

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee: Natural Environment Board – For Decision	Dated: 6 Feb 2025
Subject: Tower Hill Play Project	Public report: For Decision
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes 	Diverse Engaged Communities Leading Sustainable Environment Vibrant Thriving Destination Flourishing Public Spaces
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	£
What is the source of Funding?	City Fund and Section 106
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	Yes
Report of:	Katie Stewart – Executive Director of Environment
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Summary

This report presents a new design for the playground in Tower Hill that has been led by a public consultation exercise. The public consultation garnered 612 responses, and the design focuses on inclusivity, safety for users, biodiversity and low ongoing maintenance costs.

The project, initially approved in 2021, was delayed until 2024 due to the Capital Review Programme and reduced resources. Land Use Consultants (LUC) have been selected, via a procurement process to design and build the playground.

An online consultation was conducted from 29 November to 20 December 2024. The consultation proposed a number of design options and a variety of play equipment. The Fort concept was the most popular, with 47% of the votes. The final design includes the top requested play equipment and design elements

Final costing is pending, but initial estimates suggest the project will be delivered within budget. Planning permission will need to be secured, before we can progress with the build stage.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Approve the design for a new play area at Tower Hill Gardens so that the project can proceed.
2. Authorise preparation and submission of planning applications to Tower Hamlets to secure planning permission for the works along with authority for officers to negotiate and enter any related planning agreements before a gateway 5 report can be developed to draw down the remaining budget and proceed to the build stage.

Main Report

Background

1. Tower Hill Play Area is over twelve years old and maintenance costs have increased with most of the equipment needing to be replaced or have significant repairs carried out. In 2021, this committee agreed on a gateway two report to release funds for staff costs and fees to develop a design for the playground. Due to the Capital Review Programme and reduced resources within City Gardens, the project did not progress further until 2024. Through a procurement exercise, City Gardens identified Land Use Consultants (LUC) to enter into a two-stage design and build contract for a new playground at Tower Hill. The first stage involved a consultation process to inform the design of the new playground.

Current Position

Consultation

2. An online social media consultation was carried out between the 29 November and 20 December 2024. This consultation was promoted on various social media platforms and through the City of London Social Media Accounts. Residents and businesses within 200m of the site were written to directly, and the consultation was advertised Social Housing Estates newsletter. Two public consultation events were held, one in Artizan Street Library and one in Aldgate School during their Christmas fair.
3. Three concept designs were proposed during the consultation: the Cityscape, the Dragon, and the Fort, details of which can be found in appendix 1; Design Concepts.
4. In total, 612 individual responses were received. A report detailing the consultation results can be found in appendix 2. Three stakeholder meetings took

place as the design developed, with stakeholders including Tower Hamlets, The Metropolitan Police, Historic England, Aldgate Connect, Parent and Carers Forum, Ward Members, Representatives from CoL Housing, and City Gardens.

5. The Fort concept emerged as the most popular option, receiving 47% of the votes. The four most requested pieces of play equipment were an obstacle course, swing, climbing frame, and slide. There was a strong preference for a fenced play area, with 66% of respondents supporting this.

The Design

6. The final design, based on the Fort Theme can be found in appendix 3. The design incorporates all of the top four requested play items and includes a fully accessible roundabout suitable for wheelchairs. There are two slides; the popular current slide on site will be reused and a new slide which is more accessible for younger children will be introduced. There are two swings, a large bucket style swing and a smaller swing for younger children, toddlers including those with special needs. The design reflects the Tower of London, which is visible from the site, and focuses on inclusivity, safety, biodiversity and reducing maintenance costs.
7. Key elements of the design include a central fort structure, accessible paths, and various play elements for children of all ages and abilities. Safety considerations were also a priority, and the design has been assessed by ROSPA to ensure it is safe for play. The structure has been designed will be visually open to reduce hiding spots that may be used for anti-social behaviour.
8. There will be an accessible path, ensuring wheelchair accessibility and accessible and sensory play equipment across the site. Benches with wheelchair spaces are provided, offering views of the Tower of London. Planting areas will include an extended hedge to increase biodiversity and meet the planning obligation in regards to biodiversity net gain, whilst central planting will be low-level to ensure clear visibility across the site. The planting will be approximately 50% evergreen, with species that are resilient, enhance sensory interaction, and biodiversity being prioritized.
9. Lessons have been learnt from the initial design and whilst most of the new play equipment will be wooden, all of the legs will be sleeved in metal so no wood comes into contact with the soil. The main structure of the tower will be metal framed clad in wood. The safety surface will be renewed with one with much greater longevity than that currently in Tower Hill. Whilst no play area is maintenance free, the ongoing maintenance costs of the proposed playground will be less than the current play area.
10. The central fort structure is designed to resemble a turret from the Tower of London, with a steel subframe and cladding. It includes various ways for children to approach and climb and reuses the very popular slide that is already on site. The design will be presented to Tower Hamlets Planning Department for approval.

Budget

11. At the time of writing, final costing has not been calculated, but initial estimates suggest that this design can be delivered within budget. If value engineering is required, the ground-level trampoline and second smaller slide would be considered for removal.

Next Steps

12. Officers will submit an application to Tower Hamlets for Planning Permission. Once planning permission has been obtained and the costing realized, a report will be submitted to the corporate project board to release the remaining amount.

Options

1. The play area is removed and the area returned to garden - Not recommended
2. Officers are asked to develop a different design - Not recommended
3. The proposed play area design is approved – Recommended

Proposals

13. Tower Hill is the biggest and most used play area within the square mile, removal of the play area and returning it to garden would reduce the overall play offer from the City Corporation significantly. The project brief has been followed by the consultants and a well thought out, high quality, consultation led design, which is accessible and low maintenance has been produced which will improve the play offer significantly of the wider area.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

14. **Strategic implications** – The Tower Hill Play Project proposal aligns closely with the Corporate Plan 2024-2029 and supports its delivery in several key areas. The project delivers outcomes related to diverse engaged communities, leading sustainable environments, vibrant thriving destinations, and flourishing public spaces.
15. **Financial implications** – Funding for this project has been allocated from City Fund budgets and Section 106, whilst the final costing have not been realised the designers and play supplier are confident that the design can be delivered within budget. If this is not the case the design can be value engineered to fit within the budget envelope.
16. **Resource implications** – The current resource to manage the playground is met by City Gardens local risk. The proposed play area has been designed to reduce ongoing maintenance costs so will not require increased resourcing.

17. **Legal implications** – This design will require planning permission from Tower Hamlets and Health and Safety regulations, which are being partly managed through having the design approved by ROSPA. Works will not be able to start until all permissions have been secured.
18. **Risk implications** - The project has several risk implications; these include potential delays in obtaining planning permission, unforeseen increases in project costs, and the risk of not meeting the community's expectations. In regards to planning permission, discussions with Tower Hamlets have started and they have not raised any major concerns and the design will shortly be subject to a pre-planning application engagement meeting before the full application is submitted. Communication with the public during the next stages of the process through updating the website, onsite information and updating the stakeholder group.
19. **Equalities implications** – The Tower Hill Play Project proposal has been carefully designed to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty 2010. The project aims to create an inclusive play area that caters to children of all abilities. The design includes accessible paths and play elements, ensuring that the play area is welcoming to everyone. The inclusion of a fence and the restrictions of dogs from within the area will encourage those that have beliefs that give them concern around dogs will make them feel more welcomed. By focusing on inclusivity, the project supports the City of London Corporation's commitment to promoting equality and diversity within the community.
20. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been conducted to ensure that the proposals do not negatively impact any protected groups. The EIA has identified potential positive impacts, such as improved accessibility and inclusivity, and has ensured that any potential negative impacts are mitigated.
21. **Climate implications** - The design includes planting areas with an extended hedge to increase biodiversity and meet planning obligations regarding biodiversity net gain. The use of resilient materials and a design that minimizes maintenance costs further supports sustainability goals.

Security implications

None

Conclusion

22. The project to develop a new playground at Tower Hill Playground has made significant progress since its initial approval in 2021. The consultation process was thorough and inclusive, resulting in a design that reflects the preferences and needs of the community. The Fort concept, which emerged as the top favourite, incorporates key elements of inclusivity, safety, and biodiversity. The project is now awaiting planning permission and final costing, with the expectation that it can be delivered within budget.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 –Design Concepts
- Appendix 2 – Consultation Results
- Appendix 3 – Final Design

Background Papers

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