

URBAN ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 29TH OCTOBER, 2013

**AT 6:00PM
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2
THE COUNCIL HOUSE
DUDLEY**

If you (or anyone you know) is attending the meeting and requires assistance to access the venue and/or its facilities, could you please contact Democratic Services in advance and we will do our best to help you

**HELEN SHEPHERD
ASSISTANT DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER
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IMPORTANT NOTICE

MEETINGS IN DUDLEY COUNCIL HOUSE

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Your ref:

Our ref:

Please ask for:
Miss H Shepherd

Telephone No.
(01384) 815236

21st October, 2013

Dear Councillor

Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee
Tuesday 29th October, 2013 – 6.00pm

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee to be held on Tuesday 29th October, 2013 at 6.00pm in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley to consider the business set out in the agenda below.

The agenda and public reports are available on the Council's Website www.dudley.gov.uk and follow the links to 'Councillors in Dudley' and the Committee Management Information System.

Yours sincerely



Director of Corporate Resources

A G E N D A

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive apologies for absence from the meeting.

2. APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

To report the appointment of any substitute members serving for this meeting of the Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive Declarations of Interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

4. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record and sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th September, 2013 (copy attached).

5. PUBLIC FORUM

To receive questions from members of the public.

6. PARKS, NATURE RESERVES & OPEN SPACES STRATEGY (PAGES 1 - 6)

To consider a report of the Director of the Urban Environment.

7. UPDATE ON THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP PROGRESS AND THE TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER PROCESS

To receive a verbal update from the Lead Officer of the Committee.

8. TO ANSWER QUESTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE 11.8 (IF ANY).

To: **All Members of the Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee:**

Councillors Ali, Duckworth, Hale, Hanif, Harley, J Jones, Jordan, Sykes, K.Turner, Tyler and Mrs Westwood.

URBAN ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 9th September, 2013 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Tyler (Chair)
Councillor Hale (Vice Chair)
Councillors Ali, Hanif, Harley, J Jones, Jordan, Sykes, K Turner and Mrs Westwood

Officers

Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Housing Strategy and Private Sector) (Lead Officer to the Committee), Assistant Director of Urban Environment (Environmental Management), Assistant Director of Urban Environment (Culture and Leisure), Project Development Manager, Team Manager (Green Care), Countryside Manager, Head of Traffic and Transportation, Manager of Executive Support, Principal Executive Support Officer (All Directorate of the Urban Environment) and the Assistant Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Corporate Resources);

Councillor Islam was in attendance as an observer.

7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No member declared an interest in any matter to be considered at this meeting.

8 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27th June, 2013, be approved as a correct record and signed.

9 PUBLIC FORUM

No matters were raised under this Agenda Item.

10 PARKS, NATURE RESERVES AND OPEN SPACES STRATEGY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted together with a detailed presentation on the current development, management and maintenance arrangements for the Borough's parks, nature reserves and open spaces and to highlight to Members the key management issues and to seek agreement to any areas where more detailed scrutiny may be needed in the future.

Following the detailed presentation, Members commended Officers on the excellent report, presentation and work currently undertaken and asked questions, made comments and recommendations.

A Member requested details of the services that would no longer be able to be provided if a further reduction in funding was made and asked if the same level of service could be provided by alternative ways of working such as the privatisation of certain services or the setting up of an arms length company. It was suggested that the cost of services should be addressed as some schools no longer used the Council service for maintaining school grounds as cheaper options had been sourced.

Arising from a question raised in relation to land management issues and the large waiting list for allotment sites, it was stated that to convert land into an allotment site would require planning permission for change of use of the land, but it would also be dependent of the type of land and whether it was contaminated or not. It was also stated that costs would be accrued by the Council for the initial set-up of the site but once complete the site could become self-maintained.

In response to a further question raised the Team Manager (Green Care) stated that there had been targeted break-ins at depots across the borough in the past, but not at a huge cost to the Council, however an investment in higher security in these areas had been addressed over the last few years.

The Assistant Director of Urban Environment (Environmental Management) agreed to look at the issue raised in relation to fridges being left at the road side and stated that fly tipping was a costly problem.

A Member requested that consideration be given to how the Council could develop and make current services more effective rather than reduce services. It was requested that ways in which to promote green space areas more widely to attract tourism be investigated and that help continued with 'Friends of Parks' to maximise any external funding received.

Information in relation to current tree disease issues was requested and what contingency plans did the Council have in place to deal with these issues.

In response to a question raised the Assistant Director of Urban Environment (Environmental Management) confirmed that there was only one budget held within Green Care for fly tipping issues which was monitored and controlled.

The Lead Officer to the Committee suggested that the Committee may wish to hear the views volunteers; 'friends of parks' groups and other stakeholders.

A Member asked if ways to generate income from green spaces had been explored and a list of what services would be lost if funding was to be cut further was requested.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted, the detailed presentation and comments made at the meeting in relation to the development, management and maintenance arrangements for Borough's parks, nature reserves and open spaces, be noted.
- (2) That a copy of the presentation be circulated to all Members of the Scrutiny Committee.
- (3) That a further report, taking into consideration all the comments and requests made at the meeting, be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 29th October, 2013.

11

TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER PROCESSES

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the virtual scrutiny process suggested by Members to review Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) processes.

The Lead Officer presented the report explaining the virtual process and in doing so stipulated that would be for a trial period. The role of the proposed cross party working group advising on future TRO programmes was outlined, emphasising that the TRO process is determined by a legislative legal framework and that the final decision on programmes would still ultimately remain with the Cabinet Member for Transportation.

The Head of Traffic and Transportation explained the current lengthy process for TRO's and stated that a more streamlined robust process was required to enable an annual programme of works to be established and to make the process more efficient and transparent to elected Members and the public.

Members referred to and raised concerns in relation to the TRO Score Sheet, Appendix C to the report submitted, stating that they considered the document not to be user friendly and clarification was required on how the scoring would be applied. The Head of Traffic and Transportation agreed to circulate to Members an explanatory note detailing how the scoring process would work.

A Member suggested that when consulting on a TRO that a time limit for responses was applied and that any responses received after that date would not be taken into consideration.

The Chair requested that any issues Members had in relation to the TRO score sheet be raised electronically as part of the virtual scrutiny process.

In response to a question raised it was confirmed that temporary TRO's would not be included in this process, as this type of order were usually in relation to works that were required to be carried out.

Arising from a question raised in relation to the length of time it currently takes for TRO to be implemented and how these were prioritised, it was stated that current TRO's were implemented in area blocks and could take up to four years to be applied.

It was requested by the Lead Officer that a worked example on one particular road be provided to Members to help them understand the TRO score sheet and how the process would work. Information on how neighbouring authorities operated was also requested.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted and presented at the meeting, in relation to the Traffic Regulation Order Processes, be noted.
- (2) That the Scrutiny Committee agree to trial a virtual scrutiny process to review the Traffic Regulation Order process and for a cross party working group to be established.
- (3) That the Head of Traffic and Transportation be requested to provide an explanatory note in relation to the Traffic Regulation Order Score Sheet, together with a worked example of a particular road within the borough and circulate direct to Members of the Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 8pm.

CHAIR

DUE Scrutiny Committee –29th October 2013

Report of the Director of The Urban Environment

Parks, Nature Reserves & Open Spaces Strategy

Purpose of Report

- 1 To update members on the development of a strategy and a hierarchy to guide both future investment and inform re-alignment of future revenue budgets.

Background

- 2 As explained in the report to Committee in September, whilst there have been significant improvements to a number of parks, resulting in the attainment of Green Flag status for several, there is still an aspiration for further improvements against a challenging backdrop of major reductions in core Council funding and greater competition for external funding.
- 3 At the same time, pressure on the Council's revenue budgets, especially for non statutory functions such as grounds maintenance will be intense and therefore any future improvements must take into consideration the implications on long and short-term maintenance costs. Existing revenue spend in this area is already being challenged and decisions need to be taken within an agreed strategic context.
- 4 Whilst the Unitary Development Plan and the Green Spaces 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 & associated funding bids, together with any decisions around re-alignment of existing maintenance regimes.
- 5 Policies within Dudley Council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP) are currently being reviewed for Dudley Council's emerging Development Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) (Site Allocations DPD) which is approaching 6-weeks public consultation on a Preferred Options Stage document during Spring 2014. This provides an unprecedented opportunity for the existing UDP policies relating to Parks, Nature Reserves and Open Spaces to be reviewed and any proposed changes to be included in the formal consultation for this new document.

6 **Development of a hierarchy**

- In general terms the fundamental aspiration underlying the parks policies in the UDP and the Green Spaces Strategy is that all residents in the borough should have access to parks, nature reserves and open spaces.
- 7 Following public consultation in June 2008 related to the Green Space Strategy, we established that people are prepared to walk up to 15minutes, to parks, play areas and outdoor sports facilities, but will travel further, 30minutes, to historic parks and nature reserves. Using this information it is possible to plot a walk-time buffer around identified parks and nature reserves and review the adequacy of provision, across the borough, based upon how much the buffers are overlapping, or not. It is proposed to expand on this in the presentation at the meeting.
- 8 But accessibility and quantity has to be balanced by quality and functionality, which is delivered through good design and sustained by good management and maintenance. Since both the UDP and Green Spaces Strategy were adopted, over £14million of improvements have been carried out in many parks and nature reserves resulting in the number and nature of their facilities changing considerably. In addition, over the last 10 years, public expectation has developed and community engagement has increased. So it would be appropriate to update the categorisation of our greens spaces at this time.
- 9 One way of doing this would be to utilise a national benchmarking tool: the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) performance network for parks, open spaces and horticultural services. Within this there is a parks category which assesses individual sites against a range of facilities and then attributes them to categories A, B, C and D. APSE is an industry standard which allows participating authorities to compare their performance against a very wide range of services, but as a quality assessment for parks we consider it to have limitations. We consider the list of facilities used, to be rather dated, but this could be addressed by creating a “Dudley version”, for the purposes of this exercise, by introducing additional facilities which we consider to be more appropriate to current parks provision and public expectation. In addition APSE does not have a specific element to assess quality of nature conservation sites, so it would be necessary, for the purposes of this exercise to create some. It is proposed to expand on this in the presentation at the meeting and we have attached the APSE list as Appendix A to this report.
- 10 It would be possible to map the quantity and location of various categories of green space and analyse their respective quality “scores” and it is proposed to present preliminary findings at the meeting. This process would inevitably start to establish a hierarchy of types of green spaces and identify where there are gaps in provision or even a need for improvements to certain sites in order to bring them up to the standard of others.
- 11 Equally such mapping could identify areas of over-supply in certain categories and raise questions about the possibility of finding alternative uses to address the unmet demand for additional allotment and grazing land which was highlighted at the last meeting.

12 At the meeting on 9th September 2013 Members raised questions about the implications of future reductions in funding, on service levels, in addition to alternative service delivery models, benchmarking of services and opportunities for increased income generation all of which will be discussed at the evening's presentation. This review of green spaces and the establishment of a hierarchy could ultimately inform not only future improvement programmes, but also priorities for future management and maintenance.

13 **Public Engagement**

At the last meeting we detailed the significant levels of public engagement with parks, nature reserves and open spaces which has been established over the last 10years and highlighted the involvement of Friends Groups in the delivery of all the major improvement projects (Transforming Your Space, Liveability and Healthy Towns). To support the work we are doing for this Committee we propose to seek the views of the Friends Groups on the future of parks in the borough, this will shadow a national survey which Heritage Lottery Fund have just completed, and discuss how they see their role in the management of parks developing in the future. We will provide verbal feedback from this exercise at the meeting.

Finance

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

Law

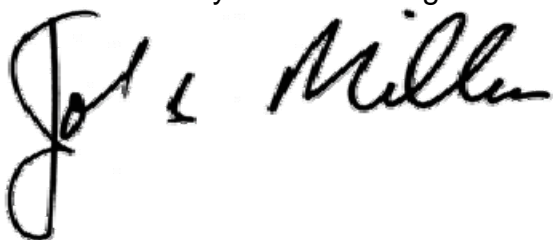
15 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 the Council is empowered to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive to, or incidental to the discharge of its functions

Equality Impact

16. 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

17. That Members note the contents of this report and the information presented verbally at the meeting.



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John Millar
Director of Urban Environment

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List of Background Papers

The Greenspace Strategy

<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/resident/planning/planning-policy/local-development-framework/adopted-parks-and-green-space-strategy/>

and the UDP

<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/resident/planning/planning-policy/unitary-development-plan/>

EXTRACT FROM APSE

Parks**3.1 Park categories**

APSE performance networks has split the various types of parks, open spaces and play areas into four categories: types A, B, C and D.

You should assess each of your parks, open spaces and play areas according to how many of the following facilities each site possesses.

Facility list

Aquarium*

Arboretum*

Artificial sports pitch*

Aviary*

Bandstand*

Boating lake*

Bowling green*

Car parking*

CCTV/Other security*

Changing facilities/pavilion*

Defined park boundary*

Dog bins

Footpath

Formal/memorial beds/floral displays*

Full access to all park areas for disabled persons

Glasshouses/floral conservatory*

Hard surface for play/kick about area/kicking wall

LEAP play area*

LAP play area

Litter bins

Multiple sports pitches*

Multiple play/adventure play*

Museum*

Paddling pool

Site based staff (i.e. Park rangers/wardens, maintenance staff, games attendants, offices*)

Petanque

Pet's corner*

Pitch & putt*

Plant collection (NCCPG)*

Putting greens

Refreshments facilities*

Seating

Signage

Single sports pitch

Single play unit

Tennis/netball courts*

Toilets*

Visitor and/or information centre*

Visitor Facilities* (i.e. railways, bouncy castles, model boating pond)

War memorials/statues/sculptures/follies

Water features/fountains

Woodland walk*

Note:

This categorisation may require a subjective judgement of 'best fit' and the category types may not match the sites/areas maintained in your authority exactly. This judgement should be justifiable under audit however, should your Authority be chosen for audit purposes.

Country parks/country estates are not included amongst these four categories and information relating to these should be entered under hectareage of 'country parks/estates maintained' (see guidance notes 2.4 and 2.5)

Multiple play refers to a piece of equipment that provides several play activities (e.g. a slide, a climbing frame and a swing). A single unit is one that provides just one activity (e.g. a slide or a set of swings).

Category A parks

A category A park, is a formally defined park/open space/recreation area having at least a 3-mile catchment area and at least 20 of the facilities from the facility list overleaf (at least 10 of which must be marked with an asterisk).

Category B parks

A category B park, is a formally defined park/open space/recreation area having at least a 3/4 mile catchment area with at least 10 facilities from facility list overleaf (at least 5 of which must be marked with an asterisk).

Category C parks

A category C park, is a park/open space/recreation area having at least a 1/4 mile catchment area with at least 6 facilities from facility list overleaf (at least 3 of which must be marked with an asterisk).

Category D parks

A category D park, is a park/open space/recreation area having at least a 1/2 mile catchment area with at least 1 facility from facility list overleaf.