



TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Council – 26 January 2022

Consideration of a Petition containing more than 500 signatures

**Petition for Improvements and an Upgrade to the Playground
at Stamford Park, Altrincham**

Lead petitioner, Diana Barrett introduced the following petition which had received 537 signatures from addresses within the Borough.

“We petition the Council to improve and upgrade the play area in Stamford Park so it can be enjoyed year round.

The current play area is in desperate need of an upgrade.

Stamford Park is one of the most popular parks in Trafford but the play equipment is dated and the playground gets water logged and muddy every time it rains.

Altrincham town centre needs a playground of a similar standard to that in Knutsford or Bruntwood Park. Soft, all weather surfaces and modern play equipment allow those playgrounds to be enjoyed in any weather throughout the year.

The Altrincham community deserves a much improved playground, which would have the added benefit of drawing more people to the town centre benefitting local businesses.

Please sign this petition to back a formal request urging the Council to allocate funding to this local play area so that all of our children can enjoy a well maintained and suitable playground.”

In presenting the petition, the lead petitioner highlighted the following issues:

- An absence of equipment past pre-school years.
- Safety was a concern with the current equipment.
- The uneven path around the park was a danger for children cycling or with scooters.
- The playground was unsuitable for differently abled users.

Furthermore, the benefits of an attractive playground were set out:

- Health and wellbeing benefits were well known and generally accepted.
- Playgrounds were at the heart of the community and an important gathering space.
- Imaginative playgrounds helped children to develop social, physical, cognitive and emotional skills.
- A better park would encourage more outside play for children all year round and would attract children for the two primary schools located next to the park.
- Spending time outdoors improves the mental health of all ages and helped combat child obesity
- It would reduce the carbon footprint by reducing the need of local residents having to travel to provision further afield.

The lead petitioner acknowledged that it could be difficult for the Council to finance improvements from the existing Parks and Open Spaces budget but with the associated benefits for local businesses and the area in general, hoped that there would be other ways to find the money. Suggestions included:

- Contributions from new housing developments, given the added selling point of a local playground.
- Sponsorship from local businesses.
- National Lottery funds and government funds to tackle child obesity and improve mental health.

In summary, an improved park would provide the growing number of families in Altrincham town centre with better facilities, make Altrincham an even better place to live, attract visitors all year round and keep locals in the area rather than having to travel to neighbouring authorities. Having had to travel also, the petitioner presented photographic evidence of a modern playground she had recently visited in support of the petition's aspirations.

Councillor Patel, Executive Member for Culture and Leisure and Councillors Mrs. Young, Newgrosh and Jerrome responded to the petition on behalf of the political parties and made the following points:

Councillor Leisure: Advised that in Trafford there were approximately 80 play areas and investment was prioritised through the Annual Capital Programme and that for a number of years funding pressures had seen the Council lose millions of pounds, year on year, from its funding. Alongside routine maintenance, Stamford Park received its fair share of capital funding and since 2017 over £100,000 had been allocated towards improving drainage, refurbishment of tennis and basketball courts and replacing a climbing frame and the Council would continue to invest in Stamford Park. The equipment in the park was not untypical of a Trafford park and individual pieces of equipment were replaced overtime and maintain and repair equipment until it is deemed to have reached the end of its lifespan. All play areas had a weekly safety inspection and whilst it was agreed that some of the equipment was dated, it was safe and remained well used. Under current budget restraints it would not be possible to undertake a complete renewal of all the equipment in a play area of its size as to do so would be to commit the entire play area budget to one park. For information, the last significant funding the Council received from the government for play equipment was in 2010. Over recent years 3 projects had been completed to the surfacing in the play area, though it remained a challenging site due to changing ground levels, high footfall and the extensive tree canopy that covered the play area.

Play surfacing could be as expensive as the equipment itself and it was unlikely that an affordable solution could be found that provided a mud free environment. Following a recent visit it was clear there had been a build-up on the hardstanding in the play area caused by leaves and therefore, a deep clean of the play area footpaths would be undertaken in mid to late February 2022. As Executive Member would be working to reset the relationship between the Friends of Stamford Park, the Council and the One Trafford Partnership and after speaking with the Vice-Chair of the Friends Group they would welcome new volunteers and asked the residents that had signed the petition and were keen to support the park to get in touch with the group. Agreed that all residents deserved access to a good park and recognised that Stamford Park, like others, was not without its current challenges. Understood that the answer was probably not what the petition had hoped for, however, hoped to have provided a positive and open response about how the Council approached its park funding and going forward would welcome the opportunity to introduce residents to the Friends of Park group and develop constructive dialogue for the benefit of Stamford Park.

Councillor Mrs. Young: Agreed that parks and green spaces played a key role in promoting good physical and mental wellbeing but was disappointed that the swing seats in the playground which were removed during lockdown had not been replaced, further exacerbated the lack of play equipment for 8-10 year olds. More equipment was needed as the current facilities were not sufficient for the amount of users. Flooding had been identified as a problem as a result of investigative walks around the park with residents and after being raised in February 2021 and told in April 2021 that engineers would investigate and provide a report, nothing had been heard since. Also the park was awaiting signage to address anti-social behaviour and in April 2021 representations were made about the maintenance of the border in the park. Welcomed attempts to increase membership of and develop the relationship with the friends group.

Councillor Newgrosh: Welcomed investment in all of Trafford's parks and would support a proposal to upgrade Stamford Park if it could be.

Councillor Jerrome: Agreed that the current petition was correct that the play area was in desperate need of an upgrade and that the Altrincham community deserved a much improved playground. Parks offered a vital green space for everyone and the playgrounds within them were an important free resource for all families offering tremendous value to health, wellbeing and enjoyment. Recalled a previous petition organised by a school pupil in 2018 regarding faulty play equipment in Stamford Park, dating back to 2015 where delays were experienced until finally being replaced in June 2020. Also commented on the experiences of other Friends Groups when seeking to get equipment maintained or replaced and suggested that the manner in which the borough's parks were maintained would be an excellent topic for the Scrutiny Committee to review.

Following the discussion the Leader of the Council, Councillor Andrew Western echoed the position as set out by the Executive Member, Councillor Patel regarding the funding and the work which would be done to maintain a fair standard across all of the borough's parks. He acknowledged that the lead petitioner was the only speaker to set out potential alternative sources of funding rather than asking for more money after 12 years of austerity that had impacted upon the Council. The maintenance of parks was one of the effects and unfortunately, with a budget gap of more than £20 million year on year as a result of the sustained cuts and the pressures placed on Councils, it was a challenge and becoming more difficult to deliver for the borough's residents. Alternative

funding sources had been suggested and if the residents and Friends of Stamford Park wanted to look how they could do that, the Council would be happy to enter into a dialogue on how to move that forward.

The Leader reflected that every Councillor received complaints about the parks, that there was a huge challenge and that was the reason why there was a separate Motion on the agenda that evening around funding for parks and green spaces in the borough. After years of being starved of funding, it was recognised that it was an area in need of investment and therefore, the Motion asked for government support to enable the Council to do that.