

BRIEFING NOTE TO SCRUTINY: INTERCHANGE PARK UPDATEReport of the Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide an update to Scrutiny Committee on the opening of the Interchange Park.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The interchange development spans two acres and is the first new green space to be created in the town centre in several generations. This much needed green space will become an attractive location for the growing town centre, providing a recreational space that will benefit town centre workers and visitors, public transport users and the residents who will move into the 4,000 new homes expected in the Mayoral Development Corporation in the coming years.
- 2.2 Since the previous update was brought to Scrutiny Committee in September significant progress has been made on the park as it edges close to completion. The walking and cycling track has been laid and the play equipment is currently being installed. The hard and soft landscaping is well underway with winter colour currently on display.

3. PREPARING FOR THE OPENING OF THE PARK**3.1 Opening events**

- 3.1.1 It is anticipated the first bus will leave from the interchange in early March. This will be followed by a Town of Culture weekend of events officially opening the park with the park brought to life by best makes, moves, sounds and tastes the borough has to offer.

3.2 Animation of the park

- 3.2.1 A fundamental element of the park's design is to make sure it is a vibrant and busy location through the animation and activation of the public space, engaging users and creating a sense of ownership. Spaces have been created for events, workshops and other opportunities for groups to utilise spaces and an extensive and exciting programme is in planning to bring the park to life. This work is being undertaken with locally based creative groups and communities to ensure the park is ready to welcome the many residents who have expressed their excitement at the prospect of our innovative new town centre park on social media.

3.3 Naming

- 3.3.1 Following a successful series of workshops with community groups and Cultural Stockport, a shortlist of three names; Arches Park, Viaduct Park and The Overbank. Voting has taken place over the Christmas period by hundreds of people, with the winning name chosen by a public token vote in locations across the borough.

4. FOCUS ON SAFETY AND SECURITY

- 4.1 The key focus of creating a safe park has been to promote the vibrancy and activation of the space and designing it to be a through route for lots of people using public transport or returning to their home. Over and above this key principle, our designers have followed best practice to design space with safety in mind.
- 4.2 A crime impact assessment was undertaken before the scheme was designed and will be reviewed once the park has been open for a year. The interchange and public realm have been designed to be a well-used, safe and welcoming place and to meet the recommendations of the impact assessment. The design also meets the three key sections of safety for women and girls identified by the University of Leeds and recommended by Green Flag award scheme:
- 4.2.1 Eyes on Park - the presence of other people in the park makes it feel safer
- 4.2.2 Awareness – being aware that the ability to see and be seen, and ensuring that the park is easy to navigate and no-one feels trapped
- 4.2.3 Inclusion – creating the space where women and children feel they belong and with activities and play equipment for everyone.
- 4.3 Subsequent to the October scrutiny discussion, the designers Gillespies, were tasked to review the design against the standards set out in the Safer Parks: Improving access for women and girls document produced by University of Leeds. They confirmed that the principles have been incorporated into the design.
- 4.4 The design, along with the town centre location and connection with the interchange and residential block will make it feel much more well used and therefore feel safer than a more suburban or semi-rural park. The specific design features of the park are set out below:

5. VIBRANCY AND ACTIVATION

- 5.1 All facilities on the park are located close to the main footpath network
- 5.2 Ground floor retail units / cafes are purposely located adjacent to the play areas for natural surveillance and space for parents to sit whilst watching children play.
- 5.3 Circular nature of oculus creates a running track
- 5.4 Space within Hatworks square for events and activation at all times of year.
- 5.5 Regular opening times of the bus station helps to know when park will be most well used.
- 5.6 To enhance safety the oculus space and circular nature of the park inherently creates options for walking routes with various entrances and exit points.
- 5.7 Variety of seating options close to and away from footpaths
- 5.8 Encouraging active travel and therefore regular throughput is an inherent part of the brief

6. VISIBILITY AND OPENNESS

- 6.1 All vegetation is low level and maintains a good level of openness. There are trees and a few specimen shrubs but still maintain an open environment to the park, with lawns and large hardstanding areas.
- 6.2 The well-used bus station, route to and from the railway station, residential building and built up environment all enhance natural surveillance.
- 6.3 All single stem trees have a clear stem of approx. 2m. There are some smaller multistem trees where the leaves are closer to the ground but these are in raised planters and smaller naturally. They are not grouped into thickets.
- 6.4 Residential entrances are clear and adjacent to main pathways with good sight lines around.
- 6.5 Wider paths – 5m cycle/footpath encircles the path creating a very open environment for many users.
- 6.6 There are 6 entrance / exit points onto the park from the surrounding areas, all wide (5m+) , but being located on a podium, access is naturally restricted at the edges due to being elevated. The entrances are clear and defined visually using the footpaths and signage
- 6.7 Play areas on the park are open and not fenced to bring the spaces together and ensure it feels all connected.

7. LIGHTING AND CCTV

- 7.1 The park is well lit at night across the entire space, is evenly distributed and lights the key routes into and out of the park
- 7.2 There is CCTV in the interchange, park and the residential block

8. WAYFINDING AND LAYOUT

- 8.1 The circular path provides clear legibility for users.
- 8.2 There are no large open spaces provided such as fields.
- 8.3 Signage is located at key entrances to the park
- 8.4 There is ample social seating in multiple safe and visible locations.

9. BELONGING AND FAMILIARITY

- 9.1 Accessible play equipment has been provided for all abilities to be able to use the spaces
- 9.2 Included within the park are: social seating, trampolines, and age-appropriate opportunities for play (other than sport).
- 9.3 Toilet facilities are provided within the main interchange to help improve the feeling of safety and familiarity.

10. MAINTENANCE

- 10.1 The park has been designed with future maintenance in mind and the council's grounds maintenance and cleaning contractor TLC will be maintaining the park once the original contract liability period expires.

11. ACCESS AND LOCATION

- 11.1 Access to the park is all via safe and well-lit routes.
- 11.2 The bridgescape site has been vastly improved, widened and made to feel more space by reducing the extent of the overbearing vegetation.
- 11.3 The location and proximity to residential buildings, interchange and other town centre developments will improve the feeling of safety.

12. RECOMMENDATION

- 12.1 The Scrutiny Committee is requested to note the report.