

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO THE
CABINET

NOVEMBER 2014

1. **REPORT TITLE:** GREEN SPACE STRATEGY REVIEW 2014
- Submitted by:** Head of Operations – Roger Tait
- Portfolio:** Planning and Assets
Environment and Recycling
- Ward(s) affected:** All Wards of the Borough

Purpose of the Report

To inform Cabinet of the current situation in relation to the Urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy and the plan to review / update the strategy in line with 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 approval is granted to review the Green Space Strategy in line with the National Planning Policy Framework and that cost of the review is met from the provision made in the general fund revenue programme for the preparation of the joint Local Plan.

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 strategy remains fit for purpose and a robust evidence base for the emerging joint Local Plan.

1.0 **Background**

- 1.1 The Urban North Staffs Green Space Strategy, which was produced jointly with Stoke on Trent City Council, was adopted by the Borough Council in 2009. The strategy was developed to ensure that green space fulfils its potential to deliver a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits through a strategic approach to planning and management of public open spaces. The strategy was developed in line with the national Planning Policy and Guidance (PPG) and Planning Policy Statements (PPS) that was current at the time of writing, mainly PPS1 ~ Delivering Sustainable Development and PPG17 ~ Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation. PPS25 ~ Development and Flood Risk and PPS9 ~

Biodiversity and Geological Conservation were also relevant guidance at the time of writing the strategy.

- 1.2 PPG17 provided structured guidance on the methodologies involved in producing Green Space Strategies, to ensure that there is a balance between quantity and quality of accessible open space of a range of typologies. Working to this guidance ensured that the emerging document was robust and could be used as a sound evidence base to the local plan (saved policies) and the Core Spatial Strategy. The adoption of the 2007 Green Space Strategy document ensured that it assisted in the delivery of sustainability as per PPS1, and started to create a balance between built and green environments, as well as providing opportunities for biodiversity and recreation.
- 1.3 In March 2012, the Department for Communities and Local Government launched the National Planning Policy Framework, a document which sets out the Governments planning policies for England and how it expects them to be applied. The document supersedes all previous PPS and PPG's, and puts sustainable development at the forefront of the planning system. Sustainable development has three dimensions: economic, social and environmental; none of which should be taken in isolation as they are all mutually dependant.
- 1.4 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.

NPPF Paragraph 73

“Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision are required”.

NPPF Paragraph 74

“Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by the equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity or quality in a suitable location; or
- The development is for alternative sports and recreation provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss”.

- 1.5 The NPPF also highlights the importance of maintaining and enhancing public rights of way and access by linking existing networks, planning for biodiversity and ensuring that local ecological networks are considered within planning policy.

2.0 **Issues**

- 2.1 An up to date and robust Green Space Strategy is considered necessary as part of a suite of supporting evidence documents for the new joint Local Plan. The evidence for the existing Green Space Strategy is in planning terms considered to be in need of updating. Other related evidence documents will include an updated Playing Pitch Strategy; Allotments Strategy; Urban Forest Strategy and Policy for Unsupervised Children's Playgrounds. A table showing the hierarchy of these documents is attached to this report at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 However, the Green Space Strategy is also an operational delivery document in its own right, which guides how the council manages its 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. Without this, the Council will continue to incur potentially unnecessary costs of maintaining open space that is not required to meet the needs of the community.
- 2.3 Your officers have carried out a scoping exercise to determine how such a review of the Green Space Strategy would be carried out, in the absence of any detailed guidance following the cancellation of PPG17, what outcomes it would be necessary to achieve and what financial and resource implications are likely to arise from the review. This has involved discussions with officers at Stoke on Trent City Council, who have decided to review their part of the strategy and have agreed that there is a need to ensure that there is a robust and consistent evidence base for the emerging Joint Local Plan.
- 2.4 A methodology for the reassessment of the sites has been drafted and agreed with officers at both Councils to ensure that any emerging documents are consistent with each other and provide a robust evidence base. (attached to this report at Appendix 2) This will entail reviewing and updating the existing datasets, in line with the agreed typologies, and reviewing the quantity, accessibility and quality of the sites. An updated community needs assessment will also be required, including high level consultation with appropriate stakeholder groups. Once this has been completed it would be possible to make decisions/recommendations on strategic greenspace in the borough.
- 2.5 The review of the Green Space Strategy will establish hierarchies, and connectivity; establish local standards and potentially identify land which is not required as open space to meet the needs of the residents. Strategic level consultation, as well as demographic analysis and value assessments would all form part of the revised strategy and action plan, as well as methods for funding the proposed action plan. The proposed review will address both the urban and rural parts of the borough.
- 2.6 Your officers have considered whether it is feasible to carry out part of the assessment works in house, but currently there are insufficient resources to enable this to take place within reasonable timeframes. The current estimated costs of

reviewing the existing data and strategy is £65,000 and this figure will be refined as the brief is developed.

- 2.7 The cost of the preparation of the Joint Local Plan and accompanying evidence base studies is accommodated for in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. However, the original estimated cost of preparing the Joint Local Plan as reported to Cabinet in October 2013, did not include the cost of preparing a new Green Space Strategy as it was envisaged at that time that the Strategy not need to be reviewed. However, as a result of the changes to the national planning framework, detailed in section 1 of this report, it is now apparent that this Strategy also needs to be reviewed to complete the suite of strategies and policies required for the preparation of the joint Local Plan.
- 2.8 Your Officers will explore a range of options available for carrying out the work, including the potential secondment of staff from other local authorities.
- 2.9 Reviewing the strategy and local standards could potentially identify further land for alternative uses, where there is an over provision in green space terms. This could potentially generate further capital receipts if the land was to be sold or the land could also be considered for community transfer, where appropriate. By reducing overall land assets, where they are not required for open space provision, this would have a positive impact on future revenue budgets and capacity moving forward for the borough.

The council is also currently reviewing and updating its Playing Pitch Strategy, and this document will sit under the Green Space Strategy as a detailed evidence base in relation to the outdoor sports typology. The main issues in relation to the Playing Pitch Strategy will be reported when this document is completed.

3.0 **Options Considered**

- 3.1 Proceed with 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.
- 3.2 To continue with the delivery of the current Green Space Strategy and potentially fail to provide a sufficiently robust evidence base for the emerging local plan; risk being unable to rationalise the council's green space assets and continue to incur costs for potentially unnecessary provision of green space land and services.

4.0 **Proposal**

- 4.1 It is proposed to review the Green Space Strategy in line with the jointly agreed methodology and to develop a revised strategy based on national planning policy requirements, to ensure that a robust evidence base for joint local plan is compiled and that the borough's green spaces are rationalised and managed effectively and efficiently.

5.0 **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 5.1 To ensure that the green space asset base in the Borough 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 a reviewed and updated Green Space Strategy will have a positive impact on equality issues.

9.0 **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 9.1 The cost of reviewing the existing data and producing a new Green Space Strategy based on the items referred to in 2.6 has been estimated at £65,000
- 9.2 This cost estimate will be refined as the brief is developed
- 9.3 It is envisaged that the cost of the work will be accommodated from the overall provision made in the General Fund Revenue Programme allocation for the preparation of the joint Local Plan.

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: 23 July 2014 – Item No. 12

12.0 **List of Appendices**

- 12.1 Appendix 1: Document Hierarchy
- 12.2 Appendix 2: Draft Assessment Methodology

13.0 **Background Papers**

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

14.0 **Management Sign Off**

	Signed	Dated
Financial Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Dave Roberts</i>		
Risk Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer –Annette Vacquier</i>		
Legal Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Mark Bailey</i>		
Equalities Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Jane Sheldon</i>		
H.R. Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Sarah Taylor</i>		
ICT Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Jeanette Hilton</i>		
Sustainability and Climate Change Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Joanne Halliday</i>		
Report Agreed by: Executive Director/ Head of Service		