

Bruntsfield Parent Council Special Meeting 19 January 2023

Attendees:

Parent Council Members (Office Bearers and Coops): Dan Gerrard (DG) Parent Council Chair, Jenni Fuchs Madine (JFM), Cindy Coleman, Kristin Pedroja, Kirsty McIntosh, Alison Redpath, Stefan Santjer (SS), Ali McCallum, Jay Feeney, Shanda Doherty (SD), Lina Hipigena

Ordinary Members: Anna Docherty, Anna Wojtczuk, Louise Gourmelon (LG), Elma Charalampidou, Victoria Lopez-Craig, Majid Safari, Szymon Kowalczyk, Ariel Cao, Petros Walden, Jerome Veyret

Parent Forum Members: Catrina Arbuckle, Emily Polack, Kenzo Harper-Wang, Jon Rowe, Tara Luckhart, Steven West, Ana Miret Garcia, Corsino San Miguel, Chloe, Emiko Komabayashi

Staff: Lesley Lamond (LL), Mel McComb, Ingrid Ramsey (IR), Soha El Hindawi, Ruth Bowes Fleming, Jane Whitehead

Apologies: Marilena Papadopoulou

1. Introduction (DG):

- The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting which was being held to consider the Playground Improvement Project led by Lesley Lamond and Louise Gourmelon.
- The Chair posted a number of questions in the chat which had previously been posed to the Playground Project team by the Parent Council (see appendix).

2. Playground Improvement Project overview

- LL began the discussion by setting the scene. She outlined that the BPS playground, in relation to the number of pupils, is the smallest in the city and that it has had very little work done over the years. It's also a very difficult playground to improve due to its size, the volume of children using it and the School being a B-listed building.
- Team are keen to improve the playground for recreation and also as an outdoor learning space. A year ago, School reached out to PC looking for support and this is when Louise Gourmelon (LG) became involved.
- The team have previously received £1,500 from the PC to pay for large planters at the front of the playground.
- Children, staff and parents have all been consulted on how to improve the playground.
- In particular, LL noted that the children have given their ideas and suggestions and it is now important these are now made a reality.
- LG added that from an educational point of view – the outside is as important as the inside.

- Children want a balance of a dynamic, exciting space and in contrast also some quiet, cozy spaces.
- Two padlets are available: one with feedback from children and one from parents.
- The interpretation of these has led to the resource list within the funding application.

[View the padlet](#)

Questions

1. It was asked if the playground would be open to the whole community as a hub to meet in during holidays and weekends as it was felt that there wasn't a free facility or other playground in the area. Schools including Sciennes and Stockbridge are already doing this.

LL replied to say that inclusivity is at the heart of the project, however she is not aware what criteria the council use to decide which playgrounds are open or closed. This is something Lesley is keen to progress and will explore further.

2. A query was raised as to whether the playground improvement project will allow more opportunity for P1 pupils to be outdoors. Many other schools really focus on this and have children out almost as much as they are in, often with dedicated spaces.

LL mentioned that there was an intention to create an outdoor classroom which will help with this (although this is not included in the application) and that many of the staff involved in the project are from P1 and P2. LG acknowledged that there was value in having a dedicated area to nurture the creativity of the younger age group, but that the playground was very much focusing on P1 right through to P7.

3. It was commented that the application in its current guise is fairly light touch and really about adding kit rather than redesigning the underlying infrastructure. It was asked if this is part of a broader ambition for the playground.

LL commented that the playground is a very difficult space to improve and in addition the council have advised that the volume of children using the playground at any one time restricts options on what can be done. LL also noted that significant playground improvement projects are very expensive. Putting in planters for greenery is the most cost effective option. At this stage cost and maximising space are the School's priorities, however she would be happy to hear from any parents in the community who might want to support the project with their expertise.

4. The team were asked if they had applied for any funds or grants as part of the project? There are a number of funds available.

LL replied that she had received some grants in the past, however the playground project is very time consuming and the team need more support to help with applying for grants. She commented that Gillespies did an overhaul of their playground a few years ago with a budget of £115K which included National Lottery funding.

LG added that anyone who can help get should get in touch via bruntsfield.playground@gmail.com

5. Thanks were given to Lesley and Louise for all their work to date. It was asked what type of support have the council has provided and what sort of support the team need from the parent council and wider community?

LL reiterated that more parents need to be involved to do specific fundraising given the investment of time the project is taking. Support from the council has focused around health and safety advice. Funding from the council is unlikely.

6. Regarding value for money, SD asked what the lifespan of the project is likely to be and whether supplies will need topped up annually. If so, how much will that cost and for how long will the PC pay? SD suggested that, after looking at the project, £1-2K per year struck her as a realistic annual cost for upkeep.

LG replied that some resources will last for 10-15 years outdoors including the arbor. Wooden items shouldn't need replaced within 2-3 years, but it depends where they are sited and weathering. Some items will need replaced annually but she wouldn't expect this to cost as much as £1K-£2K.

LG said that the Playground Application was making up for lost ground and that it was important that children see some tangible results by summer. It should be viewed as a kick-starter. Additionally, some budget could be set aside for pre-loved / second-hand items rather than buying everything new.

7. It was asked whether the PC would purchase the items directly, or transfer funds to School? If School purchase the items they will be able to recoup VAT (circa £3K), but will procurement guidelines enable the School to work with the identified supplier(s)?

LL advised that the School would purchase the items directly and it was suggested by IR that they could approach a supplier of their choosing as long as they had good reason.

8. It was asked what the key priorities would be if project was only part funded?

LL replied that from a School perspective, part funding doesn't make sense. If the PC decides not to fund something now, it will only be more expensive further down the line.

LG suggested that quiet areas would be priority areas. However, if only quiet areas or only climbing areas are funded it will mean one group of children are not being represented.

9. SS noted that the PC has given substantial funds to the playground in the past and that the majority of funding has and continues to go to the playground over other School needs. Over the last 4 years £12K has been funded with an additional £6.7K on equipment in 2019. Is full funding of the playground the goal for School even if that means some other needs cannot be met? The impression being given is that funding should be all or nothing. Furthermore, as Kidzcare use the playground, have they been involved in the process or approached for funding?

A short discussion on previous funding applications followed and it was agreed that SS would share the details with LL of the previous applications. It was suggested the £6.7K may have been a request for building blocks used by P1 and P2 in the front playground.

LL stated that she doesn't consider funding the playground to be all or nothing, however her belief is that the PC can fund all of the Schools immediate needs within their available funds.

10. It was then asked if the implementation of the playground improvement project would cause disruption to the children during their break times or whether it would mean the playground would be rendered unusable for a period of time?

LL replied that nothing suggested in the current bid would cause disruption to children playing in the playground.

11. DG noted that there was a question in the chat in reference to the fact that given the small size of the playground, the application does not take account of increasing the available space, funding trips or visits to the Links for example.

LL replied that staff had received specific training on using the Links as part of their Outdoor Learning Training and that the School has also purchased dry bags to enable this. She suggested that staff have been making better use of the links.

A discussion then followed around the transparency of the Parent Council. There was a perception from one parent that the decision on funding had already been made behind closed doors. The Chair assured everyone this was absolutely not the case. The reason for the two Special Meetings this week is to seek the views of as wide a range of the BPS community as possible.

Transparency is the purpose of these meetings and all views are being heard and taken on board. The discussion then moved on to issues around communication internally within School and how this has contributed to many of the current issues, misunderstandings and perceptions.

It was noted by JFM that most of the parent council are new and have only been in post for a couple of months. The goal of the PC is to increase transparency moving forward, and these meetings are very much part of that. With a new PC and a new Head Teacher this should be viewed as an opportunity to wipe the slate clean.

12. Next up, a question around School needs and the lack of funding applications forthcoming. The scale of the school's needs were discussed at Monday's meeting and again today. Given the level of need, it's surprising that there are so few funding applications from School. Currently, beyond the Playground, we have only two small applications. One will support P1 with a new Promethian Board and one will support P6 with a Scottish Opera Workshop. Would the School like to take some time to consider all of their needs and come back to the PC with a full list of priorities? There is no immediate rush to spend the funds available.

LL advised that timing of applications is an issue. School had assumed that the PC money would be available until such a time as they put in an application. They feel they've now had to rush to compete with St Oswalds. Additionally, a new Head Teacher has meant new priorities and the PC should expect significantly more applications to come in going forward.

13. RBF (P4 teacher) commented that she really appreciated everyone taking time to discuss the playground and that she and the children were really looking forward to seeing the results.

Close

- The chair brought the meeting to a close with thanks to everyone for their time.

Appendix - Questions submitted in advance by Parent Council

1. It would be good to know whether or not the team have consulted with other schools who have recently undertaken playground improvement projects; how those schools approached the project, raised funds and what learnings they had to offer? Quite a few in Edinburgh have recently done this.

2. Can we access any matched funding / grants etc to support the project?

Eg. Sport Scotland (they match funded Trinity Primary's £20K: £20k), National Lottery Funding, Peoples Postcode Lottery - it seems we can apply for up to £500 through Landscapes for Learning: <https://ltl.org.uk/projects/local-school-nature-grants/#nature-grant>

Are we eligible for this? Are the team actively exploring all this?

3. Have the team sought professional advice re. Planning / design / implementation of the project?

4. Is there a design / scheme available to show the playground and new equipment in situ? Is it possible to 'ring-fence' the spend to the playground, but take more time to consult with schools / professionals before we actually commit to how to spend funds.

5. It seems like a lot of money upfront without a longer term maintenance or upkeep plan. It is worth thinking about the length of service of some of the items. Eg. If they want the plan to last 10 years, then factor in how many times things will need to be replaced in that time. So for instance, let's say 10% of the capital is required for annual upkeep, that is £2000 per year for how many years? Does the School cover this going forward or will the parent council be covering this?

6. Some of the resources are equipment and some are supplies. The supplies will be used up or need to be replaced several times a year. Eg a bucket of playground chalk melts into thin air in a couple of days. Magnifying glasses will last the year if they are only brought out by a teacher and stashed away after the lesson, but if they are out all the time expect them to get lost/broken within a few weeks.

7. Cozy direct looks to me like an educational supplier and the prices seem reasonable/ competitive. Does BPS need to abide by any procurement process for large orders imposed by the Council? Will they be forced to go with another supplier? Are there insurance considerations? I think if they've ordered from there before and had a positive experience there is no reason not to do it again.

8. Has the group explored having any items made with pallets by an handyman/ obliging parent? Can the mud kitchen pots, pans and utensils be sourced from second-hand or donated by parents? With VAT is is nearly £500 for pots for mud. This seems exorbitant and antithesis to the sustainability ethos.

9. Apparently, there is GB Motors guy who will bring tyres for free to local nurseries, he checks them over for barbs and nails. If this is of interest, we can follow up on the contact.

10. Muddy Faces is great for tarps and outdoor play equipment. <https://muddyfaces.co.uk/>
The heavy duty tarps that are over £150 are the ones you want (the ones that will last). The thin ones rip really easily but they're good for role play (count them as supplies though) - or so I am told.

11. A question on VAT, can BPS recoup VAT? This application has been costed with VAT, which is a great representation of full costs, but I wondered if actually school's are exempt from VAT or can get it back. This would knock off 20% of the application.

12. Who is the CEC Outdoor Learning Unit? Is it this group: <https://www.experienceoutdoors.org.uk/about-us> ? How are they involved?

13. This application is to revise the existing outdoor space, but it does not increase the available space nor fund excursions to green areas, such as the Links. It would be great to see this in parallel with other outdoor initiatives. The application and approach are amazing and I am very supportive of the proposed additions to the playground

14. Are there any council/public funding available for such school improvement projects?

15. If purchased by the School is VAT refunded?

16. For such a high number of items, is there a plan to approach various suppliers to get discounts, customized quotation?

17. Do we need to include professional labour/building fees?

18. How does this fit with the money already raised from the playground party? Did that all go to phases 1 and 2?

19. I'd like to know if they have other sources for the funding, e.g. the school, other council initiatives, etc. Some of it especially strikes me as business as usual costs (chalks, for example) which could potentially come from school, leaving the bigger parts for us.

20. Could we fund part of it, then hold fundraisers for specific bits? We could easily ask the community for help funding this in sections, e.g. climbing area.