

TITLE OF REPORT : DRAFT GREEN SPACE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. SUMMARY

1.1 The Councils existing Green Space Management Strategy for land managed by the Council is due to expire in March 2014. The strategy provided the evidence base for the need for investment and contained action plans to deliver improvements across a wide range of sites. The strategy also provided the Council with the justification to apply for external grants and over the five year period it secured in excess of £3,420,000 of external investment.

1.2 Appendix A contains the strategy which has now been updated for the next five years (2014 – 2019). Its objective is to maintain and improve green space for the current and future needs of the local community at reduced cost to the Council. To achieve this the strategy has the following aims:

- To highlight the value and role of parks and green spaces in meeting corporate and community needs.
- To provide the justification and evidence base to maximise external investment opportunities and secure funding through planning obligations to provide continued investment for green space at reduced cost to the Council.
- To provide a framework to work in partnership with key stakeholders such as Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service along with volunteers to deliver improvements and external funding opportunities to green space.
- To provide clear policies that prioritises essential green space investment requirements for the next five years.
- Based on sound policies develop a sustainable five year investment programme for green space that reduces the Council's revenue and capital spend whilst still providing essential short term enhancements for green space.

1.3 On the 18th June 2013 Cabinet resolved:

- (1) That it be agreed, in principle, to the provision of a Green Space Management Strategy for 2014-2019 to maintain and improve green space for the current and future needs of the local community at reduced cost to the Council; and
- (2) That the Draft Strategy set out at Appendix A to the report be circulated to Area Committees for their comments.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the comments from this Area Committee be reported back to Cabinet on the 24th September 2013.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To enable Cabinet to take into account the local views of the Area Committees prior to considering the adoption of the Green Space Management Strategy.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Not to renew the Green Space Management Strategy.

5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 5.1 The draft strategy has been produced in conjunction with Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service.

- 5.2 The draft strategy is being circulated to all Area Committees for their comments.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report has not been identified in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 The benefits of quality green space for the health and well-being of communities is widely documented as evidenced in section 2 of the strategy.

- 7.2 Since the production of the draft strategy the International Federation of Parks & Recreation Administration (IFPRA) has completed a study into the benefits of Urban Parks. In summary it concluded that there is sound scientific evidence that parks contribute to human and social wellbeing.

- 7.3 The past five years has seen an increase in customer satisfaction relating to green space with a 19% increase in usage. This is further detailed in section 5.1 of the strategy.

- 7.4 Over the past five years having a clearly defined strategy in place identifying the needs of the local community has enabled NHDC to secure in excess of £3,420,000 of external investment. This relates to large projects such as Howard Park & Gardens where a £1,800,000 lottery grant was secured and numerous other smaller grants from a wide range of granting bodies. NHDC contributed £1.525million towards these projects. Full details of external funding secured is shown at section 5.2 in the strategy.

- 7.5 It is clear that quality green space will continue to play a vital role in sustaining and improving local communities. It is however widely recognised that for the next five years Local Councils have ever increasing financial constraints in providing services to local communities. The draft Green Space Management Strategy recognises the importance of 'living within our means' and will work with external agencies in particular Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service along with the local community to continue to secure external funding opportunities to supplement a limited NHDC capital investment programme.

- 7.6 In order to meet the financial needs of the Council the action plans for the next five years list a reduced investment programme focused on health & safety issues at cemeteries and essential investment required to meet local community needs at a local level in neighbourhood parks and amenity green space. The action plans rely heavily on partnership working with Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service for their delivery.
- 7.7 Conclusions from the Community *Green* research project by the Commission for Art and the Built Environment (CABE) are that “people greatly value local green spaces, from parks, pitches and recreation grounds to woodland and playgrounds. They appreciate the benefits in terms of relaxation and stress alleviation and the opportunity green space provides for exercise, social contact with friends and family and playing with children”.
- 7.8 A 2012 MORI survey commissioned by environmental charity Groundwork found that nine out of ten adults identify parks, playgrounds and green spaces as important in making somewhere a good place to live or work. More than three quarters want to see investment in them maintained by their local council.
- 7.9 Green space can also help mitigate against climate change . The Forestry Commission shows that trees in towns can help reduce the ‘urban heat island effect by up to 7°C’.

8. ISSUES

- 8.1 The option ‘not to renew the Green Space Management Strategy’ could quickly erode the quality of our green space and potentially jeopardise any applications for external grants.
- 8.2 It should however be recognised that even if the proposed strategy is adopted, whilst reduced investment may be appropriate and financially essential in the short term it will not be sustainable in the longer term and the quality of green space and the benefits it brings would be quickly eroded.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Under the Council’s constitution Cabinet can approve any strategy which is not reserved to Council. The Green Space Management Strategy falls within Cabinet’s remit.
- 9.2 The Council provides parks, grounds and open spaces under its discretionary powers.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The draft action plans list an investment programme of £3,316,030. This is £1,628,970 less than the previous 5 years.
- 10.2 The investment of £3.316 million represents the total proposed capital investment in green space over the period 2014 – 2019 and the total potential investment required from NHDC resources. However once action plans are approved it is intended to further maximise use of developer contributions and external grant funding bodies to minimise the resources required from the local taxpayer. Following this consultation the action plans will be presented and considered as part of the Corporate Business Planning process for 2014/15 onwards and Members will be asked to approve an affordable and deliverable capital programme for 2014/15 in February 2014.

- 10.3 It is the intention of the strategy to improve the quality of green space with no adverse, i.e. additive impact on revenue budgets.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Not to invest in green space would be in direct conflict with the expressed needs of the local community. The 2012 MORI survey identified that nine out of ten adults identify parks, playgrounds and green spaces as important in making somewhere a good place to live or work. More than three quarters want to see investment in them maintained by their local council.
- 11.2 The delivery of the Strategy is dependent upon partnership working with groups such as the Countryside Management Service and Groundwork Hertfordshire. Any reduction in funding to these groups or the loss of volunteers would have a detrimental impact on the delivery of the Strategy.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1st October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th April 2011. There is a General duty 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 Improvements to green space make them more accessible to a wider range of the community. For example improvements to Howard Park now allow increased access for wheelchairs and improved lighting and facilities provides a greater sense of security to visitors.
- 12.4 Central Government and national groups have expressed the continued importance of public Green Space in the health and well-being of communities. From April 2013 local authorities at county level are required to take on the statutory duty to improve the health of their communities as required by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and with it, to acquire many of the public health services currently the responsibility of the NHS. The use of open spaces, parks, playgrounds and relevant leisure facilities are promoted in terms of reducing the impact of obesity on long term health, the importance in the management of wellbeing and in aiding relaxation, as well as 'sensory' enjoyment.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 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 in paragraphs 12 above.
- 13.2 However, in order to deliver the improvements proposed it will be necessary to enter into, or continue existing, public service contracts which will then be subject to relevant Social Value implications as part of that procurement process, and reported further as appropriate.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 In order to deliver the strategy the Parks & Countryside Development Section has been restructured to reduce directly appointed staff, while maximising the use of external bodies such as Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service. This has resulted in a £169,217 saving over the next five years whilst maintaining the level of service provision.

15. APPENDICES

- 15.1 Appendix A – Draft Green Space Management Strategy

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