

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10 JUNE 2008

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,  
LEISURE AND CULTURE

9. PROGRESS REPORT ON PARKS AND OPEN SPACES DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAMME

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

'D' RECOMMENDATION - that (A) the progress of the projects detailed within the Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme Report be noted;

(B) the progress of the Southern Country Park Green Flag Award bid be considered; and

(C) the selection of The Ridgeway Open Space, Hertford as the next Green Flag Bid in 2008/2009 be confirmed.

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1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 This report provides an update on the progress of projects identified in the high level action plan and undertaken as part of the Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme; clarifies the current status of the Green Flag Award bid for Southern Country Park in Bishop's Stortford; and recommend the selection of The Ridgeway open space in Hertford as the second site to be put forward to bid for a Green Flag Award.

2.0 Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/Objectives

2.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities / objectives:

**Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities**

*Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.*

## **Caring about what's built and where**

*Care for and improve our natural and built environment.*

## **Shaping now, shaping the future**

*Safeguard and enhance our unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensuring sustainable, economic and social opportunities including the continuation of effective development control and other measures.*

## **Leading the way, working together**

*Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.*

### 3.0 Background

- 3.1 Currently East Herts Council owns and maintains approximately 120 public open spaces of all kinds, including 40 main parks and 50 play areas. These have seen significant improvement over the last few years on a site by site basis as part of the ongoing Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme.
- 3.2 On 4 September 2007 the Executive approved the High Level Action Plan and status report on current projects, submitted as part of the ongoing Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme, part of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2007 – 2012.
- 3.3 This report provides an update on progress with the Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme.
- 3.4 On 20 March 2007 the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee approved the selection of Southern Country Park in Bishop's Stortford as the first of East Herts Council's parks and open spaces to be put forward for a Green Flag Award.
- 3.5 The report also considered both the Ridgeway and Hartham Common for submission for the Green Flag Award and recommended that The Ridgeway be put forward as the second site to bid for the Green Flag in 2008. However, the Committee recommended that a progress report on Southern Country Park be considered before selecting the second site to be put forward.

#### 4.0 Report

4.1 Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme Report - Current progress on the actions outlined in the high level action plan are detailed in the table at Appendix B on page 29.

4.2 Parks and Open Spaces Audit 2008 – Work is currently underway to audit the major Council owned and managed parks and open spaces in District. The results from this comprehensive audit will be used to identify priority areas for improvement. The information will also help with any future Green Flag bids.

4.3 Play Area Audit 2008 – Work is currently underway to re-fresh the audit of all Council owned play areas in the District following the framework used successfully for the 2007 Play Area Audit, with a particular focus on sites that have changed or were recently adopted. The four newly constructed and recently adopted sites are:

- Millmead Way, Hertford – two new play areas adopted from the adjacent residential site developers.
- Southern Country Park, Bishop's Stortford – newly constructed older children's play area.
- Turners Crescent, Bishop's Stortford – newly constructed younger children's play area.

4.4 The results obtained from this audit review will be used to identify the individual play areas that would benefit in play value terms from improvement. This work directly feeds into the 2008 Play Area Development Programme.

4.5 Following the successful 2007 Play Area Audit and the implementation of the 2007 Play Area Development Programme, the following improvements have been made:

- installed a new teenage play area next to the skate park in Hartham Common, with the first climbing boulder in East Herts. This provides play for a wider range of teenagers.
- built a new play area for younger children at Turner's Crescent, Bishop's Stortford
- constructed a challenging and exciting play area for older children in Southern Country Park, with the first twin cable slide in the district
- completely revamped Foxholes Avenue play area in Hertford
- completely revamped Edens Mount play area in Sawbridgeworth

- in partnership with South Anglia Housing Association
  - added new play equipment in another seven play areas to increase play value.
- 4.6 Southern Country Park Green Flag Award Progress Report - In order to achieve this prestigious award, the Council submitted an application in January 2008. The Council's bid included a detailed five year management plan, called the Southern Country Park Greenspace Action Plan 2008 -2013.
- 4.7 The application, Greenspace Action Plan and the park were judged by a panel of Green Flag Judges on 22 May 2008 and the outcome will be announced in July 2008. If successful, Southern Country Park will be eligible to fly the "Green Flag" for one year, after which the Council must re-apply annually to retain the award.
- 4.8 The production of this detailed five year plan has enabled the Council to identify and attract external funding for many significant improvements within Southern Country Park. An operational Action Plan Matrix, combined with easy to read maps, has been produced to enable everyone to see exactly when and where the individual improvements will be taking place.
- 4.9 The Greenspace Action Plan will enhance the natural assets of the park and raise the standard from good to excellent over the next five years.
- 4.10 The final version of the Southern Country Park Green Space Action Plan 2008 -2013 and Appendices, Operational Action Matrix and Management Plan Maps are available for public viewing on the Council's website [www.eastherts.gov.uk](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk) and will be reviewed annually.
- 4.11 Future Green Flag Bids – In addition to providing a framework for park and open space development, Green Flag Status is also part of the Council's commitment to achieving Hertfordshire wide Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets. Successful achievement of which will attract additional Government funding.
- 4.12 It is proposed that a bid for Green Flag Status at a second open space should be submitted in 2008/09.
- 4.13 Two options were presented for consideration by Members in March 2007. These were Hartham Common and The Ridgeway open

space, Hertford. The Parks and Open Spaces Team and the Countryside Management Service have considered which of these two open spaces might be successful:

- 4.14 The Ridgeway open space has been transformed over the last two years from an unwelcoming, tired looking space to a vibrant and respected park. The combination of the thorough consultation process and the investment that the council have made to provide an attractive and functional meeting space for all residents is a sound basis upon which to develop a management plan.
- 4.15 Local Members have helped to build support for the development of the open space and to ensure that residents continue to be involved in looking after it. The next stage, to develop and improve the woodland area and link it with good access from the more formal open space, will ensure that the Council is able to secure a Green Flag Award.
- 4.16 The community garden that was requested by residents will be created within the large woodland area to compliment the conservation work that will develop this area into an ecologically diverse habitat for wildlife. This reclaimed space might also provide a natural element of play in addition to the new Multi Use Games Area and become an area for all residents to enjoy.
- 4.17 Much of the work to improve the woodland can be achieved relatively easily with help from the Groundworks Trust. Countryside Management Service has advised that this is the type of project that should generate sufficient external funding to cover most of the work.
- 4.18 In management and resource terms, the park can be brought up to Green Flag standard in a relatively short period. A fairly simple management plan can be drawn up based on the template from Southern Country Park to guide development and to outline the success of the site to date.
- 4.19 The key elements to a successful park of this size are to provide a welcoming, well used facility that meets the needs of the community and that optimises its natural assets. The Green Flag concept focuses on engaging the community in open space development and in making sure that they are safe and well maintained places that all can enjoy. The Ridgeway open space has been developed with this in mind and is close to reaching the required standard.

- 4.20 Hartham Common, although already providing an excellent facility for the public, requires a far more complex process to develop a well considered and dynamic management plan for the future.
- 4.21 The park contains a complex range of habitats from woodland to wetland that can be developed to create an excellent natural resource to compliment a park currently recognised primarily for its leisure facilities. This will involve extensive consultation with the Environment Agency and Natural England. With careful planning the management plan should generate sufficient grant funding to achieve this aim to a high standard.
- 4.22 One of the proposals for example is to alter the flow of the river in places to create wetland areas complete with boardwalks to explore a completely new habitat in the park. The Environment Agency has indicated their interest in this and other major improvements.
- 4.23 The recent investment by the Council to improve the play facilities could be enhanced further and with the right package of improvements may also attract additional external funding.
- 4.24 Work is underway to scope these elements of the park's development and to consider the best ways in which to consult with the public on this important project. More basic improvements are also under way to improve some of the infrastructure such as signage, seating and access.
- 4.25 It would be difficult to deliver a comprehensive and effective management plan and to carry out the necessary initial improvements on the ground in time for the next Green Flag Award application deadline.
- 4.26 Therefore, it is proposed that in order to deliver the best possible improvements to the parks in the given timeframe that The Ridgeway open space is submitted for Green Flag for the 2008-09 judging and that work continues to prepare Hartham Common for submission in 2009-10.

## 5.0 Consultation

- 5.1 There are no consultation issues directly relevant to this decision aside from the work carried out to develop the various actions and

audits referred to within the report, which have been reported previously.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 None.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 Programmed development works contained within this report will be funded from within existing budgets. The Council and Countryside Management Service will work together to attract external funding where available.

8.0 Human Resource Implications

8.1 None.

9.0 Risk Management Implications

9.1 None.

Background Papers

Report to Policy Development Scrutiny Committee – 20 March 2007

Report to Executive – 4 September 2007

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