

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 March 2018

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

12

TITLE OF REPORT: GREEN SPACE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

REPORT OF: THE HEAD OF LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR JANE GRAY

COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPONSIVE AND EFFICIENT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 On the 24th January 2017 Cabinet resolved that, prior to removing facilities identified in the Green Space Management Strategy (GSMS), 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.
- 1.2 This report updates Cabinet on the proactive approach adopted in identifying and assisting interested parties to take on the management and maintenance of the thirteen small play areas listed for removal of formal play equipment and the four football pavilions identified for closure as per the GSMS. The aim is to continue to meet the needs of the local community.
- 1.3 A proposal to manage three play areas has been received from Great Ashby Community Council. Possible solutions at nil cost to the Council have been found for an additional four play areas. It is proposed that the remaining six will have equipment removed and landscaped back to green space.
- 1.4 With regards to pavilions, Templars Football Club has provided an initial business case to refurbish and manage Bakers Close pavilion, Baldock. The business case needs further officer evaluation to determine if it is sustainable.
- 1.5 No business cases have been received for the remaining three pavilions and it is proposed that these are demolished and returned to green space.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 A three month period of time is given for the evaluation of the business case submitted by Templars Football Club for the football changing pavilion at Bakers Close, Baldock.
- 2.2 That subject to the sustainability of the business case the decision to enter into a lease with Templars Football Club or to demolish the building be delegated to the Head of Financial Services.
- 2.3 The football changing rooms at St. Johns Road, Cadwell Lane and Walsworth Common, Hitchin be demolished and returned to green space.

- 2.4 That the Council enter into a contract with Great Ashby Community Council for them to fund the maintenance and replacement of equipment for the play areas at Chilterns, Cleveland Way and Merrick Close, Gt. Ashby.
- 2.5 The Council continues to maintain the play equipment at Rosehill, Hitchin up to April 2022 or an earlier date if a new play area is provided in the locality by an independent provider at nil cost to the Council. The existing Rosehill play area will then be decommissioned.
- 2.6 For Betjeman Road and Farrier Court play areas Royston, the Council allow a period of time of up to three months for confirmation of funding sources from third parties.
- 2.7 That the equipment be removed from play areas at Ivel Road Baldock, Dacre Road and Symonds Rd, Hitchin, Linnet Close, Jackmans Recreation Ground and Oaktree Close, Letchworth. Sites to be landscaped as green space and where appropriate include elements of natural play such as grass mounds, logs and benches.
- 2.8 The play area at Fairfield Crescent, Great Ashby will no longer be considered and managed as a formal play area. The existing facilities will be monitored and managed as part of the overall green space.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To enable the retention of the green space within the budgets available to the Council.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 To increase capital expenditure by up to £150,000 pa to retain and continue to directly maintain and invest in all NHDC's 47 equipped play areas.
- 4.2 To provide capital investment in the region of £350,000 in total to refurbish four football changing pavilions.
- 4.3 Not to make the estimated revenue savings of £28,000 pa by retaining all NHDC's 47 equipped play areas.
- 4.4 Not to make the estimated revenue saving of £7,900 pa by retaining all NHDC's football changing pavilions.
- 4.5 In order to ensure the GSMS meets the requirements of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) the alternative options listed above were rejected as per the Cabinet meeting of the 24th January 2017.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The GSMS as adopted by Cabinet in January 2017 underwent a period of consultation. This included three focus groups and wide publicity in the local press.
- 5.2 The communication plan at Appendix A details the agreed consultation process between January 2017 – March 2018. This included update reports to Overview and Scrutiny, reports to Area Committees, press releases and contact with local football leagues and clubs and community groups such as Parent Teacher Associations.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 1st January 2018.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 In January 2016 a Project Board was formed to review the GSMS. In November 2016 the findings of the Project Board were reported to Cabinet and resulted in the adoption of a new GSMS for the period 2017 – 2021 that protected green space and complied with the Council's MTFS.
- 7.2 This report has been written to seek Cabinet's approval for the implementation of actions for play areas and football changing pavilions as detailed in the Council's adopted GSMS.
- 7.3 The most relevant decision relating to this report is Cabinet's resolution 8.3 of the 24th January 2017:

'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'

- 7.4 Appendix B lists other relevant committee discussions or decisions relevant to this report.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Pavilions

- 8.1.1 As per the agreed actions in 7.3 above and the Council's adopted GSMS 2017-2021 pavilions identified as being beyond economic repair were 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.
- 8.1.2 Officers have been very proactive in contacting and assisting interested parties take on the responsibility of pavilions. 8.3.1 provides a summary of actions taken and Appendix D provides full details.
- 8.1.3 The Sunday Football League made a formal complaint relating to the Council's proposed closure of pavilions 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.

8.2 Play Areas

- 8.2.1 As per the agreed actions in the Council's adopted GSMS 2017-2021, Local neighbourhood play areas identified as lower usage had until 1st March 2018 for interested parties to put forward sustainable proposals (13 sites).

8.2.2 Officers have been very proactive in reaching out to a wide range of community groups, contacting over 130 individual groups. Officers have also been looking at alternative ways to retain play equipment at nil cost to the Council. Information signs have been placed at each of the thirteen affected play areas and a play area guide shown at Appendix C has been produced to assist community groups. Appendix D provides a time line of all the actions taken since November 2016. The table at 8.3.2 provides a summary of these actions.

8.3 Summary of Actions Taken

8.3.1 Pavilions

Date	Action
Nov 2016	Received expression of interest from local group to refurbish Bakers Close pavilion as a social club. Later withdrawn.
Feb 2017	Current users of football pavilions contacted seeking expressions of interest for asset transfer.
Feb 2017	Received expression of interested from local group for use of Bakers Close pavilion as a base for beer festival. Later withdrawn.
Feb 2017	Contacted Hertfordshire Football Association for interest in asset transfer of pavilions. They had no interest in pavilions for single pitch sites.
Feb 2017	Met with Hitchin Sunday Football League to discuss their proposals for pavilions.
Feb 2017	Produced detailed information sheet for maintenance and repairs required for pavilions. Sent to all interested parties.
Feb 2017	Expression of interest received for Hitchin pavilions from Hitchin Town Youth FC. Later withdrawn.
April 2017	Formal 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. Later withdrawn
June 2017	Received expression of interest from Albion FC to take on Cadwell pavilion. Later withdrawn.
Aug 2017	Private company expressed interest in Bakers Close pavilion as fitness centre. Later withdrawn.
Sept 2017	Local Government Ombudsman response to a complaint from Sunday Football League found no fault with Council and endorsed use of focus groups.
Nov 2017	Met with Sunday football league. They were working on a business case to take on St. Johns & Cadwell pavilions. Later withdrawn.
Dec 2017	Met with Templars FC who expressed interest in Bakers Close Pavilion.
Jan 2018	Approached by Hitchin Lacrosse team re possibility of them taking on St. Johns & Cadewll pavilions. Later withdrawn.
Feb 2018	Reminder email sent to interested parties re needs to submit business case by 1 st March 2018.
Feb 2018	Received business case from Templars FC for Bakers Close pavilion.

8.3.2 Play Areas

Date	Action
Jan 2017	Article in local paper requesting asset transfer of play areas.
Feb 2017	Contacted 38 residents who expressed an interest in play areas seeking 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 produced and on web site
Feb 2017	Contacted Royston Town Council and North Herts Homes seeking interest in asset transfer. No interest.
Feb 2017	Met with Gt. Ashby Council re options for play area.
Feb 2017	Tweeted offer of support for community groups.
Mar 2017	Articles in local papers requesting community groups to run play areas.
Mar 2017	Contacted Town Centre managers for possible funding for play areas. No interest.
Mar 2017	New sponsorship page produced and on web site.
Mar 2017	Met with planning to discuss future options for new play areas.
Apr 2017	Signs erected in 13 play areas seeking community management.
May 2017	Met with resident who expressed interest in taking on Jackmans Recreation Ground play area. Later withdrawn.
May 2017	Petition received to save Rosehill play area and reported to Cabinet.
Sept 2017	Gt. Ashby Community Council agreed to take 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.
Nov 2017	Articles in local papers requesting community groups to run play areas.
Jan 2018	Produced template for business case to take on play areas and sent to interested parties.
Feb 2018	Reminder email sent to interested parties re needs to submit business case by 1st March 2018.
Mar 2018	Received business case from two local District Councillors for the continued funding of Betjeman Road and Farrier Court play areas Royston

8.4 Progress Made

8.4.1 Pavilions

There has been interest in the pavilions from nine different community groups and the Council has tried to support these groups. One has come forward with a business case to take on Bakers Close pavilion in Baldock. There have been no business cases submitted for the other pavilions. Table 8.4.3.1 provides full details.

- 8.4.1.1 Templars Football Club are long standing users of the Bakers Close site and have submitted the business case which is currently being evaluated by officers. In summary they intend to invest £88,500 to bring the building back into use. They intend to use the pavilion as a sporting base for their club. They also plan to make the changing facilities and club house available to other sporting clubs. To generate income they intend to operate a bar and host a range of entertainment including discos and live bands.

8.4.2 Play Areas

Interest was received from three different groups for the management of play areas and two have submitted business cases to provide funding for five play areas. Of the thirteen play areas listed for potential decommissioning sustainable solutions have been found for seven sites to continue to maintain them as play areas in the short to medium term. There were no business cases put forward for the remaining six sites. Full details of proposals are shown in the table at 8.4.3.2

8.4.3 The tables below identify progress made on site by site basis and contains officer recommendations for each site.

8.4.3.1 Pavilions

Site	Progress	Officer Recommendations
Bakers Close Pavilion, Baldock	Four community groups expressed an interest in taking on the pavilion. Templars Football Club submitted the business case which is currently being evaluated by officers.	To allow three months to evaluate the business case. If found to be sustainable lease the building to Templars Football Club. If found not to be sustainable demolish the building.
St. Johns changing rooms, Hitchin	Four community groups expressed an interest in the pavilion. However no business cases provided.	To remove the pavilion and reinstate to green space.
Cadwell Lane changing rooms, Hitchin	Four community groups expressed an interest in the pavilion. However no business cases provided.	To remove the pavilion and reinstate to green space.
Walsworth changing rooms, Hitchin	No expressions of interest received for existing building. Aiming to secure section 106 money for new build in 2020/21.	To remove the pavilion and reinstate to green space.

8.4.3.2 Play Areas

Site	Progress	Officer Recommendations
Generic	Seeking sponsorship of some of our larger play area sites, which may generate additional income. No offers yet received.	Continue to promote opportunities for sponsorship.
Betjeman Road, Royston	No interest from Royston Town Council. Business case received from two local District Councillors with two possible options to continue to fund NHDC's grounds contractor to maintain the play area.	Allow a period of time of up to three months for confirmation of funding sources from third parties.
Farrier Court, Royston	No interest from Royston Town Council. Business case received from two local District Councillors with two possible options to continue to fund NHDC's grounds contractor to maintain the play area.	Allow a period of time of up to three months for confirmation of funding sources from third parties.

Site	Progress	Officer Recommendations
Ivel Road, Baldock	No expressions of interest received.	Remove formal play equipment and return to green space.
Dacre Road, Hitchin	No expressions of interest received.	Remove formal play equipment and return to green space.
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.	The Council continues to maintain the play equipment at Rosehill, Hitchin up to April 2022 or an earlier date if a new play area is provided in the locality by an independent provider at nil cost to the Council. The existing Rosehill play area will then be decommissioned.
Symonds Rd, Hitchin	No expressions of interest received.	Remove formal play equipment and return to green space.
Jackmans Recreation Ground, Letchworth	Expression of interest received from community group to fund play area. Later withdrawn with no business case provided.	Remove formal play equipment and return to green space.
Linnet Close, Letchworth	Some community support to retain play area. No offers of funding.	Remove formal play equipment and return to green space.
Oaktree Close, Letchworth	No expressions of interest received.	Remove formal play equipment and return to green space.
Chilterns, Gt. Ashby	Gt. Ashby Community Council have agreed to take on responsibility of play area. They intend to continue to use NHDC's grounds contractor to maintain the play area.	Enter into a contract with Great Ashby Community Council to fund play area.
Cleveland Way, Gt. Ashby	Gt. Ashby Community Council have agreed to take on responsibility of play area. They intend to continue to use NHDC's grounds contractor to maintain the play area.	Enter into a contract with Great Ashby Community Council to fund play area.
Fairfield Crescent, Gt. Ashby	Play area reclassified as not having formal play equipment. Therefore not requiring daily inspections or other play area maintenance expenses.	Continue to maintain as green space.
Merrick Close, Gt. Ashby	Gt. Ashby Community Council have agreed to take on responsibility of play area. They intend to continue to use NHDC's grounds contractor to maintain the play area.	Enter into a contract with Great Ashby Community Council to fund play area.

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 provides parks, recreation grounds and open spaces under its discretionary powers.
- 9.3 Where the Council proposes that play areas or pavilions may be ‘adopted’ by a third party, this would be achieved by granting that party a long lease which would include an obligation on the Tenant to maintain the play equipment and/or building.
- 9.4 Legal Services are currently developing a contract Great Ashby Community Council to fund the maintenance and replacement equipment for 3 play areas in Great Ashby.
- 9.5 If approved by Cabinet Legal services will produce a lease for Bakers Close pavilion, Baldock.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 With the proposal that 13 small play areas will no longer be funded by NHDC (either as a result of external funding or equipment removal) there will, subject to negotiations with the Grounds Maintenance contractor, be revenue savings.
- 10.2 The proposals for asset transfer / demolition of pavilions will also facilitate the achievement of revenue savings.
- 10.3 The GSMS Capital investment programme includes the £310k cost to decommission pavilions and equipped play areas. These costs could be funded by capital receipts under the Capital Receipts Direction.
- 10.4 The proposals for the management and development of Green Space as detailed in the GSMS conform to the requirements of the Council’s current MTFs in relation to capital and revenue investment.
- 10.5 **Summary of potential revenue savings:**

Item	Est. revenue saving pa	Year	Comments
Close 4 pavilions identified as beyond economic repair	*£7,900	2017/18	If not transferred to a third party would require £120k to demolish and return 4 pavilions to green space.
Transfer to third party or remove equipment from 13 play areas	**£26,400 **£2,200	2018/19 2022/23	If not transferred to a third party would require £130k to demolish and return to green space.
Total est. revenue savings	£36,500		

- * Based on 2015/16 actuals
- ** Subject to contractual negotiations

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 If a strategic approach is not adopted to reduce expenditure on green space there will be insufficient funds to maintain the current infrastructure and this will lead to a gradual decline in the entire green space infrastructure.
- 11.2 Those areas which are well used and valued by the community will be the first to wear out and require decommissioning, while other areas that are little used and have limited value will survive and continue to command ongoing revenue expenditure for maintenance despite their lower community value and use.
- 11.3 Where equipment is installed in parks and open spaces, it is important it is regularly inspected and maintained to prevent any injuries to users. NHDC should ensure appropriate procedures are in place prior to transferring play areas.
- 11.4 The risks associated with green space sustainability were reviewed in 2017 and updated on the Council's performance and risk management software.
- 11.5 Effective communication will help to mitigate any reputational risks associated with the Council's recommended approach.
- 11.6 Risk of ensuring closed pavilions are still monitored prior to demolition.

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 Green Space Strategy 2017–2021 was included in the January 2017 report to Cabinet and is shown at Appendix E.

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 None contained within this report.

15. APPENDICES

- 15.1 Appendix A: Communication plan
- 15.2 Appendix B: Relevant committee discussions or decisions
- 15.3 Appendix C: Play Area guide
- 15.4 Appendix D: Time line of actions
- 15.5 Appendix E: Impact assessment

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

16.1 Steve Geach, Parks & Countryside Development Manager
Steve.geach@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4553

Vaughan Watson, Head of Leisure & Environmental Services
Vaughan.watson@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4641

Reuben Ayavoo, Policy Officer
Reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4212

Andrew Mills, Service Manager, Grounds Maintenance
Andrew.mills@north-herts.gov.uk, ext 4272

Kerry Shorrocks, Corporate Human Resources Manager
Kerry.shorrocks@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4224

Tim Everitt, Performance Improvement Officer
Tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4646

Ian Couper, Head of Financial Services
Ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4243

Gavin Ramtohal, Contracts Lawyer
Gavin.ramtohal@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4578

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 Green Space Management Strategy 2017-20

