

BALDOCK & DISTRICT COMMITTEE 4 DECEMBER 2017

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No. 7
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TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: GREEN SPACE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This information note details the steps taken and the progress made in identifying interested groups and organisations to safely provide facilities previously provided by the Council.

2. STEPS TO DATE

2.1 CABINET

At the 24th January 2017 Cabinet meeting the following was resolved:

RESOLVED:

(1) That the results of the consultation, as identified in the body of the report, be noted, and that it be further noted that Cabinet was satisfied that demographics and size of the focus groups were appropriate for the type of consultation, and that the views of young people and children who were the main users of these facilities had been included in the consultation results;

(2) That the draft new Green Space Management Strategy (GSMS) 2017 – 2021, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be formally adopted;

(3) That it be noted that, prior to removing facilities identified in the Strategy, the Council shall allow up to 1 March 2018 for interested parties to put forward sustainable proposals that would fund both the capital and revenue requirements to safely continue to provide such facilities, and that a proactive approach be adopted in seeking community groups to take on facilities, including advertising that support would be offered to guide groups through the process, particularly through use of social media;

(4) That the work programme in the new Green Space Management Strategy be incorporated into the 2017/18 budget setting process; and

(5) That, so far as Cabinet's authority is required in respect of any variation to the contract with the Grounds Maintenance contractor, to give effect to any future revenue saving options identified within the GSMS, such authority be delegated to the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Waste, Recycling and Environment.

REASON: To best enable the retention of the green space within the budgets available to the Council.

2.2 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

On the 15th February 2017 Overview & Scrutiny received a call-in of the decisions made by cabinet on 24th January 2017 – review of green space management strategy and the following was resolved:

RESOLVED:

(1) That the decisions made by Cabinet on 24 January 2017 regarding the Review of the Green Space Management Strategy not be referred back to Cabinet;

(2) That the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services be requested to produce a report detailing the steps taken and the progress made in identifying interested groups and organisations to safely provide facilities and present it to this Committee at the meeting due to be held on 18 July 2017;

(3) That the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services be requested to produce a report detailing the steps taken and the progress made in identifying interested groups and organisations to safely provide facilities, together with details of play areas that have not attracted any interested groups and would likely close following the deadline of 1 March 2018 and present it to this Committee at the meeting due to be held in March 2018.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the Call - In of decisions made by Cabinet on 24 January 2017 regarding the Review of the Green Space Management Strategy.

2.3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN.

In addition to the Overview & Scrutiny call in, a formal complaint was made to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman found no fault with the Council and endorsed our method of consultation with the use of focus groups.

2.4 ACTIONS TAKEN AND PROGRESS

A communication plan has been produced and is shown at Appendix A. It lists agreed actions between Jan 2017– April 2018.

As per the agreed actions in the Councils adopted Green Space Management Strategy 2017-2021 pavilions identified as being beyond economic repair have now been closed. (Bakers Close, Baldock, St. Johns Road, Cadwell Lane and Walsworth Common, Hitchin.) Prior to removing pavilions there is a period of time until 1st March 2018 for interested parties to put forward sustainable proposals.

Also as per the agreed actions in the Councils adopted Green Space Management Strategy 2017-2021, Local neighbourhood play areas identified as lower usage shall have until 1st March 2018 for interested parties to put forward sustainable proposals. (13 sites)

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TAKEN

2.4.1 Pavilions

Date	Action
Feb 2017	All current users of football pavilions contacted seeking expressions of interest for asset transfer. Appendix B details letter sent to existing users.
Feb 2017	Received expression of interest from interested party for use of Bakers Close pavilion as venue for beer festival. (later withdrawn)
Feb 2017	Contacted Hertfordshire Football Association for interest in asset transfer of pavilions
Feb 2017	Met with Hitchin Sunday Football League. Provided detailed information on maintenance and repairs required to pavilions.
Feb 2017	Expression of interest received from Hitchin Town Youth FC. Provided detailed information on maintenance and repairs required to pavilions.
Feb 2017	Received outline business case from community group for use of Bakers Close pavilion. Detailed business case to follow later in year.
April 2017	Followed up Sunday Football League for proposals for pavilions.
April 2017	Followed up Hitchin Town Youth for proposals for pavilions (No response)
April 2017	Complaint received from Sunday Football League re closure of pavilions.
May 2017	Received expression of interest from St. Johns FC to take on St. Johns pavilion. Provided detailed information on maintenance and repairs required to pavilion. Various meetings took place between May – August.
June 2017	Received expression of interest from Albion FC to take on Cadwell pavilion. Provided detailed information on maintenance and repairs required to pavilion. (Later withdrawn).
Aug 2017	Private company expressed interest in Bakers Close pavilion as fitness centre. Currently developing business case.
July 2017	Emailed community group for update on proposals for Bakers Close pavilion.
Sept 2017	Local Government Ombudsman response to a complaint found no fault with Council and endorsed use of focus groups.
Oct 2017	Emailed St. John's FC for update on business case.

2.4.2 Play Areas

Date	Action
Jan 2017	Article in Mercury paper requesting asset transfer of play areas.
Feb 2017	Contacted 38 residents who expressed an interest in play areas for expressions of interest for asset transfer.
Feb 2017	Contacted 46 PTA's and 85 community groups seeking expressions of interest for asset transfer.
Feb 2017	Play area information sheet on Web site (see appendix C)
Feb 2017	Contacted Royston Town Council and North Herts Homes seeking interest in asset transfer.
Feb 2017	Met with Gt. Ashby Council re options for play area. (They are undertaking residents survey results due in July)
Feb 2017	Tweeted offer of support for community groups.
Feb 2017	Provided Royston Councillors maintenance cost of play areas.
Mar 2017	Article in Comet paper requesting community groups to run play areas.
Mar 2017	Article in Royston Crow paper requesting community groups to run play areas.
Mar 2017	Article in Comet online requesting community support for Rosehill play area.
Mar 2017	Contacted Town Centre managers for funding for play areas.

Mar 2017	New sponsorship page on web site (see appendix D) Emailed link to Town Centre Managers & NHDC Business development officer to include in business newsletter.
Mar 2017	Met with planning to discuss future options for new play areas.
Apr 2017	Community management signs erected in 13 play area (see appendix E)
Apr 2017	Royston Town Council resolved not to fund play areas.
May 2017	Met with Community group who expressed interest in taking on Jackmans Recreation Ground play area.
May 2017	Petition received to save Rosehill play area.
June 2017	Community Development working on a business plan with Community group who expressed interest in taking on Jackmans Recreation Ground play area.
Sept 2017	Gt. Ashby Community Council expressed interest in taking on 3 play areas and funding new equipment for those listed as minimal investment.
Oct 2017	Contacted Hitchin Members with proposal for Rosehill play area.
Oct 2017	Mr Hall confirmed he was in the process of setting up community group to take on responsibility for Jackmans play area.

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

3.1 SUMMARY OF PROGRESS MADE

Colour	Status
	No interest from third parties
	Expressions of interest received
	Interested group secured

3.1.1 Pavilions

Site	Progress
Bakers Close Pavilion, Baldock	Outline business case received from community group to develop as social club with retained changing rooms and additional community use. Awaiting final business case.
St. Johns changing rooms, Hitchin	Expression of interest received from St. Johns FC to take on building. Provided detailed maintenance cost and condition survey. Community Development working with St. Johns FC on business case.
Cadwell Lane changing rooms, Hitchin	Expression of interest received from Albion FC to take on building. Later withdrawn.
Walsworth changing rooms, Hitchin	No expressions of interest received for existing building. Aiming to secure section 106 money for new build in 2020/21.

3.1.2 Play Areas

Site	Progress
Generic	Seeking sponsorship of some of our larger play area sites, which may generate additional income to offset the cost to help retain some of the smaller sites. We are also seeking opportunities for alternative play provision in the locality of our existing play areas through negotiations with landowners and stakeholders.
Betjeman Road, Royston	No interest from Royston Town Council. Royston District Councillors seeking options for alternative funding.
Farrier Court, Royston	No interest from Royston Town Council.
Ivel Road, Baldock	No expressions of interest received.
Dacre Road, Hitchin	No expressions of interest received.
Rosehill, Hitchin	Lots of community support to retain play area. Officers have potentially found a long term sustainable solution to retain a children's play area for the residents of Rosehill. Officers will be recommending to Cabinet in March 2018 that the existing play facility remains until such a time as a new play area is provided in the locality by an independent provider which it is expected would be at nil cost to the Council.
Symonds Rd, Hitchin	No expressions of interest received.
Jackmans Recreation Ground, Letchworth	Expression of interest received from community group to fund play area. Community Development working with group to formalise status.
Linnet Close, Letchworth	Some community support to retain play area. No offers of funding.
Oaktree Close, Letchworth	No expressions of interest received.
Chilterns, Gt. Ashby	Gt. Ashby Community Council have agreed to take on responsibility of play area.
Cleveland Way, Gt. Ashby	Gt. Ashby Community Council have agreed to take on responsibility of play area.
Fairfield Crescent, Gt. Ashby	Play area reclassified as not having formal play equipment.
Merrick Close, Gt. Ashby	Gt. Ashby Community Council have agreed to take on responsibility of play area..

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 In March 2018 provide a progress report to Overview & Scrutiny and report to Cabinet on any completed or proposed asset transfers.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Communication Plan
Appendix B: Letter sent to existing pavilion users
Appendix C: Play Area information sheet
Appendix D: Parks Sponsorship page

6. CONTACT OFFICERS

Steve Geach
Parks & Countryside Development Manager
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7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Green Space Management Strategy 2017-2021

Appendix A: Communication Plan

OUTLINE TIMELINE FOR COMMUNICATIONS – GSMS

Timing	Action	Who is responsible?	Complete
Jan 2017	Article in local press seeking interested parties for asset transfer	Comms	Yes
Feb	Contact residents who expressed an interest in play areas	SG	Yes
Feb	Contact local football clubs advising of closure of pavilions and seeking interest in asset transfer	SG	Yes
Feb	Contact Herts FA seeking interest in asset transfer	SG	Yes
Monthly	Inform Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	SG	ongoing
Feb	Meet with Gt. Ashby Community Council re asset transfer of play areas	SG	Yes
Feb	Meet with Sunday Football League seeking interest in asset transfer	SG	Yes
Feb	Contact PTA's of all Schools in District seeking interest in asset transfer	SG	Yes
Feb	Produce information pack/toolkit for asset transfer of play areas	SG	Yes
Feb	Publish information pack/toolkit on a web page on NHDC website	SG	Yes
Feb	Contact community groups who may have an interest in asset transfer	SG	Yes

Feb	Press release	Comms	Yes
Feb	Social media	Comms	Yes
March/April	Erect notices in play areas seeking interest in asset transfer	SG	Yes
April	Contact local companies for sponsorship of play areas	SG	Yes
June	Article in Summer Outlook seeking interest in asset transfer	Comms	Yes
June/July	Social media	Comms	Yes
July	Progress report to Overview & Scrutiny	SG	Yes
Oct/Nov	Press release – last chance	Comms	Yes
Oct/Nov	Social media – last chance	Comms	Yes
Oct/Nov	Briefing note for Area Committees	SG	Yes
March 2018	Progress report to Overview & Scrutiny	SG	
March	Report to Cabinet on any completed or proposed asset transfers	SG	
April	Erect removal of equipment notices at play areas not transferred explaining what will happen to the site	SG	
April/May	Remove equipment and landscape sites not transferred	SG	
March/April	Article in Spring Outlook promoting importance of green space	Comms	

Appendix B. Letter sent to existing pavilion users

Dear

On the 24th January 2017 the Council's Cabinet discussed the future of green space and adopted a four year Green Space Management Strategy to ensure its protection in North Herts. The following link provides details of the Cabinet report listed at item 9. Appendix A. details the adopted 2017-2021 Green Space Strategy.

<http://web.north-herts.gov.uk/aksnherts/users/public/admin/kab14.pl?operation=SUBMIT&meet=102&cmte=CA&grpId=public&arc=71>

You will see that the stated aim of the strategy is 'to provide a sustainable, strategic approach for the future management of green space'. The key driver of the strategy is to retain and maintain the green space in our urban environments for current and future generations to enjoy.

In relation to Football Pavilions:

The Council recognises that many of its pavilions are beyond economic repair and costly to maintain. It has been agreed that at the end of the current football season, the following pavilions shall be closed: St. Johns Road, Cadwell Lane and Walsworth Common, Hitchin.

The Council will allow up to 1 March 2018 for interested parties to put forward viable proposals for the transfer of these facilities to a third party.

If you feel you may have a viable proposal please contact North Hertfordshire District Council on 01462474553 or email steve.geach@north-herts.gov.uk.

Managing a play area

In order to ensure continued investment in its major play areas, the Council is looking for interested parties to put forward viable proposals that would fund both the maintenance and as required the replacement of the equipment for some small play areas.

These play areas include:

Dacre Road, Rosehill and Symons Rd play areas in Hitchin;

Jackmans Recreation Ground, Linnet Close and Oaktree Close play areas in Letchworth;

Ivel Road play area in Baldock;

Betjeman Road & Farriar Court play areas in Royston; and

Chilterns, Cleveland Way, Fairfield Crescent and Merrick Close play areas in Gt. Ashby

Firstly, if not already established you will need to form a legally recognised body such as a registered Friends of Group or Residents Association. Our Community Development team will be happy to assist you in this. Please contact our Community Manager, Stuart Izzard on 01462 474854 or email stuart.izzard@north-herts.gov.uk.

What we will do

The Council will transfer the play area to the group in the form of a 25 year lease. The lease will be legally binding and it is recommended that you obtain your own legal advice to ensure you are happy with it. The lease will stipulate what the Council expects from you and what you can expect from the Council.

The Council will continue to maintain the grass and any trees or shrubs that may be present along with litter picking the area and emptying the bins.

What you will do

In summary you will become responsible for the regular inspection and maintenance of the play area including the equipment, safety surfacing, litter bins, seat, fencing etc. You will also be responsible for the replacement of equipment as and when required.

You will need to take out your own public liability insurance. This [charity insurance page](#) provides useful information on insurance and other information of interest to community groups.

Inspections and risk assessments

The play area must remain open for general public use and the Council expects you to maintain it in a safe and clean condition for use.

Currently the Council inspects its play areas on a daily basis and you may wish to contact our grounds maintenance contractor for a quote to do this on your behalf. Our contractor can be contacted via andrew.mills@north-herts.gov.uk. We have found that these recorded daily inspections pay dividends in defending insurance claims. If you wish to do the inspections yourself The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) can arrange suitable training. RoSPA can be contacted at enquiries@rospa.com.

Each year you will be required to undertake an independent risk assessment of the play area and send a copy to the Council. The Council will expect you to undertake any remedial work

highlighted in the report. If any highlighted work identified as a risk to users is not undertaken, the Council may have no option but to remove the item of equipment; if there are regular failures, the Council will need to consider whether to terminate the lease.

The Council has negotiated a reduced rate with a specialist playground inspection company for these annual inspections and you may wish to take advantage of this service. The current charge is £50.00. If you prefer to make your own arrangements RoSAP will be able to provide a suitable list of companies.

Considerations when taking on a play area

The check list below is not exhaustive but identifies some of things that you will need to consider prior to taking on a play area:

Becoming qualified to undertake play area inspections.	Retaining records of safety inspections.
Routine maintenance of the equipment such as replacement swing seats and chains.	Arranging public liability insurance.
How to respond to public / media enquiries	Training for routine maintenance for example how to safely replace a swing seat.
Who will paint the equipment	Arranging annual risk assessment
What to do if you find hazardous waste such as needles from drug users.	What contact number to have displayed at the play area in case of emergencies or complaints.
How to quickly make safe a dangerous item of play equipment.	How to clean noxious substances from play equipment e.g. dog mess, sick etc.

Further help and information

This may all sound rather daunting but it is important to realise upfront what is involved in managing a play area. This information may help prevent future unexpected surprises.

If you google 'Community Playgrounds' you will see that a number of Councils have adopted a similar approach. You will also be able to contact a number of community groups that already manage play areas.

There are also a number of playground companies that will be able to offer help and guidance especial on funding opportunities for community playgrounds. Below is a brochure from Wicksteed Playgrounds that you may find of use.

If you wish to proceed with taking on the responsibility of your local play area, please contact Steve Geach, Parks & Countryside Development Manager, steve.geach@north-herts.gov.uk, or call 01462 474553.

Attachment

Size

[Wicksteed Playgrounds Funding Brochure](#)

1.02 MB

Appendix D: Parks Sponsorship page

Park Sponsorship Scheme

The Parks service of North Hertfordshire District Council runs a sponsorship scheme, designed to offer local businesses the opportunity to advertise in popular destinations around the district.

Roadside bedding displays, play areas, water splash parks and skate/BMX parks in North Hertfordshire are available to sponsor with all proceeds being used to improve the surrounding park areas. You can see an example of a sign [below](#).

Some of the sites on offer include main town gateway locations such as those entering Letchworth Garden City and large floral beds in the Green Flag award winning Priory Memorial Gardens in Royston. Also available to sponsor are the extremely popular and recently improved and well used larger play areas in our towns. Four popular interactive water splash parks including the large water pool at Howard Park in Letchworth are also available to sponsor along with our newly constructed skate park at Norton Common in Letchworth.

For more information please contact the Parks Department on 01462 474000 or by email via services@north.herts.gov.uk to learn more about the scheme and discuss how it could help your business.

Sites available for sponsorship

Site	Size (M2)	Description
Letchworth Garden City		The World's first Garden City
Pixmore Way roundabout flower beds	177m2	Flora display at main gateway into town centre
Howard Park play area	1950m2	Play area located adjacent large interactive water splash park attracting many thousands of visitors each year.
Norton Common, skate park	1205m2	New district wide skate boarding facility.
Baldock		Historic market town
Avenue Park water splash park	390m2	Interactive water splash park, open May–September each year.
Royston		Historic market town
Priory Memorial gardens, flora displays.	617m2	Town centre gardens. Displays include herbaceous borders and annual bedding.

Priory Memorial gardens, water splash park	300m2	Interactive water splash park, open May –September each year.
Hitchin		Historic market town
Bancroft Recreation Ground, water splash park	300m2	Interactive water splash park, open May –September each year.
Ransoms Recreation Ground, play area	798m2	Recently refurbished play area including equipment for all ages and multi use games area
Walsworth Common, Play Area	1914m2	Recently refurbished play area including equipment for all ages and ball games area

Attachment

Size

[Sponsorship sign example](#)

244.21 KB