



Northumberland

County Council

CABINET

13 DECEMBER 2022

Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

Report of: Jan Willis, Interim Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer

Cabinet Member: Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

1. Purpose of Report

The following report summarises proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group (CSG) via email on 4th November 2022.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

2.1 Bamburgh Play Park:

Approve a contribution of £10,000 to Bamburgh Parish Council from the Parks Enhancement Capital Programme for 2022/23 towards the provision of a new refurbished play park in Bamburgh at an overall cost of £120,000.

2.2 Isabella Heap Park, Blyth:

- Accept the Government's Levelling Up Parks Fund grant of £85,000 and other contributions of £13,500 in respect of an overall park improvement scheme costing £123,500, and add to the 2022/23 capital programme.
- Approve capital expenditure of £25,000 from the Parks Enhancement Capital Programme for 2022/23 in respect of NCC's contribution to the scheme.

2.3 Hexham High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ):

- Approve an additional allocation of £1,117,254 from the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget line for 2023/24 within the Council's Capital Programme for the Hexham HSHAZ schemes and The Shambles.

- Approve delegated authority to the Interim Chief Executive to execute contracts up to the value of £2,399,236 for delivery of the public realm improvements, subject to confirmation of associated funding being in place and the appropriate procurement processes being followed.

2.4 Queen Elizabeth II Park Commemoration Schemes

Approve expenditure of £370,175 as summarised in the table at the end of Section 8 below, to create a number of park commemoration schemes that can form a countywide celebration of the life of the late Queen Elizabeth II. The proposed schemes relate to improved access to the outdoors/countryside, such as new/improved footpaths and bridleways, enhancements within parks and new tree/community woodland planting activity and will be funded in 2023/24 as part of the new MTFP budget setting process.

3. Links to Corporate Plan

The Council's Capital Programme is consistent with the priorities in the Corporate Plan in particular the 'Living', 'Enjoying' and 'Thriving' priorities.

4. Background

This paper summarises reports considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group on the allocation of funding within the Medium Term Plan to specific projects.

SUMMARY OF NEW CAPITAL PROPOSALS CONSIDERED BY OFFICER CAPITAL STRATEGY GROUP VIA EMAIL ON 4 NOVEMBER 2022

5. Bamburgh Play Park

- 5.1 CSG was asked to consider a request to contribute £10,000 to the provision of a new refurbished play park in Bamburgh.

Background

- 5.2 Bamburgh Play Park is situated on land owned by Bamburgh Castle Estates next to the Castle and Cricket grounds. The current play area which is owned and managed by Bamburgh Parish Council was installed in 2011 and is on multiple levels, is not enclosed and there has been subsidence around several of the activities. Additionally wear and tear has meant that several of the activities are close to the end of their safe useful lives. Bamburgh is heavily marketed as a tourist destination, and the current play park is inadequate to support the increasing visitor numbers.
- 5.3 Whilst the responsibility and ownership of the play area rests with Bamburgh Parish Council (BPC), who are the lead organisation for the scheme, this scheme is prioritised for support through NCC's parks improvement capital funding as it is a high profile, heavily used play area located in one of the key tourism destinations in the county and is in need of significant repair/improvement.
- 5.4 The scheme aims to address a range of issues with the current provision, which includes safety and accessibility concerns, and to remodel the play area to create a new 'destination' play facility that will improve safety and security (fenced area and all on one level) and include a wide range of new accessible/inclusive play equipment that can be used by all young people, including those with a range of disabilities.
- 5.5 This scheme therefore supports the visitor economy, improves health and wellbeing and helps tackle inequalities/accessibility, all of which are key corporate objectives of NCC. BPC have been able to secure significant external funding in support of the scheme and NCC's £10,000 contribution would secure the remaining funding requirement needed to enable the delivery of the scheme to proceed ahead of the start of the main tourism season in the spring 2023.

Proposed Improvements

- 5.6 To replace items of old play equipment and safety surfaces with new items of play equipment to enhance and refresh the existing play park. All equipment will be constructed using Robinia timber and stainless steel. Surfacing will be a mix of wet pour and Resin bound rubber mulch all of which will be a minimum of 50mm thick.
- 5.7 The parish council seeks to improve safety by moving existing rocks away from the activities, creating a uniform level for the whole area, replacing the existing rubber matting with a more robust surface, and having the play area fenced. The existing uneven surface makes it unsuitable for less able children. A critical part of the project is

to introduce inclusive activities with improved access to ensure that disabled youngsters can participate in and enjoy the physical opportunities which are so essential to both physical and mental well-being.

- 5.8 The development of a quality play facility at Bamburgh Play Park will provide opportunities for families who may not have the ability or opportunity to visit other leisure or play facilities both locally or further afield. Ongoing safety checks and maintenance of the facility will be undertaken by Bamburgh Parish Council to ensure the play area remains in a safe and good condition.
- 5.9 Bamburgh Parish Council have secured a quote of £120,000 for the required works including costs of materials, plant and labour. They are the lead organisation on this project but they have attracted funding from the following sources:
- Northumberland County Council £10,000 (proposed)
 - Catherine Cookson Charitable Trust £60,000 (confirmed)
 - Lord Crewe Charity £20,000 (confirmed)
 - Other external funding £30,000 (confirmed)

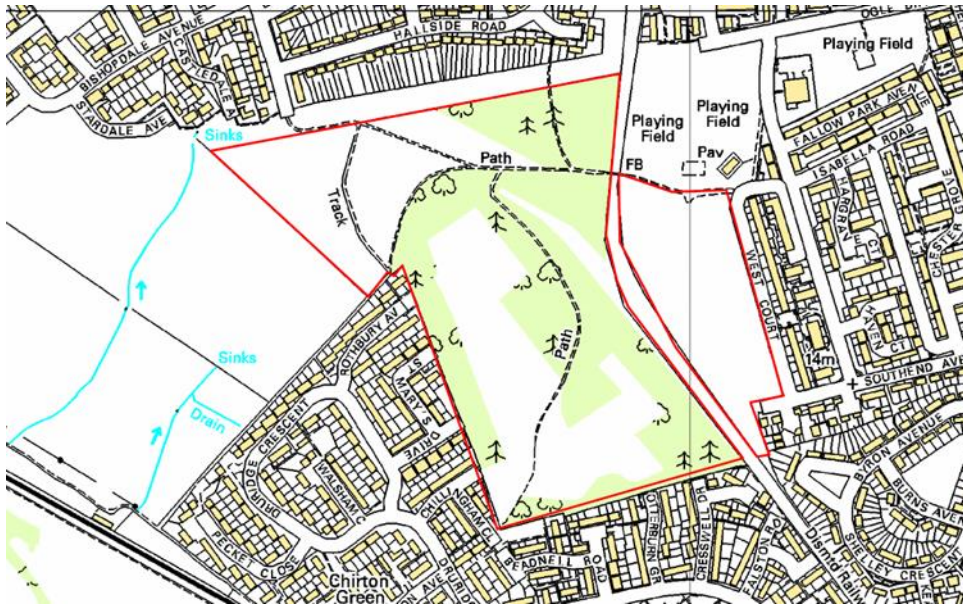
6. **Isabella Heap Park, Blyth**

- 6.1 CSG was asked to consider a request to contribute £25,000 for improvements to the Isabella Heap Park in Blyth.

Background

- 6.2 In July 2022 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities informed Northumberland County Council that areas which rated highly on the Index of Multiple Deprivation and had limited access to green space were eligible to apply for funding of up to £85,000 through the Levelling Up Parks Fund (LUPF) to create new or significantly refurbished green spaces in urban areas that met the eligibility requirements.
- 6.3 Qualification for this funding required NCC to:
- Create a new, or significantly refurbish an existing park that is free to access for the community
 - Plant and maintain trees in your green space
 - Work towards Green Flag Award status upon completion
 - Consult and engage with your community during project design and delivery whenever possible.
 - Participate in monitoring work and collaborate with us to co-design evaluation activities that will help us measure the social value and pride in place outcomes in your local area.
- 6.4 Isabella Heap in Blyth was identified as matching the Levelling Up Parks Fund (LUPF) eligibility criteria and had the additional benefit of complementing the wider economic investment and regeneration activities being undertaken as part of the Energising Blyth programme. An Expression of Interest was therefore submitted which was successful in

securing access to the £85,000 LUPF funds, subject to completion of a detailed proposal.



Isabella Heap Blyth

6.5 The Levelling Up Parks Fund is split into three categories:

1. Creation or improvement of the park
2. Project preparation, creation and maintenance
3. Tree uplift

Eligible councils will also receive an initial site assessment by Green Flag Awards, which the department has paid for to the value of £450.

Proposed Improvements

6.6 Upgrade/Create footpaths

The north of the site has a well-maintained public footpath and cycle way. The majority of the walkways through the woodlands are more informal and less accessible. Three sections of path have been identified for possible improvements through the Levelling Up Parks Fund.

Install Rock Armour and Barriers to deter motorcyclists

The site suffers from illegal off road motorcycle activity; it is proposed that the area south of the public footpath will have Rock armour installed along the edge to deter motorcycles whilst allowing pedestrian access to the actual hill and woods. It has been confirmed that none of the footpaths identified for protection are public rights of way.

Install new gates at Tynedale Drive

To allow access to horses and maintenance vehicles, a step over horse gate will be installed at the Tynedale Drive access point to the Northwest of the site.



Reprofile ponded area and install a Dipping platform

Following the infill of the old railway line a pond has naturally developed and attracts varied wildlife with resident ducks, frogs and damsel flies among other species. This pond is shallow and in places overgrown with self-set trees and shrubs and currently has poor accessibility. It is proposed that the area around the pond is cleared in places to open the tree canopy and allow better access to the water's edge. To compliment this and to act as an education resource we plan to install a low dipping platform for local children to use in order to facilitate school visits and for young people to learn more about the wildlife that the pond attracts.

Plant wildflower meadows

Much of the central part of the site is currently managed as meadow with the grass being cut once per year at the end of the growing season. This grassed area has in some areas a healthy population of native wildflowers and we aim to supplement this across the site by planting more wildflowers using a mix suitable to a reclamation site and the poor soil conditions that we have on the Heap; the planting will be a mix of small plug plants and seed. All plants and seed will be sourced from a local provenance. This will enable more precision planting in the locations identified and quicker establishment.

New Signage/interpretation boards

It is proposed to install some interpretation boards outlining the history of the site and information of the wildlife present. Boards with site maps and routes on will also be installed.

Seating

New seating will be installed on the top of the site to allow visitors to sit and enjoy the views, it is envisaged this seating will be robustly constructed metal bench style seats rather than wood and fitted onto concrete pads (to reduce risk of vandalism and life cycle maintenance costs).

Bird Hide / Feeding station

A bird feeding station will be constructed fronted by a bird viewing hide. The hide will be a robust timber fronted construction, viewing holes will be at varying heights and fully accessible to all site users. The precise location for this is still to be determined.

Wildlife nature trail

A wildlife nature trail with posts with rubbing boards and QR code information boards will be installed at various points across the site.

- 6.7 All project planning has been carried out in house by NCC Countryside Officers. Meetings have been held with volunteers and others to identify roles and responsibilities. The nearby Isabella pavilion is home to the 'Isabella Heap Volunteer Group' who have been instrumental in planning for this scheme and who will be integral in the provision and maintenance of the area. NCC will support training and provision of equipment for the volunteers.
- 6.8 A proportion of the funding from LUPF will be allocated for maintenance and restocking in years 1 and 2.

Tree uplift

- 6.9 There is no separate application process for the 'tree uplift' funding, which is provided by Defra. This can be used to cover the cost of preparation, purchase, planting, or related cost of trees in any of the urban green spaces within scope of this project.
- 6.10 Trees and shrubs will be planted in several areas across the site, there will be a need for existing vegetation to be cut back or removed to accommodate plants. There is a healthy Red Squirrel population in the park so planting will include Hazel which will in time be managed as coppice.
- 6.11 On the top of the Heap there are large areas of open grass which at the edges where it meets the tree line we intend to plant small trees and shrubs to create a new scrubby woodland edge which will be a mix of British native species such as Hazel, Hawthorn, Goat Willow, Rowan, Dog Rose, Heather, Gorse among others. This open planting will incorporate areas of wildflowers among the scrubby edges to increase habitat and biodiversity
- 6.12 To extend the tree planting to satisfy the Tree Uplift funding requirements, it is proposed to plant 12 trees on the large open space adjacent to the pavilion. This planting will consist of several Heavy Standard trees which will be protected by heavy duty tree guards.

6.13 Local members have been consulted on this scheme and are fully supportive as the outcomes will provide a safer site with improved access, reduced antisocial behaviour and increased biodiversity.

6.14 The full cost of the scheme is budgeted at **£123,500** including costs of materials, plant and labour. Funding towards the scheme has been contributed by the following organisations:

Northumberland County Council £25,000 (proposed)

Levelling Up Parks Fund £85,000 (confirmed)

County Councillors and Blyth Town Council funding £13,500 (confirmed)

7. Hexham High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ)

- 7.1 CSG was asked to consider a request for additional funds for the HSHAZ scheme and refurbishment of the Shambles in the Market Place in Hexham.

Background

- 7.2 The Hexham HSHAZ scheme was established as a £2.4m scheme in October 2020 as part of a national programme and funded by Historic England, NCC and private sector match funding contributions. It seeks to deliver heritage led regeneration to address multiple issues of town centre decline and improve Hexham Town Centre making it a more attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work, invest and visit.
- 7.3 The scheme, which runs until March 2024, is particularly targeted at the rapid deterioration of the condition of the Conservation Area, now 'at risk', including visible decline in the condition of multiple buildings resulting from lack of maintenance and limited custodianship of heritage assets. These are significantly concentrated in the Priestpottle and Battle Hill corridor.
- 7.4 The HSHAZ scheme submission highlights the importance of protecting and enhancing the rich base of heritage assets in Hexham town centre in order to improve the condition of the Conservation Area, which is currently 'at risk'. This includes the Shambles due to its pivotal and highly visible location in the Market Place, a major gateway to the HSHAZ area.
- 7.5 The investment programme for the scheme consists of a number of linked interventions which together are intended to create a lasting change in regenerating the area. This includes a building grants improvement scheme, public realm improvements, a national cultural programme, a Hexham cultural programme of events and community engagement.
- 7.6 There has been significant progress over the last 18 months with the following activities:
- Awarding of building grants to target properties with a value of £600,000 which has generated positive media coverage and a strong pipeline of future applications.
 - Launch of a varied community engagement programme with activities enjoyed by all ages and digital technology embraced.
 - The launch of heritage skills training and 'hard hat' tours giving unique opportunities to learn about the conservation repairs underway.
 - Installation of heritage lighting to enhance the streetscape
 - Technical development of the public realm designs, incorporating wide responses from the community, businesses and stakeholders. In March 2022, the heritage lighting scheme was installed as the first investment in Priestpottle, Cattle Market and Battle Hill.
 - Establishment of the partnership steering group and internal grants panel.
- 7.7 Central to the HSHAZ scheme are capital investments in the street scene and priority properties within the target area to underpin the wider programme interventions. These

are funded by Historic England, NCC capital programme and with match funding provided by building owners/tenants.

Public Realm Improvement Scheme

- 7.8 This focuses on the key corridor of Priestpopple, Cattle Market and Battle Hill within the Hexham HSHAZ boundary, as well as improvements to the Eastgate junction. Serving as the main through-route in the town centre, the rationale for significant investment is due to the existing design, appearance and poor maintenance detracting from the character of the conservation area and inherent quality of this heritage town.
- 7.9 On 8 February 2022 scheme options were incorporated into a report to Cabinet which endorsed the proposals and agreed to allocate capital funding. Subsequently, in March 2022 the Hexham HSHAZ Steering Group endorsed the scheme proposal that would form the basis of public consultation. The heritage lighting scheme element of the project was installed during March 2022 in order to demonstrate early delivery with a full consultation and information-sharing process taking place during May 2022.
- 7.10 In June 2022, NCC invited tenders for the next stage of design development services. This resulted in Southern Green being contracted to take forward the endorsed concept proposal, prepare detailed technical drawings and costings through to scheme completion. The design development incorporates, where relevant, technical queries and concerns raised through the consultation process.
- 7.11 The cost estimates included in the previous report to Cabinet on 8 February 2022 were based on the early scheme concepts calculated in October 2021. The landscape designers have now prepared more detailed plans to RIBA Stage 4, which take account of technical constraints. The latest design has been baselined by cost consultants in August 2022 to provide the most up to date budget forecasts and allow for further design development.
- 7.12 The design team has taken account of as many factors as possible in the forecasts and included provision for additional design development, a 10% contingency and inflationary uplift to Q1 2023. The cost consultant has advised that suppliers are indicating cost increases of 15% on materials and street furniture per three-month period and this has been reflected in the forecasted construction costs below.
- 7.13 The table below sets out the new anticipated scheme costs, building in an additional 16.5% contingency (over and above the 10% currently included on construction costs) and indicates a potential shortfall of £679,875.

Projected cost estimates including costs incurred to date	
Costs incurred to date on design, surveys and heritage lighting	£98,954
Design, NCC technical costs and archaeological mitigation	£272,877
Construction costs	£1,380,352
Additional contingency	£347,053
Total Costs	£2,099,236

Approved budget	£1,419,361
Extra funding request (in 2023/2024)	£679,875

Building Grants Scheme

7.14 It should be noted that the original cost estimates that underpinned the scheme plan approved by Historic England were developed 3 years ago and the factors outlined earlier have impacted on the budget in multiple ways:

- Each individual building improvement project is now significantly more expensive than originally forecast and requiring a larger match funding contribution from the applicant. This is due in part to longer timescales due to delays in supplies/materials and the availability of contractors to start on-site.
- Suppliers will often only hold their tender prices for shorter periods and given the detailed process for assessing and approving grant applications it is not uncommon for schemes to incur a funding shortfall by the time works are contracted.
- Fewer schemes can be supported from the budget than originally forecast, as each cost more and the funding envelope is now smaller, due to underspend in 2021/22 which led to a loss of external grant.

7.15 A total of 5 awards have been made offering 70% grants towards eligible costs. Three of these projects have been fully completed including one of the identified transformational projects – the Coach and Horses, which has created significant positive publicity and attracted strong demand for future grants.

7.16 There is now a strong pipeline of potential grant applications that will exceed the available budget. Each scheme under development has been reviewed by the HSHAZ Conservation Officer and the HSHAZ Accredited Architect to assess which are deliverable and best meet the objectives and criteria. This has resulted in a list of Priority and Reserve schemes.

7.17 The HSHAZ Steering Group, made up from the scheme partners and funders (Historic England, NCC officers and accountable body, Hexham Town Council and Hexham Community Partnership) received a report on 5 September 2022, highlighting the budget issues and endorsed a tighter application of the of the scheme priorities. This will ensure that the grants awarded over the final 17 months are carefully targeted; bringing forward the building improvements that will most positively impact on the Conservation Area and regeneration.

7.18 The table below shows the total value of the priority building projects including those already completed/underway, the approved funding envelope and the overall budget position. The forecast highlights a shortfall of £137,379.

Total eligible expenditure – Priority Projects	£1,398,491
Historic England funding claimed	£1,512
Historic England funding available	£452,829

NCC match agreed 2022-2024	£307,695
NCC match underspend from 2021/22	£79,530
Private sector match @ 30%	£419,546
Total funding available	£1,261,112
Extra NCC Funding Request (in 2023/24)	£137,379

The Shambles

7.19 The Shambles is a grade II* listed structure owned by the Council which occupies a very prominent position within the Market Place in the heart of the Hexham Conservation Area. It was built as a covered market by Sir Walter Blackett in 1766 and is an open structure with stone columns to the front and back columns of wood. It is currently utilised by stall holders throughout the week as a covered market with lighting, supporting the offer for visitors to the town centre.

7.20 The Shambles is in a poor state of repair and in early 2021 the HSHAZ team commissioned an independent condition survey to establish the urgency and potential cost of restoration works. This highlighted a number of issues to be addressed urgently and a long list of repairs and improvements that needed to be completed in the short term to prevent further deterioration and reduce risk. Key issues are:

- The need for protection from vehicle movements. This is evidenced by two accidents in the last 18 months that have resulted in unplanned and costly emergency repairs by NCC to two stone columns.
- Poor state of electrics, which creates a growing fire risk and requires upgrading
- Repairs needed to most areas of the structure including timber beams, timber and stone columns, roof, flooring and rainwater goods
- Pigeon roost prevention

7.21 The condition survey provided an itemised and costed schedule of works, which at the point of submission forecast a required budget of £210,000. This was calculated in February 2021 and is likely to have risen considerably. The poor condition of The Shambles now places at risk the legacy of the Hexham HSHAZ scheme and the positive impact it will have on the Conservation Area, if not addressed urgently. Allowing for construction cost pressures since February 2021, an allocation of £300,000 would enable priority works to be completed.

Summary of capital requirement

7.22 The table below sets out the request for a capital allocation in 2023/24 to the Hexham HSHAZ Building Grants Scheme and Public Realm Scheme and a budget for the refurbishment of The Shambles from the existing Strategic Regeneration Reserve:

HSHAZ Public Realm Scheme request	£679,875
HSHAZ Building Grants Scheme request	£137,379

The Shambles refurbishment	£300,000
Total capital request (2023/24)	£1,117,254

The rationale in seeking this additional funding is to ensure delivery of a transformational programme making a lasting impact to Hexham town centre and its heritage assets.

8. Queen Elizabeth II – Potential Commemoration Schemes

- 8.1 It is proposed that a number of commemoration schemes should be developed that can form a countywide celebration of the life of the late Queen Elizabeth II. Based on feedback from a countywide public consultation exercise on what are considered appropriate commemoration activities, the proposed schemes relate to improved access to the outdoors/countryside, such as new/improved footpaths and bridleways, enhancements within parks and new tree/community woodland planting activity.
- 8.2 As part of the commemoration programme each site would have a robust timber style interpretation panel installed that would identify the site as being part of the Council’s QEII Commemoration Schemes across the county, signpost visitors to where they could obtain further information on the other schemes, as well as providing site specific information to aid their visit.
- 8.3 Proposed schemes are detailed below:

TYNEDALE

1. Eastwoods Park, Prudhoe

This scheme was already in development as part of the Council’s parks improvement programme but has not yet progressed to Cabinet for approval of the capital funding allocation to enable its delivery.

The scheme involves constructing a new tarmac path around the perimeter of the park to improve accessibility for all park users, whilst also providing an all-weather route for walkers and runners of all ages and abilities that use the park (this includes a running club with junior members). The path will follow the approximate line shown on the plan below, but precise lines and locations will be defined on site prior to works commencing. The approximate total length of the path to be constructed is 425m.

Thompsons of Prudhoe has agreed to undertake the stripping off activity and preparation for construction of the path as an ‘in-kind’ contribution. The cost of constructing the path is £113,446, with £5,000 being met from met from external sources/contributions and it was intended that the remaining balance of £108,466 would be funded from NCC’s Parks Enhancement Capital Programme, subject to Cabinet approval.

There is also scope to extend the scheme to include the planting of a community

orchard on land within the southern boundary of the site (£4,000), to provide ~5 additional park benches (£6,750) and on-site interpretation (£2,000). This would increase the overall scheme cost requirement for NCC to £121,216 with the additional £12,750 also being met from the existing Parks Enhancement Capital Programme.



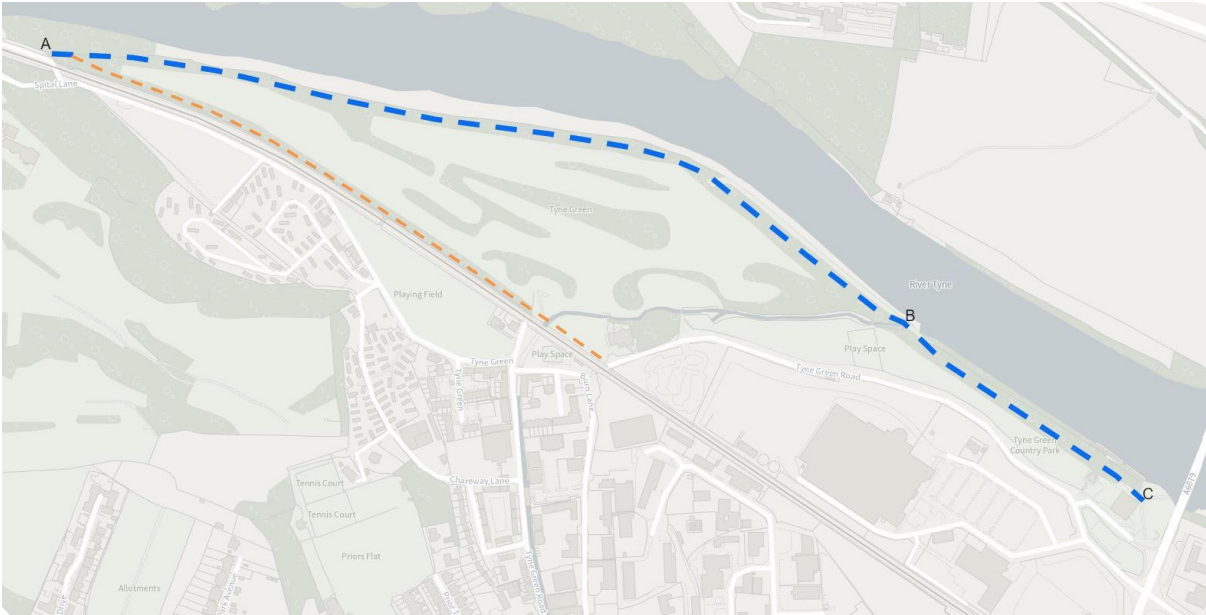
2. Tyne Green, Hexham

This is a new scheme proposal and involves the construction of a surfaced path (stone to dust) between a long avenue of mature trees on the riverside at Tyne Green (shown BLUE and running from A to C in the diagram below) which would connect into a section of path (shown RED) to create an all weather accessible circular route along this already popular riverside walk which is just over grassed areas.

Estimated total scheme costs are £32,625 (consisting of £26,500 for materials and labour and £4,125 for plant hire to construct the BLUE path total length 1380m, plus

on-site interpretation £2,000).

The RED section of path that runs through the park adjacent to the fenced off raised embankment that carries the Newcastle to Carlisle rail line has already secured the necessary funding to enable its construction, which includes a £10,000 contribution from Network Rail (as the creation of a circular path will help to reduce pedestrian movements over a pedestrian level crossing on the rail line).



Castle Morpeth

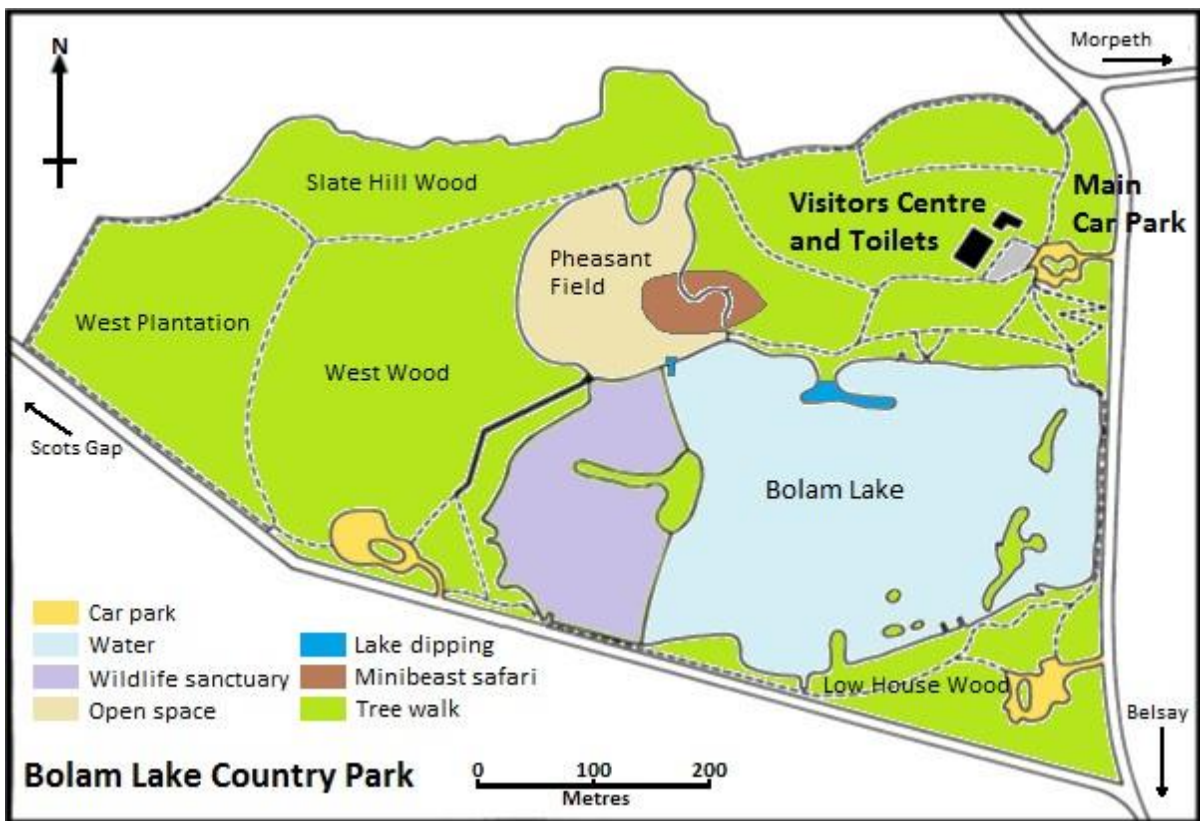
3. West Plantation, Bolam

The West Plantation at Bolam Lake Country Park has had to be clear felled following Storm Arwen. There is a need to bring this part of the park back into public use for future generations to enjoy and to ensure retention of its Green Flag accreditation.

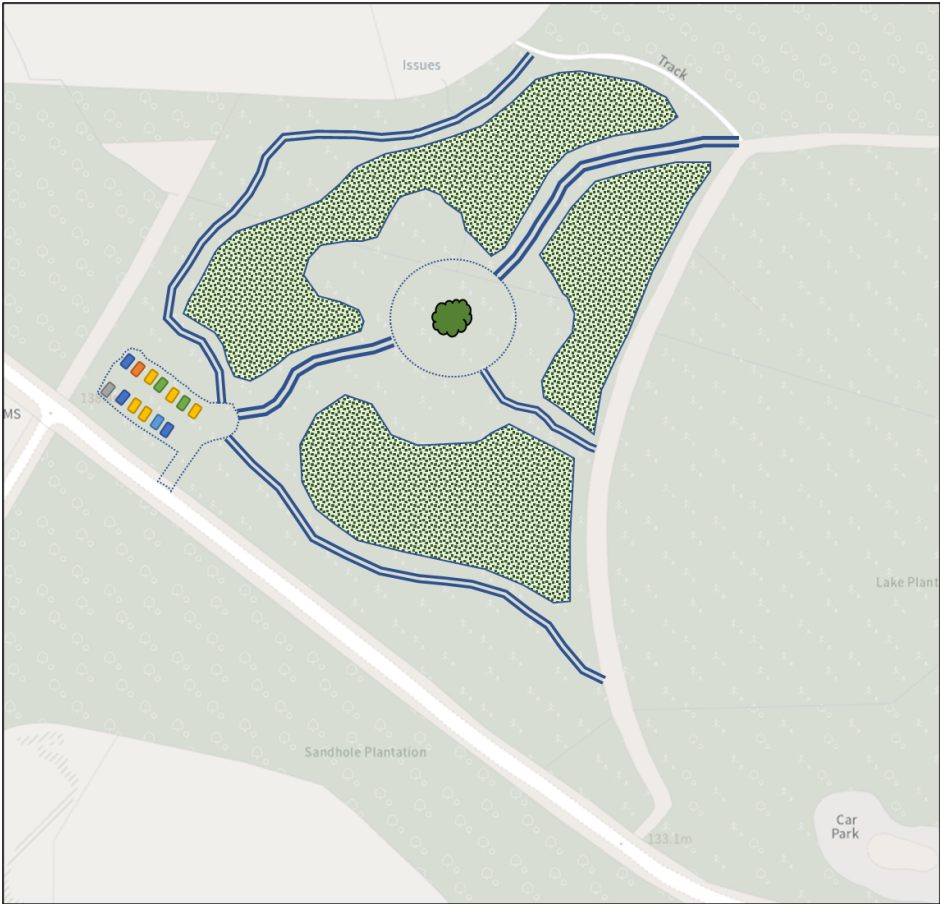
This is a new scheme that would entail the construction of a new network of paths, drainage, seating and tree planting/landscaping activity to create a new mixed broadleaf woodland, glade areas and central commemorative tree. A new car parking area is also proposed along with on-site interpretation.

The cost of the scheme is estimated at £112,000 of which £20,000 can be met from the sale of timber following the clear-felling activity. The remaining funding balance required from NCC would therefore be £92,000.

Damage to West Plantation



West Wood plantation showing proposed new access routes, central specimen tree (to be accompanied by new seating), open areas and car park.



4. Carlisle Park, Morpeth

Carlisle Park is a multi-award-winning ‘green flag’ park located on the south bank of the River Wansbeck close to the centre of Morpeth.

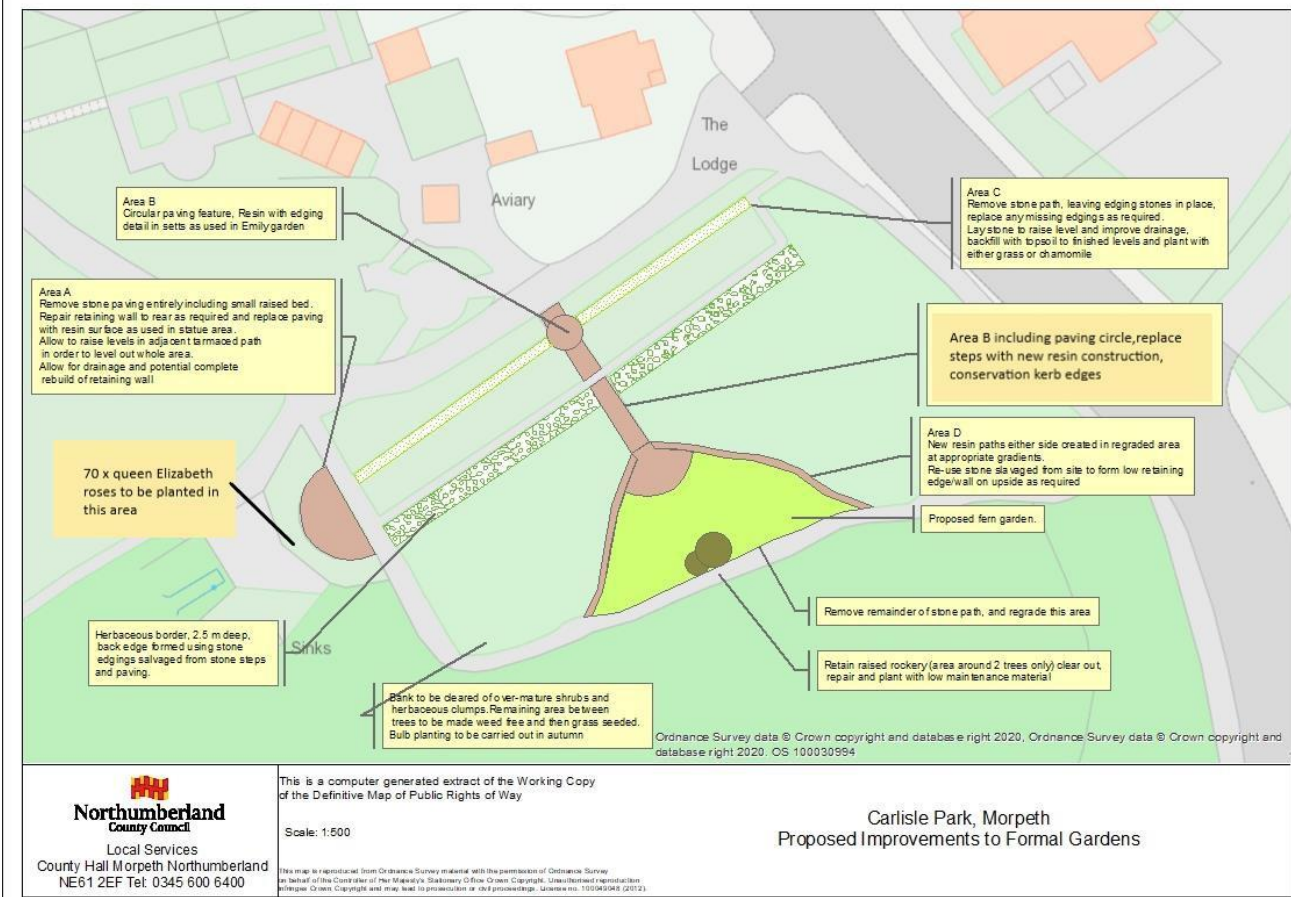
There are numerous entrances to the park, with the main ‘formal gateway’ entrance to the park being off Castle Square. This section of the park contains a range of features including the William Turner Garden, Emily Wilding Davison statue, aviary, Morpeth Floral Clock and the formal gardens.

Unfortunately, the area of the formal gardens to the left of the main access (when looking into the park from Castle Square) needs refurbished, particularly the ‘crazy paving’ stone paths and stone steps that provide the central walkways through this part of the park which are uneven, in poor condition and relatively inaccessible for most visitors. Much of the shrub and border planting in this area is also now overmature and needs to be cleared and replanted.

Whilst some work has been undertaken to scope up the works required in the formal gardens as a pipeline project in the Parks Improvement Capital Programme, the overall cost of the scheme at an estimated £110,000 was some £40,000 over what was provisionally allocated within the programme for improvement works in the park

and has not therefore been progressed pending further work to try and identify external grant funding opportunities. If the scheme were to receive £40,000 capital funding as part of the QEII Commemoration Programme, then this would enable the project to proceed.

The scheme is outlined in the plan below and would entail path and step improvement works within the formal garden area (Areas B, C & D), refurbishment of the paved seating area (Area A) to include new surfacing, bench seating and interpretation panel behind which the existing planting area would be cleared out and replaced by a new rose garden incorporating 70 Queen Elizabeth roses as well as some climbing roses to create a stunning shrubs backdrop to the seating area. Some specimen tree planting would also be undertaken within the park as well as the replanting of a fern garden in the north facing bankside (next to Area D).

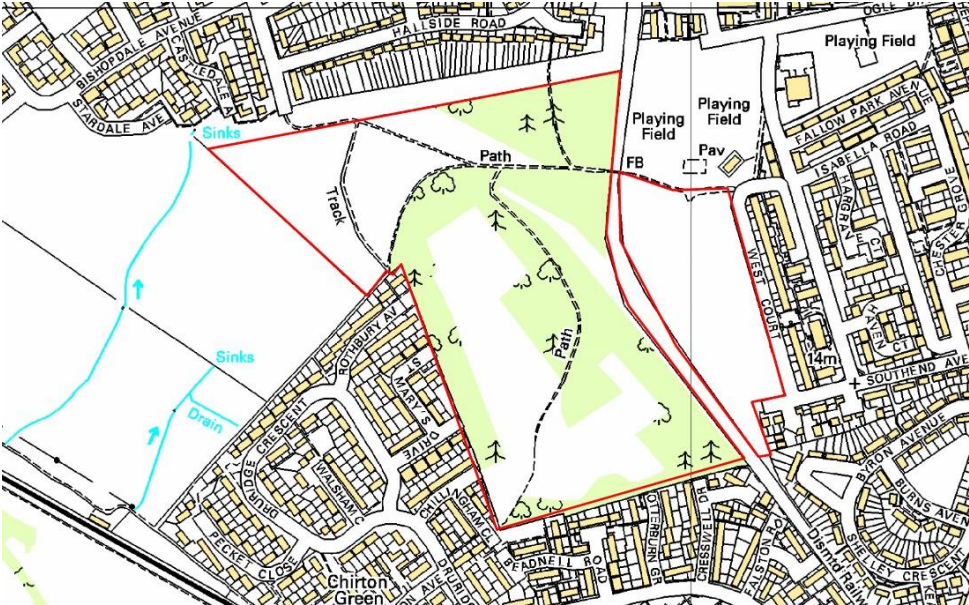


ASHINGTON AND BLYTH

5. Isabella Heap, Blyth

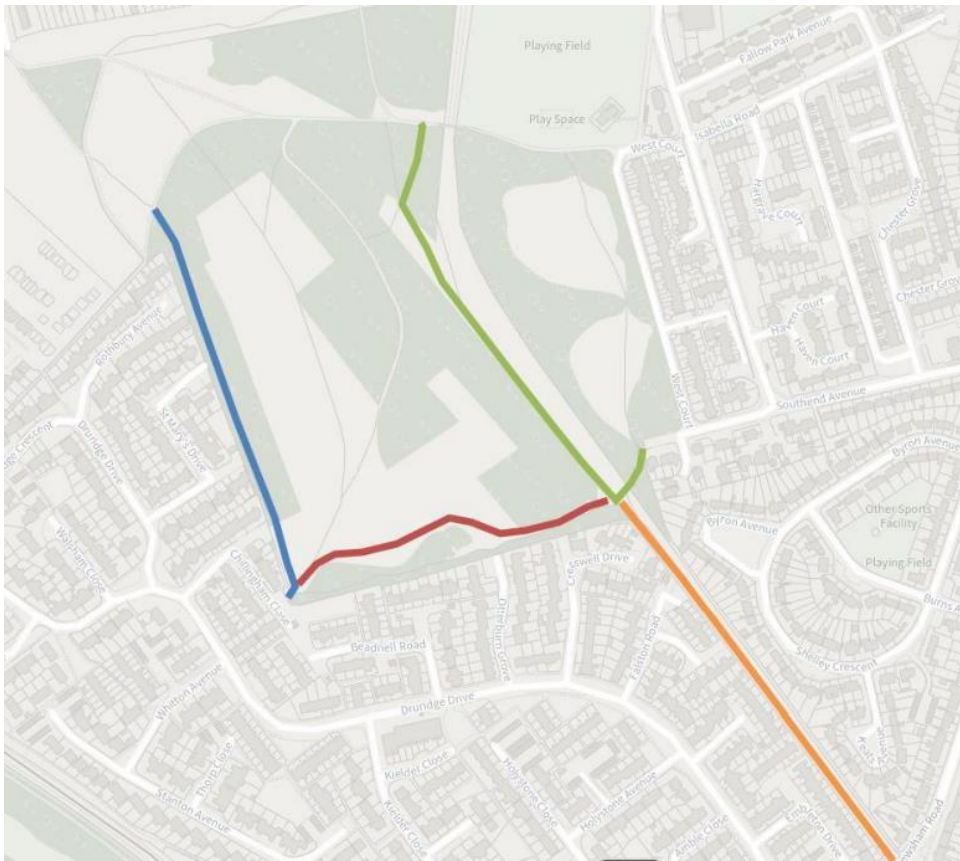
The Council has already secured Government’s Levelling Up Parks Fund of £85,000 and other contributions of £13,500 in respect of an overall improvement scheme at Isabella Heap Blyth costing £123,500 (of which £25,000 is intended to come from NCC’s Parks Enhancement Capital Programme, subject to Cabinet approval). The scheme entails the improvement of the existing Isabella Heap green space in Blyth which is already used for leisure and recreation, to include hard landscaping, e.g. boundaries, paving, paths, metal fencing to children’s play area, natural play spaces,

artwork, signs, benches, lighting, fencing and gates sculpture, and soft landscaping e.g. bulb planting, trees, shrubs, wildflowers, turfing, seeding, wildlife features such as bird and bat boxes. It would therefore be possible to consider this scheme as part of the commemoration programme for example by dedicating some of the tree planting activity and/or naming of the paths.

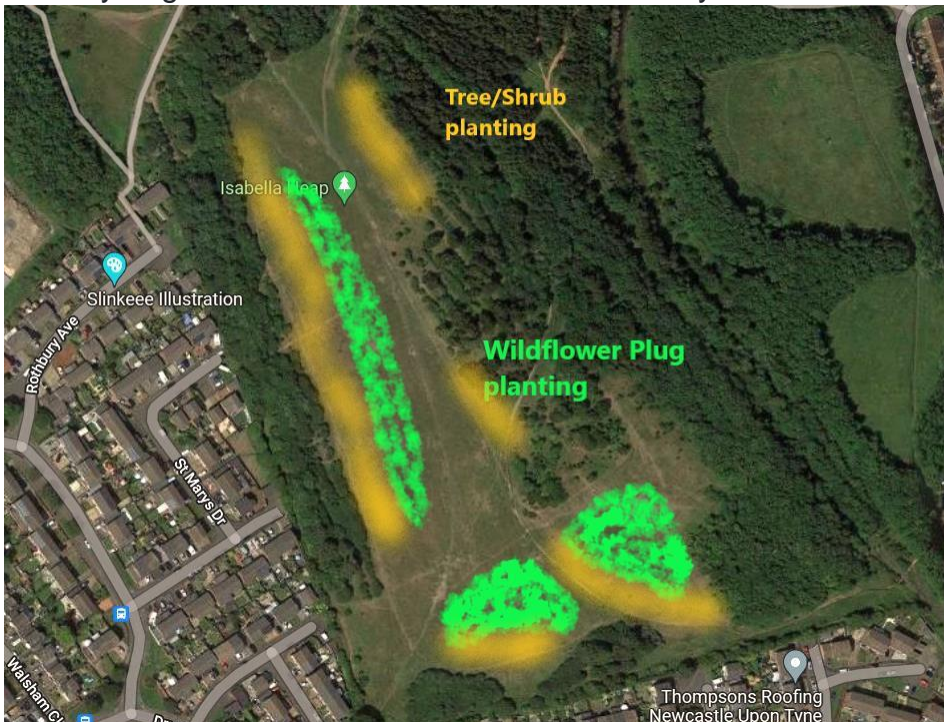


A key element of the scheme is to provide 4 new paths across the area as follows:-

1. **Blue Path.** Approximately 355m of aggregate path construction between existing tarmac path NE of Rothbury Ave and the access point at Chillingham Close.
2. **Red Path.** Approximately 285m of aggregate path construction between the access point at Chillingham Close and the old railway line.
3. **Green Path.** Approximately 430m of aggregate path construction between the Southend Ave access point
4. **Orange Path.** Approx 380m of path between Southend Ave and Newsham Road, with options for work to establish a path within the former railway line route, and / or improve the existing public footpath immediately adjacent to the former railway line, public footpath 300/042.

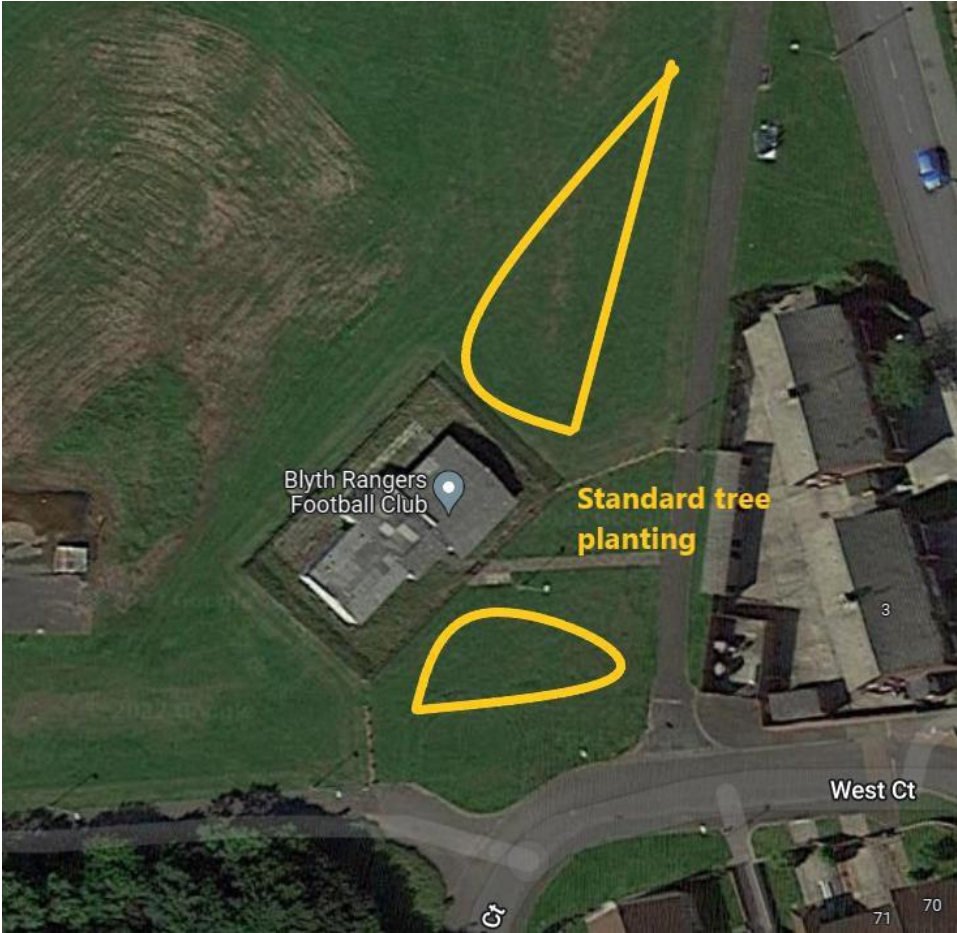


On the top of the Heap there are large areas of open grass and at the edges where this grassed area meets the tree line it is proposed to plant additional small trees and shrubs to create a new scrubby woodland edge which will be a mix of British native species such as Hazel, Hawthorn, Goat Willow, Rowan, Dog Rose, Heather, Gorse among others. This open planting will incorporate areas of wildflowers among the scrubby edges to increase habitat and biodiversity.



To extend the tree planting to satisfy the Tree Uplift funding requirements (which forms part of the Government funding conditions), it is proposed to plant 12 trees on the large open space adjacent to the pavilion. This planting will consist of several Heavy Standard trees which will be protected by heavy duty tree guards.

Proposed Heavy Standard Planting area



6. Queen Elizabeth II Country Park, Ashington

This is a new scheme. The current shoreline path to the east of the lake is grassed and can be wet/muddy underfoot during the winter period. There are also other grassed 'desire line' paths on the eastern end of the lake that could be formalised to create a variety of interconnected routes around this section of the park to improve access to the lake shore, incorporate woodland fringe and to connect to the access point into the Woodhorn Colliery Museum site to improve the accessibility between both attractions.

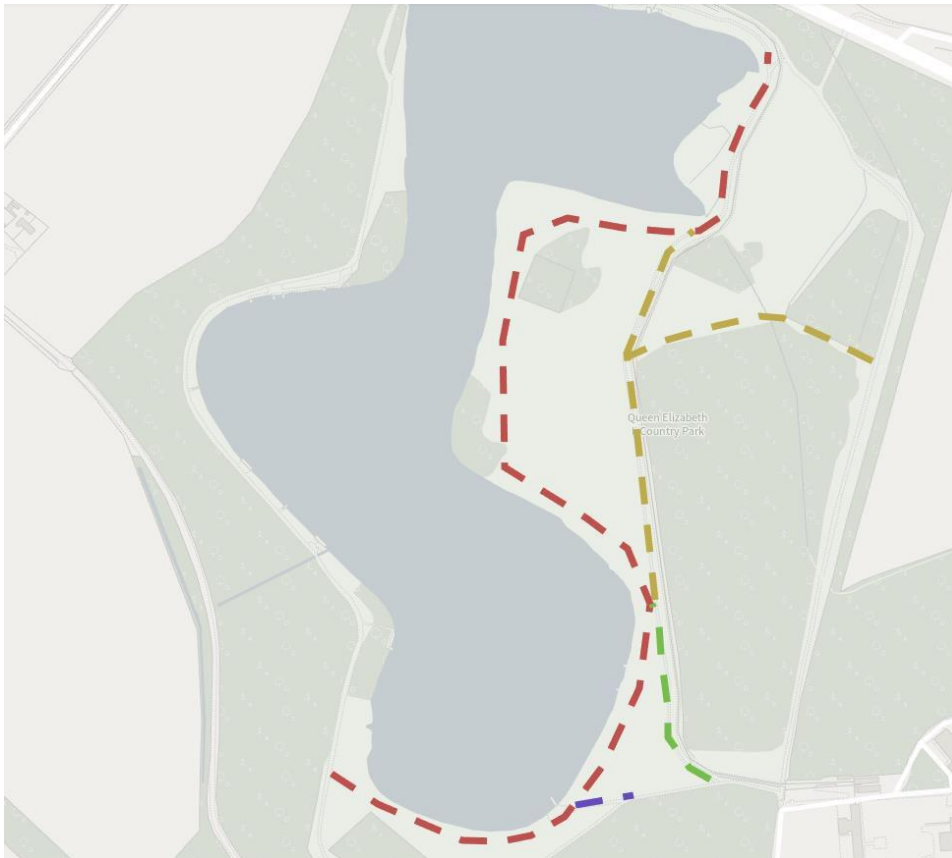
The location of these proposed new 2m wide 'stone to dust' pathways and the estimated cost of each section are detailed below. The scheme cost assuming all sections are undertaken, and including the cost for 4 new bench seats and on-site interpretation costing £7,400, would be £113,650.

Red path - shoreline 'arterial path' 1300m costed at £65,000 from which the following other link paths could also be created

Blue Path 65m costed at £3,250

Green Path 225 m Costed at £11,250

Yellow path 535m Costed at £26,750



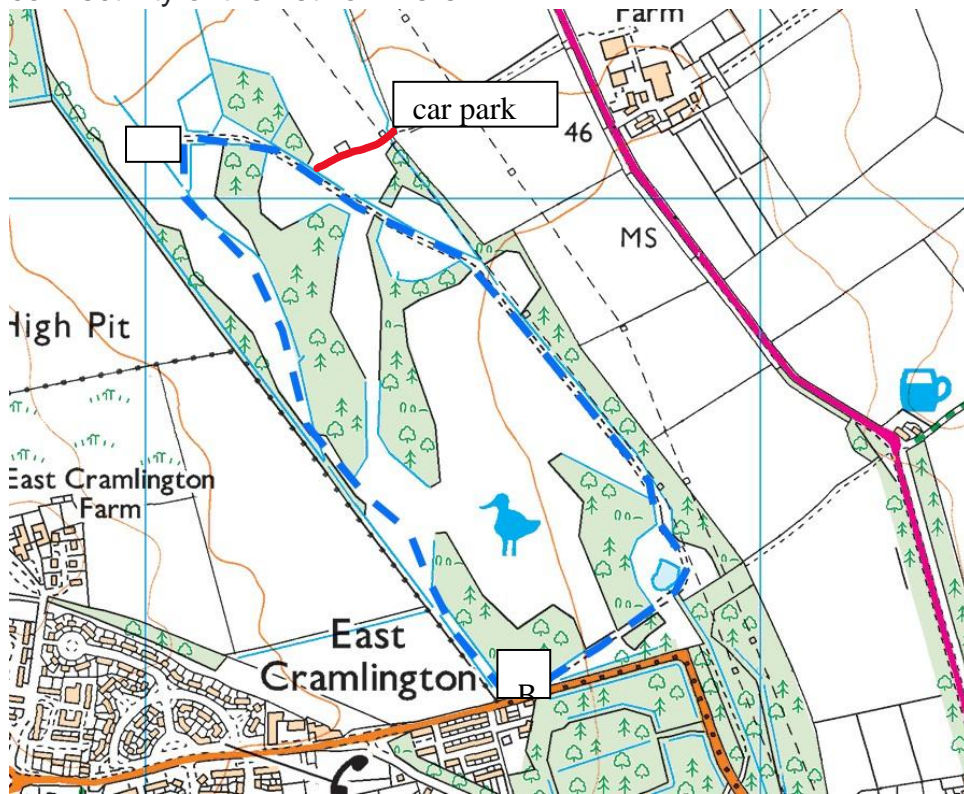
CRAMLINGTON, BEDLINGTON & SEATON VALLEY

7. East Cramlington Local Nature Reserve - bridleway improvements

This is a new scheme. The East Cramlington Local Nature Reserve has just had a new car park added at the northern end of the park and already has an existing 2.5km permissive bridleway route that runs around the perimeter of the whole site. Whilst the section of bridleway to the eastern boundary is on a stoned track, the section to the west heading back to East Cramlington is grassed and can be wet/muddy underfoot in the winter and more elderly users of the new car park have already suggested a need for improved path surfaces to aid accessibility. Improving the western section of the bridleway (point A to B) to make a more accessible all-weather circular route would cost £70,000, along with some additional minor improvements such as interpretation and signage (£3,000) and appropriate feature tree planting (£7,500) to make for a cohesive scheme costing £80,500.

It would be possible to name this as the QEII circular route and to also consider dedicating it legally as a bridleway so it appears on maps etc. Most of the route is already in place and in good condition having had LTP spend on it in recent years. There is scope longer term to seek agreement with the Hastings Estate for a link east of the site to the Keel Row paths as follow up activity, which would hugely benefit the

connectivity of the network here.



8. Valley Park, Cramlington

There is a scheme in development which is intended to be funded via the Parks Enhancements Capital Programme to improve the pathways and facilities within the Valley Park, Cramlington.

The current woodland footpaths were subject to some improvements a number of years ago, however although these paths are generally dry under foot most of the year there are some areas that are waterlogged during wet weather and the bulk of the paths are becoming overgrown with encroaching vegetation.



The plan below shows the two main footpaths through the site, Path 1 has previously received a stone dressing. Path 2 footpaths have never been properly laid out with stone but have just developed through time by people walking desire lines through the woodland.



It is planned to overlay the footpaths (1&2) with a new stone surface similar to the picture below



It is also planned to remove the high steps leading from Dudley Lane and install a path on a slight incline to make the site more accessible to all. There is also a need to repair two small wooden bridges crossing the stream within the site, it is planned to either replace them completely or widen them both to allow better access for all. The sections of path leading to the bridges will be gently ramped to all wheelchair access.

There are two ponds (see below picture) on site which are both 99% silted up with reeds and debris, the plan is to dredge these ponds to allow between 30 and 60% open water whilst retaining some reed beds and overgrown areas as these will add to the biodiversity of the area.



There is an old boardwalk through the woods next to the larger pond, this is to be removed and a new pond dipping platform installed at the edge of the pond.

The estimated cost for the scheme is £117,000 broken down for each element as follows and it is envisaged that £5,000 was to come from Members Local Improvement Scheme funds and the remaining £112,000 would be funded from NCC's Parks Enhancement Capital Programme, subject to Cabinet approval:-

- Restone footpaths 1 & 2 and improve access from Dudley Lane (£76,000)
- Bridge improvement works and vegetation clearance (£22,000)
- Pond clearance, remove boardwalk and install dipping platforms (£17,000)
- Install on-site interpretation (£2,000)

It should also be noted that there is only pedestrian access to the park currently so if the intention was to designate this area as a Local Nature Reserve as part of the commemoration activity, then consideration would need to be given to the need for parking provision in order to accommodate visits from a wider catchment area. There is scope to provide a new small car park off the B1505 near St John the Baptist RC Church, Cramlington and the church has already expressed an interest in the provision of a small car park for their services, so there is potential for some joint funding. The cost of a new car park has not been included in this scheme.

9. Cleasewell Hill Park, Choppington

This is an existing scheme identified for progression in year 3 of the Parks Improvement Programme and is therefore currently only at concept stage with further development work still required.

Cleasewell Hill Park is located off the A1068 at Sheepwash Road, Choppington and looks across the R. Wansbeck with the popular riverside footpath connecting Wansbeck Riverside Country Park just a short walk away over Sheepwash Bridge.

The park is currently somewhat tired and in need of significant refurbishment. It is proposed to undertake a scheme involving provision of new accessible playground equipment, resurfacing of paths, improvements to the entrance gateway and provision of small new car park, as well as landscaping/planting works within the park. This scheme is just at concept stage within the parks enhancement capital programme with Choppington Community Council (CCC) expressing a willingness to make a significant funding financial contribution towards any scheme, whilst also being open to dialogue over community asset transfer of the park with CCC taking on future maintenance responsibility upon completion.

The overall cost of the scheme is estimated to be ~£200,000 and, whilst it was envisaged NCC would be able to secure external funding support from CCC, if this is now to be progressed as an NCC commemoration scheme (rather than a joint project with CCC funding support) it would be necessary for NCC to meet the full cost from the Parks Enhancement Capital Programme funding, subject to Cabinet approval.

Given the early stage of development of this scheme and the need to undertake community engagement, followed by design, planning and procurement activity it is envisaged that it would be late 2023/24 at the earliest before the scheme could be implemented.

NORTH

10. Creation of Community Woodlands in Alnwick

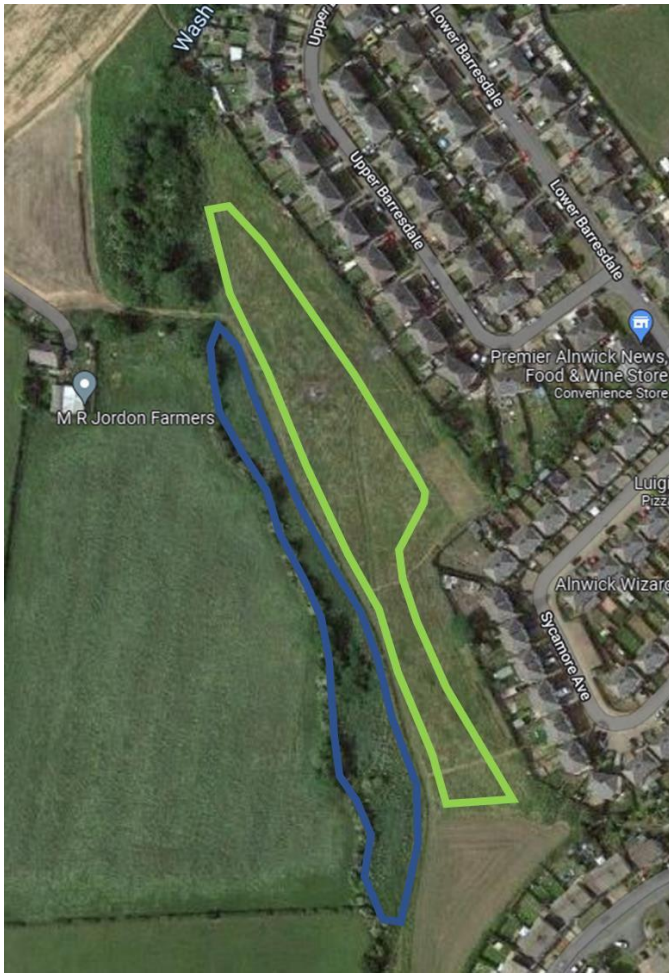
This is a new scheme. The County Council owns two areas of land on the north eastern edge of Alnwick to the rear of Sycamore Avenue & a former recreation ground to the rear of Alwynside/Lower Barrasdale.

The area to the rear of Sycamore Avenue is unused green space that could be used for tree planting activity to create a new amenity woodland area close to residential properties.

The area available for planting represents the northernmost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the site. It is proposed that the Blue edged area shown in the plan below would be planted to significantly broaden existing hedgeline. The Green edged area could be planted at a standard density (1.5m spacing) or at a density to provide more of a parkland setting (copses).

Consultation with local residents would be essential, which is likely to mean that any planting activity would need to be undertaken in the winter 2023/24 to allow time for community engagement over the design of the woodland and path layout.

Great Northumberland Forest funding (Woodland Creation Grant) could be applied to cover the costs of planting and aftercare – this would be a 5 month process so again aligns to winter 23/24 planting. No assessment has yet been made of the need for surfaced paths, though a Woodland Creation Grant is able to provide up to 100% of these costs.



The second of these new community woodland sites is connected to the land at the rear of Sycamore Avenue via a short walk countryside walk. The second site is an area of unused former sports pitches that again could be used for tree planting activity to create a new amenity woodland area close to residential properties.

This site has previously been used as a football/sports pitch and goalposts remain on site. Public access is in evidence and grass cutting operations have previously set out a number of routes.

The majority of the 2.8 hectare site is available for tree planting (either 2.5 metre spacing or copse planting) and the construction of paths, provided that any design incorporated two areas which are used as 'informal' football pitches.

Great Northumberland Forest funding (Woodland Creation Grant) could be applied to cover the costs of planting and aftercare - this would be a 5 months process so again aligns to winter 23/24 planting. No assessment has yet been made of the need for surfaced paths, though a Woodland Creation Grant is able to provide up to 100% of these costs.

Consultation with local residents and Alwick Town Council would be essential (the town council has previously indicated that part of the southern end of the site could be suitable space for the creation of additional allotments). The consultation

requirement is likely to mean that any planting activity would need to be undertaken in the winter 2023 to allow time for community engagement over the extent and design of the woodland and path layout.

It would be necessary to install on-site interpretation panels at both locations (cost £4,000) along with provision for seating (4 seats cost £5,400) – these elements would not be eligible for Woodland Creation Grant so a budget of ~£9,400 would be required for these items.



11. Queen's Garden, Tweedmouth

This is a new scheme. The Queen's Garden at Tweedmouth is an area of green space on the south bank of the R. Tweed at Tweedmouth, located between Berwick Old Bridge and the Royal Tweed Bridge, adjacent to the Tweedmouth War Memorial. Queen Elizabeth II visited the site in 1952.

The garden offers an excellent viewpoint looking across the R. Tweed towards Berwick and its Elizabethan Town Walls, with the Berwick bridges in the foreground.

Nearby to the park is the start of the Riverside Walk, a popular riverside pathway which runs along green space by the river with stunning views towards the Royal Border Bridge (rail bridge) and across the river to Castle Vale and Coronation Parks. It is proposed that the Riverside Walk could be renamed in honour of the late Queen, with 4 new benches being installed along the route and interpretation, with some scope for 'memorial' tree planting at a total cost of £12,000

12. Warkworth Beach – Creation of Picnic Site and Coastal Viewpoint

The Council currently provides a car park and public conveniences at the popular

Warkworth Beach beauty spot. It is proposed that an area of unused open green space within the site to the south of the surfaced car park is used to create a picnic site and visitor viewpoint through the provision of a short section of path from the car park into the green space and installation of picnic benches. This area offers a raised vantage point from which visitors would be able to look out across the River Coquet estuary, Amble Harbour towards Coquet Island – offering stunning views of this part of the Northumberland coast.

The cost of the proposed scheme is estimated at £12,000 and was already in development with the intention of being funded from NCC's Parks Enhancement Capital Programme, subject to Cabinet approval.

Summary – List of Potential Commemoration Schemes and Funding Requirements

Scheme Name	Estimated Cost	Status of Funding Arrangements	New Funding Required from Commemoration Scheme Provision
1. Eastwoods Park, Prudhoe	£113,446	NCC parks funding allocation agreed by CSG £108,466, with balance secured from external sources to construct new perimeter path.	None
	£2,000	Interpretation - Not secured but could make provision within parks budget	None
	£4,000	Community orchard – not secured but could make provision within parks budget	None
	£6,750	Park benches (5no) - not secured but could make provision within parks budget	None
2. Tyne Green, Hexham	£32,625	£10,000 secured from Network Rail. Balance of £22,625 not secured.	£22,625
3. Bolam Lake Country Park	£112,000	£20,000 available from sale of timber	£92,000.

4. Carlisle Park, Morpeth	£110,000	£70,000 provisionally available within NCC parks programme for improvement works within the park.	£40,000 (to deliver the refurbishment of the formal gardens to include new rose garden feature)
5. Isabella Heap	£123,500	Secured. NCC parks funding allocation agreed by CSG £25,000, with balance from external sources.	None
6. QEII Country Park, Ashington	£113,650	None secured	£113,650 (assumes all sections of new paths are included in the scheme)
7. East Cramlington LNR circular bridleway	£80,500	None secured	£80,500
8. Valley Park, Cramlington	£117,000	£112,000 Provisionally allocated from NCC Parks programme funds subject to CSG approval £5,000 MLIS contribution informally agreed pending confirmation	None
9. Cleaswell Hill Park, Choppington	£200,000	Increase NCC parks contribution to meet full cost of scheme.	None
10. Creation of Two Community Woodlands, Alnwick	TBC	Details of tree planting and path creation capital costs to be confirmed but expected to be met under woodland creation grant funding (England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO)) but 5 months process so planting would be in winter 23/24.	None of tree planting and path creation

	£9,400	Not secured	£9,400 to meet seating and interpretation costs not eligible for Woodland Creation Grant funds
11. Queen's Garden, Tweedmouth	£12,000	Not secured	£12,000
12. Warkworth Beach	£12,000	£12,000 provisionally allocated within NCC parks improvement programme	None
		already provisionally allocated within NCC parks improvement programme.	
Total Additional funding Required			£370,175

Implications

Policy	The capital programme is part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022-26. The plan supports the Corporate Plan.
Finance and value for money	The report outlines proposed project allocations and amendments to the approved Capital programme. The financial implications of these proposals are outlined in the main body of the report. The projects will be funded from the existing capital programme or external funding.
Legal	Subject to any contractual implications arising from the receipt of grant funding, there are no direct legal implications. The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are not functions reserved to Full Council
Procurement	In line with all other capital expenditure, the additional spend will be subject to the Council's recognised procurement procedures.
Human Resources	Not applicable.
Property	The properties affected by the proposals are identified in the main body of the report.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable.
Risk Assessment	The risks associated with the proposals are regarded as acceptable but these risks will continue to be reviewed up to and during implementation of the proposals.
Crime & Disorder	There are no Crime and Disorder implications.
Customer Consideration	There are no Customer Considerations.
Carbon reduction	Carbon Reduction measures have been considered within each project and Carbon Impact Assessments have been completed for the relevant projects.
Health & Wellbeing	There are no Health and Wellbeing implications.
Wards	All wards.

Background Papers:

Medium Term Financial Plan 2022-26

Report sign off:

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	Name
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance and S151 Officer	Jan Willis
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Portfolio Holder	Richard Wearmouth

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