

Parks, Nature Reserves and Open Spaces(Green Spaces)



Presentation to Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee 9th September 2013



BACKGROUND TO PRESENTATION

The three key issues arising from the members scoping session in June are summarised as follows :

1. Greater in-depth understanding of the Parks, Nature Reserves and Open Spaces Service to help inform future scrutiny
2. Are there alternative ways of providing the service and does the current service provide value for money?
3. How will the Council prioritise resources and external funding opportunities against a backdrop of significantly reduced budgets?



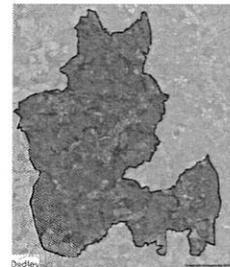
BACKGROUND TO PRESENTATION Contd.

- The presentation tonight will provide members with detailed information on the various aspects of the green spaces related services to help address issue 1
- A report will be brought to the October Committee with detailed benchmarking analysis to enable Members to scrutinise value-for-money in terms of green care maintenance, to address issue 2
- A draft Green Spaces Asset Management Plan will be brought to future committees for members consideration, to help address issue 3



How green is our Borough ?

- Dudley Borough covers an area of 9800 ha (38 square miles)
- Approx 30% of this is Parks, Nature Reserves and Open spaces
 - 900ha maintained land (parks, recreation grounds, open spaces)
 - 300ha nature reserves
 - 300ha woodland
 - 55ha grazing and 28ha allotments
 - 1700ha greenbelt



Links to our Council Priorities

- Green Space makes a significant contribution to many national agendas and also to all the Council Plan key priorities and particularly :
 - Cleaner, greener & environmentally friendly
 - Health & wellbeing
 - Regeneration
 - People being better served linked to 'Love your Community'



Cleaner, greener and environmentally friendly

- Protect and conserve bio and geo-diversity
- Play a vital role in keeping our air and water clean, by counteracting the damaging effects of air pollution and climate change
 - The sheltering effect of trees could save 3-9% of energy bills
 - Increasing "green cover" by 10% in urban residential areas reduces rainwater runoff by almost 5% or as much as 10% if tree cover increased
 - 10ha of park with 200 trees, can save 74 tonnes of carbon



Regeneration

- Neighbourhood, town and regional economies benefit from high quality parks and open spaces. Stimulate recreation and tourism. Inward investment, raise property values in local area. Attract direct investment through lottery bids and planning contributions
- Developers and estate agents across Europe believe that parks add value to commercial property.
- Developers are willing to pay a minimum of 3% more for land in close proximity to parks
- Increased visitor numbers to Glasgow Green after £15m improvements, stimulated £30m additional spend in the wider economy.
- Birmingham canal side improvements generated net visitor (boating) spend of £115k



Health & wellbeing

- Places to exercise: improve mental and physical wellbeing ; contribute to reducing obesity and managing stress. Greenspaces are a low cost preventative and remedial opportunity for public health interventions.
 - Portsmouth park may be saving NHS £900k as a result of improved health from increased levels of physical activity
 - 61% of UK population are overweight or obese. 33% of children aged 4-11 years are overweight or obese. Obesity costs the NHS £5.1billion/annum
 - Type 2 diabetes cost UK £10billion/annum And 80% of cases are preventable.
- Local Authorities are now accountable for health outcomes
- Healthy Communities Project has stimulated a 73% increase in levels of activity over 3 years

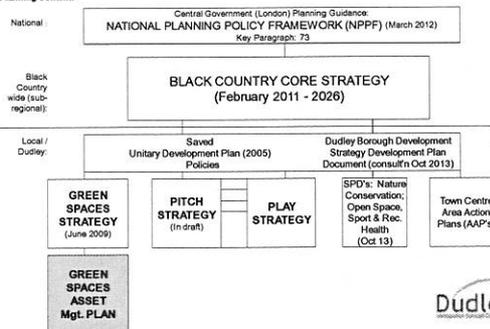


People being better served linked to 'Love your Community'

- Parks and open spaces provide:
 - locations for festivals and activities;
 - places to meet and celebrate with family;
 - opportunities for volunteering and educational visits.
- Are inclusive and accessible to help address inequalities and ensure social inclusion
- Promote community empowerment through friends groups.
- Are a significant part of our cultural heritage



Planning Context:



Green Care – Services

- Four main service areas
 - Management and day to day Grounds Maintenance
 - Management and day to day Maintenance of trees (Arboriculture)
 - Parks development & community engagement
 - Habitat management (Countryside Services)



Grounds Maintenance

- Maintain over 4400 individual sites /9 million sq m
- Carry out over 700 different individual tasks
- These will include:
 - Grass cutting
 - Bedding displays
 - Rose / Shrub bed maintenance
 - Weed control
 - Play area maintenance
 - Sports pitch maintenance
 - Litter / litter bins / dog bins
 - Hedge Cutting
 - Hard surface maintenance



Grounds Maintenance

- A mix of permanent and seasonal staff and volunteers provide a wide range of maintenance borough wide
- 12 satellite depots (5 micro depot)
- 50 large items of vehicles and plant
- 400 items of small plant and equipment
- Specialist Play Area Inspection & Repair Team



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Grounds Maintenance

- Stakeholders include :
 - Other Council directorates
 - Schools
 - Friends of the Parks
 - Tenants & Residents Assoc.
 - Elected members & MP's
 - 313,000 residents
 - Visitors and people who work in the borough



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Arboriculture

- Maintain trees on
 - Highways
 - Parks & Open Spaces
 - Nature Reserves
 - Cemeteries & Crematoria
 - Council Housing land
 - Law and Governance land
 - Schools
- Estimated 60,000 individual trees
- Approx. 300 ha woodland
- 1500 trees pruned or felled in 2012



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Tree Strategy

- Adopted Tree Strategy (2000)
 - Aims to protect and enhance the tree stock of the Borough
 - Sets out the benefits of trees in the urban environment
 - Sets out policies to support achievement of the service aim and to ensure consistency of approach
 - Provides guidance to Officers, Elected Members and the general public



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Tree Risk Management Model

50 emergency callouts for dangerous trees in 2012

Decisions about elective "tree work" are based upon a risk management model:

- Health & Safety Executive Risk management guidance
- Risk Zoning
 - ~ Visual tree condition assessments
 - ~ Prioritise Works & Inspections
- Proactive Tree Inspections (more effective)
- Risk Scores
 - ~ Prioritise the highest scores at all times.



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Parks Development

- Aims to promote, enhance and protect Dudley's Parks and Open Spaces by..
 - Working with Friends and Community Groups
 - Seeking and supporting, external funding opportunities
 - Promoting the health & wellbeing benefits of green spaces in partnership with the Office of Public Health
 - Supporting events and activities to encourage wider use and greater diversity of visitors to parks and open spaces



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Parks Development – key facts

- Service responsible for management and development of ...
 - 219ha Parks and gardens (inc 1 Scheduled Ancient Monument)
 - 354ha Recreation and amenity spaces (approx 461 sites)
 - 36 allotment sites (33 self managed, 1000 plots/ 28 ha in total)
 - 51 grazing fields (55 ha)
 - 105 football pitches (174 Teams)
 - 6 bowling greens, 2 croquet lawns
 - 19 multi use games areas (MUGA's)
 - 62 equipped play areas
 - 6 skate parks
 - 27 tennis courts
 - 7 Out-door gyms



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Parks Development – key facts continued

- Nearly 10,000 Volunteer hours per year
- 20 + Health walk volunteers
- 26 active Friends of Parks Groups
- 14 FTE Physical Activity Activators on Healthy Towns Parks (Sports & Physical Activity Section)
- 13 changing rooms
- 5 lodge houses, 4 community buildings, 5 Activity Centres
- Event equipment for fun days and clean ups.



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Parks Development – Community Liaison

- Supports 26 active Friends Groups to:
 - Develop funding bids
 - Create Master plans / Management plans
 - Consult with the wider community
 - Organise and deliver 110 events and activities per year (approx 23,000 visitors)

Facilitates the *Green Spaces Forum*, a network of Friends and Community Groups which shares best practice

Organises an Annual Awards evening to celebrate the hard work and many achievements of:

- Allotment Associations
- Health Walk Leaders
- Friends Groups and volunteers



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Parks Development – Track record of success

- From 1st April 2005 - 31st March 2013 we successfully secured £14m external funding, in the current financial year there is £5.5million external funding in the capital programme

- Transforming Your Space, £374k (Big Lottery)
- Steps to Health, £220k (Dept. Of Health)
- Liveability, £3.4 million (Central Government)
- Play Pathfinder, £2.6 million (DCMS)
- Priory Park refurbishment, £1.7 million (HLF)
- Healthy Towns Project, £4.5million (DoH)
- Mary Stevens Park refurbishment, £2.6million (HLF)



As a result of this investment and the input of officers and members 4 parks have received **Green Flag Awards** to date

- 2012: Silver Jubilee Park and Netherton Park
- 2013: Wollescote Park and Huntingtree Park

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Parks Development – Events

Training sessions for volunteers (funding opportunities, health & safety, events management, promotion etc)

Environmental Education sessions with schools

Themed guided walks on Park heritage and environmental issues

Health Walks with Over 50's and overweight.

Buggy Walks with young mums

Carnivals with Friends groups

Tree Planting with volunteers

Clean up Days with schools and volunteers

Green Spaces for Health **Leaflets** now promotes all events across Parks and Countryside including Himley Hall.



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Countryside Services

- Aims to promote and protect Dudley's natural heritage, bio and geo-diversity through..
 - Habitat management and creation
 - Increase flora and fauna such as
 - ~ Grasslands
 - ~ Wildflower Meadows
 - ~ Woodlands
 - ~ Wetland
 - ~ Geology
 - Education, training and volunteering
 - ~ Promoting community involvement through volunteering and training
 - ~ Tours for Primary, Secondary and Further Education students and Forest Schools



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Countryside Services – key facts

Dudley has many sites of National and International Importance, including:

- National Nature Reserve (NNR) -Wrens Nest
- Grade 1 Listed Historical Landscape -The Leasowes
- Several Scheduled Ancient Monuments within Wren's Nest, Saltwells and Barrow Hill
- Special Area of Conservation -Fens Pools
- Approx 50ha Ancient Woodlands (e.g. Saltwells)
- 8 Local Nature Reserves (LNR's)
- 8 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) (e.g. Doultons Clay Pit, Saltwells)
- 0.9ha/1000 population (Natural England Standard: 1ha/1000)
- Indicator 160-00, Dudley's current score is 20%
- 2 Green Flags: Wrens Nest and The Leasowes
- 1 Green Heritage site accreditation: The Leasowes



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Countryside Services

- There are 4 staffed sites
 - Saltwells LNR
 - Wren's Nest NNR
 - The Leasowes & Coombeswood
 - Fens Pools & Barrow Hill LNR's
- In addition we work with volunteers to manage:
 - Bumble Hole LNR
 - Cotwall End Valley LNR
- The team also manage approximately 30 other smaller areas of publicly owned woodlands and countryside walk routes



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Countryside Services – community engagement

- 23 regular volunteers working 9,951 hours/year
- Work placements from schools, universities and colleges
- Countless other volunteers who turn up to help with one-off projects (e.g. Corporate Team building)
- 7 regular community groups and 1 national charity (Phoenix Futures) help us to manage and improve our sites
- The nature reserve 'Friends Groups' are made up of very practical and passionate people who are striving to improve their local environment



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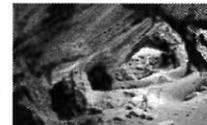
Countryside Services – Projects

Ongoing projects:

- Woodland improvement feasibility studies
- Wild flower meadows creation in local parks.
- Forest Schools Training
- Nature Improvement Area bids for funding
- Ripples through Time at Wrens Nest, providing access and interpretation. - £800k
- 3 Higher Level Stewardship Agreements funding ongoing management– £31k

Completed projects:

- The Leasowes restoration (phase 1) - £1.7million
- 31 woodlands improved over 5 years - £40k
- New LNRs declared through the Wildspace! Project



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Countryside Services – Events

Annual programme of educational Events and activities ranging from Summer Holiday activities to Bat Walks, including (in 2012):

- 68 guided walks and talks with total of, 1386 visitors
- 32 School groups with a total of 1,146 pupils
- 739 college and university students



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Parks, Nature Reserves and Open Space –the costs

Total Greencare Budget (net of income, CECs and capital charges) approx: £4,331k

Made up of:

- Green Budget (grounds maintenance) £2,975k
- Arboriculture £541k
- Parks Development £189k
- Countryside £626k

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Next Steps, Where Do We Need to Go?

- What are our objectives?
- What are our priorities?
- What can we afford?
- To determine a sustainable asset management plan that will form the foundation for a cohesive strategy for parks nature reserves and open spaces.



And How Are We Going to Get There?

- Does the existing service provide value for money?
- Are there alternative ways of providing the service?
- How do we develop the service and introduce innovation?



In Conclusion

- Dudley Borough should be rightly proud of its green spaces in local, regional, national and international terms
- The challenge is to further develop these important borough wide assets against a backdrop of reduced funding and resources whilst ensuring value for money in the delivery of the services to residents
- The scrutiny committee can play a key role in the development of the Green Spaces Asset Management Plan that will be a significant document in prioritising resources and support external funding bids
- The scrutiny committee can also play a key role in assessing the value-for-money to the borough's ratepayers of the existing service providers
- The remaining scheduled scrutiny committees, informed by officer reports and presentations, will help the council meet the challenge



Thank you for listening.....

Questions and Answers

