

SKEGNESS TOWN COUNCIL

REPORT TO: COUNCIL 16TH SEPTEMBER 2020
BY: TOWN CLERK
SUBJECT: Review of the Tower Gardens Accessibility and Sensory Environment

PURPOSE:

To respond to Council's request for more information and guidance in relation to the Report considered at Council on 2nd September 2020

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Council received a report commissioned by Cllr Cunnington that looked at:
 - disability access in Tower Gardens,
 - adaptations to make the playground more inclusive
 - the potential for a sensory garden.
- 1.2 Council requested that the Town Clerk examine the report and bring back observations on the report, a plan that could be used as the basis for a funding bid and some more refined costings.
- 1.3 Due to the time constraints of the potential funding source, there has only been about a week in which to prepare the report and the associated figures. Currently there is no clear or agreed brief of what Council's expectations or requirements are. As a result, report and costings at best can only be taken as an indication based on assumptions the Town Clerk has had to make in the absence of clear instruction. Council should understand that such figures are not robustly formatted and any funding evaluation will most likely require significant further work which would be a concern.
- 1.4 The report has been split into several sections. One part focuses on a commentary to the original report and options and others on the costs and timescales

2 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF TOWER GARDENS REPORT

- 2.1 No comment is being made here in respect of the introduction or general description of the gardens contained within the Environmental Assessment as the Council already has its own information.

2.2 GRAND PARADE ENTRANCE

2.2.1 Adjacent to the Grand Parade entrance there are paths and steps leading down into the gardens. Advice given in the report identifies a possible issue with the gradient of the slope. Reference is made in the report to Building Regulations Part M. However, these regulations specifically refer to buildings and their entrances not “parks and gardens”. On this basis, the Council is not failing to comply with the Building Regulations, albeit the slopes and levels set out in the regulations may make the gardens more accessible for those with non-motorised wheelchairs. Re-routing the paths to incorporate a zig zag paths and a gentler slope would require a full ground survey before accurate detailed costs can be provided. This has not been included in the costs below as there is an alternative route for easier access.

2.2.2 The steps had previously been identified as an area of concern. Advice in the report is that the step nose edgings do not have to be highlighted as this would benefit only a small proportion of people and may cause additional problems for others. On this basis it is suggested that there are more suitable entrances and paths that can be used. Not mentioned in the Environmental Assessment, but the Council may wish to install ground markers ahead of the steps to form a warning to blind people using a cane that there are steps ahead and to direct them to the safer routes. This would require insertion of Corduroy tactile paving into the block pavement at the top of the steps and directional tactile paving ahead of this indicating a safe route. If included this will need to be assessed and installed by a tactile paving professional to ensure accuracy of positioning. For the purpose of tactile paving an allowance has been included in the figures below.

2.2.3 The handrails to the stairs are peeling and have rough/sharp edges. The work to refurbish the handrails is already planned for STC staff to undertake and will be started once the visitor numbers have dropped. This has therefore been excluded from the cost plan.

2.2.4 There are bollards at the entrance and the report recommends painting these in a higher contract colour. This is not the only area where colour contract is a factor and Council may wish to consider how a change to obtain colour contrasting could be incorporated into the overall colour scheme. For the purpose of the report an allowance has been made for repainting those bollards and other areas that require a contrast.

2.3 RUTLAND RD ENTRANCES

2.3.1 The report indicates that the gated pedestrian entrance adjacent to the vehicular access has a slope which is steeper than desirable. Again, this

is not in breach of Building Regulations as suggested, as they do not apply here. The slope is part of the general fall from Rutland Rd into Tower Gardens which ends where the grass area meets the bandstand (water collects here when raining). It is likely that a more extensive work will be required to ensure any changes do not make the drainage problem worse. A full ground survey would be required to establish ground levels and to create plans that create the appropriate slope and surface water flows.

2.3.2 The report suggests widening the path and gates at the other Rutland Rd entrance to 1.8m to enable wheelchairs to pass. The existing path goes through the centre of a group of mature horse chestnut trees. Any path widening at this location will need tree protection assessments to establish what is possible. For the purposes of this report it has been excluded as there is another entrance on Rutland Rd.

2.4 LUMLEY ROAD ENTRANCE

2.4.1 The report identifies a problem with the covered walkway structure that the Council are already aware of. The biggest problem here is pigeon guano. Officers have already put in place plans to box in some of the pigeon roosts and to renew the spikes which help to stop pigeons from landing. Hopefully this will reduce the problem, but it is likely that only a new structure designed to prevent the problems will provide a permanent solution. Given the rights of neighbouring properties in leases and recognising the complexity of this area, replacement is likely to be a longer-term ambition that is impossible to specify and cost here.

2.4.2 Painting of bollards and the introduction of tactile paving would assist in making this passageway more accessible.

2.4.3 Some one-off cleaning of the path has been undertaken on paid overtime, but there is no water supply or power in this area for use by the grounds team and as a result it is a labour-intensive process. If regular cleaning is required extra resource would need to be added to the establishment.

2.5 THE POND AREA

2.5.1 Comments regarding the pond level in the report should be ignored as this is not within the remit of the author and is factually incorrect.

2.5.2 The issue relating to the path to the west side of the pond is well known and the suggested improvement ignores some of the more complex issues. Again, Building Regulations quoted in the report do not apply. The pathway will need a full survey to understand the services which lie beneath (electrical, drainage etc) and also advice relating to the structure

of the mature tree roots which are abundant in this area will be needed to formulate a design. Currently this path has warning signs to alert members of the public of the danger relating to this path. It is probable that the path may need to be diverted from its existing route if a sensible design is to incorporate a significantly reduces the rise and fall, but without a ground survey this is impossible to plan at this stage.

2.6 CIRCULAR CANOPIES

2.6.1 It is suggested that some of the seating is removed to accommodate two wheelchairs. The canopy is well used by families for picnics. Any reduction in seating may reduce the general amenity. There are two panels open for entry and so one of these could be used for a wheelchair.

2.7 COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.7.1 The dog bowl is placed in a sensible area out of the way but may of course be moved by customers from time to time.

2.7.2 The barriers between the slope and the steps are placed to delineate the line between the slope and upper terrace. The number of barriers has been considered within the risk assessment for this area and an extra barrier in the area indicated would block the steps for those who wish to use the Eastern side of the entrance and so is not appropriate.

2.8 EVENT AREAS

2.8.1 Any “boulders” on a path that are a trip hazard will be removed or rendered safe, those that are simply part of the landscaped area that is not designed for walking on will be left in place (e.g. those on the banks of the pond).

2.9 PLAY AREA AND ZIP WIRE

2.9.1 There have been some enquiries about inclusive play equipment and Officers have already made some initial enquiries as to what is available on the market. As is indicated in the assessment this is a specialist area of work that would require input from a play specialist. The existing area is quite compact and the addition of equipment will likely require an expansion of the play area by a few meters.

2.9.2 The zip wire gets a lot of use (and abuse). Whilst in an ideal world a shared facility would be good, in practice this may result in the facility not being available for lots of the time. Again, a specialist would be able to advise.

2.10 BENCH SEATS

2.10.1 The Council manages 100 plus benches in and around Skegness and in Tower Gardens. Refurbishment of the benches has always been part of the winter duties of a couple of the Grounds Team. Typically, with the Tower Gardens benches included there is now approximately a 10 year plus cycle of maintenance. The seats in Tower Gardens all came over in poor condition. It will take some time to bring these into the maintenance schedule. The Council has considerable experience of refurbishing benches and the most suitable methodologies for different locations. The Council may of course wish to pick up the point that the existing colour scheme is not of high contrast which may pose a problem for those with visual impairment. An allowance for the benches to be repaired in one go has been included.

2.10.2 Once again reference is made to building regulations, these of course do not apply to park benches.

2.11 SENSORY GARDEN

2.11.1 Council have given no specification or design brief for such a garden and have not identified a suitable location. The proposal in the assessment has therefore been largely prepared from the author's own plans that he has been developing for 20 years.

2.11.2 The Assessment focuses on the establishment of a sensory garden with two areas identified. These are both part of the greater open green space in Tower Gardens one of which is used for events and the other is a popular spot for family games and picnics. Loss of this space does not seem to fit with the Council's wider objectives for Tower Gardens. Council need to determine whether this is how they wish to proceed.

2.11.3 Not in the report but put forward as an alternative, which has been developed in discussions between Officers, is the potential to have a sensory trail. This would offer a similar experience to a sensory garden but on a smaller scale and would involve sensory experiences along existing path routes. This would avoid having to dedicate part of the open space. A sensory trail could also be marketed as a visitor attraction. Of course, a sensory trail using the existing paths will require that these are all brought up to a good standard and are accessible for all.

3 COSTINGS

3.1 Until Council are clear about what they wish to achieve, it is impossible to obtain any meaningful costings. To produce something for Council as a guide, a number of assumptions have had to be made. The following is an

outline of what has been included for costing purposes. It is emphasised that these are just basic estimates at this stage.

3.2 It is assumed for cost purposes that:

- a rerouting of the path is required to the area west of the bridge in order to avoid what is a considerable slope.
- A general repair and level check of paths is required
- No change is made to the mid-path from Rutland Rd as there are mature trees surrounding this.
- No changes are made to main entrance from Rutland Rd other than by way of general repair.
- The work to handrails is excluded
- 24 x Bench repair is included as part of the work
- No allowance should be included for changes to the entrance to Lumley Rd as the intention is to move ahead with the existing planned improvements to deal with the pigeon colony.
- Play area improvements will include a small expansion to the play area and an additional disability swing and markings for the visually impaired. No allowance is included for changes to the zip wire.
- Bollards will need repainting. A small allowance has been included, but this will need to be increased if a full colour scheme change is wanted.
- Tactile paving will be introduced at the top of the steps to Grand Parade.
- Options for a full sensory garden and a sensory trail have been provided.

Element	Costs
Design Stage:	
Ground Surveys	£2000
Ecological Surveys (trees and bats)	£1000
Design/Architect Fees	£5000
TOTAL	£8000
Path modifications/repair:	
Est 10m ³ Excavation	£200
Est 50m ² Remove loose path surface	£500
Disposal of spoil	£1500
Drainage	£2000
Re-routing services	£1000
Setting new path levels	£650
Tactile paving installation	£1000
Surfacing	£32500

TOTAL	£39350
Bench repairs	
Remove, dismantle and strip	£1000
Replace slats with composite slats	£10000
Repaint ironwork	£1500
Re-assemble and site	£1000
TOTAL	£13500
Play area	
Extend site area 10m ² (groundwork, fencing, ground cover)	£2000
Disabled swing	£15000
Floor markers and associated works	£1000
TOTAL	£18000
Repainting of Bollards	
Rub down and repair Repaint with primer, undercoat and 2x topcoats	
TOTAL	£1000
Option 1 Sensory Garden	
168m ² Excavation	£850
Disposal of spoil	£5000
Topsoil and improvement	£20000
New Paths	£14000
Hard areas (colour tarmac)	£4000
Drainage	£2000
Infrastructure	£50000
Planting	£40000
Signage	£450
TOTAL	£136300
Option 2 Sensory Trail	
Structures	£20000
Topsoil and improvement	£10000
Planting	£40000
Signage	£450
TOTAL	£70450
Procurement Project Management and Fees	
	£5000
Totals	
Option 1	£221150
Option 2	£155300

- 3.3 Given the uncertainty in the specification and costs that a further contingency of **20%** is allowed in addition to the above figures.
- 3.4 In addition to the above, Council would need to consider ongoing maintenance. There are a lot of plants proposed that would need care as well as ongoing maintenance to the additional infrastructure. This would mean additional gardening hours. At this point the amount cannot be quantified. If cleaning of the Lumley Rd entrance is required then this would also need additional weekly hours.

4 TIMESCALES

- 4.1 Given current capacity, and the significant amount of work needed to take these projects forward, together with the necessity to undertake work outside the main season, it is likely that any completion would be closer to Autumn 2022 rather than 2021 as suggested by the author of the Environmental Assessment Report.

5 TOWN CLERK COMMENTS

- 5.1 In the absence of a clear understanding of what Council wants, it has been extremely difficult to produce anything that is robust. I have not made any recommendations as it is not clear how the Council wish to proceed and currently there is no budget allocated or available to undertake any work.

.FOR DECISION

For information relating to this report please contact The Town Clerk, Town Hall Skegness or email info@skegnesscouncil.org.uk
Background Papers: None