

## **Response to Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 25th Sept 2023**

At the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in June 2023 members sought an explanation as to why the £250,000 allocated to the Parks Enhancement Capital Programme had not been utilised in 2022/23 and an assurance that it would be spent this year.

### **Response:**

The £250,000 refers to a Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) component of the Parks Enhancement Capital Budget allocation. This contribution was not utilised in 22/23 but will be fully utilised in 2023/24. This funding was not utilised in 2022/23 due to the delivery of several schemes being delayed due to a combination of factors. These factors primarily involved: capacity constraints within the NCC Countryside Team, who were still having to undertake a large volume of Storm Arwen recovery works within parks and greenspaces; and delays whilst agreements were secured with partners over external funding contributions and 'in-kind' contributions, such as undertaking elements of the improvement works at no-cost – both of which act to maximise the overall benefits that can be secured from the Council's investment in the parks improvement programme.

It should be noted that during 22/23, £141,230 of the Parks Enhancement Capital Programme budget was utilised for the delivery of the following projects:

- Berwick – Castle Vale Park - renovation of ornamental pond
- Ashington – Hirst Park – supporting a partnership scheme with Ashington Town Council to provide new interpretation within the park to celebrate Ashington's sporting heroes which included a contribution from NCC towards the installation of the Jackie Charlton Statue
- Bamburgh – supporting a scheme with Bamburgh Parish Council with NCC contributing towards the construction of a new 'destination' play area
- Ashington – Wansbeck Riverside Country Park – revamp of children's play area
- Newbiggin – supporting a partnership scheme with Newbiggin Town Council with NCC contributing to the construction of new 'destination' play area at Milburn Park
- Isabella Park, Blyth – initial works as part of a large scale improvement scheme running into 2023/24 involving new interpretation and QEII commemoration information, path creation and improvement, tree planting, public seating and landscaping

In addition, a number of other Parks Enhancement Capital Programme projects and schemes continued to be developed during 22/23 which will be implemented across 23/24 and following years. The Countryside and Green Spaces Team has also secured additional staffing resource in respect of a Project Officer to support the development and delivery of projects and schemes

under the Parks Enhancement Capital Programme and the Queen Elizabeth II Commemoration allocation.

Good progress is being made with the implementation of the Parks Enhancement and QEII Commemoration schemes in 2023/24, with the following schemes having now been delivered or in progress:

- Eastwoods Park (Prudhoe) - perimeter path, community orchard (QEII commemoration)
- Valley Park (Cramlington) - path resurfacing, footbridge replacement, pond revival and platforms (QEII commemoration)
- Isabella Heap Country Park (Blyth) - path improvements, tree planting & landscaping
- Barns Park (Cramlington) - path improvements
- Queen's Garden (Tweedmouth) - tree planting, bench installation (QEII commemoration)
- QEII Country Park - access improvements (QEII commemoration)
- East Cramlington Local Nature Reserve - access improvements (QEII commemoration)