

Subject:	The Big Conversation – An Open Spaces Strategy for Brighton & Hove		
Date of Meeting:	15 March 2016		
Report of:	Acting Executive Director of Environment Development and Housing		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Jan Jonker	Tel: 29-4722
	Email:	jan.jonker@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Ward(s) affected:	All		

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

- 1.1 The city's parks and open spaces are critical to the economy, quality of life and the environment. In light of this reduced budget, future provision and maintenance of parks and open spaces needs to be reviewed and alternative models of funding and service delivery assessed and tested to inform a revised Parks & Open Spaces Strategy.
- 1.2 The challenge for the strategy will be to protect and enhance parks, and maximise environmental, economic and health benefits at a time of reducing resources.
- 1.3 Development of the Open Spaces Strategy was approved by Environment, Transport and Sustainability Committee in October 2014. This report sets out our progress since then and seeks approval for the next stages of the work

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the background to the strategy development.
- 2.2 That the Committee agrees the next steps in the strategy development with a draft strategy to be ready for consideration by this committee by October 2016.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The term 'Open Spaces' incorporates a wide range of land uses including:
 - Formal parks and gardens
 - Natural and semi natural green space
 - Amenity green space
 - Church yards
 - Allotments
 - Outdoor sports facilities

- Play areas
- 3.2 Brighton & Hove has an extensive network of open spaces infrastructure of over 50 parks, including heritage parks, seven green flag parks, playing fields 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 public spaces in the city are managed by City Parks supported by a large number of stakeholders including many volunteers and Friends of Groups.
- 3.3 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 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.
- 3.4 The existing Parks Strategy was adopted in 2006. Since then a lot of progress has been made, and key projects include:
- The formal designation of the South Downs National Park in 2010 the boundary of which extends far into the city.
 - The creation of the Biosphere Partnership of which Brighton & Hove is the lead partner.
 - Changes in practices to increase the amount of perennial planting both to improve biodiversity and reduce costs
 - Extending wildflower planting in to the city, in part through the Nature Improvement Area (NIA) project in partnership with the national park and funded through DEFRA and the introduction of sheep grazing
 - Implementing parking controls in Preston Park and East Brighton Park to improve the appearance and safety for park users with any surplus income ring-fenced to the park.
 - The delivery of the Playbuilder Project which resulted in 26 of the city's play areas being upgraded and the completion of four skateparks.
 - The delivery of The Level HLF funded project. The Level is one of the city's main parks and was highlighted in the previous strategy as being a priority in terms of investment need.
 - The adoption of the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study produced in line with Planning Policy Guidance 17 and adopted in 2008 which provides an assessment of the existing provision of outdoor space and sets high level recommendations for each typology and local open space standards.
 - The adoption of the Open Space Study Update 2011 further assessed the findings of the 2008 study and undertook an analysis of open space at both a sub area and ward level.
 - The adoption of the Allotment Strategy in March 2014
 - The commitment to progressing the Stanmer Project as a Council priority in partnership with the SDNPA.

Future Challenges and Opportunities

- 3.5 The service faces significant challenges in future. Current budgets are insufficient to maintain all existing parks and infrastructure to current standards. As an example, many playgrounds received a significant amount of investment over the last six years through external grant funding and s106 contributions. Much of this investment will come to the end of its life at similar times and existing budgets are insufficient to maintain all of these sites. Currently, the council is unable to make any significant investment in play areas without external funding. A similar situation applies to other facilities such as outdoor sport facilities and infrastructure such as paths, gates and fences. General maintenance funding is also expected to reduce over coming years affecting the amount and quality of horticultural displays.
- 3.6 The budget proposals for 2017/18 include reducing the subsidies to outdoor sports and allotments by £0.230m. Over the next year officers will work with sports clubs, and groups like the Allotment Federation to identify how these savings can be made whilst minimising the impact on the users of these services and facilities as far as possible.
- 3.7 If service budgets are reduced without service modernisation and finding alternative ways of working there will be a gradual erosion of parks and open spaces across the city. A strategic approach will enable clear priorities to be identified. It will also enable alternative funding and maintenance models to be explored. These could include things like:
- Business Improvement District Funding either as individual parks or clusters, e.g. Squares
 - Establishing a Parks Foundation; a separate body from the council aimed at fundraising e.g. legacy, crowdfunding
 - Establishing Park Management Charitable Trusts, not-for-profit organisations that secure external funding
 - Exploring the use of Enabling Developments: small scale developments that provide ring-fenced funding for park maintenance
 - Exploring ways of sports and leisure activities to be self-funding (e.g. bowls clubs, allotments, sports clubs and facilities – tennis, football, and cricket). Fees have been historically set at a rate to reflect the councils health and wellbeing objectives and it is recognised that most sports bookings do not recover the cost of provision
 - Exploring other avenues of funding – e.g. Public Health / NHS though recognising reduced budgets from these avenues, or EU funding such as, including Horizon 2020 and Interreg funding as the council's ability to subsidise these activities comes to an end.
 - Explore possibilities around corporate sponsorship such as naming rights and other corporate packages
- 3.8 While there is no single solution that will be suitable for all parks and open spaces, these options will be considered during the development of the strategy. Part of the Big Conversation will consider the viability of some of these options.
- 3.9 Research from Nesta demonstrates the potential of new models of delivery:

- After becoming a cooperative council, Lambeth is working to adopt a new relationship with citizens across all local services. Through the Cooperative Parks Programme, the council is offering local communities three levels of involvement in the management of parks and open spaces – remain under council management, through community-led groups or ‘cooperative management’. The Programme is promoting a stronger focus on value for money and transparency
- Potters Fields Park, Southwark is managed by the Potters Fields Park Management Trust, a not-for-profit organisation. Its aim is to manage and maintain the park for the public to enjoy. The park is leased for events and functions to generate funds of maintenance and to develop programmes which educate and engage. Consequently, it does not need any financing from public funds
- Wimbledon and Putney Commons are largely financed through a levy on the Boroughs of Wandsworth, Merton and Kingston, relevant to the number of Band D properties in each borough. This levy is passed on by way of an addition to the council tax on properties in the area
- Green Estate, Sheffield is a social enterprise formed out of a project to regenerate green spaces. Its stewardship model has increased engagement of local people in the neighbourhood and created a entrepreneurial opportunities for funding by mixing commercial sales and services with social and environmental activities

3.10 Some progress on alternative ways of working has already been made. Examples include:

- St Peters Cricket club has taken on a lease for the facility in Preston Park and responsibility for maintenance
- The number of bowls clubs has been rationalised and a number of clubs have taken responsibility for some of their greens.
- Future options for tennis provision are being discussed with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and tennis users.
- Early discussions are underway with individuals and organisations interested in taking over management of some outdoor sports facilities
- British Cycling has made a significant capital contribution to the Preston Park Cycle track and the hire cost of the Preston Park cycle track has been brought in line with that of similar facilities elsewhere to cover day to day maintenance
- The RFU and Hove Rugby Club have contributed to the resurfacing of the pitches in Hove and are leading on delivery of this work. Once completed it will allow the pitches to be used more intensively.
- Alternative management models for Stanmer Park are being explored including establishment of a ring fenced budget to deliver the maintenance plan.
- The Allotment Strategy was co-produced with the Allotment Federation with support from the Food Partnership and all three organisations are working together with an open book approach to identify better ways of working.

- 3.11 To inform the strategy a review of play areas is being completed and a sub strategy for outdoor sports pitches is being produced with Sport England who have contributed to the funding of the document. External support to help compile the strategy is being procured. The brief includes reviewing all relevant baseline information, reviewing and assessing the viability of different operating models, with business plans and creating a detailed action plan to implement the strategy.
- 3.12 The ambition is to co-produce the strategy with key partners and stakeholders and its development will be subject to extensive consultation and engagement led by council officers. The Project cuts across directorates as the strategy impacts the economy, the environment and public health.

4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 4.1 As set out in the body of this report, the quality and quantity of open space has a significant impact across many aspects of the city, from the economy to public health. Alternative ways of providing services involve coproducing services and working closely with stakeholders who may lead on management of some sites.
- 4.2 For the strategy to be effective it needs buy in across the council and across external partners and stakeholders. The project is being managed through the Corporate Modernisation Board to secure this wider support. It will also be subject to wide scale communication and engagement. A high level communication plan is set out as Appendix 1.

5 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 Much of the baseline data for the Strategy already exists and progress has been made gathering further evidence. The review of play areas is being completed and the outdoor playing pitches strategy will be completed in the summer. The key next stages of work are:
- March 2016 Appointment of consultants to support final stages of strategy development
 - Preparation of draft strategy and action plan
 - Delivery of consultation and engagement plan.
- 5.2 It is anticipated that a draft strategy will be available in October 2016, with final adoption early in 2017. Exploration of alternative delivery options is already underway and will be progressed in parallel with the development of the strategy. Examples include:
- Dialogue with the Allotment Federation to coproduce options to reduce subsidies
 - Discussions with interested parties around leases for facilities, similar to the approach adopted with St Peters Cricket Club in Preston Park
 - Review of management arrangements for Stanmer Park
- 5.3 This work will continue alongside the strategy and will inform the final version with reports back to members at the appropriate times.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Parks and open spaces are critical to the economy, health and sustainability of the city as well as being key to the UNESCO Biosphere Designation. Existing resources are insufficient to maintain all existing infrastructure, a situation that is likely to get worse as the infrastructure ages and budgets reduce.
- 6.2 The Open Spaces Strategy will establish an updated policy framework for the management of parks and open spaces, and explore alternative delivery options to protect and enhance this infrastructure at a time of reducing resources. The strategy will be delivered through a detailed action plan appended to the strategy.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5 The cost of officer time and consultancy associated to developing an Open Spaces Strategy will be funded from the existing Parks Projects revenue budgets in the current (2015/16) and next financial year (2016/17).

It is anticipated that the strategy will support actions to achieve future savings proposals of £0.230m relating to sports and recreation subsidies, and £0.200m relating new delivery models of parks services. 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 income becomes more robust and can be accurately forecast.

It is anticipated that the strategy will assist in making funding applications for external resources and the development of funding bids to deliver the identified actions.

Finance Officer Consulted: Steven Bedford

Date: 11/02/16

Legal Implications:

- 7.1 The proposed Strategy will assist the Council in focusing on and meeting its obligations in relation to the provision and management of Parks and Open Spaces.

Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert

Date: 2/3/2016

Equalities Implications:

- 7.2 The strategy will be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA will be completed early on to inform the consultation and engagement process.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.3 The city's parks and open spaces are critical to the city's environmental and economic sustainability, and form a key element of the region's Biosphere. The strategy will seek to enhance the sustainability of these resources.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. None

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. None

Background Documents

1. None

