CABINET
24 MARCH 2020

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: GREENSPACE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021 – 2026 SCOPING

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPOND TO CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Green Space Management Strategy (GSMS) is intended to give focus and direction towards the future management of development and maintenance of the Parks and Public Open Spaces owned by North Herts District Council.

1.2 The GSMS will provide support and direction to Members of the Council, Officers, External Organisations and residents regarding the future direction of the Authorities Greenspace both in the short and medium terms.

1.3 It Aims :-

- To identify sustainable and affordable principals for the short and medium term
- To identify current influences upon Greenspace and make proposals to manage them
- To identify previous achievements and propose new projects and aspirations
- To contribute and provide input into solutions in response to the pressures of development as identified within the Council's Local Plan. To enable the Council to have clear policies on adoption of any new residential developments
- To suggest alternatives that could have a beneficial environmental impact
- To encourage positive use of our Parks and Open Spaces by everyone

1.4 To report to Cabinet in December 2020 with the final draft GSMS for consideration and adoption

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Cabinet notes that Officers are commencing a process of review, to develop the next Greenspace Management Strategy from 2021 to 2026

2.2 To consider and approve the scoping document as attached at Appendix A

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The existing GSMS is due to expire in March 2021 and the replacement document will provide the future strategic direction for the Greenspaces of North Herts.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 The only alternative option is not to develop a future GSMS. However, this would have a negative impact upon Greenspace in the Medium to Long Term as there would be no agreed strategic direction or financial commitment which in turn would have consequences to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure and PLB have been consulted on this proposed process.

5.2 A process of consultation is highlighted within the scoping document which includes the use of the Citizens Panel, results from the District Wide Survey and Member Workshops

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report was included within the Forward Plan on the 11th December 2019

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 The existing GSMS is due to expire on the 31st March 2021 and the Scoping Document sets out the context under which the subsequent GSMS will be delivered.

7.2 The scoping document has been produced to guide the process and to support the production of the Greenspace Management Strategy (GSMS) for the District of North Herts District Council (NHDC). The plan will cover a period of 2021 to 2031 with regards principals and future vision. However the action plan associated with the GSMS will cover a period of 2021 – 2026 so as to enable an opportunity of review pending future economic circumstances.

7.3 The GSMS is intended to give focus and direction towards the future management of development and maintenance of the Parks and Public Open Spaces owned by North Herts District Council. Initially the GSMS will provide clear logical processes for the future management of our Parks and Open Spaces while identifying longer term principals that will underpin NHDC's future approach to this service area.

7.4 It is intended to undertake a structured engagement process with stakeholders to ensure that they are fully aware of this process. Engagement will be encouraged and there will be opportunities to feed into the new GSMS in a constructive and timely manner. Therefore this document is intended to initiate this process.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The GSMS will need to consider the following broader issues –

- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Local Plan – impact of proposed developments
- Environmental issues (wilding of verges, tree planting, use of pesticides, local nature reserves etc.)
- Future provision of services within our Greenspaces. (Play areas, pavilions etc.)

8.2 To ensure a clear and logical process is undertaken for the review of the GSMS as shown in Appendix A and the following timeline:-

Activity	End date
Presentation at PLB	January 2020
Cabinet Approval for commencement of GSMS project	March 2020
Development of draft GSMS in accordance with MTFS and Root and branches financial review	June/July 2020
Public and Member engagement/consultation	August/September 2020
Revision following consultation and production of final draft	November 2020
Presentation to Cabinet for adoption	December 2020

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Within Cabinet's terms of reference are "to prepare and agree to implement policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council" and "to approve those major service developments or reductions which also constitute Key Decisions." The Green Space Management Strategy falls within Cabinet's remit and this project has been noted on the Council's Forward Plan as a key decision.

9.2 The Council provide parks, recreation grounds and open spaces under its discretionary powers.

9.3 However elements such as Burials and Allotments are statutory functions.

9.4 Discretionary services are subject to binding contracts with third party providers and in some cases other public bodies. Changes to service specifications or early termination of contracts may incur costs. Such costs must form part of any business case that falls within the scope of the fundamental review as referred to in paragraph 10.1 below.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There is forecast to be a need for the Council to generate income or reduce its costs by around £1.1m per year by the end of 2023/24. It is planned that this will be achieved primarily via a fundamental review of discretionary services and services delivered in excess of the statutory requirement. The total revenue spend on green space is budgeted to be £2.1m in 2020/21, and the vast majority of this is on discretionary services (the exceptions are listed in 9.3 above). This demonstrates the need for the Green Space Management Strategy to be mindful of the extent to which existing provision and the inherent costs therein are considered a priority when compared with other services.

10.2 As part of the development of the capital budget for 2020/21 and beyond, an estimate was made of the capital spend required to maintain and develop green space provision over a 10 year period, which totals £1,615,000.00. For a number of years the Council has had capital receipts which it can spend on replacing and developing its assets, which significantly reduces the cost of capital investment compared with the need to fund it by borrowing. Based on current forecasts it is expected that the core capital programme over 10 years can be funded from existing capital reserves and new capital receipts. However there is an opportunity cost whereby that capital funding could have been used to generate income which would help to address the revenue funding shortfall detailed above.

10.3 In relation to new developments, the strategy will need to consider the revenue and capital costs of taking on new green space over the short, medium and long-term. This will need to be balanced against the value to the community and District that they provide.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The risks associated with Greenspace sustainability are regularly reviewed and updated on the Council's Performance and Risk Management Software.

11.2 The following are some of the risks that need to be addressed:-

- Financial Risks (Capital and Revenue)
- Customer expectations
- Reputation
- Environmental impact

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their 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.

12.2 An impact assessment of the GSMS 2021 – 2026 will be undertaken as part of the review process. Any alterations to service provision will be identified within the assessment alongside any mitigating actions.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" policy do not apply to this report.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

14.1 It is proposed that The GSMS review is undertaken within existing resources, however it will have significant resource implications for the existing team and should the demands become unmanageable, and the employment of consultants cannot be ruled out.

15. APPENDICES

15.1 Appendix A – Greenspace Management Strategy Scoping Document

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

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17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 Existing Greenspace Management Strategy 2017 - 2021