

**HITCHIN COMMITTEE
5 DECEMBER 2017**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

8

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE : GREEN SPACE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR LEISURE

1. SUMMARY

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

2. STEPS TO DATE

2.1 CABINET

At the 24 January 2017 Cabinet meeting the following was:

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

2.2 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

On the 15 February 2017 Overview & Scrutiny received a call-in of the decisions made by Cabinet on 24 January 2017 – Review of Green Space Management Strategy and it was:

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 interested 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
Ext 4553
Email: steve.geach@north-herts.gov.uk

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Green Space Management Strategy 2017-2021