

# CABINET

## Parks and Open Spaces Strategy - Update 11<sup>th</sup> December 2007

### Report of Head of Cultural Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To update Cabinet on progress against the Parks and Open Spaces Action Plan.				
Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date Included in Forward Plan	December 2007			
This report is public				

#### RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR MAIA WHITELEGG

- (1) That Cabinet note the progress made against the Parks and Open Spaces Action Plan.
- (2) That Cabinet authorise Officers to progress the respective “partnership” proposals in respect of Happy Mount Park (private) and Highfield Recreation Ground (community), with a view to bringing either or both proposals forward to a future meeting of Cabinet for final consideration and approval.

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2004, Cabinet approved a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. Notable achievements since the adoption of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy Action Plan include:-
  - A. Adoption of the CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) “Manifesto for Public Open Spaces”.
  - B. Establishment of Parks & Open Spaces User Forums.
  - C. Consult with young people.
  - D. Identify non-participating groups and establish why?
  - E. Development and submission of successful external funding applications (e.g. Lottery), in respect of major parks.
  - F. Develop an events programme to attract visitors to Parks & Open Spaces.
  - G. Develop a Marketing Plan.

- H. Develop an Education Pack.
- I. Award of Green Flags for Happy Mount Park and Williamson Park.
- J. Improved Play Area provision.
- K. Carry out a tree survey.
- L. Pursue environmental ground maintenance practices.
- M. Identify opportunities for sponsorship
  
- N. Assess quality of existing Parks & Open Spaces using local standards, as part of PPG17.
- O. Improve sports pitch provision.
- P. Identify other “partners” (e.g., the private, community and voluntary sectors).
- Q. Prepare Development Plans for Parks & Open Spaces in consultation with local community.

## **2.0 Proposal Details**

- 2.1 The above represents significant progress against what was an ambitious and challenging Action Plan, with every action either having been completed (Actions A to M) or because they represent long-term objectives are work in progress (Actions N to Q).
- 2.2 Certain elements of the Action Plan are inter-related and as longer-term objectives require a commitment of time and effort to establish sustainable “partnerships” and thereafter a logical progression of actions. For example Action N (Assess quality of existing Parks & Open Spaces using local standards), and Action O (Improve sports pitch provision) are clearly related. At the time of writing this report Cultural Services and Planning Services are awaiting the outcome of jointly commissioned update of Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG 17). Once received the findings of PPG 17 will be used to review the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.
- 2.3 Other linked elements of the Parks & Open Spaces Action Plan are Action P (Identify other “partners” e.g., the private, community and voluntary sectors) and Action Q (Prepare Development Plans for Parks & Open Spaces in consultation with local community).
- 2.4 Although the above are described as work in progress, much has been achieved to-date. For example, both Happy Mount Park and Regent Park have long established private partnership arrangements, whilst Highfield Recreation Ground and Palatine Recreation Ground have community partnership arrangements.
- 2.5 Based on experience gained to-date, specifically Happy Mount Park (private partnership arrangements) and Highfield Recreation Ground (community partnership arrangements) are at the point where Cabinet are asked to consider establishing pilot schemes that could ultimately represent alternative management models that, if successful, could be rolled out into other parks within the District.
- 2.6 Happy Mount Park.

The current arrangements are based on a partnership with a main and support concessionaires who operate different elements, such as the Café, Indoor Play Area, Sports and Play facilities. The above has been in place for a number of years and has seen considerable improvements and success within the Park. In addition to the investments made by the City Council in respect of the Splash Park, Multi-Games Area and Public Conveniences, the main concessionaire has invested upward of £250,000 in the Café, Indoor

and Outdoor Play facilities and the Crazy Golf. The main and support concessionaires have also helped Cultural Services to stage a programme of events in the Park.

Discussions with the main and support concessionaires indicate that they are interested and willing to develop the partnership, to include further capital investment and service development. If Cabinet is minded to support such an approach Officers will liaise and negotiate with the concessionaires with regards to a range of issues, including;- further capital investment; service improvements; park management, operations and maintenance; revised lease arrangements; and an enhanced events programme, etc. Dependant on the outcome of the discussions between Officers and the concessionaires, any final proposals would be submitted to Cabinet at a later date, for consideration and final approval.

## 2.7 Highfield Recreation Ground.

The facilities at Highfield Recreation Ground include;- Bowling Greens, a Children's Play Area, public open space and a Youth Shelter/Teen Meet. The site also includes redundant tennis courts.

For more than a year a local community group (Highfield Regeneration Project) supported by, among others;- Lancaster City Council (Officers and Ward Councillors), Lancashire County Council, the Gregson Institute, Lancaster Boys Grammar School, and the Groundwork Trust, etc., have following extensive community consultation, developed a scheme to bring the former tennis courts back into operation as a new multi-games area, as well as the pavilion. The scheme is well developed and the group have identified potential external funding sources.

Those involved with the project (as listed above) have also undertaken extensive work with regards to the future operation and management of the facilities, based on a community management model business plan. The proposals are innovative and represent a sustainable model whereby the key responsibilities would be identified in advance between the City Council (as landlord) and the Highfield Regeneration Project, as the operators and managers of the facilities at Highfield Recreation Ground. Lancaster City Council would have representation on a proposed Highfield Regeneration Project Management Board. Dependant on the outcome of the discussions between Officers and the Highfield Regeneration Project, any final proposals would be submitted to Cabinet at a later date, for consideration and final approval.

- 2.8 In addition to Happy Mount Park and Highfield Recreation Ground, cabinet should note that Williamson Park Board is due to receive a report at their January meeting on options for the future management arrangements of Williamson Park where the suitability of retaining the existing local authority controlled company status will be reviewed. The outcome of the Board meeting will be reported into January Cabinet.

## 3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 The proposals in respect of Highfield Recreation Ground are based on extensive community consultation.

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

4.1 The options within this report relate to the proposals for Happy Mount Park and Highfield Recreation Ground.

4.2 Happy Mount Park - Do nothing

Failure to achieve an identified Action Plan in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and a cessation of any further private sector investment and development in Happy Mount Park.

4.3 To support the enhanced “partnership” with the private sector.

Achievement of an identified Action Plan in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. Subject to final approval by Cabinet, at a later date, the possibility of further private sector investment and development in Happy Mount Park.

4.4 Highfield Recreation Ground - Do nothing

Failure to achieve an identified Action Plan in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and failure to secure external funding (only available to community groups) that would bring the tennis courts and pavilion back into operation.

4.5 To support the community management model.

Achievement of an identified Action Plan in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. Subject to final approval by Cabinet, at a later date, the possibility of “pilot” community management model which, if successful, could be rolled out to other parks within the District.

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

5.1 Options 4.3 and 4.5, for the reasons as set out above.

#### **6.0 Conclusion**

6.1 The two schemes provide the Council with an opportunity to test out alternative and innovative approaches to the management of parks and open spaces.

#### **RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The proposals meet outcomes set within the Parks and Open Spaces strategy.

#### **CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

The proposals present the Council with alternative and sustainable management models that encompass community engagement.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

At this stage there are no financial implications arising from the report. Any financial issues would need to be considered in full if the proposals are taken forward, with appropriate and timely involvement being sought from Financial Services.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The report includes no details of any financial implications for the Council, but it is understood that there are no commitments arising as a result of this report, and that no discussions have been held regarding any expectation of the Council giving any form of financial support to the schemes.

Given these points, the recommendations would allow the proposals to be developed further and should any financial considerations arise, these would be considered as part of the 2008/09 (or a later year's) budget process, alongside all other competing demands.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

At this stage there are no Legal Implications arising from the report. However, it may be that at a later stage, Legal Services are involved in advising on developing private partnership arrangements and/or establishing community partnership arrangements.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments at this stage.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

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