

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S
REPORT TO HEALTH WELLBEING & ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

25 November 2024

Report Title: Options for Scrutiny Review of Parks

Submitted by: Service Director – Sustainable Environment

Portfolios: Sustainable Environment

Ward(s) affected: All

<u>Purpose of the Report</u>	<u>Key Decision</u>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
To outline options for the HW&E Scrutiny committee to review elements of the Councils parks and green open space provision.			
<u>Recommendation</u>			
That HW&E Scrutiny:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To receive this report 2. Agree to set up a task and finish group to consider what area of parks and open spaces they wish to review. 			
<u>Reasons</u>			
As part of HW&E scrutiny's work programme, and items members wished to look at moving forward, a suggestion was made and agreed to consider the Councils Parks. This report aims to provide suggestions as to where HW&E scrutiny members may wish to focus their attention, as there are many facets to parks and open spaces which would allow more focused scrutiny.			

1. Background

- 1.1** At its meeting on 16th September 2024, the committee asked to look at the state of different parks within the Borough, and this was added to the committee's future work programme.

- 1.2** As a large land holder in the borough, the Council has a significant number of sites that are maintained as designated parks and additional green open spaces. These include district or strategic parks, neighbourhood parks, sports grounds, semi natural green space including local nature reserves and green corridors, including green routes. The total number of individual sites is in the region of 500.
- 1.3** More specifically, the Council oversees 5 District Parks (The Brampton, Lyme Valley parkway, Wolstanton Marsh and park, Wye Road Park and Bathpool park), 20 neighbourhood parks (such as Arnold Grove, Crackley Recreational Ground Thistleberry Parkway) and a number of Sports Grounds including the Westlands, Wolstanton Park and the Wammy in addition to leased-out sites such as Birchenwood and Roe lane. Local nature reserves include Bradwell Woods, Bates Wood, Pooldam Marshes in addition to 4 green corridors including Newcastle Greenway and Kidsgrove Greenway.
- 1.4** Six of the Councils parks have been awarded Green Flag status, an international quality mark accreditation for parks. Green Flag status is achieved by presenting high quality grounds maintenance and providing a robust 'live' management plan demonstrating achievement and future time bound plans in several areas including building and infrastructure maintenance and investment, biodiversity and environmental sustainability, environmental management, community involvement and marketing and communication, management including risk assessments and costed maintenance costs. Accreditation is awarded following a robust and detailed inspection regime determined by Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) including announced or mystery shopping visits to the sites to test independently or interview relevant officers in relation to all aspects of the judging criteria.
- 1.5** In addition, the Council has 63 playgrounds which require weekly site inspections with running repairs undertaken on a regular basis to predominantly aged play equipment that is uninviting and produces a significant number of complaints annually, in relation to the visual aspect. A small number of playgrounds are repeat vandalism locations which require substantial investment to repair safety surfacing.
- 1.6** In 2022 a review took place of the Councils 2017 Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy. These strategies are produced to help recognise the need to make cities, towns and villages more sustainable in response to challenges such as the climate emergency and the ecological crisis. The Councils natural environment and valued greenspace networks have a critical role to play, and over the last few years this has been brought into sharp focus by the unfolding Covid-19 pandemic, which has revealed the value people place on their natural and semi natural greenspace.
- 1.7** The review provided a response to these challenges, and to identify strategic opportunities to deliver potential solutions, as well as to inform a sustainable, considered approach to growth in the borough to 2040.
- 1.8** Connected with this strategy and the Councils Sustainable Environment Strategy (SES) the Council has also produced and implemented its urban

tree planting strategy (now known as the Borough Tree Planting Strategy) and its Grassland Management Strategy, a review of which following its first year of implementation is currently being undertaken.

2. Potential areas for scrutiny

- 2.1** There are a number of areas and potential projects which a member task and finish group could consider looking at the Councils parks and green open space provision.
- 2.2** Building on a report prepared in 2021, the committee could look at how utilisation of parks and open spaces, and historical landmarks could be brought together in designing walking trails which would link the parks green open spaces and historical landmarks together.
- 2.3** Looking at the 2022 open space and green infrastructure strategy review, this could consider the issue of investment and funding opportunities to enhance existing sites.
- 2.4** Members could furthermore review current play park provision, and options for the future.
- 2.5** Members could also give thought to how parks and green open spaces can help the Council in its work to protect and enhance biodiversity.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1** To receive this report and to agree what area of parks the committee wish to scrutinise through a task and finish group.

4. Reasons

- 4.1** Parks and green open spaces are a vital part of the Councils infrastructure and provide positive benefits to enhancing health and wellbeing to citizens and visitors to the borough.
- 4.2** Parks and green open spaces are a key element in the delivery of the Councils SES, with positive benefits in decarbonisation, and enhancing biodiversity.

5. Options Considered

- 5.1** Not applicable to this report.

6. Legal and Statutory Implications

6.1 Not applicable to this report.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

7.1 There are no equality impact issues arising from this report.

8. Financial and Resource Implications

8.1 The current revenue budgets for management and maintenance of the Councils parks and green open spaces is £1,546,450 (2024/25), and £402,420, for the management and maintenance of cemeteries and crematorium grounds.

8.2 There is an ongoing capital programme for repairs and improvements which this year 24/25 equates to £331,145.

9. Major Risks & Mitigation

9.1 There are no risks arising from this report.

10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

10.1 The Councils parks and green open spaces play a significant role in the Councils SES.



11. Key Decision Information

11.1 The report is not a key decision.

12. Earlier Committee Reports / Resolutions

12.1 Encouraging Greater Use of Parks and Open Spaces report to H&W scrutiny April 2021.

13. List of Appendices

13.1 None

14. Background Papers

14.1 None