

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## CABINET

8<sup>th</sup> November 2022

**Clr Malcolm Longley – Cabinet Member for Finance**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Abington Park facilities</b>
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### List of Appendices

None

#### 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1 To seek approval for capital budget of £1.2m in 2023/24, to be funded from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), to replace the existing welfare facilities located in Abington Park East in a more suitable location, in consultation with key stakeholders.

#### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 Abington Park is split West and East by Park Avenue South (A5095). On each part of the park, welfare facilities (public toilets and changing rooms) are provided. The facility on Abington Park West is located near to the Abington Park Museum. The facility on Abington Park East is located at the bottom of a bank within a wooded area between the equipped children's play area and the lake. Given the size of Abington Park, the nature of the facilities, and the division by the road, two sets of toilets are required.
- 2.2 The location of the welfare facilities in Abington Park East means that they are partially concealed and prone to vandalism and misuse. Over many years the level and repeated nature of vandalism have led to the facility being unsafe for public use. This reached a position in 2021 whereby the cost, regularity of repairs required and impacts of public safety led to its closure. Since this date the facility has been closed to the public and boarded up. The building is still subject to ongoing vandalism, but this has mainly been restricted to the exterior of the building.
- 2.3 This report seeks a capital budget of £1.2m in 2023/24, funded from CIL, to demolish the existing building and bring the area back into public use and re-provide a new facility at a suitable location on Abington Park East. The location of the new facility will be subject to consultation with key stakeholders such as the Friends of Abington Park and the Police Crime Prevention Design Officer.

### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - 3.1.1 Approve a capital budget of £1.2m in 2023/24, funded from CIL, to remove the existing and provide replacement public welfare facilities at Abington Park East, and recommend to Council that the budget be amended accordingly.
  - 3.1.2 Authorise the procurement of services and works, award and completion of contracts to facilitate the works.

### **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- 4.1 To provide an important public amenity.
- 4.2 To support and encourage the use and enjoyment of Abington Park.
- 4.3 To reduce the safety risk associated with people, especially children, crossing Park Avenue South to access the remaining open public toilets.
- 4.4 To reduce potential for anti-social behaviour by removing the existing building and enabling a new facility to be located and designed to minimise this risk.

## 5. Report Background

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- 5.1 In both Abington Park East and West is a welfare facility for public use. The building on Abington Park East provides for public toilets and changing facilities for park users, whereas the building on the West is for public convenience only.
- 5.2 The building on Abington Park West is located near to the Abington Park Museum. The building on Abington Park East is located down the bottom of a bank within a wooded area between the equipped children's play area and the lake. The West building has not had the history of vandalism and damage that the East one has endured. This is due to the proximity of the building on the West to other activities such as the museum and park café, compared to location of the building on the East. Outside of typical use hours, the building on the East is not visible by passing vehicles and is out of direct view line of nearby residential properties and park users at several locations.
- 5.3 The Abington Park East building, over many years, has received repeated vandalism and damage which at times has led to the facility being unsafe for public use. Regrettably, the cost of vandalism and damage plus the potential risk to public level reached a point whereby it was more cost effective and safer to close the building. Since this date the facility has remained closed and boarded up. The building is still subject to ongoing vandalism, but this has mainly been restricted to the exterior of the building
- 5.4 As well as providing public toilets for all, the welfare facility was provided for those paying to use the park's football pitches as well. Since the building has been closed those using the football pitches some users have had to change either in public spaces or in their cars neighbouring the pitches. The lack of welfare provision has had a direct impact on income from paying park users. Teams are now looking at alternative venues to play rather than Abington Park. The resident Angling Club has nowhere close by to use, which is causing complaints.
- 5.5 The Council has received a number of enquiries and complaints regarding the building's closure and the inconvenience to the public of having to using the alternative facilities on Abington Park West. Consideration has been given to undertaking the necessary repairs to the building to make it safe for public use, and a number of measures have been implemented. However, these have not been successful and trying to implement further measures would be unlikely to resolve the continual vandalism, damage, or concerns about public safety.
- 5.6 Preliminary consultation has taken place with the Friends of Abington Park as to their views of providing welfare facilities. The outcome of this initial consultation has led to the conclusion that a reprovision of the facility in Abington Park East would be the best socio-economic solution and the initial view is that they should not be too far from the existing location in order to meet the needs of users.

5.7 Initial design and cost planning indicates that to demolish, make good the existing building area, and re-provide a new facility would cost around £1.2m.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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6.1 The choices available to the Council are as follows.

- A. Do nothing and leave the building closed in its current condition: This would not enable the Council to mitigate against future vandalism and damage or prevent those determined to access the flat roof from doing so, thus retaining a safety risk. It is highly likely that the building would become so damaged that it would be unsafe to remain in situ. The current condition of the building creates a negative visual image of the park, and consequently the Council, leading to reputational damage. The option does not support the Council's objects for safer communities and improving health and wellbeing.
  - B. Demolish the existing facility and retain the provision on Abington Park West: This option would enable the Council to mitigate against continued vandalism and removes an unsightly building from the park. However, it would reduce public welfare facilities. The Council would not be providing the required changing facilities for paying user of the park's facilities or meet the need of users of the play area and lakes. The option would not support the Council's objectives for improving health and wellbeing.
  - C. Refurbish the current facility and bring this back into public use: Works to the building would still require circa £120k to ensure the building was initially safe for use. This would include altering sanitaryware, improvements to seating/benching, vanity units and cubicles, doors etc. although these works would make an aesthetic improvement to the building and improve its resilience to damage to a degree. However, it would still be prone to vandalism and critical failure. Nor is the existing building, even if it was not vandalised, an attractive addition to the park.
  - D. Approve £1.2m capital funding in 2023/24 to demolish the existing facility, bring the area back into public use, and provide a relocated facility: This would remove the current safety risks and reputational harm, and enable the Council to mitigate against future vandalism and damage. It would support the Council's objectives for safer communities and improving health and wellbeing.
- 6.2 Option D above is the only option that enables the Council to effectively support its objectives and provide the facilities to enable income for use of the parks football pitches. Option D also provides an opportunity to design and construct a new facility with high levels of energy efficiency and sustainability, thus contributing to achieving the target of Net Zero by 2030, and other visual and environmental improvements.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **Resources and Financial**

- 7.1 Option D would require a budget of £1.2m. It is proposed this is appropriately taken from CIL as Abington Park is Northampton's premier park and is likely to be increasingly used as development of the town proceeds. of CIL funding for 2023/24. There are CIL balances which could be used for this purpose.
- 7.2 It is expected that by providing a new welfare facility that current paying football teams would remain. [Insert quantification of the income impact.]

### **Legal**

- 7.3 Section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936 provides that a Council may provide sanitary conveniences in proper and convenient situations. The Council can also provide them under the general power of competence provided by Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. However, the Council is not under any statutory duty to provide such conveniences, it is at the discretion of the Council whether or not to do so.

### **Risks**

- 7.4 The project carries a number of inherent risks, notably:
- 7.4.1 Works could be delayed due to material and labour supply issues. This could be mitigated by the early ordering of materials by the contractor and agreed programme between the parties.
- 7.4.2 The location of the new facility may not reduce the levels of vandalism and damage. This would be mitigated by consulting with the relevant bodies including the Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor on location and design.
- 7.5 The project would also greatly reduce the risks of the current situation, where the Council has a continuing liability in relation to authorised and unauthorised access to the building, and reputational risks around the lack of provision for Abington Park East.

### **Consultation**

- 7.6 Initial consultation has taken place with the Friends of Abington Park. This would continue alongside that of consulting with the relevant WNC services, the Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor, and other key stakeholders to ensure that both the location and design are suitable.

### **Climate Impact**

- 7.7 The design and construction approach of a new facility would seek to reduce the carbon footprint. The approach would be to install energy efficiency measures which may include renewable energy options.

### **Community Impact**

- 7.8 The new facility would provide a valuable sustainable asset to the community. The location of the building should promote community interest and self-monitoring.

### **Communications**

It will be important to keep existing users of the park and local community interest groups informed and engaged about the proposals and any subsequent works carried out as well as communicating the future benefits to local residents.

## **8. Background Papers**

- 8.1 None.