

**TITLE OF REPORT: PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS TO SMITHSON'S RECREATION GROUND AND KING GEORGE V PLAYING FIELDS, HITCHIN**

REPORT OF THE PARKS & COUNTRYSIDE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER (as Lead Trust Officer for Smithson Recreation Ground, Hitchin Charity number 264311 and King George's Field Hitchin Charity number 1087603)

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To report to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on proposed improvements to Smithson's & King George's Fields.
- 1.2 On the 24th September 2013 Cabinet adopted the Council's Green Space Management Strategy for 2014 – 2019. The strategy contains action plans for improvements to both Smithson's and King George's Field.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Sub-Committee:

- 2.1 agrees that the Council undertakes the proposed improvements to Smithson's Recreation Ground as set out in Appendix A, subject to the Council securing an approved design.
- 2.2 agrees that the proposed improvements works to King George's Field as set out at 7.2.1 in the report be undertaken by the Council (subject to their inclusion in the 2016/17 capital programme).

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To allow the Council to provide improved facilities in accordance with the Council's adopted Green Space Management Strategy.

**4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 None.

**5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS**

- 5.1 The Council's Area Committees were consulted on the proposed action plans contained within the Council's adopted Green Space Management Strategy.
- 5.2 Ward Members have been involved in the consultation process for the proposed enhancements for Smithson's Recreation Ground.

5.3 Between the 16th and 30th November 2015 Groundwork Hertfordshire undertook public consultation on the proposals for Smithson's Recreation Ground.

## **6. FORWARD PLAN**

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

## **7. BACKGROUND**

### **7.1 Smithson's Recreation Ground**

7.1.1 For 2015/16 the Council's Green Space Action Plans list £30,000 of improvements to Smithson's Recreation Ground. Funding for the works have been secured by the Council in the capital programme and is using £21,000 section 106 contributions to this project.

7.1.2 Groundwork Hertfordshire is currently working with NHDC officers involving local groups and apprentices that work on the site to develop plans for a new pathway, improved planting and signage. Appendix A details design proposals.

### **7.2 King George's Field**

7.2.1 For 2016/17 the Council's Green Space Action Plans list £60K of improvements to King George Fields for repairs to car park, signage, improvements to main entrance and to restore electricity to the garages. This has been put forward in the capital programme for 2016/17 and will be considered by Cabinet and Council later this year.

## **8. ISSUES**

8.1 The proposed improvements to King George's Field are subject to Cabinet approval for inclusion in the 2016/17 capital programme.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The Council acts as the Trustee for the above mentioned Charities/ Charitable Trusts and this Sub-Committee of the Cabinet is the managing committee appointed on behalf of the Council to manage them. The Trustees, when carrying out their duties, must act solely in interests of the charity. They do not promote the interests of a 3rd party (i.e. the Council), even if that 3rd party appointed them as a trustee.

9.2 The Sub-Committee's role and function under 5.10.4 (a) (b) and (e) of the Council's constitution is to act on behalf of the Council as a Trustee for all assets of the Council; consider all matters relating to those Trusts including to receive reports on any matter, including the property and financial implications concerning those trust's assets.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no financial implications for the Trusts. The proposed works as set out will be funded by the Council in accordance with paragraph 7.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 One of the trust objectives is to ensure the use and enjoyment of the fields by people. The Council's improvements will assist with the continuing achievement of that aim.

- 11.2 For the Council, failure to invest in green space would be in direct conflict with the expressed needs of the local community. The 2013 District Wide Survey demonstrated that satisfaction with Council Services that residents have used within the last year is generally high – 90% or more are satisfied with parks and open spaces. Around four fifths of residents have used parks and open spaces (79%) in the last year.
- 11.3 Without capital investment, infrastructure will deteriorate and eventually will not be fit for purpose.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 12.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 12.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.3 The opportunities derived from the proposals will benefit the community by improving the infrastructure of both Smithson's & King George's Field.

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 The Public Services (Social Value) Act was passed at the end of February 2012; under the Act, public bodies in England and Wales are required to consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. 'Social Value' involves looking at what the collective benefit to a community is when a public body awards a contract. It applies to all public services contracts and those public services contracts with only an element of goods or works. It does not apply to public work contracts or public supply (goods) contracts. The Act requires public authorities at the pre-procurement phase of procuring services to consider how what is being procured might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area and how the authority might secure that improvement through the procurement process itself.
- 13.2 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraphs 12. The proposal also has benefits to the social and environmental well being of the North Hertfordshire area and more specifically, Hitchin.

## **14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 There are no human resources implications from this report.

## **15. APPENDICES**

- 15.1 Appendix A – Proposals for Smithson's Recreation Ground.

**16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

- 16.1 Stephen Geach  
Parks & Countryside Development Manager  
01462 474553  
[steve.geach@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:steve.geach@north-herts.gov.uk)

**17. CONTRIBUTING OFFICERS**

- 17.1 Vaughan Watson  
Head of Leisure & Environmental Services  
01462 474641
- 17.2 Jeanette Thompson  
Senior Lawyer  
01462 474370
- 17.3 Andrew Cavanagh  
Head of Finance  
Performance and Asset Management  
01462 474243

**18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 18.1 Green Space Management Strategy for North Hertfordshire 2014–19.
- 18.1 Cabinet decision 24<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

## **Appendix A - Proposals for Smithson's Recreation Ground**

Smithson's recreation ground is a piece of public green space in Hitchin, adjacent to some of the main through fares both vehicular and pedestrian and has a small play space, along with a larger green space that is currently laid to lawn with tree and shrub borders on the outskirts.

As part of their ongoing investment in green space, North Hertfordshire District Council have included improvements to the space and provided local community charity Groundwork Hertfordshire with a brief for the space for some basic improvements to the site.

The site required the following:

- Improved access and circulation around the site for those using the area as a pedestrian cut through
- Increased planting to help improve biodiversity
- Any new planting to be easily maintained
- Review of the current planting bed
- This history of the site was to be reflected in the design and references were to be made to the covenants related to the site
- Interpretation of the site's history to be included on site

The play area was not to be included as part of this project.

The history of the site was particularly relevant, as the site had been gifted to the council and the local people of Hitchin by Sarah Smithson (1844-1928) who was an eminent local woman, a member of the suffrage movement and scholar.

As part of her history it was found that Sarah Smithson and her husband had, like many of her contemporaries at the time, gone on the 'Grand Tour' around Europe, focusing mainly on Italy. She can be traced as staying in Anzio in Italy and it was felt that the garden should reflect her travels and that the space was intended for reflection and respite. A more formal Italian style garden space with seating for rest periods with appropriate planting was settled upon.

Possible design

