

1. **REPORT TITLE:** URBAN NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE GREEN SPACE STRATEGY ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2014

**Submitted by:** Head of Operations – Roger Tait

**Portfolio:** All

**Ward(s) affected:** All Urban Wards of the Borough

**Purpose of the Report**

To inform Cabinet of progress made with the implementation of the Urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy and the associated Action Plan over the last year.

To inform members of the need to review the current Green Space Strategy to reflect changes in national planning policy, local government finance and projected resources to ensure the strategy remains fit for purpose for the future and is a robust evidence base for the proposed joint Local Plan.

**Recommendations:**

- (a) That the report be received and progress noted.
- (b) That authorisation is given to scope the review of the Green Space Strategy in line with the National Planning Policy Framework and report the resource implications of the review to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

**Reasons**

- (a) To ensure that the green space asset base in urban North Staffordshire and in particular Newcastle fulfils it's potential to deliver a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits through a strategic approach to planning and management, and that the document remains fit for purpose and a robust evidence base for the emerging joint Local Plan.

1.0 **Background**

1.1 At the meeting of the Cabinet of 7 September 2011 a report was considered in relation to the Urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy. It was resolved:-

“That Officers be instructed to undertake an annual review of the progress made with implementation of the North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy and the associated Action Plan to ensure that objectives are being met”.

1.2 The Urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy was formally adopted by the Cabinet of the Council at the meeting of 2 December 2009. Since this time, work has been progressing with delivering the actions identified in the Action Plan programme and in developing processes and mechanisms to deliver the aims and objectives of the Strategy.

## 2.0 **Issues**

- 2.1 The Urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy promotes the environmental, economic and social benefits which green space brings to parallel strategic regeneration initiatives and to the Council's corporate priorities and core values. The Strategy demonstrates how good quality green space supports economic regeneration and provides opportunities for people to live a healthy and active lifestyle in a clean and safe environment. It also demonstrates the positive impact green space has on carbon reduction.
- 2.2 The Strategy aims to ensure that the residents of the Borough have the right amount of green space to cater for their needs in terms of parks, play, sport, nature and green routes. The Strategy seeks to provide these sites in places which are accessible and easy to reach for as many people as possible and by grouping facilities together into larger, multi-functional high quality green spaces.
- 2.3 To achieve these aims, the Strategy includes a phased and prioritised Action Plan programme to strategically manage the Council's green space assets to ensure that they deliver a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits and that the financial and community value of green space is recognised and reflected in the way the Council sets priorities and allocates resources.
- 2.4 Significant progress has been made in delivering the Action Plan for the Strategy and a progress report is attached to this report at Appendix 1. In addition to this, annual consultation is carried out with residents of the borough to gauge their views on a number of green space and cleanliness indicators including meeting expectations, safety, cleanliness of streets and open spaces and appropriate provision of facilities. Parks users are also consulted via the Parks Quick Survey, which gauges opinion on standards of maintenance, what facilities are considered important, levels of safety and whether they would like to see more events in parks.

### **Key Achievements To Date Include:-**

- (a) In the last six years a total of over £4.8 million in external funding has been secured towards delivering the projects in the Action Plan and a number of key capital development projects have been completed or are in progress to provide and improve community green space provision.
- (b) Implementation of the Streetscene Service to deliver the cleaner, safer and sustainable agenda and neighbourhood working.
- (c) Review of potential surplus green space assets incorporated into the asset management and site allocation development plan document consultation process.
- (d) Consistent high performance and achievement of highest quality standard in Britain in Bloom campaign and Green Flag Awards.
- (e) Projects have been completed or are currently in progress to create or improve facilities at Wolstanton Marsh, Lyme Valley, former Silverdale Colliery, The Wammy, Silverdale Park, Cotswold Avenue and Thistleberry Parkway.

- (f) Programme of work ongoing to maintain the Council's playground stock and green space footpaths/roads in a safe condition.
  - (g) Launched and developed the Community Engagement and Participation Framework to enable and support residents to take an active role in looking after their neighbourhood, with over 8814 hours of volunteer time (estimated value of £80,000) contributed in 2013/14. This work is key to the success of the strategy as it creates the opportunity for communities to be fully involved in shaping and delivering green space services in their neighbourhoods. A highly successful "Communities Day" was held on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2014 where 33 different community events took place in the Borough's parks, open spaces and neighbourhoods involving large numbers of volunteers.
- 2.5 Further work is underway to identify and bid for funding to deliver other projects prioritised in the Action Plan programme. These projects, and their proposed funding mechanisms, will be the subject of future reports to Cabinet at appropriate times.
  - 2.6 Work is also underway with partner agencies to investigate the potential to jointly deliver initiatives identified in the Action Plan programme. The outcome of this work and any associated resource implications will be reported at appropriate times.
  - 2.7 The Urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy and its Action Plan programme is designed to be delivered over a fifteen-year timescale, ending in 2022, following which the Strategy should be reviewed and developed for the future. The Strategy and Action Plan are designed to be flexible in order to accommodate changes in residents' needs and priorities over the fifteen year life of the document and in recognition of the financial and staff resource constraints which may influence its delivery. However, the Strategy sets out a framework and core principles for green space management which, if followed, will assist in ensuring that its main objectives continue to be met throughout periods of change. The strategy ensures that most green space projects within the action plan are delivered and are sought to be delivered using external funding from grant and S106 sources.
  - 2.8 Your officers have reviewed the current policy, legislative, financial and demographic influences which affect North Staffordshire, and in particular Newcastle, in relation to green space provision, management and maintenance. Changes have been identified as a result of the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which supersedes all previously acknowledged planning policy guidance, changes to the Local Development Framework and the decision to produce a new joint Local Plan, with Stoke on Trent City Council.
  - 2.9 The NPPF in paragraphs 73 and 74 identifies the need for high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation, as an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. It is further stated that Planning policies need to be based on robust and up to date assessment of needs for open space, sport and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings should not be built upon unless it is shown to be surplus to requirements or can be replaced in a suitable location.

- 2.10 A robust Green Space Strategy is required as part of a suite of supporting evidence documents for the new joint Local Plan. Other evidence documents will include the draft Playing Pitch Strategy which has recently be reviewed and is being developed, allotments strategy, urban forest strategy and policy for play. A table showing the hierarchy of these documents is attached to this report at Appendix 2.
- 2.11 However, the Green Space Strategy is also an operational delivery document in its own right, which guides how the council manages it's green space asset base to ensure that the needs of the community are met in the most appropriate way. In the climate of reducing local authority resources, it is considered essential to review how the council will approach this role in the future and to explore different mechanisms for delivering green space services in line with projected capacity and resource reductions. Therefore, it is proposed to carry out a scoping exercise to determine how such a review of the Green Space Strategy would be carried out, what outcomes it would be necessary to achieve and what financial and resource implications are likely to arise from the review. There may be significant costs involved in reviewing the Green Space Strategy, but a review of the strategy could assist in freeing up assets for disposal. The result of the scoping exercise would then be reported to Cabinet later this year.
- 2.12 A review of the Playing Pitch Strategy has recently been commissioned. This work will update the current Strategy and seeks to establish the strategic plan in terms of formal playing pitches in the Borough and to match supply with demand. A report on the implications of the revised strategy will be brought to Cabinet in due course.

### 3.0 **Options Considered**

- 3.1 To continue with the delivery of the existing Strategy in line with the strategy document in the short term.
- 3.2 Proceed with scoping the review of the Green Space Strategy to ensure that it remains a robust evidence base for the emerging joint Local Plan, alongside the other supporting documents.

### 4.0 **Proposal**

- 4.1 It is proposed that the report be received and progress with the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan be noted.
- 4.2 It is proposed to scope the review of the Green Space Strategy and report the resource implications of the review to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

### 5.0 **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 5.1 To ensure that the green space asset base in urban North Staffordshire and in particular Newcastle, fulfils it's potential to deliver a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits through a strategic approach to planning and management.

### 6.0 **Outcomes Linked to Corporate Priorities and the Sustainable Community Strategy**

- 6.1 A clean, safe, and sustainable Borough.
- 6.2 A Borough of opportunity.
- 6.3 A healthy and active community.
- 6.4 Becoming a co-operative council, delivering high value, community driven services.

## 7.0 **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 7.1 The Council has various powers and duties relating to green space provision and management, set out in statutes relating to open space, public health, miscellaneous provision and well being.

## 8.0 **Equality Impact Assessment**

- 8.1 It is considered that the Strategy has a positive impact on equality issues.

## 9.0 **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- 9.2 Financial implications associated with a review of the Green Space Strategy will be estimated as part of the scoping exercise and reported to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

## 10.0 **Major Risks**

- 10.1 The major risks associated with this report are:
  - 10.1.1 Failure to prove that the current Green Space Strategy is valid and up to date evidence could create a situation where funding and open space provision is unable to be secured through planning processes.
  - 10.1.2 Failure to realise savings and/or capital receipts from prudent management of the council's green space asset base.
  - 10.1.3 Failure to provide a robust evidence base for the joint Local Plan.

## 11.0 **Earlier Cabinet Resolutions**

- 11.1 Cabinet: 09 February 2005 – Resolution No. 761
- Cabinet: 03 August 2005 – Resolution No. 285
- Cabinet: 21 May 2008 – Resolution No. 39
- Cabinet: 02 December 2009 – Resolution No.
- Cabinet: 07 September 2011 – Resolution No. 13
- Cabinet: 23 May 2012 - Resolution No. 5
- Cabinet: 17 July 2013 - Resolution No. 4

## 12.0 **List of Appendices**

- 12.1 Appendix 1: Action Plan Progress Report
- 12.2 Appendix 2: Document Hierarchy
- 12.3 Appendix 3: Playing Pitch Strategy

## 13.0 **Background Papers**

- 13.1 Urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy.
- 13.2 National Planning Policy Framework