

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 11th November 2013

Report of: Environmental Services Manager (Parks and Streets)

Title: Adoption of a Final Green Spaces Strategy for Watford for 2013-2023

1.0 **SUMMARY**

- 1.2 The previous 2007-2013 Green Space Strategy is now out of date and required considerable revising and updating taking into account national and local policy changes such as the Localism Act and National Planning Policy Framework as well as revised Corporate Priorities and our Core Strategy that has recently been found to be sound and legal by the Government inspector. The previous strategy has therefore been reviewed and Action Plans assessed and revised.
- 1.3 A new Green Spaces Strategy was drafted and is based on qualitative and value assessments carried out as well as incorporating the Council's new Corporate Priorities and Green Infrastructure principles. It also recognises the significant current reductions in core funding the Council is facing, and the recent outsourcing to Veolia of the parks and open spaces service.
- 1.4 A report was presented to Cabinet in April 2013 with a Draft 10 year Strategy which was approved for wider consultation. Consultation was carried out internally and externally and the feedback has been fed into the new FINAL strategy with a new 10 year Action Plan to be adopted by November 2013. It is proposed that now wider public consultation has been carried out on the draft Green Spaces Strategy that Cabinet approve and formally adopt this new 10 year strategy.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the final Green Spaces Strategy
- 2.2 Delegate to the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services in consultation with the Portfolioholder any minor changes required to the documentation prior to publication along with the content of the summarised

version of the Strategy to be made available for local residents.

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Report approved by: Lesley Palumbo, Head of Corporate Strategy and
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3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The report of 3rd April 2013 highlighted details in relation to the need for Watford to update its Green Spaces Strategy. Watford adopted its first Green Spaces Strategy in 2007 with an aim *'to provide green spaces to be proud of, which will benefit the whole community, improving health, well-being and quality of life'*. It identified a number of objectives and outlined an Action Plan that has already achieved much but has also identified further work that needs carrying forward. This has now been reviewed and recognised that a number of successes have been achieved which were outlined in the April report. Since then, successes have continued:-
- Improvements to children's playgrounds and youth facilities at Harwoods Rec, Harebreaks Rec and Leavesden Green MUGA.
 - The ongoing development of the £6.5 million Cassiobury Park Restoration Round 2 HLF bid;
 - Continued retention of Green Flag for Cassiobury Park, Woodside Playing Fields and Cheslyn House and Gardens for 2013;
 - Adoption of the Allotments Strategy;
 - The £1.5 million Parks Improvement Programme, including Oxhey Park, Callowland Recreation Ground, King George V Playing Fields, Vicarage Road Cemetery, North Watford Cemetery, and Waterfields Recreation Ground that will be completed by December 2013 and will see many of our Community Parks transformed; and
 - The £800,000 Allotments Investment Programme, now underway with consultation with tenants ongoing and due to start in early 2014.
- 3.2 A new and updated strategy was therefore developed and had to consider the following:-

- Reductions in core funding to the Council and what it can now realistically achieve in relation to green spaces management;
- Alternative funding mechanisms and income generation opportunities;
- The impact of service redesign and outsourcing;
- Changes in service delivery;
- Continued high public expectations;
- Changes to Section 106 / Community Infrastructure Levy;
- Green Infrastructure approach to green space planning; and
- Quality, accessibility and quantity evidence base.

A new and updated green spaces vision has therefore been developed:-

“Watford will have a network of accessible, high quality and highly valued green spaces to be proud of, promoting sustainability, supporting bio-diversity and extensively contributing to the economic, social and environmental aspirations of the town.”

3.3 Progress to Date

- 3.3.1 Work began on updating the strategy in September 2011 with a thorough review of the previous strategy and action plans completed as well as those outstanding. A review of the Open Spaces Study that was completed by officers in 2010 was also completed. Part of that review highlighted that a full and comprehensive Open Spaces, Sport and Recreation Study compliant with PPG17 had never been fully completed for Watford, although the 2010 Open Spaces Study had partly fulfilled this through comprehensive mapping on GIS of all open space typologies in Watford as well as quantity and accessibility thresholds.

As part of the Core Strategy development, Kit Campbell Associates (KCA) were engaged to carry out a qualitative and value analysis of all Watford open spaces and to map the results on GIS having already carried out significant work in Watford. Quality and Value mapping has been analysed and with the quantitative and accessibility work already completed in 2010, this data now forms the basis of the new Green Spaces Strategy and has helped determine strategic priorities based on a new strategic network of green spaces. See Page 55 of the Strategy document.

- 3.3.2 KCA also carried out a thorough review of current national policy relating to green spaces, including The National Planning Policy Framework, The Natural Environment White Paper, The Localism Act and a review on guidance related to Green Infrastructure.

Officers have also carried out a review of current Corporate Priorities related to the revised Corporate Plan and policy linkages to Green Spaces as well as other corporate priorities such as Carbon Management, sustainability and equalities.

A revised draft strategy was therefore drafted and included the following:-

- A Policy Review;
- Analysis of findings – The Audit Results;
- Setting, developing and applying provision standards;

- Policies and aspirations;
- Strategic borough wide network;
- Our Vision and Strategy; and
- Action Plans.

3.3.3 Further consultation was required in further developing the new Green Spaces Strategy and in particular in determining local views and this was carried out from April 2013 after approval by Cabinet to consult on the Draft Strategy:-

- Further officer consultation (Planning, Property Services, Buildings and Projects, Culture and Community);
- Citizens Panel;
- Member consultation on quality and value;
- Friends Groups and Residents Associations; and
- Survey Monkey online consultation.

This consultation assessed local peoples views on quantity of open space, their perceptions on quality and accessibility, addressing such issues as how far local users will walk to a park, play area or allotment both in relation to their local green spaces as well as Watford as a whole. We also looked at why people visited our green spaces. The results are summarised on Page 11 of the Strategy document. The overall feedback was excellent. We also asked for feedback on the draft strategy as part of the online consultation. Although the feedback was limited, it was overall positive and the value of green spaces recognised.

3.3.4 The strategy also details the need to work in partnership with other providers and organisations such as the Wildlife Trust, Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Groundwork as well as to develop further partnerships to deliver this ambitious 10 year strategy. It also acknowledges the need to work with Veolia Environmental Services in the delivery of many of the Actions. A summarised 4 page version of the Strategy will also be available for local residents.

3.4 **Conclusions**

3.4.1 The revised and Final Green Spaces Strategy recognises the difficulties faced by the Council as well as the importance of green spaces to local people and communities. However, the final Strategy is ambitious yet seeks to build on the continued successes in Watford in managing, maintaining and developing its green spaces.

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial**

4.1.2 The Director of Finance comments that a considerable financial investment has been made over the past few years in upgrading our green spaces 'offer'. This ability to invest 'in the future health and well being of our community' will be constrained as available

local authority funding continues to reduce.

- 4.1.3 Any detailed Action Plan necessarily requires a financial commitment and, with the reductions in funding, the Action Plan for 2013-23 will need to recognise a longer delivery period. Alternative funding mechanisms such as government funding and partnerships will need to be further developed in order to make the Action Plan a reality.

- 4.1.4 Traditional funding through Section 106 capital receipts and the community infrastructure levy will be used wherever possible and this Green Spaces Strategy will provide the evidence base to justify such investment.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 Head of Democracy and Governance comments that any legal implications are contained within the Strategy.

4.3 **Equalities**

- 4.3.1 See EIA (background paper)

4.4 **Risk**

- 4.4.1 The Environmental Services Client team will develop a detailed risk register for the delivery of the Green Spaces Strategy and Action Plan which will set out all the current risks and identifies the mitigating actions needed to manage the risks. This will continue to be monitored and updated throughout the life of the Strategy.

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
Unable to secure capital funding	2	4	8
Changes in policy locally and nationally	1	2	2
Staff pressures and lack of resources to deliver	1	4	4

4.5 **Staffing**

- 4.5.1 With outsourcing recommended by Cabinet at the meeting of 3rd April 2013, the responsibility for delivery and management of the Green Spaces Strategy with Action Plan has transferred to Veolia Environmental Services. The delivery of the Strategy will be monitored in partnership by the Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks and Streets).

4.6 **Accommodation**

- 4.6.1 Not applicable

4.7 **Community Safety**

4.7.1 Not applicable

4.8 **Sustainability**

4.8.1 Not applicable

Appendices

- 1) Green spaces survey results
- 2) Green Spaces Strategy

Background Papers: EIA

File Reference: None