

WARDS: All

AGENDA ITEM

NO.

DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

NORTH DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE - 13 JULY 2004

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

LIVEABILITY FUND AWARD -IMPROVING PARKS FOR PEOPLE

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform the Area Committee of the Council's 2 year Liveability Project to improve parks and open spaces within the borough.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 What is Liveability?

2.1.1 On 2nd February 2004, it was announced that Dudley MBC had been awarded £3.4m by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister from the Liveability Fund to improve and regenerate parks and open spaces within the borough.

2.2 The Project

2.2.1 The overall objective of the Dudley project is to improve, protect and enhance strategic parks and open spaces in the borough. There are 3 elements to the project:

- Creation of a **Local Involvement Team** to support and develop Friends of Parks Groups
- Extension of the Council's existing **GroundForce pilot maintenance/ training scheme**
- Delivery of **physical improvements** on certain parks in line with the needs identified by local people.
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2.3 The Local Involvement Programme

2.3.1 The aims of this Team are:

- To establish new and support existing Friends and User Groups
- To develop the groups' skills and capacity in order that they may be more self sustaining beyond the end of the project.
- To develop skills and capacity within the existing Council Parks Development Team and Park Keeper Service, to enable the Local Involvement work to be continued beyond the end of the project.

- To link with other initiatives and generate match funding for parks and green spaces.

2.3.2 The first steps in delivering this element of the project will be to recruit 2 new staff to create the Local Involvement Team who will work alongside the existing Parks Development Team.

2.4 Scope of the Project

2.4.1 The involvement of the community in the form of a constituted Friends Group is fundamental to the sustainability of improvements to parks and green spaces. It is our experience that where there are such groups, there is greater local ownership and policing of the park, more people visiting the park on a regular basis and there is a stronger community led desire to protect and improve the park. It is therefore proposed that only parks and green spaces with such groups will be included in the project.

2.4.2 All of the sites, and associated groups, which were involved with the Fairshare Transforming Your Space (TYS) scheme will be included automatically within the project. In addition a number of new Friends Groups have been established since the TYS project and it is proposed to include these in Liveability as well.

2.4.3 Currently there are no established Friends Groups in the North Dudley Area. A priority task for the Local Involvement Team will be to stimulate and support the development of such groups that arise.

2.5 The Ground Force Project

2.5.1 Key to the sustainability of parks regeneration is the Council's ability to maintain the improved sites. The Ground Force element of our proposals will address this issue by exploring different ways to maintain parks and green spaces in the borough, thereby increasing the Council's capacity to deliver maintenance services in a more cost effective way. This proposal will build on the successful pilot currently underway on th Priory Park by extending the pilot to Netherton Park. The current pilot is developing new ways of maintaining local parks through the linkage of the Green Care workforce, the Council's Service responsible for the maintenance of green spaces throughout Dudley, alongside Future Skills Dudley (FSD), the training delivery arm of the DMBC Directorate of the Urban Environment.

2.5.2 The project will allow us to recruit and train around 50 local unemployed people per year onto a range of vocational and basic skills training programmes.

2.6 Physical Improvements Programme

2.6.1 Extensive public consultation was conducted as part of the TYS Project. This identified an inventory of improvements for each of the 11 participating parks

totalling approximately £4,500,000. Clearly for the extended list of Parks and Open Spaces which will be involved with Liveability this figure would significantly increase.

2.6.2 It would not be possible to implement all these works within the time-frame and funding limits of the Liveability Programme. In addition, the delivery of physical improvements is dependant upon the Local Involvement Project & Ground Force elements of the project attaining stated targets and the production of a masterplan for each park. However, it is important to re-emphasise the role that the respective Friends groups will play in identifying the priorities for expenditure within their park which may be as diverse as providing security fencing, installing sports and recreation facilities or renovating existing park features.

2.6.3 The exact details for the distribution of the capital funding will be developed and monitored by the project steering group, which will include key stakeholders such as the Primary Care Trust, the police, Groundwork Black Country and key officers from the Council.

2.7 Sustainability of the Project

2.7.1 The guidelines for Liveability require that all funding is distributed by March 2006 and it is proposed that the project will be substantially completed by this date.

2.7.2 Three of the staff in the Local Involvement Team will be employed on fixed term contracts which will be terminated at the completion of the project. It is a key part of the project that the existing parks development staff, the parks patrol staff and the friends groups will have acquired additional skills and training as part of the project. As a result the Friends groups will be more self-sustaining and require less support from the Council and the remaining staff will be better equipped to provide support over the long term.

2.7.3 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 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.

3.0 PROPOSAL

3.1 That the Area Committee welcomes the £3.4m Liveability Award to fund improvements to Parks and Open Spaces within the Borough.

4.0 FINANCE

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

5.0 LAW

5.1 The Council provide parks under the Public Health Act 1875 and the Open Spaces Act 1906. Some of the parks referred to in the report were conveyed to the Council by way of deed of gift and are subject to restrictive covenants regulating their use.

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

6.1 The Liveability project contains proposals which accord with the Council's equal opportunities policy. It is a specific objective of the project to ensure that membership of Friends Groups is representative of the local population.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 That the proposals in paragraph 3.0 be agreed.

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J. B. MILLAR – DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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