



## **CABINET REPORT**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Parks and Open Spaces Strategy – Consideration of Representations from Consultation and Approval of the Strategy, Planning Standards and Implementation Plan</b>
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**AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC**

<b>Cabinet Meeting Date:</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> November 2009
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Listed on Forward Plan:</b>	Yes
<b>Within Policy:</b>	No
<b>Policy Document:</b>	No
<b>Directorate:</b>	Planning and Regeneration /Environment and Culture
<b>Accountable Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillors Trini Crake, Richard Church and Paul Varnsberry
<b>Ward(s)</b>	All Wards

### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 For Cabinet to consider the representations received during the consultation phases, approve the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for Northampton and the Open Space Quantity Standards outlined for Planning Policy purposes.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Cabinet consider the outcome of the consultation on the Consultative Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and notes the key summary responses.

- 2.2 That Cabinet approves the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for Northampton.
- 2.3 That Cabinet approves the use of the Accessibility, Quality and Quantity Standards as set out in Appendix B as the agreed standards for green space, as required for new development in accordance with Policy E19 in the Northampton Local Plan.
- 2.4 That Cabinet notes the process to develop an Action Plan from the workstreams identified, and to receive an annual briefing in respect of progress.

### **3. Issues and Choices**

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#### **3.1 Report Background**

- 3.1.1 On 13<sup>th</sup> January 2009, a full report outlining the timeframe and resources needed to develop a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for Northampton was taken to Cabinet and approved. This report included the “Strategy Scoping Plan”, which set out the detailed stages for the development of the strategy. The Scoping Plan identified the need for public consultation on the Draft Strategy before being brought back to Cabinet for adoption in November/December 2009.
- 3.1.2 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy was developed through:
- 3.1.3 **A crosscutting Steering Group** that included representatives from Northampton Borough Council Service Areas (Environment, Culture and Leisure and Planning), including other key partners (NCC, Wildlife Trust, RNRP (River Nene Regional Park) and WNDC (West Northamptonshire Development Corporation)) was established to take forward the development of a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.
- 3.1.4 **An up-date of the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment and Audit 2006.** This has provided baseline evidence for the Parks and Open Space Strategy which:
  - Reaffirmed Surplus and Deficiencies in Open Space and up-dated local standards
  - Identified local needs and deficits in provision.
- 3.1.5 **An internal review of service provision using the “Towards An Excellent Service” process.** This process outlined a need for a cross directorate review of strategic policies and priorities relating to Planning Management, Leisure and Regeneration for Open Space and Parks.
- 3.1.6 Consultation was undertaken in line with NBC’s consultation toolkit, the main elements of this included:
  - Aims and Strategy for Consultation Process
  - A Stakeholder Analysis was completed

- An Engagement Plan developed
- An Equalities Impact Assessment completed
- Key Stakeholder Workshops held in July 2009
- Public Drop-In Surgeries held at the Guildhall on 15<sup>th</sup> September and 17<sup>th</sup> September 2009
- A Consultative Parks and Open Spaces Strategy being available for public comment on the Northampton Borough Council website from 13<sup>th</sup> August 2009 to 28<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

3.1.7 A significant allocation of CABA (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) advisory and support time was secured to assist in the development of the Strategy. CABA Advisors supported the facilitation of the workshops and reviewed the Consultative Strategy.

3.1.8 A series of workstreams (Appendix E) will be required to deliver the Strategy, these were developed in liaison with the Project Steering Group, Planning Officers and Service Heads for Regeneration, Leisure and Environment.

3.1.9 The workstreams will be developed into a three year rolling programme of deliverable actions, closely aligned to capacity and available resources and in accordance with priorities of the Strategy. Once developed by Officers, the Action Plan will then be agreed by the Portfolio Holders for Planning and Regeneration and Environment and Culture.

## **3.2 Issues**

3.2.1 Following the completion of the updated Audit, Policy Review and Consultation with Stakeholders and the general public, a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has been completed. This Strategy sets the framework for Parks and Open Spaces in Northampton and include a number of policies.

3.2.2 A set of Standards (Quality, Quantity and Accessibility) against Planning Policy Guidance 17 for Parks and Open Spaces in Northampton.

3.2.3 A set of Improvement Policies for the different types of Open Space.

3.2.4 A review of how Northampton Borough Council currently works with Partners, including Community Groups and "Friends of Groups" and recommends Policies for more effective partnership working.

3.2.5 Policies and workstreams for improving the sustainability of our Parks and Open Spaces.

3.2.6 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy sets the Accessibility, Quality and Quantity Standards for the purposes of Open Space in new developments. These Standards set the requirements for adequate

provision in new developments. They have a material implication for Planning Policy and will ensure that the Council are able to achieve realistic allocations of Green Space Provision in growth areas and revenue contributions for Section 106 monies.

3.2.7 The Accessibility, Quality and Quantity Standards set out in the Strategy will, in the future, be formally incorporated into the Local Development Framework for the purposes of determining Planning Applications through the proposed West Northamptonshire Affordable Housing and Developer Contributions Development Plan Document (DPD). The adoption of this DPD is likely to be at least two years away. In the interim, it is considered necessary that the Strategy Standards in Appendix 2 be used to set out the appropriate Quality, Quantity and Proximity to Open Space that new development will be required to achieve. Cabinet are therefore asked to approve these Standards as interim policy for the purposes of Development Control, which will then provide the necessary clarity for Officers in dealing with Open Space associated with new development proposals.

3.2.8 Further work will be done between Neighbourhood Environmental Services and Planning Teams to establish a justified formula for the calculation of associated financial (revenue) contributions, as a commuted sum for the maintenance of Open Space.

### **3.3 Resources Required**

3.3.1 Resources to deliver the Strategy are limited and finite.

3.3.2 It is expected that printing costs for the Strategy (Appendices) could be contained within £2,000. It is important that these resource requirements are shared between the lead Directorates of Planning and Regeneration and Environment and Culture.

3.3.3 The Action Plan, when completed, will identify which actions can be resources through base budgets and where additional external funding will need to be sourced. For example, major improvement works on specific parks.

3.3.4 The implementation of the Strategy will require significant Officer time from Environment and Culture to co-ordinate and deliver the Action Plan reflecting available capacities in its programme.

### **3.4 Choices (Options)**

3.4.1 There are three choices available to the Council regarding the options:

### 3.4.2 Option A – (Preferred Option)

**Adopt the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and the Accessibility, Quality and Quantity Standards (to be used in association with Policy E19 of the Northampton Local Plan)**, subject to any minor changes. This would enable Northampton Borough Council to have an agreed Strategy for how it manages Parks and Open Spaces. Adoption will strengthen the Council's Planning position and provide a clear basis to support Bids to external funders to improve our Parks and Open Spaces.

**3.4.3 Option B - Reject the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, Implementation Plan and the Accessibility, Quality and Quantity Standards (to be used in association with Policy E19 of the Northampton Local Plan)**, as inappropriate documents for the management of our green spaces. Cabinet would need to give guidance on how Officers are expected to prepare a different approach to revising the documents. This option would delay the process considerably and risk creating discontent from Community Partners and other Stakeholders, who have been working on and are expecting a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and Implementation Plan in 2009. This would have an impact on reputation. This would leave the Council in a weak Policy position and open to challenge on any Planning decision relating to Open Space. Funding applications to external funders will also be limited, as many require a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and subsequent prioritisation.

**3.4.4 Option C - Revise the current Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, Implementation Plan and the Accessibility, Quality and Quantity Standards (to be used in association with Policy E19 of the Northampton Local Plan)**, in their current form and suggest areas where the document should be improved, added to and redrafted. This option would delay the process and provide some risk of discontentment from Community Partners and other Stakeholders, who have been working on and are expecting a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy in 2009.

## **4. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **4.1 Policy**

**4.1.1** The adoption of a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will establish a clear policy framework for the management, investment and rationalisation of Open Space in Northampton.

**4.1.2** The Strategy and Policies replace any previous Strategies and Policies relating to Parks and Open Spaces.

- 4.1.3 The Council will have a robust, locally set Planning Policy on Standards for Accessibility, Quality and Quantity Standards for Open Space, as required for new development, in accordance with Policy E19 in the Northampton Local Plan.

## **4.2 Resources and Risk**

- 4.2.1 There is an ongoing risk that if the Strategy and Standards are not adopted, then investment in Parks will continue to suffer, as both internal and external funding sources require clarity on strategic priorities.
- 4.2.2 The Strategy and associated document, along with the development of an Action Plan, will allow Northampton Borough Council to manage the expectations of Community Groups within the constraints of severe current funding limitations.
- 4.2.3 The implementation of the Strategy will require significant Officer time from the Environment and Culture Directorate to co-ordinate and deliver.
- 4.2.4 Officer time will be required to strengthen relationships with Community Groups to ensure maximisation of resources through partnership working.

## **4.3 Legal**

- 4.3.1 None.

## **4.4 Equality**

- 4.4.1 An Initial Equalities Impact Assessment on the Strategy has been completed. The Strategy will not impact adversely on any Equalities Group and there is no need to proceed to a full Equalities Impact Assessment.

## **4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)**

- 4.5.1 The development of the Strategy has been discussed with Portfolio Holders for Environment and Culture and Planning and Regeneration. The Director of Planning and Regeneration, Director of Environment and Culture, Head of Regeneration and Development, Head of Planning, Head of Neighbourhood Environmental Services and the Head of Culture and Leisure have also been consulted, together with external groups/stakeholders as outlined in the report.

## **4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes**

- 4.6.1 **Priority 1: We will help our Communities become Safer, Greener and Cleaner .** This project will maintain a range of good quality Open Spaces and Parks, and the provision of new facilities.
- 4.6.2 **Priority 2: We will improve Housing and Health to enhance Wellbeing of our Communities.** This project could clearly help provide a range of leisure and cultural activities for young people, improve participation and access to cultural opportunities, promote healthy living initiatives for young people, contribute to improving the health of local people and encouraging vibrant neighbourhoods and engaged communities.
- 4.6.3 **Priority 3: We will be a Confident, Ambitious and Successful Northampton.** This project will contribute towards creating place by ensuring adequate physical and social infrastructure in the town through Parks and Open Spaces to support sustainable growth for new and existing communities, whilst at the same time enhancing the unique history, heritage and culture of Northampton.
- 4.6.4 **Priority 4: We will strengthen our Commitment to Partnerships and Community Engagement.** Improve partnerships to deliver joined up services, involve our voluntary and community sector in Planning, Decision Making and Delivery of Services.
- 4.6.5 **Priority 5: We will be a well-managed organisation that puts our customers at the heart of what we do.** The Strategy will enable the Council to determine priorities and to focus resources within the current funding limitation.

## **4.7 Other Implications**

- 4.7.1 Following the various reports to Cabinet in early 2009, there is an expectation from Partners (Funders, Key Agencies and the Voluntary and Community Sector) that the production of a Strategy and Action Plan will improve partnership working relationships.

## **5. Background Papers**

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- 5.1 Appendix A - The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for Northampton.
- 5.2 Appendix B - Outline of Key Interim Planning Standards and Policies.
- 5.3 Appendix C - Feedback Summary from Consultative Draft Strategy, Questionnaire and Drop In Surgeries.
- 5.4 Appendix D - Summary feedback from the Consultation workshops.
- 5.5 Appendix E - Workstreams.

5.6 In turn, the following suite of documents support these papers:

- The up-dated, Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment Audit (2009)
- Parks and Open Spaces Project Initiation Document (PID).

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