

WARDS: All

AGENDA ITEM NO. 15

DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET REPORT – 9th February 2005

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

**LIVEABILITY PROJECT IMPROVING PARKS FOR PEOPLE.
ALLOCATION OF FUNDING**

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval of the allocation of the £2.1 million funding for physical improvements to parks through the Liveability Project and to provide an update on the projects implementation .

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 2 February 2004 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) announced an award of £3.4 million from the Liveability Fund to Dudley Council, for parks regeneration.

At its meeting on 17 March 2004 the Executive authorised the Director of Law and Property to enter into the necessary Funding Agreements and accept the funding award.

- 2.3 The ODPM define Liveability as :
- Creating high quality places with attractive public spaces; and
 - Sustaining the quality of those places by:
 - Managing and maintaining them better and
 - Improving social use and behaviour in public places

- 2.4 The ODPM recognised that whilst good planning and quality design are important for creating and transforming public spaces this needs to be combined with effective management and maintenance. To deliver such improvements local authorities are required to achieve service reform in these areas in order to secure a “reward” grant to support physical improvements. The two elements of the grant are inextricably linked and the reward is strictly dependent upon the delivery of the service reform. The Grant Agreement with ODPM defines a number of milestones which have to be achieved in order to release the funding.

2.5 The **service reform** elements of Dudley's project are the:

- Creation of a **Local Involvement Programme (LIP) team** to help support and develop Friends Groups to become sustainable "Champions" for their parks. This would include helping the groups establish a long term plan for each site.
- Extension of the Council's existing **GroundForce pilot scheme**, to operate in both Priory and Netherton Parks and work in partnership with Greencare to find more cost effective ways of delivering day to day grounds maintenance.

2.6 Experience on other projects, such as "Steps to Health", have indicated that service reform projects and developmental work with community groups requires significant input to be successful. It is a basic principle of this project that the sustainability of physical works is dependent upon there being a strong sense of local "ownership" for the park, which should help to reduce vandalism and increase public use. Therefore the Environmental Task Group, at its meeting on 19th October 2004, recommended that the Service reform elements of the bid should be extended to run over a 3 year period rather than the 2 years originally anticipated. It was recognised that whilst this would reduce the overall funding available for physical improvements, it would be in line with the Liveability Fund's overall objective to stimulate service reform, which is in effect one of the main drivers of the liveability agenda.

PROGRESS SO FAR

2.7 A project steering group has been established which is entitled the Environmental Task Group (ETG) the terms of reference and membership are detailed in Appendix A. This group is located within the Local Strategic Partnership structure.

2.8 Two staff were appointed to the LIP team in September 2004, both staff are secondees from Groundwork Black Country, a partner in the project.

2.9 The original two NRF funded Ground Force staff have been maintained and are continuing to deliver training and the improvement and maintenance of Priory Park, through this we have so far: recruited 33 trainees (17 full, 14 part time), from which 13 have achieved qualifications and 4 have entered employment with the balance continuing with their training.

2.10 The value of the Ground Force project should not be underestimated and its contribution to the improvements that have been made on Priory Park is every evident. The Friends of Priory Park recognise this in their January newsletter in which they state 'visiting our park has become a credit to Dudley' and they acknowledge the role that the Ground Force project has played. "The dedication by those involved in working in all weathers in the park has led to a marked change for the better". Clearly this impetus is something that the Council should seek to build on.

2.11 An additional 2 staff have now been recruited (through secondments from Green Care) with the aim of setting up a new team to begin the maintenance of Netherton Park. This will commence during January 2005, and will allow additional trainees to be recruited and improvements to the park to be started.

2.11 The Landscape Design Team have now completed master plans for the following six sites:

- Mary Stevens Park, Stourbridge
- Priory Park, Dudley
- Grange Park, Dudley
- King George V Park, Wordsley
- Netherton Park
- Buffery Park, Dudley

PROPOSED ALLOCATION OF FUNDING FOR PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS.

2.12 The ETG have proposed that the service reform elements of project run for 3 years, resulting in the following budget allocation for the project:

SERVICE REFORM		£908,700
PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS		£2,119,600
MASTERPLANS & PROJECT SUPPORT		£371,700
Total project cost		£3,400,000

2.13 It is a fundamental principle of the project that the involvement of the community in the form of a constituted Friends Group is essential to the long term sustainability of the physical improvements in the parks. For this reason it is proposed that only parks and green spaces with constituted Friends Groups should be included in the programme of physical improvements. It is the objective of the LIP team to work closely with Friends Groups, supporting and developing their skills and thereby increasing their long term sustainability. A ‘model’ has been developed which will allow the LIP team to assess the level of support required by each group and measure their development progress over the course of the project.

2.14 It is also essential that each of these parks have a long term masterplan which will drive continuing improvements beyond the life of the Liveability Project and help support bids to other funding bodies. Every masterplan will be based upon needs identified by the Friends Groups and then endorsed and refined through public consultations.

2.15 The ETG have proposed that allocation of funding should also reflect the strategic importance to the borough, of the individual park or greenspaces. Whilst the Parks Strategy for the Borough is currently being produced it is not anticipated this will be complete until 2007 therefore it is proposed that the hierarchy of sites

defined within the UDP (Revised Deposit Plan February 2002) should be used to guide this process.

- 2.16 It was originally proposed that the funding be allocated between 5 funding streams and briefing notes already circulated to elected members reflect this. At its meeting on 27th January the ETG together with representatives of the Friends Network voted by a majority to re-allocate Fund 5, which was a contingency sum for sites where Friends Groups were established during the course of the project who would not otherwise financially benefit. Whilst the majority of the Friends Network members present at their meeting on 11th January agreed to the proposals for the allocation of the funding, a number of groups felt that their allocation would be insufficient to make a significant improvement to their site. For this reason the ETG agreed to re-allocate this funding from Fund 5 into Fund 1. Thereby providing a longer amount for improvements to the Borough's Historic and Town Parks.
- 2.17 Appendix B shows the mechanism for allocation of the Physical Funding Allocation but which in accordance with the draft UDP designations has the parks allocated as follows:-

(i)

HISTORIC AND TOWN PARKS FUND -£953,820

As detailed in policy SO6 of the UDP. This funding allocation would be divided equally between the following town and historic parks:

The Leasowes

Marsh Park, Brierley Hill

Stevens Park, Quarry Bank

Stevens Park, Wollescote

Mary Stevens Park, Stourbridge

Netherton Park

Grange Park, Dudley

Priory Park, Dudley

King George V Park, Wordsley

King George VI Park, Kingswinford

Silver Jubilee Park, Coseley

Sedgley Hall Park Farm

(Highlighted parks have existing Friends Groups it is proposed that the LIP Team will work with local people to establish groups for the other parks).

(ii)

LOCAL PARKS FUND - £423,920

These are not listed in the UDP but are shown on the Proposals Plan. In addition the policy states that areas of Community Open Space will be recognised as Local Parks where these are identified in partnership with the local community, for the purpose of Liveability this would be indicated by the existence of a constituted Friends Group. The following sites would currently fall into this category:

**Buffery Park
Bumble Hole LNR
Fens Pool LNR
Green Park
Cotwall End
Pedmore
Western Avenue
Priors Mill**

The Friends Network have proposed that there be a closing date for groups to join this fund. The funding then to be equally divided between the sites.

(iii)

DEVELOPMENT FUND - £317,940

All groups could access this funding, and the success of their bids would be determined by their group development as measured by the Development Model. This would further support the long term sustainability of the project.

(iv)

FEES - £423,920

Funding within the previous funding streams is exclusive of fees. This allocation is to cover the cost of all professional fees associated with design and construction process, planning applications and survey costs.

2.18 The UDP (Revised deposit plan February 2002) provides a rational framework for the grouping of parks which has been tested through a public enquiry. The Inspectors report considered the possibility for Local Parks to “gain promotion” to the higher tier of Town Parks and recommended that the plan be “modified by the insertion of a reference under the heading “Local Parks” to the possibility of Local Parks being improved and enhanced leading to their re-classification as Town Parks”.

2.19 Therefore it is proposed to offer the Local Parks identified above, the opportunity for the purpose of the Liveability project, to seek re-classification to the designation of Town Park and that the Lead Member for Leisure be authorised to consider such appeals and determine the outcome. In order to ensure that the ODPM's milestones and targets are achieved thereby securing the funding, it is proposed that such appeals must be lodged by 28 February 2005 and that these appeals be determined by the end of March 2005.

2.20 The current allocation per Town/Historic Park is approximately £79,000. In the event of a local park being re-classified as a Town Park the equivalent sum will be re-allocated between the appropriate funds.

2.21 Key to the long-term sustainability of parks regeneration is the Council's ability to maintain the improved sites. It is our belief that a consequence of involving the local community in the Liveability process is the promotion of local ownership, and the reduction in the levels of vandalism and abuse of sites. This would allow the redirection of some existing of revenue funding towards maintenance rather than repairs. During the course of the project it is proposed to seek additional funding to enable the Ground Force element of the project to be continued and extended beyond March 2006 thereby increasing the existing maintenance capacity of Green Care Services.

2.22 However, despite these considerations there will still be a need for additional revenue funding to provide ongoing maintenance of the improved sites. It is anticipated that this could be in the region of £300,000 a year. The Friends Network members have made strong representations about this issue and have requested that the Council, give consideration to the protection of existing and the growth of future revenue budgets for this area of service.

3.0 PROPOSAL

3.1 That the Cabinet endorse the proposed mechanism for allocation of physical improvements funding.

3.2 That the Lead Member for Leisure be authorised to consider appeals from Friends of Parks Groups on their categorisation within the parks designations detailed in this report.

4.0 FINANCE

4.1 The Liveability Project is funded by a grant received from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The total grant award is £3,400,000 which is estimated to be spent £2,119,600 on capital works and £1,280,400 on revenue expenditure. The capital element of this project is included within the Council's Capital Programme.

4.2 The ongoing maintenance implications of this project could be approximately £300,000 per year. It would not be possible to accommodate this within the current revenue funding for DUE Green Care.

APPENDIX A

Stakeholder	Name
DMBC Sustainable Development	Alex Webb
BTCV	Alison Wilkes
J1 & J2 Police	Alistair Cook (DMBC Police Liaison Officer)
DMBC Sports and Recreation	Andy Webb / Rachael McKiernan Doyle
DMBC Finance	Dave McNaney/ Victoria Jones
PCT Steps to Health	Dean Hill / Melanie Taylor
DMBC Liveability Project	Greenspace Team Leader/ Mark Lavender/ Chris Green/ Rosemary Millar
Dudley MarComms	Jan Jennings
DMBC Dudley Community Partnership	Joanne Wilbraham
DMBC Directorate of Housing	Athol McDonald Strategic Development Manager
Dudley Racial Equality Council	Kenneth Rodney
DMBC Special Projects and Community Development	Lindsay Newton and Dewi Williams
DOSTI	Caroline Webb
'Me Too Project'	Michelle Cox
Dudley Borough Local Access Forum	Mike Freer
Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust	Neil Wyatt
Groundwork Trust	Paul Gibson & Paul Mason
GOWM	Rob Lawley/ Surjit Matharu
DMBC Greenspace Strategy/Policy	Sandra Ford/ Robin Whitehouse
DMBC Greencare	Russ Newey
DMBC Culture & Community	Sally Orton (Chair)
DMBC Community Safety	Sue Hickin
DMBC Social Services	Zoey Fencott
Friends Network	Cllr. Mike Attwood (Mary Stevens Park) Janet Alderman-Rowe (Priory Park & The Green) Sandra Rath (King George V Park, Wordsley)

ENVIRONMENTAL TASK GROUP

**TERMS OF REFERENCE
(Revised 27th September 2004)**

AIM: Improving Parks and Greenspaces for People, by working in partnership to facilitate a co-ordinated strategic approach to the provision and enhancement of greenspaces across the borough for all communities.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- To facilitate and promote multi-agency understanding, goals and action in relation to the greenspace agenda.
- To facilitate the delivery of national and local targets of partner agencies relating to greenspace provision and development in the borough.
- To review Dudley's greenspace strategies and develop a co-ordinated action plan for implementation.
- To facilitate partnership working for the delivery of borough wide greenspace improvement programmes.
- To ensure opportunities for links and synergy between greenspace management and improvement strategies across the borough are realised.
- To ensure programmes developed reflect the cultural diversity and needs of all communities within Dudley.
- To identify funding routes for identified greenspace development and management programmes and ensure a joined up and themed approach.
- To develop a strategic approach to the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and strategies across agencies.
- To be a recognised point of contact for local and national organisations that require information, support and advice on greenspace programmes within the borough.
- To oversee the set-up and implementation of local and national initiatives with regard to greenspace management and development.
- To develop a sustainable approach to the development of green spaces.
- To co-ordinate and disseminate information to Friends Groups.

Proposed Allocation of Funding for Physical Improvements

