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Chief Executive

Housing

As outlined in the report.

Author: Andrew Murray, Head of Housing

Community and Wellbeing (Includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)

As contained within the report.

Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community and Wellbeing

Governance (Includes HR)

As set out in the report.

Author: Simon Hill, Head of Governance

Appendices

Appendix A – Review of Paddling Pools – Scoping Report

Appendix B – Overview of Health and Safety Regulations for Splash Parks and Paddling Pools

Appendix C – Hall Associates - Harlow Paddling Pools Safety Review

Appendix D – Leisure and the Environment – Community Consultation, Overview of Findings

Appendix E – Leisure and the Environment – Observations, Conclusions and Recommendations

Appendix F – Paddling Pools – Operational Risks Table

Appendix G – Paddling pools – finance table (options)

Background Papers

Leisure and the Environment, Community Consultation Review of Harlow's Paddling Pools – Report of findings

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.