

DUE Scrutiny Committee – 9th September 2013

Report of the Director of The Urban Environment

Parks, Nature Reserves & Open Spaces Strategy

Purpose of Report

- 1 To provide members with an overview of the current development, management and maintenance arrangements for the Borough's parks, nature reserves and open spaces, highlight the key management issues and seek agreement to any areas where more detailed scrutiny may be needed at future meetings This report will be complimented by a more detailed presentation to Committee on the night

Service Overview:

- 2 The Borough of Dudley covers an area of 9800ha (38 square miles) and approx 30% of this is publicly accessible Parks, Nature Reserves and Open spaces, all of which is developed, managed and maintained by Green Care Services, which can be summarised as follows:
 - **Habitat management for bio and geodiversity on** staffed nature reserves at Fens Pools, Saltwells, Wrens Nest, and The Leasowes, together with strategic management of Cotwall End Valley, Bumble Hole and Barrow Hill nature reserves. In addition the co-ordination and administration of the statutory Local Access Forum.
 - **Management and day to day grounds maintenance:** of approx. 1600ha of land, including such activities as; grass cutting, shrubs maintenance, seasonal bedding displays, sports pitches maintenance and renovation, together with inspection and repair of outdoor facilities such as play areas.
 - **Management and day to day maintenance of** the borough's tree stock comprising of an estimated 60,000 individual trees and 320ha of woodland, in accordance with the Council's adopted Tree Strategy,
 - **Long term development and community engagement** of the borough's parks and green spaces, including: support to and liaison with the 'Friends' network over 33 individual parks (listed in appendix 1 to this report) securing external funding and promoting activities and events. In addition bookings for pitches and bowling greens, letting sites for grazing and supporting allotment associations' management of our sites.

Future Improvements

3. Over the last 10 years in excess of £10million of external funding has been secured by the Council, to improve parks and open spaces. Whilst this has improved a significant number of sites, and led to the recent recognition of Green Flag status for several sites there is still an aspiration for further improvements against a challenging backdrop of major reductions in core council funding and reduced opportunities to use the likes of section 106 funds as this is replaced by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
4. It is therefore critical that bids for external funding are made within the context of a robust strategy which brings together existing policy but also defines an agreed hierarchy for parks, nature reserves and open spaces. Whilst the Unitary Development Plan and the Greenspaces Strategy (adopted June 2009) provide a strategic policy context, it is now proposed to create an additional document which could specifically be used to direct future parks improvements and associated funding bids.
5. At the same time, pressure on the council's revenue budgets, especially for non statutory functions will be intense and therefore any future improvements must take into consideration the implications on long and short-term maintenance costs.

Land Management Issues

6. There are also a number of other pressing land management issues including:
 - A large waiting list for both allotments and grazing land in the borough, which could only be accommodated through the creation of new sites.
 - In addition to the major Nature Reserves there are considerable areas of land which are not managed on a day-to-day basis therefore this is a potential area of future pressure from the public in relation to nuisance issues and tree management.
 - Whilst the Play Pathfinder project created a high-level strategy for play development there is no agreed strategy for future provision and replacement, yet there is continual expectation and requests for new facilities from the public

Finance

- 8 The services detailed in the body of the report are funded by budgets held by the Street & Green Care Division of Environmental Management.

Law

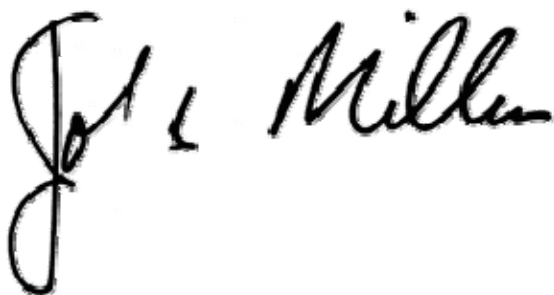
- 9 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 the Council is empowered to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive to, or incidental to the discharge of its functions

Equality Impact

10. The project is borough wide, inclusive and accessible to all in line with the Council's equality and diversity policies. Most major parks and nature reserves have been audited for physical accessibility and new developments are always designed in line with the Greenspaces Access Design Guidelines/ Standards

Recommendation

11. That, Members note the contents of this report and the information presented verbally at the meeting and then agree areas for more detailed scrutiny at the meetings on 29th October and 25th November.



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List of Background Papers

- The Greenspace Strategy and the UDP
<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/resident/planning/planning-policy/local-development-framework/adopted-parks-and-green-space-strategy/>
<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/resident/planning/planning-policy/unitary-development-plan/>

Appendix

Dudley MBC Parks Forum – membership list (August 2013)

The total number of active Friends Groups varies over time but those currently on the membership list for The Parks Forum are as follows:

Alder Coppice
Bernard Oakley Memorial Park
Buffery Park
Bumblehole LNR
Clayton Park
Cotwall End Valley LNR
Green Park
Huntingtree Park
Homer Hill
Hope Street
High Fields
King George V Park, Wordsley
King George VI, Kingswinford
Lakeside, Amblecote
The Leasowes
Marsh Park
Mary Stevens Park
Milking Bank
Netherton Park
Norton Covert
Pensnett Wildlife Group (Fens Pools LNR)
Priors Mill
Priory Park
Saltwells LNR
Sedgley Beacon
Sedgley Park Farm
Silver Jubilee
South Road (Swan Pool Park)
Southern Down Road
Stevens Park, Quarry Bank
Stevens Park, Wollescote
Turls Hill and Swanbrook Valley
Vale Street
Woodside Park
Wrens Nest NNR

These groups represent a mixture of formal parks, recreation grounds, open spaces, nature reserves and woodlands