

Subject:	The Big Conversation – An Open Spaces Strategy for Brighton & Hove		
Date of Meeting:	17th January 2017		
Report of:	Executive Director of Economy, Environment & Culture		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 Parks and open spaces are very important to the economy, quality of life and environment of the city. However, against a background of significantly reduced financial resources available to the council, the future provision and maintenance of parks and open spaces has been reviewed. This review together with the results of over 3500 responses to “The Big Conversation” (the title of the public consultation on the future of parks and open spaces in the city) has enabled alternative models of funding and service delivery to be assessed to inform a proposed Open Spaces Strategy which is attached in Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The current situation is not unique to Brighton & Hove and the national context is provided in two documents available in the Members’ rooms, the Heritage Lottery Funds “The State of UK Public Parks” and “Rethinking Parks” from NESTA, an innovation foundation.
- 1.3 The public consultation to inform the new strategy has generated one of the highest levels of responses achieved by a public consultation exercise undertaken by the council. This high level of response reflects the importance of parks and open spaces to stakeholders and residents. A report on the consultation results is included in Appendix 2.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee approves the Open Spaces Strategy attached in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 That the Committee approves the priority actions listed in the Executive Summary included in the Open Spaces Strategy attached in Appendix 1.
- 2.3 That the Committee notes the results of “The Big Conversation” consultation for which a summary report is attached in Appendix 2.

- 2.4 That the Committee approves the Playing Pitch Strategy as circulated to Members and made available on the council's website for which the Executive Summary is attached in Appendix 3.
- 2.5 That the Committee notes the Play Area Report in Appendix 4.
- 2.6 That the Committee notes that further reports on the detailed implementation plan and timetable will be brought to future committees for Members consideration.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The initial development of the Open Spaces Strategy was approved by the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee in October 2014, with further steps for the strategy development approved by committee in March 2016.
- 3.2 Fundamental to the strategy development was the launch of The Big Conversation, in which responses were sought to a questionnaire that had been developed to seek views on the key issues facing the future of parks and open spaces in the city. In order to achieve the response rate the council extensively promoted the consultation exercise, including engagement with community groups across the city and in particular those groups directly active within parks.
- 3.3 The term 'Open Spaces' incorporates a wide range of land uses including:
 - Formal parks and gardens
 - Natural and semi natural green space
 - Small Grassed Areas
 - Churchyards and Cemeteries
 - Allotments
 - Outdoor sports facilities including playing pitches
 - Play areas
- 3.4 Brighton & Hove has an extensive network of open spaces infrastructure of over 50 parks, including heritage parks, seven green flag parks, playing pitches and amenity green space, plus the seafront, over 3,000 allotments, 50 play grounds, green verges and extensive areas of natural and semi-natural space forming part of the South Downs National Park. Most green spaces in the city are managed by Cityparks supported by a large number of stakeholders including many volunteers and Friends of Groups.
- 3.5 Maintaining high quality open spaces is vital to the city. Open spaces contribute to economic growth, urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal making the city a more attractive destination and a nicer place to live. They help improve the mental and physical wellbeing of the population. Green networks support biodiversity, including rare species of plants and animals and link to the city to the sea and the Downs. They play an important role in creating more resilience to extreme weather. The city is part of the wider Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere, recognising the unique nature of the local environment.

- 3.6 Proposals for the future management of open spaces in the city are set out in Strategy taking into account the results of The Big Conversation. Further information is also attached in Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 on parks trusts and parks foundations.
- 3.7 As well as the main strategy document there have also been specific research studies undertaken with regards to the playing pitches and play areas across the city.
- 3.8 A Playing Pitch Strategy for the city has been developed by a steering group including representatives of the main governing bodies of sports that use playing pitches (i.e. Football Association, England Cricket Board, England Hockey and Rugby Football Union) together with Sport England (who part funded the study) and other stakeholders. There are over 70 sites with a range of playing pitches across the city. An executive summary of this Strategy is attached in appendix 3. Within the context of diminishing council resources for the council, the stakeholders have acknowledged the importance of working together to provide the best possible playing pitches for the city. Sport England has complemented all the partners involved on the development of such a comprehensive and detailed Strategy for the city.
- 3.9 The council also commissioned a review of public play areas in the city by Groundworks (Appendix 4). Several years ago the delivery of the Playbuilder Project resulted in 26 of the city's play areas being upgraded and this review has considered the impact of aging play equipment. Again within the context of diminishing financial resources for the council, the report provides suggestions with regards to play provision across the city in the future.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The analysis and consideration of alternative options has been fundamental to the development of the Open Spaces Strategy.
- 4.2 A number of options have been identified in the Strategy in relation to potential delivery models and resources.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Big Conversation has underpinned the development of the Open Spaces Strategy. A report on the consultation results is attached as an appendix 2.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The value of parks and open spaces to residents and visitors is well recognised. However, diminishing financial resources for the council combined with ageing infrastructure means that a new Open Spaces Strategy is essential to the future delivery of parks and open spaces in the city.

- 6.2 The new Open Spaces Strategy will establish an updated policy framework for the management of parks and open spaces, and explore alternative delivery options in relation this infrastructure at a time of reducing resources. The Strategy will be delivered through an implementation plan which will be brought to future committees for Members' consideration.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The cost of officer time and consultancy associated with developing the Open Spaces Strategy has been funded from existing Parks Projects revenue budgets within the City Environmental Management service.
- 7.2 The strategy will support actions to achieve future savings identified within the department 4-year Budget Strategy, relating to new delivery models of the parks service and to reduce sport and recreation subsidies. The recurring financial impact of the proposed savings will be incorporated in future years budgets as part of the budget setting process when information on the costs and incomes becomes more robust and can be accurately forecast.

Finance Officer Consulted: Steven Bedford

Date: 05/12/16

Legal Implications:

- 7.3 The Open Spaces Strategy will assist the council in focusing on the meeting its obligations in relation to the provision and management of Parks and Open Spaces. Some of the actions will require legal advice prior to implementation. For example, in relation to establishing a Parks Foundation. These implications will be addressed as appropriate in the follow up report to Committee, once the further work has been completed and the details of the proposals are clear.

Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert

Date: 20/12/16

Equalities Implications:

- 7.4 The importance of a wide range of parks and open spaces across the city to provide for the diverse local community and visitors to the city has underpinned the development of the new strategy.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.5 The city's parks and open spaces are of significant importance to the city's environmental and economic sustainability, and form a key element of the region's Biosphere. The strategy seeks to enhance the sustainability of these resources.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Open Spaces Strategy including Executive Summary
2. Summary report of Big Conversation results
3. Playing Pitch Strategy Executive Summary
4. Play Area Report
5. Delivery Models – Guide to establishing a new Parks Foundation or Trust
6. Establishing a new Parks Foundation – Bournemouth and Leeds comparisons

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. Playing Pitch Strategy
2. Heritage Lottery Fund – “The State of UK Public Parks”
3. NESTA – “Rethinking Parks”

Background Documents

1. Reports to the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee in October 2014 and March 2015.

