

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 1 OCTOBER 2013

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH, HOUSING AND
COMMUNITY SUPPORT

REVIEW OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACES STRATEGY

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report concludes the process to review the new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2013 – 2018. This replaces the previous strategy following a comprehensive review and update which explores its effectiveness and revises its direction of travel for the next five years.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCIL: That:

(A)	the Parks & Open Spaces Strategy 2013 – 2018 is formally adopted, and
(B)	the draft High Level Action Plan is agreed.

1.0 Background

1.1 The original Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2007-2012 formed the policy framework under which Parks Management Plans for individual sites have been developed and consulted upon. Following an extensive consultation process it defined the key objectives relating to the management and development of the Council's open spaces.

1.2 The original strategy was first presented to the (former) Policy Development Scrutiny Committee for comment and consideration on 20 March 2007. Subsequently the Strategy was open to public consultation during July 2007 prior to its adoption.

- 1.3 Results and achievements against the previous strategy were reported to the Environment Scrutiny on 13 September 2011 and it was agreed that it should be reviewed and an updated draft that was appropriate for the next 5 years brought forward.
- 1.4 Officers have consulted internally with those departments which affect the delivery of the revised strategy and who have shared interests in the outcomes.
- 1.5 The Draft Strategy following approval was sent out to public consultation on 5 March 2013. It was published on the Councils' web site and circulated by email to external stakeholders including "Friends of" groups for consideration and comment. This part of the consultation process was open for a period of 6 weeks.
- 1.6 Residents were asked to focus their feedback on three main areas:
- Does the strategy cover the key areas relating to open spaces that they feel are important?
 - Is the strategy sufficiently inclusive?
 - Are the objectives appropriate to meet the identified needs?

2.0 Report

- 2.1 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2013 - 2018 has been reviewed and developed to set out the policy framework for the parks and open spaces owned and managed by East Herts Council for the next five years. Green spaces represent one of the things that are best about East Herts and are consistently seen as important by our customers. The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that parks and open spaces, as a valuable natural resource, are managed and developed in a responsible and effective way.
- 2.2 The Strategy sets out aims and objectives within a framework that considers:
- The wider context
 - The vision for parks and open spaces provision
 - An overview of existing provision in East Herts
 - What the strategy aiming to achieve

- Our commitment

2.3 The document recognises that parks and open spaces serve different needs and groups and aims to deliver quality and accessible services described in the context of:

- Parks for people
- Parks for recreation and enjoyment
- Parks for wildlife, conservation and heritage

2.4 The resultant strategy considers the needs of our customers and how the asset of open space can deliver an important contribution to enhancing health and wellbeing. This aspiration has been realised in a number of ways during the previous 5 year plan. Our experience from delivering a high standard of maintenance along with successive improvements shapes the ongoing strategy. Our parks are under various pressures relating for example to the need for us to:

- protect their natural beauty
- conserve their importance for wildlife and the environment
- provide outlets for leisure and play
- control anti social behaviour and
- rise to the challenge of the current economic climate

The Strategy considers these and other pressures and provides a balanced way forward for the next five years.

2.5 See **Essential Reference paper 'B'** for the final version of the revised Parks & Open Spaces Strategy 2013 – 2018.

2.6 The Strategy was open to a six week public consultation from 25 March to 6 May 2013. It was made available on the council's website with the opportunity to provide feedback / comment via an online survey questionnaire. The public consultation on the Strategy was publicised in the press and in Link. Hard copies were sent to all Parish and Town Councils, and were made available at council offices and local libraries.

2.7 In addition, the Council consulted directly with 30 external stakeholders, 42 other groups and individuals who it was felt might be particularly interested in Strategy.

2.8 The consultation process attracted comments from a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. Internally these included our Engineers, Leisure Services, Environmental Health, Planning Policy and Community Safety. Externally encouraging and constructive comments were received from the Canal and River Trust, the Countryside Management Service, Sport England, The Environment Agency and the County Council's Historic Environment Unit.

2.9 The online public survey questionnaire attracted twelve additional responses. A summary of the results are as follows.

- Q1. Do you agree with the Draft Strategy?
Yes 80.0% No 20.0%
- Q2. Do you agree with the Objectives outlined in the Draft Strategy under the headings 5.3 - Parks for people?
Yes 88.9% No 11.1%
- Q3. Do you agree with the Objectives outlined in the Draft Strategy under the headings 5.4 - Parks for recreation?
Yes 90.0% No 10.0%
- Q4. Do you agree with the Objectives outlined in the Draft Strategy under the headings 5.5 - Parks for wildlife, conservation and heritage?
Yes 90.0% No 10.0%
- Q5. Are there any broad issues with our parks and open spaces that you think we have not covered in our Draft Strategy?
Yes 81.8% * No 18.2%

2.10 *The 'yes' respondents to question 5 submitted a wide range of comments and specific amendments to the Strategy. These and other consultation responses received have been considered and used to amend the Strategy document. **Essential Reference Paper 'C'** provides a full summary of all the comments / feedback received and how these have been used to shape the final version of the Strategy.

2.11 Following on from the development of the Parks & Open Spaces Strategy 2013 – 2018, officers have created a draft High Level

Action Plan - see **Essential Reference Paper 'D'**. Detailed delivery of this will be monitored by the Environment Scrutiny Committee.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

Report to Policy Development Scrutiny Committee - Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and Green Flag Award accreditation - 20 March 2007
<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=3363> Item 8

Report to Executive - Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2007 and status report on current projects - 4 September 2007
<http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/CeListDocuments.aspx?Committeed=119&MeetingId=518&DF=04%2f09%2f2007&Ver=2> Item 8

Report to Environment Scrutiny Committee - Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme – Progress Report – 13 September 2011
<http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=154&MId=1404&Ver=4> Item 282

Report to Environment Scrutiny Committee – Review of Parks & Open Spaces Strategy – 26 February 2013
<http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=154&MId=2080&Ver=4> Item 615

Report to Executive – Draft Parks & Open Spaces Strategy – 5 March 2013
<http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=119&MId=2121&Ver=4> Item 645

Contact Member: Linda Haysey – Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support
linda.haysey@eastherts.gov.uk

Contact Officer: Cliff Cardoza – Head of Environmental Services
1698
cliff.cardoza@eastherts.gov.uk

Report Author:

Ian Sharratt – Environment Manager – Open
Spaces

ian.sharratt@eastherts.gov.uk