

Committee(s): Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee	Dated: 12 October 2021
Subject: Open Spaces Department Capital Project proposals to RASC	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Yes
If so, how much?	Up to £2.3M
What is the source of Funding?	Central Capital Funds from RASC
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Projects submitted as part of the annual capital bidding process
Report of: Juliemma McLoughlin	For Information
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Summary

Proposals for the annual RASC capital bidding process closed on 6 September 2021. During the summer, the Director of Open Spaces discussed the Departments range of proposed projects with the various Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Open Spaces Committees. Their meeting with the Director on 1 September finalised and prioritised the capital project proposals for submission to RASC.

Refurbishment of the athletics track at Parliament Hill was identified as the priority project with a capital cost of up to £2million. Officers are trying to identify external funding but none has been confirmed. The other projects being submitted are post Covid-19 restoration and repair work to the paths in Epping Forest (£250k) and refurbishment of the playground and sandpit at Queen's Park (£100k but funding request only 55k).

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- **Note the report.**

Main Report

Background

1. A Corporate annual bidding process to request funding from central sources for capital projects was introduced in 2019. This process, as agreed by Policy and

Resources Committee sets out clear criteria for which funding bids will be assessed:

Projects must:

- a. be an essential scheme (Health and Safety or Statutory Compliance,
 - b. be fully/substantially reimbursable,
 - c. be a major Renewal of Income Generating Asset,
 - d. be a Spend to Save (with a payback period within 5 years.)
 - e. address a risk on the Corporate Risk register; or the following items that would otherwise be escalated to the corporate risk register:
 - i. replacement of critical end of life components for core services;
 - ii. schemes required to deliver high priority policies; and
 - iii. schemes with a high reputational impact
 - f. have a sound business case clearly demonstrating the negative impact of the scheme not going ahead, i.e. penalty costs or loss of income, where these are material.
2. Projects put forward by Departments have to show how they meet the relevant criteria and Committee chairman are requested to prioritise the proposals. These capital proposals are considered by RASC in October and in principle funding agreed for approved projects.
 3. Where projects have not progressed within the year they are considered for potential withdrawal of funding for reallocation elsewhere. Resubmissions for these projects is possible.
 4. Since the introduction of this annual funding bidding process, Open Spaces have successfully been awarded funding and are progressing the following projects:
 - **2019** – Finsbury Circus reinstatement, East Heath Car Park, West Ham Park Playground, ParkLife.
 - **2020** – Tower Hill play area replacement, Carbon removals programme (part of the Climate action strategy), Hampstead Heath swimming facilities safety, access and security improvements.

Current Position

5. The closing date for capital funding proposals was 6th September. The Director of Open Spaces started sharing initial ideas for projects with Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs at his monthly meeting in July.
6. A full list of projects was circulated to the Chairs and Deputies in August for discussion and decision at their September meeting. Comments were received from some of those who were unable to attend. Thirteen projects were considered and taking into account the clear funding criteria, four projects were agreed for onward consideration by RASC.
7. The project to *repair the outflow and dams at middle pond at Burnham Beeches* was the fourth agreed project. However since the 6 September closing date,

additional funding has been identified by City Surveyors and the £82k funding request to RASC has been withdrawn.

8. The three projects for which we are seeing capital funding this year are shown in the table below. More detail can be found in appendix 1.

Project	£ requested
Parliament Hill Athletics Track Reconstruction and Flood Lighting	Up to £2 million
Path restoration at Epping Forest, post Covid-19	£250,000
Redevelopment of Queen's Park play area and sandpit	£55,000

9. Parliament Hill athletics track was identified as the highest priority project for open spaces as it clearly demonstrated a
- need for replacement of critical end of life components,
 - increasing health and safety concerns
 - likely high reputational damage when high-profile events at the track have to be cancelled if TrackMark accreditation can no longer be secured.
10. Parliament Hill athletics track is an exceptional funding request. The project requires a full resurfacing of the 8 lane track which has reached the critical end of its lifespan. The track currently shows surface irregularities including shrinkage, subsidence, puddling and kerb movement. The reconstruction works required include drainage works, removal and replacement of surfaces and LED lighting.
11. The track is seen as critical infrastructure at a Regional level. Without full reconstruction the track will not comply with standards set out by the UKA TrackMark Quality Assurance scheme for UK outdoor track and field athletics facilities. Losing this certification will mean that the track can no longer host competitive athletics. This will impact on European and Regional events as well as the local athletics clubs, schools, community groups and general public.
12. If this capital request is unsuccessful it will not only impact on the health and wellbeing of the local and subregional community but will mean that high profile events such as the Night of 10,000 PB's which attracts significant media attention cannot be held at Parliament Hill.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

13. These projects help achieve the Corporate Plan aims to:
- **Contribute to a flourishing society**
 - **Shape outstanding environments**
14. The reconstruction of the athletics track will help deliver the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy vision
- To deliver health, social and economic benefits through sport and physical activity.*

And the outcome:

People enjoy good health and wellbeing and health inequalities are reduced.

In particular the strategy activity to:

Use our assets to encourage and facilitate accessible and inclusive sport and physical activity.

Financial implications

15. The total value of capital being requested for the three projects is up to £2,305,000.
16. The funding request for the athletics track is significant (up to £2M) and officers have already started conversations with offices in Camden to see if they are able to provide any funding as Parliament Hill is the only athletics track in their Borough. Conversations are also underway with London Sport. The Director has spoken to the London Marathon Charitable Trust (LMCT) and officers will reapproach the LMCT in late October when LMCT will have a better understanding of what funding they have available after the 3 October London Marathon. Wembley National Stadium Trust have advised that they cannot fund this project. Officers are reviewing what other external funding streams may be available.
17. The budget income target for the track is £32,000 and this would not be sufficient to propose the capital submission as a *spend to save scheme*.
18. The capital funding request to repair the most well used and damaged paths in Epping Forest is £250,000. No external income has been identified. Two Green Recovery Challenge Fund applications were submitted by Epping Forest to the Heritage Fund in 2020 and 2021 for post covid recovery funding, but both applications were unsuccessful.
19. The Epping Forest Fund was established in the Epping Forest Act (1878), Section 41(1) of the Act [Application of Fund] provides as follows:
The Conservators may from time to time apply any part of the capital of Epping Forest Fund, as occasion may require, in payment of purchase money or compensation, or for the expenses of the erection of lodges, pounds, or other permanent buildings which they are empowered to erect, or of the substantial repair of any buildings of which they become possessed, or for any other expenses properly chargeable on capital.
20. To date the Application of Fund has been traditionally interpreted as permission to spend Forest Fund only on the purchase of land, and capital investment in buildings or structures on Forest Land. Approval to spend the Forest Fund must be granted by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee. There is £77,000 funding uncommitted in Forest Fund. However there is a £200,000 funding gap in the ParkLife project. Whilst every attempt is being taken to find external funding for this, it was anticipated that the remaining resource in the Forest Fund could be used to ensure the ParkLife project, (which is 60% externally funded), could proceed.

21. The total cost of the playground and sandpit improvements at Queens Park is £100,000. Officers are proactively seeking £45,000 CIL funding from the LB Brent. A donations campaign has been running for the playground at Queens Park since December 2020 and at 24 September 2021, £8,910 has been donated online via the Queens Park donations webpage, which has been strongly 'pushed' by officers via social media, conversations with the public, posters etc. <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/queens-park/donate-to-us> . The total capital funding being requested from RASC is £55,000.

Conclusion

22. Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the various Open Spaces Committees have, over the summer, been informed of a range of capital projects that officers wished to put forward to RASC for funding. The Chairs and Deputies identified four priority projects which best met the RASC funding criteria for submission, with the athletics track at Hampstead Heath being the number one priority project. Since submission, the project at Burnham Beeches has been withdrawn as City Surveyors have identified resources from their own budgets. RASC will consider these projects along with those from all other Departments at its meeting in October.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Capital projects being considered by RASC

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Appendix 1 – detail behind capital proposals

Project Title & £ requested	Brief Description	RASC Funding Criteria Met	Reason for funding request	Impact if funding not awarded
Parliament Hill Athletics Track Up to £2million	Full reconstruction of the 8 lane Parliament Hill Athletics Track and associated track infrastructure to obtain TrackMark Accreditation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement of critical end of life components for core services • Health & Safety scheme • Schemes with a high reputational impact • Schemes required to deliver high priority policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track surface has reached the end of its 10-year life span. • 2018 holding repairs undertaken and condition survey commissioned which recommended full or partial reconstruction of the track surface. • The UKA Facility Surface Track Performance Report classified the track as amber for visual inspection and shock absorbance. Recertification will require the full reconstruction of the athletics Track to ensure athletes safety and to continue hosting competitive events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track may be required to close as the surface has the potential to cause injury or harm to athletes. • Track will not be able host World Class athletics competitions, some of which are used for qualifying times for selection to International events • Reputational damage as The Night of the 10,000 PB's event attracts widespread national media coverage • Potential for event to go elsewhere and not return to Hampstead even if track accreditation was achieved in later years.
Path restoration at Epping Forest, post Covid-19 £250k	Essential repair or restoration of 60 paths in the path network which focusses on the worst affected paths in the higher public access areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pandemic and Lockdowns saw visitor numbers across Epping Forest increase three to five fold. • The Forest experienced one of the five wettest winters on record. • Unprecedented foot, hoof and tyre damage to paths, many of which have deteriorated beyond repair. • Following a path condition assessment (March 2021), 86.5 km of path verge was found to have been permanently damaged. • Rather than consider all 435 paths managed in the Forest for repair, funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended and irreparable damage to the edges of the SAC and SSSI landscape. • Increased complaints from visitors • Much increased H&S risk of walkers, riders and cyclist accident and injury due to path deterioration with potential insurance claims against the Corporation.

Project Title & £ requested	Brief Description	RASC Funding Criteria Met	Reason for funding request	Impact if funding not awarded
			request has focussed on areas of highest footfall and greatest disrepair.	
Redevelopment of Queen's Park Play Area and Sandpit £55k	To provide replacement equipment in the children's play area and refurbish the sandpit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement of critical end of life components for core services • Health & Safety scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground and Sandpit are visited an estimated 200,00 per annum. • Playground and sandpit has reached the end of its critical life. • The equipment is becoming more costly to maintain and will become a health and safety risk. • Quality of play value of sandpit and playground is falling due to ageing or unusable equipment • Need to provide a safe, accessible play environment allowing children to develop physical, social and emotional skills through exploration and interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of formal play value at Queens Park • Closure/removal of equipment and/or the sandpit due to defective equipment • Reputational damage through negative media impact • Increased complaints