

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO THE HEALTH, WELLBEING AND PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Health Wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
07 June 2021

Report Title: Encouraging Greater Use of Parks and Open Spaces
Submitted by: Executive Director – Operational Services
Portfolios: Environment and Recycling; Leisure, Culture and Heritage
Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To report the findings of the Parks and Open Spaces Working Group in relation to the use of parks and open spaces for the benefit of physical and mental health and wellbeing, and to recommend actions to the Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation

That the Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee receive the report of the Parks and Open Spaces Working Group, and report to the Cabinet on any matters they wish to recommend for further action.

Reasons

To respond to a request from members of the Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee to explore the potential for encouraging greater use of parks and open spaces to promote physical and mental health and wellbeing.

1. **Background**

1.1 A Parks and Open Spaces Working Group was established in March 2020 and has met a number of times to consider how greater use of parks and open spaces could be encouraged to benefit physical and mental health and wellbeing. The following topic areas were explored:

What is the current level of use of parks and open spaces in the Borough?

Are there barriers to use and if so, what are they?

What knowledge is there among residents of the open spaces in their area? How is this promoted and publicised and is this effective?

1.2 The working group received reports exploring these topic areas and questioned officers on related matters.

2. **Issues**

2.1 At the meeting of 15 April 2021, after final debate and discussion, the working group agreed the following:

- Working group recommend to the parent committee that the importance of open spaces for physical and mental health and wellbeing is emphasised and given appropriate priority in the Council's annual budget setting programme and the One Council programme in relation to digital promotion of the service and customer engagement with it.
 - Initial pilot work is undertaken to improve information on open spaces on the website, including a register of strategic open spaces with location maps, and QR codes at 2 sites (Lyme Valley and Bathpool Park) which enable users to upload feedback. Resources need to be made available to implement this work. Existing web "report it" functions are reviewed and improved via the One Council programme where necessary.
 - The existing tree planting project in the Environmental Sustainability Strategy is reviewed to incorporate potential community "sponsor a tree" initiatives (eg 850 trees to celebrate the Borough's 850th anniversary in 2023) and Britain in Bloom community projects. The Council's Urban Forest Strategy (2013) is also reviewed and updated to reaffirm support for such initiatives.
- External funding and partnership activity is reviewed and capacity issues highlighted.

2.2 The work of the Parks and Open Spaces Scrutiny Working Party therefore concluded at this stage, and the above recommendations are proposed to the Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee at this meeting.

3. **Proposal**

3.1 That the Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee receive the report of the Parks and Open Spaces Working Group, and report to the Cabinet on any matters they wish to recommend for further action.

4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

4.1 To respond to a request from members of the Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee to explore the potential for encouraging greater use of parks and open spaces to promote physical and mental health and wellbeing.

5. **Options Considered**

5.1 The Parks and Open Spaces Working Group considered and debated a range of options as part of their review, and concluded that the 4 areas detailed above should be prioritised for initial consideration.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 There are no implications arising from this report. The Council has the power to provide and maintain parks and open spaces for public use and enjoyment as part of its remit.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 Equality issues will be considered as part of any work which is taken forward, including exploration of any current barriers to use of parks and open spaces and how these can be overcome.

8. Financial and Resource Implications

8.1 Financial and resource implications will be considered as part of any work which is taken forward as a result of the recommendations of the task and finish group. However, appropriate resource needs to be considered for any suggestions to be driven forward.

8.2 There are a number of parks and open spaces improvement projects currently included in the Council's 10 year capital programme, which are considered and prioritised each year as part of the budget setting process. The Council also seeks improvements through the planning process for either provision of new open space or improvement of existing.

8.3 In addition, there are external grant funding opportunities available, but resource is required to make applications, which can often be complex and time-consuming, particularly for larger scale projects. At present, capacity is very limited to facilitate grant applications for larger schemes.

8.4 For recommendation 2, it is estimated that short term project support is required to implement the initial improvement work to the website. A budget of around £5,000 would be needed to complete this work.

8.5 For recommendation 3, it is considered that this work can be undertaken and funded as part of the Britain in Bloom "business as usual" work programme.

9. Major Risks

9.1 The major risks arising from this piece of work are the potential for creating expectations around options that might be identified but are not affordable or otherwise within the Council's ability to deliver.

10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

10.1 Sustainability and Climate Change Implications will be considered as part of any work which is taken forward.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

LGA Guidance is here:-

https://30312f94-9adb-4918-80dd-708c590bada3.usrfiles.com/uqd/30312f_79b08331d11e44bc888e1ee08c05474e.pdf





11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 Proposals that might arise following on from this report, if taken forward, could be Key Decisions depending on the cost to the authority and/or impacts on communities working or living in the borough.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 Health, Wellbeing and Scrutiny Committee 2 December 2019 minutes.

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 None

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 Parks and Open Spaces Working Group 15th December 2020 minutes.
Parks and Open Spaces Working Group 25th February 2021 minutes.
Parks and Open Spaces Working Group 15th April 2021 minutes