

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee	Dated: 20 May 2025
Subject: Queen's Park water play feature	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 -Providing excellent services -Flourishing public spaces
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Yes
If so, how much?	£250,000 - £275,000
What is the source of Funding?	Local Risk Budget (£112K) £62K from 2024-25 £50K from 2025-26 Cyclical Works Programme (£66K) £72-£97K in external funding to be secured.
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Internal funding has been approved
Report of:	Katie Stewart, Executive Director, Environment
Report author:	Charlotte Williams, Head of Operations and Parks, North London Open Spaces

Summary

This report provides Members with an update on the feasibility of reopening a water play feature at Queen's Park. It provides options on how to proceed, with Officers recommendation to install a splash pad in the location.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve Option 1 as outlined in paragraph 27 herein.

Main Report

Background

1. The paddling pool at Queen's Park was installed in 1999. It has been mainly closed since 2020 due to the Covid pandemic restrictions, underlying operational issues with the pool and its adjacent treatment plant, which requires repair, and staff shortages.
2. There is desire by officers, Members and the local community to return this space to active recreational use. However, the required repairs, ongoing operating costs, and staff training and supervision that are needed to ensure compliance with relevant legislation, make the current paddling pool facility very costly and time consuming to repair, maintain and operate.
3. The paddling pool at Queen's Park is an important recreational facility, which benefits the local community. It helps us to deliver our charitable objectives for Queen's Park, forms part of the 10-year management plan, 5-Year business plan, and Natural Environment Division strategic priorities - principally Access & Recreation and Community Engagement.
4. This paper considers the potential future uses for the site, including repair and retention of the existing paddling pool, conversion and installation of a splash pad, repurposing the site for alternative, non-water play use, and 'mothballing' the paddling pool (i.e. keeping in closed).

Physical issues affecting the paddling pool

5. Issues affecting the paddling pool include but are not limited to defects with the plant room, faulty dosing systems, and blocked pipes.
6. In March 2024, the City Corporation appointed a consultant to carry out a full review and assessment of the condition of the paddling pool, and to undertake an independent review of its operation. The consultant assessed pool and water treatment, as well as the pool's design. They also considered the pool's operation under governing health guidelines, its supervision needs while in operation, staff training needed to manage the facility, facility access, and facility security.
7. Pool readings and independent bacteriological tests are taken before the pool is opened each year, and every month during the operating season. The last tests were undertaken in August 2023 and were not compliant with industry standards. The current controls are inadequate, and the automatic dosing system is not operational.

8. The filtration system is dated and does not provide adequate turnover rates to ensure adequate water quality. In the UK, swimming pool filtration system regulations are primarily guided by health and safety standards and industry best practices, rather than by legislation. However, local Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and pool operators are expected to follow authoritative guidelines such as those from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Pool Water Treatment Advisory Group (PWTAG). As a result, a new paddling pool filtration system would need to be installed to meet industry standards as the existing inlets and outlets are not adequate to allow suitable flow and circulation of chlorinated water, which contributes to inadequate disinfection levels throughout the entirety of the pool.
9. There is also no provision of a cyanuric acid day tank and pump to introduce cyanuric acid to the pool, which stabilises pool water and prevents chlorine from dissipating in sunlight. This poses unacceptable safety risks and cannot be done manually.
10. The current design of the paddling pool is also not fit for purpose; it is both unsafe and does not provide suitable access for many. The paddling pool beach area slopes down to a depth of 0.5m, which can lead to young children/toddlers/babies drifting into deeper water. This requires appropriately qualified, trained, and accredited staff, and in sufficient numbers. Pool staff would need to be qualified RLSS Pool Lifeguards and qualified Paediatric First Aiders. There should also be an experienced and qualified Plant Operator on duty during pool opening hours. There is insufficient budget and capacity to provide the additional staffing required to operate and supervise the pool safely. And, by its nature, the sloping surface of the paddling pool makes it inaccessible to those with mobility challenges, in opposition with the charity's objectives.
11. In addition, the paddling pool is surrounded by a fence that has historically been scaled by trespassers and presents a problem with vandalism and hazardous materials (e.g. broken glass) being introduced into the pool overnight that is difficult to see on daily inspections before opening.
12. The paddling pool would require extensive work and expenditure to comply with HSE legislation and to carry out the recommendations from the consultant's report to make it operational and safe for users. Restoring the pool 'as is' would also require appointment of additional staff, incurring significant additional staffing, recruitment and training costs to ensure staff are competent and suitably qualified. There is no budget available to pay for this.
13. The estimated cost to complete the necessary works to reopen and operate the paddling pool for the 2025 season in compliance with HSE legislation is £92,475 (Appendix 2). This does not include the cost of recruiting and training of additional staff, which would be ongoing costs that are also not funded.
14. Repairing and reopening the paddling pool 'as is' would not address the problems with the current design and there is no budget to pay for the

additional staff needed. There is also no budget available to cover the cost of weekly maintenance, which would need to be done by staff when the paddling pool is open.

Staffing requirements of the paddling pool

15. Due to the current design profile of the paddling pool, it would be necessary to provide constant supervision by appropriately qualified and trained members of staff during all pool opening hours from May to September. At a minimum, two qualified trained staff would be needed per day to allow for adequate breaks and support during times of heavy use and otherwise. This is currently not possible, as there is a staff shortage at Queen's Park and no funding is available to pay for additional staff.
16. Any staff working at the paddling pool would need to be appropriately qualified, trained, and accredited. Pool staff would need to be qualified RLSS Pool Lifeguards and qualified Paediatric First Aiders. There should also be an experienced and qualified Plant Operator on duty during pool opening hours.
17. The current staffing structure only allows Operative Rangers - who are not skilled at or accredited to carry out these duties - to potentially oversee the paddling pool. As noted, however, there is not sufficient staffing to accommodate this additional demand, and providing the necessary level of staffing for the paddling pool is currently unachievable and unaffordable and would not align with operational needs and priorities for the existing team of Operative Rangers.

Splash Pad

18. While returning the paddling pool to operation is neither achievable or advisable, Officers do seek to return a water play feature to Queen's Park to support local needs and priorities. Officers believe that installation of a splash pad would not only achieve this, but it would also do so in a way that is safer, operationally more achievable and cheaper, and would provide a facility that is accessible to more of the community.
19. A splash pad is a recreational area, often in a public area, for water play that has little or no standing water. Typically, they have above ground play items and ground level water sprays. The water is either freshwater or recycled and treated water, and splash pads are surfaced in textured, non-slip concrete or in a rubber crumb material. An illustrative example is included in Appendix 1.
20. Open splash pads offer many benefits compared to paddling pools. They require less maintenance, are easier to clean and faster to open, and provide a safer experience. They are also more accessible when at ground level, as they allow for greater access to those with mobility challenges. Importantly, they offer many operational benefits, as no lifeguarding or staff resource is needed, as there is no water depth, so they are safer, easier and more cost effective to operate from a staffing perspective.

21. Splash pads are also proving increasingly popular in public recreation spaces, as they are more interactive safe spaces that are inclusive, accessible, and invite all ages and abilities to play together.
22. Splash pads require installation of only a very slight gradient to allow water to drain. Dependent upon the water management system installed, the used water will either enter the local sewer, be collected and repurposed for irrigation, or recycled for more water play. Therefore, splash pads offer environmental benefits of using less water and fewer chemicals. Installation of a splash pad would support Queen's Park Charity in meeting its community, environmental, and access aims.
23. There are different models and systems. A splash pad could be created either with a flow through system, a flow through system with an additional grey water tank, or with a PWTAG-compliant recirculation system.
24. A flow-through system is the preferred system, as it is the lowest capital to install and maintain, as no water treatment is needed. Water is drawn from the mains supply to feed the features. The water quality would not need to be checked by staff every two hours.

Funding

25. Officers have already identified partial funding (£178,000) for the installation of a splash pad at this point and propose a fundraising effort to raise the remaining amount, as outlined below.
 - a. £62,000 has been reserved from 2024-25 local risk to fund this project, with approval of the Chamberlain's Department.
 - b. £66,000 in the Cyclical Works Programme is allocated to a water play feature in the park, which Officers have confirmed can be used for this project.
 - c. £50,000 in local risk from 2025-26 has been identified for further contribution to the project.
 - d. The remaining amount would be raised locally via a fundraising campaign. It is worth noting that the local community has responded positively to other fundraising campaigns in the past, including the recent renovation of the sandpit at Queen's Park.
 - e. While £72,000 would be needed to fund the most affordable specification of a splash pad, an additional £25,000 (c. £97,000) is included to cover any costed risks. If additional amounts are fundraised, then Officers could improve/increase the specification to allow for installation of a more advanced facility.

Options

26. There are several options to reactivate a water play feature in the part of the park, as discussed herein. The options are presented below for Committee review and approval.

27. **Option 1 (Recommended):** Formally decommission the paddling pool at Queen's Park and raise c. £97,000 to install a new splash pad water play feature in the same location that will be safer, more accessible, and easier to operate and incur lower operating costs to operate. This option is recommended, as it retains a water play feature, would allow for installation of a modern, safe, accessible feature to the play area in the park and will not require staff supervision.
28. **Option 2 (not recommended):** Invest £92,475 into the paddling pool to reopen it. This figure does not include year 1 and ongoing and additional staffing costs. This option is not recommended as it is not in line with health & safety guidance and would be difficult and expensive to repair, maintain and operate. A minimum of two qualified, trained and accredited staff would be needed and no funding is available for recruiting additional staff. The current staffing structure only allows Operative Rangers - who are not skilled at or accredited to carry out these duties - to potentially oversee the paddling pool.
29. **Option 3 (not recommended):** Repurpose the paddling pool for uses other than a water play feature. This is not recommended, and has not been explored in detail, as there is a clear desire locally, and from Officers and Members, for a water play feature to remain in the park.
30. **Option 4 (not recommended):** Maintain the status quo – an unused, non-functioning feature in a prominent area of the park. This option is not recommended, as the area is an eyesore, presents various health, safety, and anti-social behaviour risks, and inaction risks reputational damage to the City Corporation.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

31. A water play feature is part of the 10-year Management Plan, which sits within the context of wider City Corporation plans and strategies, which address the delivery of the City Corporation's overall aims and objectives across key areas.
32. Key among these are the new Corporate Plan (2024-2029), the Natural Environment Strategies (2024- 2029), and the Climate Action Strategy (2020-2027), which set out the City Corporation's strategic approach to our managed open spaces, assets, and activities.

Financial implications

33. The proposed option will require additional spending as outlined below.
- a. £62,000 has been reserved from 2024-25 local risk to fund this project, with approval of the Chamberlain's Department.
 - b. £66,000 in the Cyclical Works Programme is allocated to a water play feature in the park, which Officers have confirmed can be used for this project.

- c. £50,000 in local risk from 2025-26 has been identified for further contribution to the project.
- d. £97,000 will need to be raised through grants and local fundraising efforts for the most affordable specification of splash pad and to allow for any costed risks. If additional amounts are fundraised, then Officers would improve/increase the specification to allow for installation of a more advanced specification.

Resource implications

- 34. Officers' time to liaise with local groups and stakeholders in order to raise the required funds and campaign locally via a fundraising campaign. In addition, procurement and project management of any water play project will require officers to expend significant additional time on this project.

Legal implications

- 35. None

Risk implications

- 36. Risks are monitored and recorded through the various risk registers, including the Division and Departmental Risk Registers.
- 37. An additional £25,000 has been included in the figures to allow for any risk implications in procuring and delivering this project.

Equalities implications

- 38. The new splash pad would ensure compliance with our public Sector Equality Duty 2010.

Climate implications

- 39. None

Security implications

- 40. None

Conclusion

- 41. This report provides Members with an update on Officers' research and due diligence into the feasibility of reopening a water play feature at Queen's Park. It provides options on how to proceed, with Officers recommendation to install a splash pad in the location at a cost estimated to be £250-£275,000.

Appendices:

- Appendix 1: Illustration of splash pad
- Appendix 2: Estimated costs to reopen and operate the paddling pool

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Appendix 1

Illustration of splash pad



Appendix 2

Estimated costs to reopen and operate the paddling pool

Description	Cost excl. VAT
Paddling pool filtration system to meet industry standards	£37,083
Materials to treat the paddling pool	£5,222
Repair and resurface of paddling pool flooring	£44,398
First aid and emergency response materials	£2,772
Deep clean of the paddling pool before the start of the season	£1,000
Annual maintenance of the paddling pool (tank clean, pool equipment service, water sampling and summerisation/winterisation)	£2,000
Total Cost:	£92,475