

Appendix 4

Capital Bid for Birkenhead Park (January 2024)

**NEW PROJECT PROPOSAL
OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE**

OVERVIEW

This Outline Business Case template should be completed for all new projects or one-off investments including external grant applications. The OBC will be assessed to determine how well the project fits with Council strategy and priorities to determine if the proposal is either: A. rejected, B. supported but with implementation deferred, C. proceeds to implementation or D. a full business case is required.

ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

Check	Yes / No
Is this a request for capital funding?	Yes
Is this a request to acquire new IT equipment, software or digital services?	No
Is this a request to purchase land/property or enhance an existing Council building or Asset?	Yes
Has the Procurement Team been consulted on the approach / timescale required?	Yes
Has the legal team been consulted?	Yes

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title:	Birkenhead Park People's Garden – a potential World Heritage Site (Capital improvements to enable a successful UNESCO nomination)
Business Area:	Neighbourhoods - Parks & Countryside – Birkenhead Park
Business Case Author:	Rob Belcher
Project Manager/Lead:	Rob Belcher

REVIEW PROCESS

REVIEW	DATE	OUTCOME
Director/Accountable Officer: Jason Gooding – Director of Neighbourhoods	06/11/2023	Support
Programme / Portfolio Board:		
Finance Business Partner:	17/11/2023	Sarah Cox
Is a key decision required to proceed? (A key decision includes expenditure being incurred above £500,000 or having a significant impact on 2 or more Council wards)		

As per the Investment Change Board, all new capital bids must be reviewed by the appropriate Director **prior** to submission to the Capital Team:

- Review all current approved capital schemes within the Department to determine whether any other scheme can be replaced or re-engineered to accommodate this scheme? Detail why the original scheme is no longer required and/or can still be delivered within remaining funds and whether there is any significant impact upon operations from removing the scheme/reducing the funding.
- The cost of borrowing must be met by the revenue budget? The Council has a Statutory Duty to set aside each year from its annual revenue budget an amount towards the eventual repayment of borrowing (minimum revenue provision – MRP).

DIRECTOR REVIEW

Review all current approved capital schemes within the Department to determine whether any other scheme can be replaced or re-engineered to accommodate this scheme? Detail why the original scheme is no longer required and/or can still be delivered within remaining funds and whether there is any significant impact upon operations from removing the scheme/reducing the funding.

Current capital schemes within Parks have been reviewed and there is no additional funding available that can be vired across to this scheme. Capital expenditure against most schemes has been committed this year.

State whether the cost of borrowing can be met by the revenue budget? The Council has a Statutory Duty to set aside each year from its annual revenue budget an amount towards the eventual repayment of borrowing (minimum revenue provision – MRP).

This expenditure cannot be met from the Revenue Budget for this area without ceasing to fund and provide services in other areas – which include statutory duties. The Neighbourhoods budget, including the Parks & Countryside Budget, has been significantly reduced over previous years and is currently overspent. While action is being undertaken, in year, to reduce this overspend at this time no revenue budget can be committed from the service to contribute towards the cost of borrowing.

It is important to note that the Council has already given an undertaking to Government to fund this submission which has benefits to the whole of Wirral not just Birkenhead Park.

CAPITAL FUNDING ONLY

REVIEW		Revenue Code	EVIDENCE (from Director)
In all cases the Finance Cost will be funded from revenue. Provide full revenue cost centre	No		See comments in Directors Review
Finance Cost to be funded from re-engineering of existing capital schemes?	NO		See comments in Directors Review

OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE TEMPLATE

1. Executive Summary – Provide a high-level summary of the key points in the business case including the need for the project, the key benefits and return on investment. Include any key partners/stakeholders and their commitment to the project.

In early April 2023, the UK Government (through its Department of Culture, Media & Sport - DCMS) announced its 'new' Tentative List of sites (for potential future nomination to UNESCO as World Heritage Sites (WHS) over the next 10 years). Significantly, Birkenhead Park is included on that list of only seven sites in the United Kingdom and its overseas territories.

Now that Birkenhead Park is on the UK's short list, the current phase is to work towards a formal nomination (which will be submitted by the UK Government) to UNESCO. Such a nomination is the basis on which UNESCO's World Heritage Committee will decide on whether or not to inscribe it as a WHS. There is much to be done to prepare for nomination and it is a process that may take several years.

The benefits of WHS recognition

Firstly, the ambitions for Birkenhead Park fully support the Council's strategic priorities and the vision to promote fairness and opportunity for people and communities – this is essentially the reason why the Park was created in the first place nearly 180 years ago.

The benefits of becoming a WHS (and even of initially being included on the UK's Tentative List) are potentially enormous for the Borough and sub-region, including:

- building international awareness and a global reputation;
- growing the Borough's visitor economy, specifically national and international tourism – the WHS 'brand' is recognised as a significant driver;
- increasing opportunities for inward investment and grant funding, and making significant contributions to Birkenhead's comprehensive regeneration programme (specifically in terms of attracting businesses to the area and creating job opportunities for local residents);
- increasing community and civic pride; and
- securing the protection and improved management of this unique public heritage asset for future generations (a key factor for UNESCO).

Specifically, the initiative sits 'hand in glove' with the priorities of Birkenhead's regeneration programme and its enormous potential should not be underestimated in:

- driving economic regeneration (generating investment and employment opportunities);
- enabling social regeneration (tackling the causes of health inequalities for example); and
- transforming our neighbourhoods (focusing on benefits for people and the environment).

Evidence of the economic impact of WHSs in the UK is substantial:

- UK WHSs generate nearly £6 million per year per site, on average, in additional revenue resources*;
- WHSs are very successful in attracting external funding – over 14 years the National Lottery Heritage Fund invested £566 million in 24 UK WHSs*;
- Visitor numbers will increase after a site is inscribed – anywhere between 6% and 50%**;

- WHSs promote wider economic growth in the local area of between 1% and 3% in the years following inscription**;
- WHSs can help alleviate socio-economic problems in their local areas. In some cases, poverty rates fell from 46% to 9% over the 18 years following inscription**;
- The WHS inscription process can generate PR worth very large sums. This alerts international visitors of the importance and specialness of a site**.

(Information from:

** Report by United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO, 'The National Value of UNESCO Designations to the United Kingdom', 2020*

***Report for Gwynedd Council (The Slate Landscape of North Wales WHS), 'An assessment of the Current and Potential Economic Impact of Heritage', 2015)*

Already, we have experienced the impact of WHS association. The Tentative List announcement in April 2023 provoked a plethora of national, regional, and local press coverage and hugely raised awareness of the park and the wider area. 'Visits' to the park's website increased by 900%, and there has been much interest from specialist and professional organisations in terms of articles and talks.

The initial investment provided by this capital bid will see a significant financial return for the Borough in the long-term through enabling a successful WHS nomination to UNESCO.

More visitors and increasing income opportunities

Currently, the annual number of visitors to Birkenhead Park is estimated at between 1.5 and 2 million. These consist mainly of people from the local area. As a direct impact of WHS recognition, it is anticipated that visitor numbers will increase by as much as 50%, i.e. to between 2.25 to 3 million a year. And, by establishing a global reputation, we will welcome more visitors from further afield – regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Given Birkenhead Park's geographic location close to a significant international city and with excellent public transport (with a dedicated train station), this consequent increase in footfall to the park – and indeed to Birkenhead and the wider Wirral peninsula - is a very realistic prospect. It will bring with it additional spending power and significant income, both for the park and, more importantly, in terms of Wirral's visitor economy.

Concerning the former, Birkenhead Park is fortunate in having a number of existing revenue income streams, and together these have typically realised circa £90k per annum in the years immediately prior to the Covid pandemic – income levels are still returning to those previously seen pre-pandemic. There is certainly great opportunity to significantly increase annual income from current sources, as well as identifying additional sources.

It is anticipated that a medium-term target to double the park's annual income is achievable and a successful bid for WHS recognition, maximising the heightened reputation that goes with it (and associated investment in its infrastructure and facilities through this capital bid), will undoubtedly provide a major driver to enable that to be realised. Some of the main opportunities for increasing the park's income will be:

- developing a range of catering opportunities - both at the Visitor Centre and various locations throughout the park,
- building a high-profile events and activities programme,
- encouraging commercial concessions,

- renting out of indoor spaces – gallery and function room,
- promoting the park for filming and TV productions (pre-Covid, the park was used in the filming of ‘The Irregulars’ Netflix series),
- merchandising and sales,
- sponsorship and donations programmes, and
- developing a centre of excellence / learning centre for the delivery of professional training on best practice in landscape management, heritage site management, forest schools practice, etc.

However, such an increase in revenue for the park will seem as insignificant compared to the growth in the wider visitor economy of Birkenhead and Wirral as a result of being the custodian of a World Heritage Site.

The next steps to WHS inscription

The process of preparing and submitting a WHS nomination is time consuming and will take several years. The UK’s most recently inscribed WHS – the Slate Landscape of North West Wales – took eight years from joining the Tentative List to being nominated to UNESCO. Jodrell Bank (inscribed in 2019) was of a similar timescale.

There are essentially two phases of work which need to be undertaken:

- the Technical Evaluation (by UK Government) and Preliminary Assessment (by UNESCO) phase; and
- the Nomination phase.

The indicative timescale for WHS inscription

The indicative programme suggests that it could be possible to achieve Birkenhead Park’s inscription as a WHS within the next 6 years. However, the decision as to when, and if, a nomination will be submitted rests with the UK Government, which will also be considering the progress towards nomination of other sites on the Tentative List. Of course, if DCMS feels that Birkenhead Park is ready to proceed earlier than assumed, then the timetable for the UNESCO nomination could well be shorter.

The potential costs of priority capital works for WHS nomination

As already stated, the process of preparing and submitting a nomination is time consuming. Consequently, the associated investment required will be significant, both in terms of the need for additional revenue and capital expenditure. A ‘Revenue Growth and Budget Pressures’ form has already been prepared and submitted in relation to the anticipated additional revenue costs associated with this project between 2024/25 and 2027/28.

There are also additional significant capital costs (anticipated to be £975,000) which need to be addressed and are the subject of this Capital Bid. These mainly relate to the current condition of the park’s physical infrastructure – its landscape and some of its key natural and cultural heritage attributes and landmarks. Their condition and presentation are not presently at the level of WHS expectations if we want to be considered for a successful nomination.

Such priority elements which require additional capital improvements in the short to medium term (delivered over 5 years) consist of:

- Replacement of a number of gates and railings (£190,000);

- Restoration of main historic buildings and structures – specifically Grand Entrance, Swiss Bridge, and Roman Boathouse (£250,000);
- Replacement of lake platforms in the Upper Park (£60,000);
- A programme of park boundary improvements, replacing damaged walls and replacing some entrance paths that do not meet current standards (£125,000);
- Refurbishment / replacement of the park's visitor centre and facilities (including toilets, decoration, and general visitor facilities) (£60,000);
- A comprehensive overhaul of site furniture including notice/information boards, benches, and waste bins (£40,000);
- Data collection and monitoring of visitor numbers - purchase and installation of automated visitor counters at all of the Park's entrances (£60,000).

These proposals will be delivered by a part-time development manager/coordinator, whose salary will also be capitalised (£190,000).

All figures above include a contingency and inflation allowance at 25%.

In order to fully realise the significant benefits that will undoubtedly come from the international recognition of WHS inscription, further considerable investment will also be required in the long term.

At a fundamental level, it will be essential to:

- commit to appropriately protecting, managing, and looking after the special heritage asset and the attributes - both physical and intangible - for which Birkenhead Park is held in such high regard;
- do that in accordance with the Council's response to climate emergency and its commitment to environmental sustainability;
- maximise the opportunities that WHS recognition would bring for our residents, in terms of health and wellbeing benefits, employment and business development, and broader 'community' outcomes;
- greatly expand opportunities for people to engage with, and learn more about, this important place and its role in the development of public parks across the world; and
- plan for future success.

With Birkenhead Park as an integral element in the wider regeneration programme for the town, such longer term investment will be sought from a cocktail of external grant funders including the National Heritage Lottery Fund, Liverpool City Region, etc.

Supporting Partners and Stakeholders

The site being almost wholly within the ownership of Wirral Council, the Council is the main stakeholder. However, there are also a wide range of external stakeholders, including:

- the owners and occupiers of private properties within and neighbouring the proposed WHS;
- local communities, largely represented by community and residents' associations, schools and other educational establishments, and significantly by the 'Friends of Birkenhead Park';
- visitors to the park and various user groups (including sports clubs and third sector organisations) – visitor surveys conducted in 2019 and 2021 show that Birkenhead Park is considered to be a 'very special place' by local people, and there is strong public support for pursuing WHS recognition;
- volunteers undertaking a variety of valuable roles throughout the Park, and the 'Friends of Birkenhead Park' which has a significant part in providing and supporting volunteering, as well as fundraising and contributing to the management of the park;

- national, regional, and local communities of interest including Conservation Areas Wirral, Birkenhead History Society, Merseyside Civic Society, and University of Liverpool.

Since 2017, a Steering Group consisting of representatives from the major stakeholder groups has met on a regular basis to make progress on the WHS ambition.

Capital Strategy Criteria met:-

- Essential Health and Safety / Disability Discrimination Act Schemes
- Invest to save scheme, including those developed with the intention of avoiding future cost pressures.
- A Scheme that reflects Council priorities that could have a wider economic benefit that link in with the Wirral Plan

2. Background, Context and Need – Set out the reasons for undertaking the project and explain how it enables the achievement of corporate objectives or strategies.

In terms of the Council's WHS ambition for Birkenhead Park, the successful application to join the UK's Tentative List is the first fruit of much preparatory work over the preceding 8 years. The previous corporate approvals for this initiative are:

- February 2017: Cabinet and SLT supported an application for WHS inscription.
- December 2017: Cabinet and SLT established a revenue reserve budget of £250,000 to take forward its aspirations for Birkenhead Park.
- November 2020: Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee endorsed support to progress the aspiration for WHS inscription.
- October 2022: SLT approved the submission of the WHS Tentative List application.
- April 2023: Wirral Council accepted the UK Government's decision to include Birkenhead Park on its WHS Tentative List and agreed to fund the nomination.
- December 2023: SLT received an updated briefing on the project and endorsed the approach to UNESCO nomination.

While being on the UK's 'shortlist' does not guarantee that a site will proceed in being nominated to UNESCO, it is the formal 'first step on the ladder' in the long journey to seek this prestigious international recognition.

The UK Government states in its Tentative List guidance that:

"Inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is an acknowledgement of the global significance of such places. It is an honour and a privilege and can bring social and economic benefits. However, because all World Heritage Sites have to be of global importance, the World Heritage List is inevitably highly selective and many places of national or even of international significance will not make it on to the list."

The journey towards such recognition evidences the Council's high ambitions and will be an important catalyst for regeneration, contributing to increases in property values (particularly in the immediate surroundings), growth of the visitor economy, and a more diverse and higher quality retail offer. It will also help in unlocking external funding opportunities (lottery and others) and attracting businesses and development opportunities to the area. Indeed, the initiative rightly sits 'hand in glove' with the priorities of Wirral's regeneration programme:

- driving economic regeneration (generating new investment and new employment opportunities);

- enabling social regeneration (tackling the causes of health inequalities for example); and
- transforming our neighbourhoods.

The need to undertake an early programme of priority capital improvements in Birkenhead Park - focused on conserving the condition of its historic attributes - is essential to evidencing the Council's good custodianship of the site, and in preparing for a successful nomination to UNESCO.

3. Business Options / Preferred Option – Summarise your analysis of the base options considered (including do nothing) and your reasoning behind the preferred option.

Option Description	Reason for rejection
Do Nothing	<p>This option assumes that a programme of capital improvements to the park's infrastructure (as summarised in 1. above) is not undertaken. This will result in long overdue improvements to the condition and presentation of significant heritage attributes not being undertaken.</p> <p>Consequently, the condition of these elements will continue to decline without attention, delaying the inevitable time when even more considerable and costly remedial action is unavoidable.</p> <p>This worsening physical condition will clearly have an impact on the enjoyment of the park by visitors. And, in terms of the WHS ambition (and the potential benefits associated with such recognition), it will not be looked on favourably by UNESCO and its advisors in considering a WHS nomination.</p> <p>Consequently 'do nothing' is considered to be an unrealistic option at this time.</p>
Preferred Option	<p>A capital funding allocation of circa £1million to undertake a 5-year priority programme of infrastructure improvements in the Park would significantly contribute to a successful WHS nomination. Not only would it improve and conserve the condition of key elements of heritage importance but would also evidence to UNESCO the Council's good custodianship of the site.</p> <p>This preferred option (including its benefits) is obviously further described and detailed in this document, and it is proposed to take forward this option.</p>

4. Expected Benefits – These should be set out in measurable terms against the situation as it exists prior to the project. Benefits should be both qualitative and quantitative and aligned to relevant programme or strategic benefits. Any benefits realisation requirements should be stated.		
Financial Benefits:		
Benefit Description	Measurement Method	Benefit Owner
Improving and maintaining the physical fabric of the park to a high standard will ensure its attractiveness to visitors, and consequently provide opportunities to sustain and increase income generated from catering and hospitality, events and activities, visitor centre sales, etc.	Monitoring the park's annual income generated from various sources.	Wirral Council
The improvement of the condition and presentation of the park's key heritage attributes will ensure the best chances of a successful WHS nomination to UNESCO, which in turn will see growth in Wirral's visitor economy, and greater opportunity to attract external investment.	Monitoring the park's annual income generated from various sources. Monitoring visitor economy growth as a result of WHS inscription. Increase in external investment.	Wirral Council
The early improvement of the condition of the park's fabric will prevent further decay (which would be more costly to repair in the long run).	Cost comparison analysis.	Wirral Council
Non-Financial Benefits:		
Benefit Description	Measurement Method	Benefit Owner
Improved condition of the park's historic fabric.	Number and extent of the park's infrastructure elements are in a good condition.	Wirral Council Park visitors Local residents
A well-maintained park (which gives a greater feeling of safety) is more attractive to visitors and residents, enabling more people (and a wider range of people) to enjoy healthier lifestyles, take pride in their park, etc.	Number of visitors and qualitative surveys.	Wirral Council Park visitors Local residents

The improvement of the condition and presentation of the park's key heritage attributes will ensure the best chances of a successful WHS nomination to UNESCO.	WHS nomination and inscription	Wirral Council
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5. Expected Disbenefits – Highlight any outcomes perceived as negative by project stakeholders including any current and future increases on revenue budgets e.g. increased maintenance costs. These need to be actual consequences of the project rather than risks.

Disbenefit	Stakeholders Affected
No disbenefits anticipated as a consequence of the capital investment proposed.	

6. Constraints – Set out any anticipated constraints to the project e.g. timing issues, planning constraints, resources, external funding requirements etc. and the measures being taken to mitigate these.

Constraints	Measures to address constraints
No constraints are anticipated with regard to delivering the capital investment proposed. It is important that the works summarised earlier are undertaken in preparation for a successful WHS nomination to UNESCO. However, this is likely to take several years and so the capital works programme is proposed to take place over the next 5 financial years.	

7. Procurement – If your proposal requires any procurement activity, set out your procurement strategy for the project including any social value considerations.

It is anticipated that various elements of the programme's delivery will require the procurement of specialist contractors. Consequently, we will work closely with the Council's Procurement team (and where necessary, the Asset Management team) from an early stage to ensure that requisite procedures are followed correctly and the best suppliers and contractors are appointed to support this important project.

8. Timetable – Specify the expected start and end dates. Set out key milestones against the project timeline, these will be used to monitor delivery progress. and the period over which benefits will be realised. Include any funding end-dates as milestones. **For capital funding timetable only – please complete appendix 1**

Start Date:	April 2024	End Date:	2028
Milestone Description		Target Date	
Condition surveys undertaken/updated where necessary		Autumn 2024	
Complete work to remove/repair lake platforms in the Upper Park		Winter 2024/Spring 2025	
Install of automated visitor counters		Spring 2025	
Refurbish the park's visitor centre and facilities (including toilets, decoration, and general visitor facilities)		Spring/Summer 2025	

Commence rolling programme of railings/gates repair and decoration	Spring 2025 to 2028
Commence redecoration and repair programme of main historic buildings and structures – Grand Entrance, Swiss Bridge, and Roman Boathouse.	Summer 2025 to 2028
Commence rolling programme of overhauling site furniture - notice/information boards (including content); benches; waste bins.	Autumn 2025 to 2028

9. Project Costs – A summary of the project costs and funding arrangements as well as any impact on operational budgets. Applications for capital resource require completion of Appendix 1.

Project/Programme Costs						
	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Council Borrowing	75,000	300,000	300,000	300,000	0	975,000
External Grants						
Revenue						
External Grants						
Funding Body	Amount Funded	Funding Secured	Funding announcement date	Funding end date		
£	Yes/No					

10. Investment Appraisal – Compare the aggregated benefits/disbenefits to the anticipated project /programme costs and any on-going operational costs to determine the value of the project as an investment. (Liaise with your business partner if you have any questions about presenting your investment appraisal).

As this document seeks to communicate, the capital budget currently sought is not simply about improving the condition of specified priority elements in Birkenhead Park (although of course that is an extremely valuable result in its own right). The prime reason for submitting this capital bid at this time is to support the wider ambition of seeking WHS recognition for the Park. Since being selected to join the UK's new 'Tentative List' of potential future WHSs this ambition is now very realistic.

A future successful WHS inscription would have far-reaching benefits not only for the park and its immediate neighbourhoods, but also for the Borough and indeed the wider Liverpool City Region. It is integral to supporting the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities for People, Business, and Environment. The benefits of becoming a WHS are potentially enormous, including:

- securing the protection and improved management of this unique public heritage asset for future generations (this is a key factor for UNESCO);
- raising international awareness of the value of this special place;
- increasing community and civic pride;
- growth in the Borough's visitor economy, specifically in the form of national and international tourism; and
- increasing inward investment and external funding, and significant contributions to Birkenhead's comprehensive regeneration programme.

For this reason, it is considered that this proposed capital bid is an extremely valuable investment for the Council.

11. Risks – Provide a summary of the key risks associated with the project. Score the likelihood and impact from 1 – 5 (1 = low and 5 = high), the assessed risk score is the likelihood score multiplied by the impact score.			
Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Assessed Risk
Works prices are higher than available budget leading to insufficient funds and consequent time delays.	3	4	12
Programme delays in appointing contractors/suppliers leading to over-run of whole project.	2	4	8

End of document

APPENDIX 1 – CAPITAL COSTS AND FUNDING

enter / change year if required	2024/2025				2025/2026				2026/2027				2027/2028				2028/2029				Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	£000
Capital Expenditure:																					
Internal costs e.g. legal, design, PMO, Architects	0	0	0	5	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	0	0	0	0	185
External Costs e.g. contractors, build			20	50	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	0	0	0	0	790
Total	0	0	20	55	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	0	0	0	0	975
Funding																					
Grant																					0
Other External Funds																					0
Revenue																					0
Reserves																					0
Borrowing	0	0	20	55	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	0	0	0	0	975
Total	0	0	20	55	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	0	0	0	0	975
Revenue Expenditure																					
Employee																					0
Running costs																					0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Income (show as a negative figure)																					
additional income generated																					0
savings generated																					0
Total																					0
Net Revenue impact	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0