

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3 MARCH 2009

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,
LEISURE AND CULTURE

6. PROGRESS REPORT ON PARKS AND OPEN SPACES DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMME

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

'D' RECOMMENDATION - that (A) the progress with the Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme be noted; and

(B) the Committee be requested to comment on the timetable for developing the main open spaces.

1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 Members have requested that regular updates are provided on progress with the development of the Council's parks and open spaces. A report was presented to Committee in June 2008 describing the parks planning process to improve parks and open spaces across the district. This report presents the programme recommending the order in which management plans should be prepared and includes a brief insight into the rationale behind proposals.

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 within the Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme.

4.0 Report

4.1 Management Plans play a crucial role in the development of the Council's open spaces. They provide a framework to deliver improvements by ensuring that all the important steps are taken to assess each site and carry out appropriate consultation. They can be designed to describe in simple terms what the targets are for a site and what work is necessary to optimise potential or can be much more complex documents that fully assess and prescribe the precise actions required for a park to succeed. Each plan will be tailor made according to the needs of the site and the expectations of those that use it.

4.2 Factors in determining the order in which management plans will be created for the main open spaces across the district include:

- Size of open space.
- Open space and play audits results.
- Current condition.

- Health and Safety requirements.
 - Level of need and problems that require attention.
 - Potential for development.
 - Estimated number of visitors.
 - An awareness of a fair spread of development work across the District.
- 4.3 The table below sets out the proposed programme for the development of management plans for the major and most significant parks and open spaces in the district in the order in which management plans are to be produced. The “Percentage Audit Score” column represents the priority for improvement of the site determined by the Parks and Open Spaces Audit. Scores are based upon an analysis against a range of criteria which allows one park to be compared with another. Details of criteria used are contained in the Report to Executive on 4 December 2007.
- 4.4 Further information on the first seven open spaces to have management plans is detailed after the table to provide some perspective on how the ongoing process to deliver and use these plans is developing. These include some open spaces that already have management plans that require refreshing.
- 4.5 Developing management plans in consultation with residents and stakeholders is resource intensive and it is not practicable to have a full plan for every open space. Smaller spaces, not detailed in the table will have a ‘generic’ management plan.
- 4.6 The dates shown in the table are for the completion of the management plan for that site. This does not mean that there will be no work on the site until that date. Ongoing maintenance and, where appropriate, improvements will continue. It should also be noted that the development and improvement of play sites, whether or not they are located at a park, are addressed through a separate audit programme, as detailed in the report to Executive on 4 September 2007.
- 4.7 Additional information, including the management plan and operational action matrix and maps for the first open space in to achieve Green Flag status, Southern Country Park, can be found in the Parks & Open Spaces section of the Council’s website www.eastherts.gov.uk
- 4.8 Members are reminded that The Ridgeway Local Park was chosen as the second open space to be focussed upon as it met the criteria required for the Local Area Award targets to deliver successful

Green Flag parks across the County. This was outlined in a report to this Committee on 10 June 2008.

Name of Open Space:	Town:	% Audit Score	Open Space Size	Brief site description	Date for management Plan
Southern Country Park	Bishop's Stortford	95	LARGE	See details following table	Completed 2008
The Ridgeway	Hertford	82	MEDIUM	Fairly large local park, equipped play area, MUGA, recently reclaimed woodland, current Green Flag application site.	Completed 2009
Hartham Common	Hertford	89	LARGE	See details following table	2009/ 2010
Grange Paddocks / Red, White & Blue	Bishop's Stortford	86	LARGE	See details following table	2009/ 2010
Pishiobury Park	Sawbridge -worth	80	LARGE	See details following table	2009/ 2010
The Castle / Castle Gardens	Hertford	95	MEDIUM	See details following table	2010
Bishop's Stortford Castle Gardens	Bishop's Stortford	73	MEDIUM	See details following table	2010
King George V Recreation Ground	Ware	73	LARGE	Well used local park, equipped play area, new MUGA, some peripheral planting	2010
Bishop's Park	Bishop's Stortford	78	LARGE	Informal playing fields, goal wall, equipped play area and young woodland.	2011
Buryfields Open Space	Ware	82	LARGE	Town park, some ornamental planting, local events.	2011
Foxholes Open Space	Hertford	78	LARGE	Well used naturalised spaces for dog walking and informal play, woodland and open spaces.	2011
Northern Parkland	Bishop's Stortford	76	LARGE	Large busy urban park, informal sports, well	2011

				equipped play area, woodland copses and naturalised grassland /mounds	
Presdales/ Postwood Open Space	Ware	70	LARGE	Large football area, well used for dog walking, car park. Large well visited and mature woodland.	2012
Lower Park Crescent / Thorley Wedge	Bishop's Stortford	71	LARGE	Large busy park, range of open spaces, play areas, youth shelter, woodland and streams.	2012
Watermill Lane Open Space	Hertford	58	MEDIUM	Fairly large local space, equipped play area, kickabout, contoured woodland.	2012
Millmead Open Space / Beane Road	Hertford	67	LARGE	Newly created local park, riverside, small woodland area and small equipped play areas.	2012
The Bourne Open Space	Ware	63	LARGE	Well used fairly large open space with stream and woodlands.	2012
Sadlers Farm Open Space, Farm Close	Hertford	76	MEDIUM	Naturalised local space, informal kickabout, rambling contours with copped areas.	2012
Demonfort Rise Open Space	Ware	71	LARGE	Large well used open space	2012
Kingsmead Open Space	Ware	69	LARGE	Large open space with football pitches (Linked to Hartham Common)	2012
Parsonage Lane	Bishop's Stortford	67	LARGE	Large grassed open space with equipped play area and goal post for kickabouts.	2012
Waytemore Road	Bishop's Stortford	66	LARGE	Local open space, equipped play area, some ornamental planting.	2012
Sacombe Road Open Space	Hertford	66	MEDIUM	Fairly large open space with equipped play area and woodland edges.	2012
Lower Bourne Gardens Open Space	Ware	65	MEDIUM	Fairly large local park with equipped play area and woodland edges.	2012
Vantorts	Sawbridge	69	SMALL	Small local park,	2012

Close	worth			equipped play area and fenced hard surface	
Beacon Road Open Space	Ware	56	MEDIUM	Small local space with equipped play area.	2012
Quaker Burial Ground, Kybes Lane	Ware	-	SMALL	Historically important but small urban space, seating area and some ornamental planting.	2012
Brookside Open Space	Hertford	64	SMALL	Small local space, woodland edges.	2013
Northolt Avenue	Bishop's Stortford	56	MEDIUM	Local open space with equipped play area.	2013
Kingham Road Open Space	Ware	50	LARGE	Well used large open space.	2013
Cannons Close	Bishop's Stortford	49	MEDIUM	Local open space with equipped play area.	2013
Garden Square, St Michael's Mead	Bishop's Stortford	-	SMALL	Small formal ornamental local space.	2013
Carpenter's, St Michael's Mead	Bishop's Stortford	-	SMALL	Small local space with some ornamental planting	2013
Chapelfields Open Space	Stanstead Abbots	44	SMALL	Small local space with equipped play area.	2014
Ward Crescent	Bishop's Stortford	65	SMALL	Equipped play area enclosing open space well used by residents.	2014
The Pines	Hertford	-	SMALL	Sloping mature woodland with potential access links across adjacent County Council woodland.	2014
Balls Wood extension	Hertford Heath	-	SMALL	Naturalised grassland and woodland	2014

Southern Country Park

4.9 Following the award of the Green Flag last year, the Council celebrated the park's success with a 'Walk in the Park' event in August. It provided an opportunity to thank everyone who helped with the project and the event attracted over 250 visitors. There were guided conservation and health walks, refreshments and a

range of displays that provided an insight into what we do and encouraged support for a 'Friends of the Park' Group. It was featured in the local media as a resounding success.

4.10 The Council has been successful in attracting significant levels of external funding in the development of the park and has delivered all planned actions along with some interesting new ones. Officers, working together with partners, are well on the way to meeting the challenge of securing external funding to deliver the next phase of improvements.

4.11 Some of the main achievements this year are:

- Recruited over 20 volunteers.
- Run 3 health walks and trained up volunteer leaders.
- Organised 2 hedge laying tasks with Friends volunteers.
- Improved the mowing regime.
- Removed invasive weeds.
- Cleaned up more woodland.
- Planted trees.
- Introduced Hebridean sheep.
- Improved footpath surfacing.
- Completed the new play area.
- Installed kissing gates to restrict motorcycles.
- Created a dog-free area.
- Installed Byelaw signs.
- Replaced the deep water signs.
- Worked extensively on promoting and marketing the park.

4.12 An orienteering event is planned to take place during 'Love Parks Week' at the end of July and to start some "Meet what you eat" sessions with our grazing animals. Our next key target is to develop a partnership with a local angling club to improve the management of fishing at the site.

Ridgeway Local Park

4.13 The Ridgeway Local Park whilst being a focal open space for the estate and popular with residents has been undergoing a major transformation. It has been dramatically improved over the last three years as part of a wider project to deliver a new community centre. It had been an old fashioned recreation ground at the edge of the estate since the 1950s and residents felt it to be tired and unwelcoming.

- 4.14 The park now really does meet the needs of local residents. It could be described as “deceptively spacious” and provides valuable transition from the built environment to a natural space.
- 4.15 Key improvements to date have been to remove the old chainlink fencing, create a new landscape scheme, install new paths in the formal areas, provide a new MUGA and enhance the existing play area.
- 4.16 The principal objectives to be addressed in the first year of the management plan are to:
- Improve signage and information to visitors.
 - Prepare design and construction plans for an attractive access link between the formal and natural areas.
 - Improve the aesthetic finish of the existing footpaths
 - Clear the natural area of debris and problematic vegetation
 - Expand on the good relationship with residents by forming a Friends Group.
- 4.17 Other key objectives are to:
- Create an attractive piece of signpost artwork.
 - Develop woodland management.
 - Further improve public interaction with the parks’ wildlife.
 - Enhance the site with natural play.
 - Install a central viewing platform.

Hartham Common

- 4.18 This is a Large Destination Park with a wide range of habitats including woodland, wetland, river and grassland. The key features that the park can currently boast are a Leisure Centre, Skate Park, teenage and children’s play area, trim trail, football pitches, Bowling Green and tennis courts.
- 4.19 A full management plan is required to assess and prioritise what will be needed to develop the park to Green Flag standard. A complex consultation process will be arranged to seek guidance and support from local residents, The Environment Agency, The Town Council, The Civic Society, local businesses, English Nature, The Big Lottery, The Forestry Commission, The Wildlife Trust and a range of other local groups.

- 4.20 Some of the main considerations relating to the potential development of the park will be to meet the needs of a wide range of visitors, to ensure access is appropriate for all users, to optimise the potential ecological significance of the site, to connect with the parks historical past and to strengthen events management.
- 4.21 Work has been started to scope the initial access needs of the park and its ecological potential. The draft plan will be published to submit to the Civic Trust through the Green Flag Application process by January 2010.

Grange Paddocks and Red, White and Blue

- 4.22 This large park is known perhaps principally for its sports facilities, including the Leisure Centre and football pitches. It also though provides a well used pedestrian link from the town centre park up through to an environmentally significant open space and to the North West area of Bishop's Stortford that is potentially due for residential growth.
- 4.23 An ecologically based assessment has been completed with the assistance of Countryside Management Service (CMS) to capture many of the potential development opportunities for the park. The Red, White and Blue area to the north of the park has a Countryside Stewardship Scheme already in place. The existing plans are to be expanded to consider a wide variety of projects that local people may be keen to see developed. For instance, the reclamation of the adjacent old town tip, the introduction of a teenage play space, the improvement of the riverside habitats and a cycle path linking the various spaces that makes up the overall parkland.
- 4.24 An overall management plan that explores the potential developments and outlines the consultation process that will be necessary to deliver this will be published by December 2009. The Council will be working closely with its new Leisure Services contractor, Sport and Leisure Management Ltd on the development of the site.

Pishiobury Park

- 4.25 The existing 5 year management plan has now expired. A Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was commissioned in 2007 and this forms the basis for the revised management plan. The park's historical past features strongly in the decisions on how it

should be managed for the future. Its significance in providing leisure opportunities to a wide range of visitors and its ecological value are also crucial in the decisions determining how it is to be managed.

- 4.26 CMS is currently assisting to complete the action plan and prepare a map based document that will support the initial LCA and provide a tool to develop a 'Friends of Group'. This revised plan will be made available to the public by August 2009.

Hertford Castle Grounds

- 4.27 This is an important town centre park that will require an extensive consultation process to capture all of the potential development opportunities that it holds.
- 4.28 Key issues to explore; river erosion, Ashley Webb Shelter, Ice House, anti social behaviour, event management, historical importance, bridges, access and working closely with the Town Council to agree a shared vision for the park.

Bishop's Stortford Castle Grounds

- 4.29 This is an important town centre park that will require an extensive consultation process to capture all of the potential development opportunities that it holds.
- 4.30 The key features that it currently offers are a historically significant castle and mound, a river, a high profile water causeway, tennis courts, a war memorial and extensive ornamental plantings. Some of the challenges involved in delivering a successful management plan for this park are to identify and bring together some of the diverse issues that affect it. These include its historical importance, conservation of the structural and natural features, anti social behaviour, access, its relationship with the adjacent Town Council Park and how local people would like to be able to use it.

5.0 Consultation

- 5.1 The Parks and Open Spaces team has worked closely with various departments across the Council in determining the strategy to improve the Council's parks and open spaces, including Community Development, Leisure Services, Community Safety, Environmental Health, Property Services and Planning and Building Control. The Service is working directly with the Countryside Management

Service and also considers the views of other key stakeholders such as County Youth Services, Groundworks Hertfordshire and the Town and Parish Councils. Public and stakeholder consultation will be a key element in the development of future management plans.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 None.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 There are no financial implications of this report. Improvement works 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 Executive – 1 July 2008

Report to Environment Scrutiny Committee – 10 June 2008

Report to Executive – 4 September 2007

Report to Policy Development Scrutiny Committee – 20 March 2007

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