

# CABINET

## Happy Mount Park – Master Plan 2015-2025 17<sup>th</sup> February 2015

### Report of Chief Officer (Environment)

| PURPOSE OF REPORT   |                 |                  |                              |  |
|---|-----------------|------------------|------------------------------|--|
| To seek approval for the Happy Mount Park Master Plan 2015-2025 |                 |                  |                              |  |
| Key Decision  | X               | Non-Key Decision | Referral from Cabinet Member |  |
| Date of notice of forthcoming key decision                      | 19 January 2015 |                  |                              |  |
| This report is public   |                 |                  |                              |  |

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) To approve the new master plan for Happy Mount Park 2015-2025.
- (2) To delegate decisions relating to the delivery of the master plan to Chief Officer (Environment), in line with financial regulations.
- (3) That where appropriate the City Council acts as accountable body for external funding that is raised to deliver the master plan and that the Chief Officer (Environment) is authorised to bid for, where appropriate, and accept external funding that contributes to the master plan in line with financial regulations.
- (4) To endorse the use of the renewals reserve for the replacement of paths in the park over a 5 year period.
- (5) That Cabinet notes the efforts of volunteers in Happy Mount Park and many other Parks and areas of open space in the District and expresses thanks for the ongoing contribution they make.

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Clean, Green and Safe places are a priority for the Council. A measure of success in this regard is the number of projects that directly involve local communities in improving local areas, parks and open spaces. This report will focus specifically on Happy Mount Park.
- 1.2 Happy Mount Park is an extremely popular park for both locals and tourists,

especially in warmer weather. Over the years, many improvements have been made, such as the introduction of the splash park and the natural adventure play area, which have led to the increasing popularity of the park. The effective management and maintenance of the park is recognised nationally by the fact the park consistently achieves Green Flag status.

In accord with best practice work has been taking place to develop a long term plan for the park. The purpose of the master plan is to ensure the council effectively manages the park over the next ten years through identifying the future direction of the park, key areas to focus on for preservation, and opportunities for additional funding.

- 1.3 Extensive consultation in development of the plan has established that the majority of people are very happy with the park and are keen to preserve it as it is. From the consultation a vision and key principles for the future development of park have been established.

The vision is-

*To preserve Happy Mount Park as a green park which incorporates a mix of traditional and modern attractions, catering for visitors of all ages.*

Key principles are;

*Maintain the current character of the park and preserve it for future generations.*

*Develop the Park in such a way that the changes will be sustainable both financially and ecologically whilst allowing for maximum enjoyment of its beautiful wildlife and fun activities.*

*Respect the historic background of the park in its general design and layout.*

## **2.0 Proposal Details**

- 2.1 As outlined above over the last year a comprehensive consultation process has taken place to develop a long term master plan for Happy Mount Park. The master plan is attached at Appendix A. Cabinet should note that during the consultation process it has been made very clear that, due to the financial pressures facing the Council, delivery of the master plan is entirely dependent on accessing external funding.
- 2.2 It is extremely unlikely that the Council itself would be eligible for external funding. However, there is a well- established 'Friends of' group in the park. These volunteers have over a number of years now devoted many hours to improving the park. The combination of a long term vision for the park, Council commitment to the future of the Park and a thriving 'Friends of' group means that with ongoing support from the Council there is a realistic prospect of the master plan being delivered.

- 2.3 As would be expected the consultation process also highlighted three areas of operational concern- Lack of car parking, Lack of toilet facilities/condition of toilet facilities during busy periods and the condition of the footpaths.

Proposals to tackle these issues are-

**Car Parking-** Additional signage is required to indicate Coastal Road Car Park is the identified car parking area for the park. The issue is mainly seasonal and additional parking cannot be made within the park. The only other option available to residents is to request the area to become a residential parking area, this had a mixed response.

**Toilets-** The toilets in HMP were fully refurbished only a few years ago. It is not cost effective to build additional toilets in the park when in reality additional toilet capacity would only be utilised for a few weeks of the year. Furthermore, it was found the main issues related to families with young people having to pack-up their stuff to go to the toilet as it is at the opposite end to the two main attractions, the splash park and play area. Also as there are no changing facilities in the splash park it appears people are using the toilets instead which means that on summer days the toilets get wet and messy quickly. On balance the best way of resolving this would be to look at installing some changing facilities in the Splash Park as part of the delivery of the master plan.

**Pathways-** many of the pathways within the park are either in very poor condition or are deteriorating. £13,500 has already been allocated for emergency repairs this financial year. However, to maintain the safety of the park all the pathways will need replacing over the next five years at a cost of approximately £100,000. Cabinet are requested to endorse a replacement programme using the existing renewals reserve.

### 3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 Consultation has been undertaken at various stages throughout the process of developing the plan. This has involved reviewing previous questionnaire based consultation, meeting with officers and stakeholders, five advertised public consultation sessions in the park and a dedicated Facebook consultation group for the park.
- 3.2 Through the consultation process a group of interested people was formed to help develop the detail of the plan. This group 'Happy Mount Park Project Group' is now constituted and keen to start delivery of the master plan if approved.

*Initial projects that already have potential funding / resources would be a) the Japanese gardens- as we have funding secured to design this element further as well as a keen volunteer group; b) The traditional area at the front of the park; c) the woodland area*

#### 4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

|               | <b>Option 1:</b> Approve the master plan for delivery   | <b>Option 2:</b> Continue without a master plan   |
|---------------|---|---|
| Advantages    | <p>The master plan helps focus current and future resources on areas and attractions that will enhance the park. (I.e. the current balance of green space to hard landscape should be maintained or enhanced; Wildlife should be encouraged focusing on the areas identified within the plan; The park does not have capacity for an increase in users during peak times, therefore, additional events, etc. should focus on enhancing the length of the day (i.e. evening or morning usage or extending the season)</p> <p>The plan will also help support applications to external funders to preserve and enhance the park</p> | <p>The opportunities to preserve and enhance the park through additional funding support would be very much reduced.</p> <p>There would be no clear guidance to the development of the park. This can be particularly difficult when considering new opportunities.</p> |
| Disadvantages |   | Less potential for external funding opportunities   |
| Risks         | Funding for development is not secured. If the volunteer groups disband it would be difficult for the council to obtain funding from external sources.  | The park may slip into decline without proper forward planning  |

#### 5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

- 5.1 The preferred option is option 1. The park is very popular and well used it is importance to have a plan for the future to ensure it remains popular.
- 5.2 The three identified operational issues; toilets, car parking and pathways should be noted.

#### 6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The master plan will assist in allocating current and future resources within the park, to both preserve the park and enhance its assets.
- 6.2 The plan will help support applications to external funders to preserve and enhance the park.
- 6.3 Three operational issues (car parking, pathways and toilets) have been identified as part of this process which should be noted.

## **RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK**

As outlined in the report

## **CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, HR, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

The master plan takes account of design issues relating to accessibility, community safety, sustainability etc. As the master plan is delivered individual elements will be assessed for impact.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

None as a result of this report

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

If members approve the Officer recommendation (option 1) there will be capital costs of £100,000 over 5 years to be funded from the renewals reserve for replacement of pathways.

All other additional expenditure associated with implementing the master plan is expected to be met from external funding. The master plan contains a mixture of capital and revenue expenditure and where capital expenditure is incurred such as building of new changing facilities at the splash park, there will be on-going capital charges and revenue costs for maintaining newly generated assets which will have an impact on revenue budgets in future years. It is expected however, that the ongoing maintenance costs will be met from within existing resources.

Where proposals can be financed fully from external funding and/or existing budgets, then following appropriate due diligence the approved budgets would be updated to enable their implementation, under Officer delegations.

Should any proposals not be affordable in this way, then they would be referred back for Cabinet's initial consideration (ahead of potential referral to Council as part of the relevant year's budget process).

If option 2 is approved it is likely that the park will slip into further decline and revenue costs are likely to increase year on year to cover reactive repairs and maintenance which become necessary in order to keep the park in a safe and operational condition. Visitor numbers could also fall potentially resulting in reduced income from the café and concession facilities.

It is reiterated that the replacement of footpaths is essential for health & safety reasons and failure to carry out these works will put us at risk of claims for personal injury.

## **OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Human Resources:**

None

### **Information Services:**

None

### **Property:**

As outlined in the report

**Open Spaces:**

As outlined in the report

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The s151 Officer has been consulted and her comments reflected in the report. She would add that on the basis that the park will continue as an attraction for the foreseeable future, the proposals represent a reasonable and efficient way forward to manage the financial sustainability, affordability and prudence aspects of its development. The application of the Financial Regulations provides for appropriate input from the s151 Officer and/or Accountancy and other professional support as appropriate.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

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