

Information/Discussion Paper

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11 May 2011

Green Space Strategy

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

1.1 This is part of the scheduled review process for the Council's Green Space Strategy.

2. Background and History

2.1 On 21st July 2009, Cabinet approved the Council's Green Space Strategy, which set out the aims and specific objectives for green spaces in Cheltenham.

2.2 An action plan was developed to implement the strategy, with review mechanisms to ensure that the milestones are met and adjustments made in line with the changing environment and changing priorities.

2.3 This report sets out the work undertaken by officers to meet the objectives and raises some points for discussion and consideration.

3. Summary of the Issues

3.1 The Green Space Strategy review focuses on three key areas:

(a) Milestones achieved in the delivery of the strategy

(b) Areas for review and consideration

(c) Priority to deliver new allotment plots for Cheltenham

3.2 The Green Space Strategy covers a 15-year period, with scope to review and amend main areas of focus and priority. Therefore, this discussion paper highlights to members the milestones reached but also the current priorities and issues, enabling member discussion and input.

4. Milestones Achieved in the Delivery of the Strategy

4.1 Overall, good progress has been made in several key areas. Appendix 1 gives an update on each section of the Action Plan.

4.2 Highlights include £750,000 raised in grants and £100,000 raised in in-kind contributions to fund dry stone walling on Leckhampton Hill. The Higher Level Stewardship agreement, which was signed in Spring 2011, will see over £60,000 in funding for the hill over the next 5 years.

- 4.3** Successful applications for Playbuilder Funding have brought in over £200,000 for new play facilities in five areas over the last two financial years. The new facilities are located in Springfields Park, Agg Gardner, Benhall Open Space, QEII Playing Field and St Peters Park.
- 4.4** Multi-use games areas (MUGAs) have now been installed in 6 locations (Grange Field, Agg Gardner, Springfields Park, Naunton Park, Clyde Crescent and Brizen Rec) and have proved to be very popular with young people. This was an age-group highlighted in the Green Space Strategy consultation.
- 4.5** The management of allotments was recognised in a 2010 survey, with 80% of council allotment tenants finding the Council's allotment service to be good or excellent. Over 200 additional allotments have been created by renovating derelict areas and dividing large plots.
- 4.6** Bio-diversity and climate change are being addressed through some changes to mowing regimes, development of local nature reserves and alternative and more sustainable forms of planting. Long grass and wildflower areas have been developed in Springfields Park, Naunton Park, Hatherley Park, Cox's Meadow and Jenner Gardens. These increase bio-diversity (both flora and fauna) and reduce the amount of mechanical mowing.
- 4.7** Special Events in parks and gardens have risen steadily over the last few years to the point where key town centre gardens are at capacity. The Parks Department also runs its own very successful Paws event and contributes to the Montpelier Fiesta.
- 4.8** Three Green Flags were awarded in 2010 for Council parks and a fourth application has been made for Springfields Park in 2011. Springfields Park won a Planting Places award (Sustainability South West) in February 2011 and Jenner Gardens won a Civic Award and a Heart of England Neighbourhood Award in 2009.
- 4.9** Parks and play areas have continued to have a very good safety record with weekly, monthly and annual inspections undertaken and quick response to reports of damage and vandalism. This has resulted in a very low accident rate and therefore no resulting claims from park users against the Council in the last two years.
- 4.10** Partnership working with Friends groups, Community Services Unit and Youth Offending Service has significantly increased. The number of volunteer hours spent on shrubbery maintenance, litter picking, painting of railings and facilities, tree and shrub planting and fund raising is currently at its highest level. This is partly due to the good working relationships developed between Council staff and volunteer groups. This has helped to maintain standards despite budget reductions.
- 4.11** Volunteer hours on allotments have also significantly increased. There are now 13 on-site volunteer wardens assisting in the management of allotment sites.

5. Areas for Review and Consideration

5.1 The Green Space Strategy was written at a time when there was a stronger government focus on measuring and bench-marking. Many items in the strategy relate to the development of benchmarking of services, quality standards, measuring against standards, performance management and performance review.

5.2 With reduced resources and the changing political environment, it follows that the

extent of these measuring activities be re-considered.

- 5.3 The Parks Development Team has developed performance indicators (appendix 2), which it believes are a meaningful and useful measure of activity and achievement and it would welcome any comments or feedback before these may be implemented.

6. Priority to Deliver New Allotments for Cheltenham

- 6.1 In line with the Allotment Strategy Action Plan, approved by Cabinet on 26th October 2010 and in accordance with the legislation relating to the statutory provision of allotments and the use of proceeds of sale of allotment land (Midwinter), there is now an urgent need to progress the identification of suitable land for allotments and the development of new sites.

- 6.2 This will require input and collaboration between various Council departments.

- 6.3 This project will require a sponsor who can bring together the various departments and ensure delivery in a short timescale of new allotment sites, in accordance with the methodology already approved.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 The committee are invited to acknowledge the progress made in achieving the objectives detailed in the Green Space Strategy and to discuss the issues identified.

- 7.2 An Environment Overview and Scrutiny working has been established and a follow-up meeting will be arranged to consider the provision of additional allotment land, in order to meet current demand, sustainable management practices and bio-diversity in green spaces.

Appendices

1. Updated action plans
2. Draft performance indicators for Green Space Management

Background Papers

1. Cabinet Report and appendices 21st July 2009
A Green Space Strategy for Cheltenham
2. Cabinet Report and appendices 26th October 2010: *Allotment Strategy Review and New Action Plan 2010-2015*
3. Overview and Scrutiny (Environment) Committee 15th September 2010: *Review of Allotment Strategy*
4. Overview and Scrutiny (Environment) Committee 11th June 2009: *Draft Green Space Strategy*

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Scrutiny Function

Environment