

## RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISION TAKEN BY AN EXECUTIVE MEMBER

This form **MUST** be used to record any decision taken by the Elected Mayor or an individual Executive Member (Portfolio Holder).

The form must be completed and passed to the Chief Officer Legal and Democratic Services no later than NOON on the second working day after the day on which the decision is taken. No action may be taken to implement the decision(s) recorded on this form until 7 days have passed and the Chief Officer Legal and Democratic Services has confirmed the decision has not been called in.

**1. Description of decision**

To approve the development and creation of a Sensory Garden on the site of the current Time Garden in Russell Park on the Embankment, funded from East London Foundation NHS Trust (ELFT) project funding, in the sum of £40,000, and the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), in the sum of £23,000.

**2. Date of decision**

11 March 2024

**3. Reasons for decision**

This project will deliver a sensory garden that is accessible to all children and young people regardless of disability and provide a place where families can spend time together. It will encourage leisure activities and make people happy to be in the local area. The sensory garden is located near to the inclusive park and changing place toilets and it is likely that families will spend longer in this area of town with the addition of the sensory garden.

**4. Alternatives considered and rejected**

The Council has been approached by ELFT to fund this project and, as such, the "do nothing" option would necessitate the non-acceptance of funding from ELFT. This could lead to reputational damage as the Parent Carers Forum, with 1000+ members, is aware that funding has been awarded to the Authority to spend on a Sensory Garden.

**5. How decision is to be funded**

East London Foundation NHS Trust (ELFT) have funded £40,000 for the sole purpose of use on this project.

£23,000 of the project is being funded by Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF).

**6. Conflicts of interest**

Name of all Executive members who were consulted AND declared a conflict of interest.	Nature of interest	Did Standards Committee give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and date of dispensation)	Did the Chief Executive give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and the date of the dispensation).

The Mayor has been consulted on this decision

Not Applicable

Signed Tom Wootton

Date: 11 March 2024

Name of Decision Taker: Mayor Tom Wootton

**This is a public document. A copy of it must be given to the Chief Officer Legal and Democratic Services as soon as it is completed.**

Date decision published: ....11March2024.....

Date decision can be implemented if not called in: ...21March2024.....

(Decision to be made exempt from call in.....NO.....)

**Bedford Borough Council – Mayoral Decision**

**11 March 2024**

**Report by: Chief Officer for Education, SEND and Schools Infrastructure**

**Subject: Russell Park Sensory Garden – Approval to receive funding from ELFT to support Sensory Garden**

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Council is now in a position to start works on the creation of a new sensory garden in Russell Park, with a planned opening in 2024. This will utilise funds awarded by East London Foundation NHS Trust (ELFT), in the sum of £40,000, as well as Contain Outbrook Management Fund (COMF) funding of £23,000.
- 2.2 As the Sensory Garden spend is £63,000 (revenue), to gain approval to spend the funding, a Key Decision from the Mayor under his delegated executive authority is required. The constitution requires a key decision for “*additional (i.e.) unbudgeted expenditure (capital or revenue) of over £50,000*”.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **That the Mayor approve the utilisation of the allocated funding from ELFT, in the sum of £40,000, and the balance of funding from the allocation of COMF funding, in the sum of £23,000, for the works required to create the Sensory Garden on the site of the current Time Garden in Russell Park, The Embankment, Bedford.**

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 This therapeutic Sensory Garden will have a transformative impact on the lives of Bedford Borough residents; not only will it be a place of refuge and calm in the heart of the Town (encouraging more families into Bedford) but through engaging with local support groups, services and volunteers in the ongoing maintenance of the garden, the upkeep of the garden itself will have ongoing therapeutic benefits as well as a source of pride for local residents who use and maintain it. Having a dedicated sensory garden on the embankment will build on the development of an inclusive play park in Russell Park and be another example of the commitment from Bedford Borough Council to make Bedford Borough truly inclusive.
- 3.2 This project will deliver a Sensory Garden that is accessible to all children and young people regardless of disability and provide a place where families can spend time together. This clearly meets the priority of 'enhancing places' as it will encourage leisure activities and make people happy to be in the local area. The Sensory Garden is located near to the inclusive play park and changing place toilets and it is likely that families will spend longer in this area of town with the addition of the sensory garden.
- 3.3 It meets the Council priority of 'empowering people' as young people and parent carers have been involved in the project from the start. Young people with a disability are being shown that they are an important part of the community and that they have a right to enjoy the parks and gardens like any other child.
- 3.4 It also meets the Council's Children Plan vision of "Children and young people including those with SEND are supported to develop and maintain good physical and mental health" as well as it's legal duties under the short breaks agenda to ensure sufficient opportunities and activities are available to children and young people with disabilities.

### **4. THE CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 Since the initial receiving of the funds from ELFT, a design for the sensory garden has been coproduced with various stakeholders. These designs have now been put out to tender and a figure for the total costs of the project has now been confirmed. By utilising COMF funding, in the sum of £23,000, alongside the funding from ELFT, in the sum of £40,000, the Council is now in a position to move forward with this project.

## 5. DETAILS

- 5.1 ELFT have provided £40,000 of funding to be used towards a Sensory Garden for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families. There is a requirement for the project to start in this financial year otherwise the funding will need to be returned to ELFT. £23,000 of funding is to be provided from COMF Funding which was provided to increase leisure opportunities for people with a disability within the community.
- 5.2 A Steering Group was set up to manage this project involving representatives from the Bedford Parent Carer Forum, the SEND Programme Team and Parks and Environment.
- 5.3 A location has been agreed which is close to the Russell Park inclusive play area and the new Changing Place toilets making this part of the town an accessible and fun place to visit for young people with SEND.
- 5.4 Parent carers and young people have been consulted in regard to what they want to see in the garden and plans have been drawn up for the garden. Young people have been involved in workshops to build bug hotels and fun activities will be offered to engage young people to encourage them to visit the garden when it opens.
- 5.5 ELFT have requested that the Council support with the procurement and delivery of this sensory garden using the funds they have been allocated as they feel this will be beneficial to the wellbeing of Parents and Carers of young people with SEND who live in Bedford Borough. A full procurement process has been run to secure a company to build the garden.
- 5.6 During the pandemic, parents of children and young people with Special Educational and Mental health needs faced ostracism when using outdoor spaces and parks because of their child's needs, anxieties and playing preferences. Parents contacted the Parent Carer Forum for support in gaining agreement to develop a safe, free and public space into a sensory garden that could be accessible for all to use. Bedford Borough Council has agreed to utilise a space that is already on the embankment in Russell Park (The Time Garden), in the heart of Bedford and are converting this into a dedicated Sensory Garden to promote the use of sensory and wellbeing gardening in Bedford.
- 5.7 The Council already maintains the existing 'Time Garden' that is the site for this new sensory garden. It is not envisioned that there will be any additional maintenance costs on top of what is already undertaken. In fact, there is a lot of work that needs to take place in the Time Garden (removal of bushes, cutting back, replanting etc) that would actually be funded from this money rather than the Council having to find the resources. The Environment Team are part of the steering group and will sign off the final designs to ensure there is not anything within the designs which would place undue financial pressure due to ongoing maintenance.

- 5.8 The location was chosen because most of the infrastructure for the sensory garden is already in place which will massively reduce costs. The Time Garden already has paths and borders and has been flattened sufficiently – the designs for the Sensory Garden will build upon this existing infrastructure. If the Council did not do this then the budget for groundworks and appropriate flooring / pathways would take up a significant amount of the budget. This means more of the funding can be spent on the plants, artwork and facilities that will have the biggest therapeutic impact on its users.
- 5.9 There is an ever-increasing body of scientific evidence that gardens are good for our physical, mental and social wellbeing. There are very few activities that can achieve all the things that horticulture and gardening can. In particular, the measurable impact on active lifestyle, mental wellbeing, and social interaction.
- 5.10 Introducing a usable garden for wellbeing for SEN, mental health and dementia users is key to improving isolation, accessibility, self-esteem, healing, relaxation, positive mental health, a sense of community and achievement. It is envisaged that this garden space will be visited by up to 500 people per month based on activity already recorded in the surrounding parks and embankment. Community groups have been involved in the design and upkeep of the garden which in turn will have a positive impact on those groups mental health and wellbeing. One other reason for the location of this park is its central location, making it easier for the various community groups who want to use and maintain the garden to access.
- 5.11 The Council has undertaken a lot of work with families of children with SEND regarding access to facilities and equipment in Bedford Borough and there has been a common theme of wanting a ‘destination’ where they can go to access all that they need as a family and have a true ‘day out’. Russell Park has been identified is the site for our main inclusive play park, and is also the site for our successful government bid for a changing places toilet (to allow wheelchair users to not only access play equipment but also to be able to use changing place facilities for toilet/changing needs).The sensory garden will build upon this by enabling families to access all 3 much needed facilities within the same council maintained park.
- 5.12 The design of the sensory garden has been coproduced with the users of the project space, with children and young people with SEND and their families having engaged in focus groups on the potential designs as well as building some of the ‘bug hotels’ that will be used in the final sensory garden.
- 5.13 ELFT are keen to support with funding for this sensory garden as they plan for their CAMHS discovery college (DISCO) to use the garden to support people in their journey of mental health recovery and engage them in the overall project where they can see a positive outcome whilst also benefiting their mental, physical and emotional health. Some of these young people have fallen through gaps in educational and health services and haven’t gained expected qualifications.

5.14 The Council is providing some of the funds towards the project using COMF funding. This funding had been allocated to increasing the activity and wellbeing of the SEND population and is left over from the projects to increase SEND physical activity. The remaining COMF funding is being utilised alongside the £40,000 of funding that ELFT have provided towards this project in 2022 (for which approval was given to receive the funding on 28 March 2022).

**6. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

6.1 As the Council has been approached by ELFT the option of “do nothing” is not really an option. If the Council “do nothing” it will need to return the money to ELFT. This could lead to reputational damage, as the Parent Carers Forum with 1600+ members know that this money has been given to the Authority to spend on a Sensory Garden. Alternative options are not able to be considered as ELFT have directed the money to be used on this project.

**7. KEY IMPLICATIONS**

<b>7.1 Legal Issues</b>	None
<b>7.2 Policy Issues</b>	<p>The Council’s Corporate Plan 2022-2026 vision of the period of this Plan is:</p> <p>“We want Bedford Borough to thrive as a place, that people are proud of, want to live in and move to. To do this we need a growing and strong local economy and an active response to climate change. From this foundation our residents will be able to thrive and realise their potential, supporting and celebrating our diverse and inclusive communities.”</p> <p>To achieve this the plan focusses on goals and strategic priorities. The Russell Park Sensory Garden works towards the ‘Develop Places’ goal through strategic priorities of, ‘develop our urban and rural places’ and ‘enrich our local environment’, along with the ‘Empower Communities’ goal through strategic priority, ‘enable people to participate in their community and celebrate out vibrant culture’.</p> <p>The Russell Park Sensory Garden also works to achieve the cross-cutting themes of Climate Change Emergency and Well-being within the Corporate Plan. This is through providing pollinator friendly planting in the new garden, therefore supporting our Bugs and Bees, and working towards providing facilities for all residents of the borough.</p>

<p><b>7.3 Resource Issues</b></p>	<p>The Council already maintains the existing ‘Time Garden’ which is where this new Sensory Garden will be built. This will therefore not significantly increase the amount of maintenance or resources required for the general upkeep of the garden.</p> <p>By utilising community groups who wish to maintain the spaces as part of their therapeutic interventions we will be able to maintain this area to an enhanced standard, therefore reducing pressure on grounds maintenance staff to focus on other areas (no community group currently maintains the Time Garden).</p> <p>The environmental service is part of the steering group for this project and will have final say on the designs to ensure that everything that is put into the Sensory Garden is easily maintained and services using existing resources.</p>
<p><b>7.4 Risks</b></p>	<p>Capital expenditure exceeding the amount of funding awarded, however the project will be managed to mitigate these risks and we have now gone out to tender and so have a fixed price for the works.</p>
<p><b>7.5 Environmental Implications</b></p>	<p>The Russell Park Sensory Garden will have a positive impact on the environment. Where possible items are being re-used within the site, this is ranging from the hard landscaping such as pathways and plants.</p> <p>This project is focused on bringing in sensory items within the space, with a wildlife focus. The new planting will primarily be pollinator friendly and new habitats are being created in the form of insect hotels which have been made by young people. Overall, the project will support biodiversity and help with offsetting carbon.</p>
<p><b>7.6 Equalities Impact</b></p>	<p>The space will provide a space is aimed at positively improving the lives of people with disabilities, from children and young people with SEND, to adults with disabilities, mental health needs and dementia. This space will not only benefit those communities but also the general public, ensuring improved equality for all.</p>
<p><b>7.7 Impact on Families</b></p>	<p>This will have a positive impact of families, giving them a new space to feel safe and part of the community. For families of young people with SEND, having space and activities where their child can feel included, safe and happy is a vital responsibility of the Local Authority. The therapeutic benefits of providing a space like this are significant are well evidenced.</p>



	The park will not only enable families to explore space in a physical way, but to interact with it in creative and curious ways, such as with the bug hotels, learning more about ecosystems and the world around them.
<b>7.8 Community Safety and Resilience</b>	The space will enhancing our local community, by bringing different community groups on board to support its maintenance and development over time. This will ensure young people and families with SEND have safe and usable space.
<b>7.9 Impact on Health and Wellbeing</b>	<p>Good quality parks and open spaces have a positive impact on people’s lives, and Bedford Borough’s parks are highly valued by borough residents. The environment plays a crucial role on Health and Well-Being and ‘essential for human health’ including reducing symptoms of dementia, through to the role parks play in the national health strategy promoted by the World Health Organisation – as outlined in <i>‘From the inside out to the outside in: Exploring the role of parks and protected areas as providers of human health and well-being’</i> (Romagosa, Eagles &amp; Lemieux, 2015).</p> <p>Experiences that appeal to sensory needs are considered vital for well-being as ‘connecting with the senses excites pathways in the brain to induce biochemical benefits’ (‘What are the benefits of sensory gardens’, 2020). The impact of this for our families and community, in improving mood, reduce anxiety and helping to regulate emotions will be extremely positive, and provide them with a reliable space for access to take place in sustainable ways in the years to come.</p>

## 8. SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS AND OUTCOME

8.1 The following Council units or Officers and/or other organisations have been consulted in preparing this report:

Cllr. Jane Walker, Portfolio Holder  
 Director Children’s Services  
 Corporate Leadership Team

**9. WARD COUNCILLOR VIEWS**

9.1 Cllr. Lucy Bywater and Cllr. Paul Edmonds are in full support of this proposal, recognising the positive benefits it will bring to the community and young people with SEND needs.

**10. CONTACTS AND REFERENCES**

<i>Report Contact Officer</i>	<i>Nicola Ready, Manager for SEND Programme</i>
<i>File Reference</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Background Papers</i>	Executive Decision 1583: 28 March 2022 <a href="https://apps.bedford.gov.uk/ExecDecisions/Files/D446494547554051.pdf">https://apps.bedford.gov.uk/ExecDecisions/Files/D446494547554051.pdf</a>
<i>Appendices</i>	<i>None</i>