

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: GREENSPACE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-2027

REPORT OF: Service Manager, Greenspace

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Environment and Leisure

COUNCIL PRIORITY: BE A MORE WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE AND EFFICIENT COUNCIL /
RESPOND TO CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To agree the proposed Greenspace Management Strategy (GSMS) 2022 – 2027 as the basis for the Council's future strategic approach to maintaining the Greenspace provision in North Herts

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet is recommended to:

Adopt the Vision, Objectives and Aims for managing Greenspace as detailed at 7.5 below.

2.2. Review and adopt the Greenspace Management Strategy 2022-27 at Appendix A.

2.3. Agree the delegation for creating an Action Plan arising from the GSMS and an annual review of the Action Plan to the Greenspace Manager in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure and the Service Director - Place.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. These recommendations are put forward to ensure there is an ongoing proactive and pragmatic approach for the future management and maintenance of Greenspace within North Herts for the period April 2022 – March 2027.

3.2. Additionally, the GSMS 2022 – 2027 provides the strategic link between the previous Greenspace strategies and the future demands placed upon North Herts Council, specifically; managing the environment and biodiversity, finance and planning while delivering high quality greenspace services to our existing and newly developed infrastructure.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. The alternative of not reviewing the GSMS would create a void for the future direction of Greenspace provision. This would potentially lead to conflict between various elements of demand resulting in an illogical application of decision making in the future. Therefore, no alternative options have been considered.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure chaired the Project Board associated with the GSMS. The Deputy Executive Member for Environment and Leisure was also consulted on the development of the strategy. Additionally the Council's Political Liaison Board was consulted on 1 March 2022.
- 5.2 A consultation exercise was undertaken during January 2022 using online software. It was promoted via means of a press release, e-bulletin, website article and social media posts. The survey was also directly emailed to 31 stakeholders such as Friends of groups Parish Councils etc and to all councillors.
- 1082 responses were received and a copy of the report can be found as Appendix B .
- 5.3 When asked what they value the most about our parks and open spaces, over 80% of respondents said being in a natural environment, 46% said watching wildlife and 39% said somewhere to relax.
- 5.4 When asked what the council's top priorities for greenspace should be, 62% of respondents said to continue to maintain high standards of maintenance, 52% said to improve biodiversity by allowing more areas to go wild and 51% said managing litter.
- 5.5 Respondents were also asked if the council had to make savings in one area what would that be. 23% of respondents said grass cutting, 22% said paddling pools and 20% said flower beds.
- 5.6 Within the survey there were options for respondents to comment on what they feel the council's priorities should be regarding greenspace and also to highlight any concerns they have. Some key themes have been identified and our response to those can be seen in the table below:

Key themes of consultation responses

Theme	Comment	Response
Litter and dog fouling	Volume of litter and dog fouling	NHC runs regular campaigns about litter and dog fouling and has a good level of bin provision across the district. We will continue our awareness raising campaigns throughout the lifetime of the new strategy.
Allotments	Not sufficient provision and should be a priority	We will develop an allotment strategy and work with Planning to

		identify provision within future developments
Children's play areas	Poor quality / concerns over particular items of equipment.	The GSMS is increasing the capital budget for play areas from £75,000 to £180,000 annually. This will allow two play areas to be renovated annually
Anti-social behaviour and safety	Concern about personal safety, vandalism	We will work with colleagues and partner organisations to manage this issue as and where it is identified.
Biodiversity & wilding	Concern about the environment and wanting to do more	The contract review has identified areas to be amended that will reduce our carbon impact and are beneficial to the environment – these changes will commence in April 2022 with a reduced frequency of grass cutting in some locations
Future Development	Development on greenbelt	While development on areas of greenbelt is outside this strategy, officers are working with the planners and developers to ensure that where open space is adopted it is appropriate and at an acceptable standard, in the right location.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 14 January 2022.

7. BACKGROUND

The review process was set up with a Project Board that consisted of the Executive Member Cllr Steve Jarvis and Deputy Executive Member Cllr Adem Ruggiero-Cakir. It also included officer representatives from across a number of directorates including planning, policy, finance and Place.

- 7.1 The previous GSMS expired at the end of March 2021. At this time and due to financial pressures, the review of the GSMS was placed on hold for 12 months pending a review of the Grounds Maintenance contract with John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance Ltd. The outcomes of the contract review were agreed at Cabinet June 2021, with many of its recommendations being implemented from 1 April 2022.
- 7.2 Significant financial savings were made as part of the contract review, however these have primarily been environmentally focused, for example reducing the frequency of highway verge cutting, which will in turn encourage biodiversity. This approach to considering environmentally sustainable actions has also been carried over into the GSMS.

7.3 A review of our existing principles for management of green spaces was carried out and in addition the GSMS also takes into consideration three key influences upon this service area which are:

- Planning - regarding the implications of future housing development from the Draft Local plan
- Our policy approach to meeting our climate change commitments and biodiversity aims
- Financial Pressures

7.4 It is proposed to adopt a new vision, objectives and aims for the delivery of the greenspace service.

Vision

Our vision is to provide high quality, well managed green spaces to meet the needs of our communities and which contribute positively to our sustainability priority

Objectives

The objectives of the GSMS flow from the overarching council priorities:

- To manage our greenspaces in an environmentally sustainable way, while also providing value for money for residents
- To provide a wide range of greenspaces which can be used for many recreational purposes
- To ensure greenspaces for future developments are developed with the needs of communities and sustainability in mind and deliver long term benefits.

Aims

Aim 1	To promote the central role that green spaces play in contributing to the District’s health and well-being.
Aim 2	Provide and maintain quality green spaces in appropriate locations and ensure they are protected for future generations.
Aim 3	Use green spaces as a community resource that encourages active outdoor participation.
Aim 4	Promote the important role that green spaces play in contributing to the biodiversity, climate change, sustainability, culture and heritage within the District.
Aim 5	Allow local people to understand and influence the way the Green Spaces are developed and managed

Aim 6	Agree objectives for good design, management and maintenance, and provision in new housing sites.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. On 21st May 2019, the Council passed a climate emergency motion which pledged to do everything within its power to achieve zero carbon emissions in NHDC's district by 2030 As such the aims of the GSMS are aligned with the council's climate change strategy.
- 8.2. The GSMS will also need to provide clarity for future policies regarding the adoption of new green spaces through development and how these areas are to be maintained.
- 8.3. The GSMS builds upon the previous strategy and takes forward the Vision, Objectives and Aims of the Greenspace Service regarding the management and maintenance of our existing Greenspace infrastructure

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Within Cabinet's terms of reference at 5.6.1 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. Section 164 on the Public Health Act (1875) and Sections 9 and 10 of the Open Spaces Act Open spaces grant power to local authorities to acquire land for or to provide recreation grounds, public walks, pleasure grounds and open spaces and to manage and control them.
- 9.3. Section 23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act (1908) places a statutory duty on local authorities to provide a sufficient number of allotment plots.
- 9.4. The Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 ('the Act') places a statutory duty on local authorities to arrange for a burial or cremation where no suitable alternative arrangements are being made.
- 9.5. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006) requires all public bodies to have regard to biodiversity conservation as part of the policy and decision making, commonly referred to as the 'Biodiversity duty'.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The Council's revenue budget for 2022/23 reflects the savings achieved through the changes to the grounds maintenance contract. The resultant budget is sufficient for the current levels of service and maintenance of existing green space. Any additional levels of provision (e.g., additional provision within existing green space or extending the

amount of green space) would require additional budget. The strategy sets out the priorities for the adoption of new green space and references that this could be linked to property growth, and therefore funded from some of the growth in the Council tax base. The Council is currently forecasting an annual 0.5% growth in its tax base. In the medium term it is expected that tax base growth would be more than this, but the prudent assumption is that some of the growth will be required to fund growth in service provision (e.g. green space) beyond the direct costs of household growth (e.g. waste collection). This will need to be kept under review, as property growth and the need to fund additional service provision will not be directly correlated (i.e. in amount or timing). There may also be additional costs linked to the delivery of the Council's climate change strategy. Those costs will need to be agreed as part of the Council's budget process and will need to balance the cost with the environmental benefits, particularly when comparing to other climate change projects.

- 10.2. The Council's capital projections for 2022-27 (and further high-level forecasts for 2028-33) include the forecast capital costs required to deliver the strategy as set out. Some of the projects will have third party funding contributions, and this is included in the capital spend forecasts. Some of the capital schemes will be contingent on that funding being available, and therefore maybe delayed until it is available.
- 10.3. The Strategy reflects the financial savings that have been achieved as part of the recent contract renewal, which have also delivered other environmental benefits. The Strategy is then generally based on continuing with the same cost base moving forwards. As set out in financial forecasts, the Council could be required to deliver annual budget savings of £1.5m within the next 5 years. It will be for the Council to determine how those savings would be delivered, and there has been a commitment to carry out public consultation as part of that decision process. This may mean that there will need to be further changes to the Green Space contract/ strategy within the 5-year period. Those changes could be focused on any areas that are lower priority within the strategy.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. The adoption of a Strategy helps to determine the priorities for Green Space within the District. In turn that helps to ensure that resources are effectively employed to deliver those priorities. In general the Strategy is in line with the existing Strategy and does not introduce any new significant risks. The increased capital investment in play area refurbishment would tend to reduce the risk to the Council.

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.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.2. Environmental Impact Assessment has been undertaken. This Strategy has been considered and no relevant adaptations mitigation measure that could be applied that have not been considered already as part of ongoing Planning considerations or already covered in the previous Grounds Contract Review

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no direct Human Resource impacts as a result of this report.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A Greenspace Management Strategy 2022 – 2027

- 16.2 Appendix B Summary of consultation responses

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 Greenspace Management Strategy 2017 - 2022

