

Subject:	Open Spaces Strategy for Brighton & Hove		
Date of Meeting:	7 October 2014		
Report of:	Executive Director of Environment, Development & Housing		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Jan Jonker	Tel: 29-4722
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 Brighton & Hove has a rich heritage of parks and open spaces with destination parks like Preston Park, six green flag parks and the South Downs National Park extending in to the city. Parks and open spaces contribute to making the city an attractive place to live and visit, improving health and wellbeing, acting as a buffer against weather extremes and contributing to the local economy.
- 1.2 The city needs an updated strategy to inform the future development and maintenance of parks and open spaces. Since the previous strategy was adopted in 2006 a lot of progress has been made: the National Park has been formally designated, the city is part of the Brighton & Lewes Downs UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, significant capital projects have been delivered including Playbuilder and The Level and funding has been secured to extend wildflower planting in the city to improve biodiversity.
- 1.3 An updated strategy is now needed in order to inform the future development of the service and budget decisions and to provide a clear prioritised framework for the long term management of infrastructure. The strategy should also inform Part 2 of the City Plan, particularly in relation to the provision of land for housing and form the basis to help secure external funding and investment including grants and planning contributions.
- 1.4 This report sets out the proposed scope of an Open Spaces Strategy for the city, outlines the process to develop the strategy and seeks permission to proceed with the work.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the importance of producing an updated Open Spaces Strategy for the city at this time.
- 2.2 That the Committee approves the plans to develop an Open Spaces Strategy for the city.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The term Open Spaces incorporates a wide range of land uses including:

- Formal parks and gardens
- Natural and semi natural green space
- Amenity green space
- Church yards
- Allotments
- Outdoor sports facilities
- Play areas

3.2 Maintaining high quality open spaces is vital to the city. Open spaces contribute to economic growth, urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal making the city a more attractive destination and a nicer place to live. They help improve the mental and physical wellbeing of the population. Green networks support biodiversity, including rare species of plants and animals and link the city to the sea and the Downs. They play an important role in creating more resilience to extreme weather. The city is part of the wider Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere recognising the unique nature of the local environment.

3.3 Brighton & Hove has an extensive network of open spaces infrastructure which includes heritage parks including six green flag parks, the sea front, over 3,000 allotments, 50 play grounds, amenity green space, playing fields, green verges and extensive areas of natural and semi natural space forming part of the South Downs National Park. Most green public spaces in the city are managed by City Parks supported by a large number of stakeholders including many volunteers and Friends of Groups.

3.4 The existing Parks Strategy was adopted in 2006. Since then a lot of progress has been made. Key projects include:

- The formal designation of the South Downs National Park in 2010 the boundary of which extends far into the city.
- The creation of the Biosphere Partnership of which Brighton & Hove is the lead partner.
- Changes in practices to increase the amount of perennial planting both to improve biodiversity and reduce costs
- Extending wildflower planting in to the city, in part through the Nature Improvement Area (NIA) project in partnership with the national park and funded through DEFRA and the introduction of sheep grazing
- Implementing parking controls in Preston Park and East Brighton Park to improve the appearance and safety for park users with any surplus income ring-fenced to the park.
- The delivery of the Playbuilder Project which resulted in 26 of the city's play areas being upgraded and the completion of four skateparks.
- The delivery of The Level HLF funded project. The Level is one of the city's main parks and was highlighted in the previous strategy as being a priority in terms of investment need.
- The adoption of the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study produced in line with Planning Policy Guidance 17 and adopted in 2008 which provides an

assessment of the existing provision of outdoor space and sets high level recommendations for each typology and local open space standards.

- The adoption of the Open Space Study Update 2011 further assessed the findings of the 2008 study and undertook an analysis of open space at both a sub area and ward level.
- The adoption of the Allotment Strategy in March 2014
- The commitment to progressing the Stanmer Project as a Council priority in partnership with the SDNPA.

Why a new strategy is needed

- 3.5 Brighton & Hove now needs an updated Open Spaces Strategy to protect and enhance the infrastructure, to maximise their economic, health and environmental benefits and inform planning decisions. The strategy should inform priorities for the service, explore alternative options for service delivery and form a basis for the future management and maintenance of assets. It is also a key document to maximise planning contributions and grant funding.
- 3.6 The City Plan will be the council's key planning document: Part 1 will provide the overall strategic vision for the future of Brighton & Hove to 2030, whilst Part 2 will set out more detailed development control policies. The City Plan will set out how the council will respond to local priorities, meet the challenges of the future and identify broad and more specific locations, scale and types of development needed together with the supporting infrastructure. The City Plan highlights that to meet open space standards more than an additional 200 hectares of open space will be needed by 2030. However it also indicates that due to the constraints and development pressures on the city this is unlikely to be met. Emphasis is therefore placed on retaining, enhancing and making effective use of existing open space to help address the needs of the increasing population.
- 3.7 The City Plan Part 1 is currently at examination stage however the Planning Inspector has indicated that a more rigorous assessment of urban fringe open spaces is needed to determine their potential to help meet housing targets.
- 3.8 This may result in some open space being developed for housing needs and an Open Spaces strategy will help inform decisions on specific locations and how the pressures of additional housing may be minimised or mitigated through effective use of planning gain.

Aims of strategy

- 3.9 The aims and objectives of the strategy will be formally identified through the engagement process but are likely to include:
- Protecting open spaces and the associated heritage in the city to enhance the physical character of the area and shape existing and future development in the city
 - Maintaining the visual amenity essential to the economy and sense of civic pride
 - Increase the economic potential of tourism, leisure and cultural activities
 - Actively contributing to the health agenda improving physical and mental health and social inclusion.

- Aiding urban regeneration and helping secure external funding for regeneration projects
- Deliver the Biosphere priorities in the city including improvement of biodiversity, greater engagement and involvement of local communities and increase resilience to extreme weather
- Maintaining sustainable cultural, social and community facilities including events
- Helping secure planning contributions and ensure they deliver improvements where the need and/or benefit is the greatest
- Help secure grant funding - many potential sources of grant funding require evidence of strategic needs for projects
- Informing the future priorities for the service at a time of increasing budget pressures. It is not anticipated that existing budgets will be sufficient to maintain all of the existing assets to the required standards in years to come. A strategy will provide an evidence base to help inform future management of facilities.
- Explore alternative models of service delivery including opportunities for raising income (eg new commercial facilities) or reducing revenue costs.
- Create a more integrated approach to managing open spaces across the council between different departments including Transport, Property & Design and the Sea Front.

Methodology & time-scales

- 3.10 The strategy will be delivery focussed. A lot of baseline information is already available including documents such as the emerging City Plan the Allotment Strategy, the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, Sea Front Strategy, There will be a need to develop some additional baseline data to inform future plans in areas such as play grounds and playing fields. Developing the strategy will require input from officers across the council including areas such as Public Health, Sustainable Transport, Events, Leisure and Economic Development. The strategy will also engage the community and voluntary sector including Friends of Groups, the Food Partnership and organisations like the Allotment Federation.
- 3.11 The outcomes of the strategy will include:
- Identification of priorities for the service
 - Policies on maintenance of open spaces and green infrastructure, eg in relation to planting and tree planting
 - Identification of areas and types of open spaces where investment should be prioritised to inform budget decisions and efforts to secure external funding
 - Opportunities to improve integration and accessibility to parks and open spaces.
- 3.12 The strategy will focus on delivery and will include an action plan which will be reviewed and updated at least every two years.
- 3.13 The strategy development process will be managed in line with Corporate Project Management procedures. Reports will be brought to this Committee at the relevant stages in the strategy development process supported by a number of member briefings.
- 3.14 Producing the strategy is a significant piece of work which will take up to 18 months to complete.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The strategy process will include identification and evaluation of options for maintenance and development of parks and open spaces.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 A communication and engagement plan will be produced as part of the strategy.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Parks and open spaces are a valuable asset to the city. An updated strategy is required to inform future management and development of these spaces and help prioritise and secure resources.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 It is anticipated that the cost of producing the strategy would be in the order of £50,000 to £60,000 including consultancy support. The cost would be met from the existing Parks Project revenue budget over two financial years (2014/15 and 2015/16).

Finance Officer Consulted: Steven Bedford

Date: 28/08/14

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 provides that the determination of planning applications must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The statutory development plan for the City is the Brighton & Hove Local Plan 2005 which will be superseded by the City Plan once adopted. The City Plan will therefore be the City's key planning policy document as noted in the report. Until such time as the City Plan is adopted the weight to be given to policies set out in the 2005 Local Plan depends on their degree of consistency with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The City Plan, in order to be adopted, must similarly be consistent with the NPPF, as must the Open Spaces Strategy insofar as its purpose of informing the City Plan is concerned.

Lawyer Consulted: Hilary Woodward

Date: 5/9/14

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 The strategy will seek to maintain and improve access to open spaces. As part of the consultation information will be sought from underrepresented groups and people who do not use

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 The city's open spaces are critical to sustainability. One of the key aspects of the strategy will be how the city's open spaces can further contribute to improving sustainability and deliver Biosphere priorities. The strategy will be supported by a detailed action ensuring it is delivery focussed.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.5 The provision of accessible public open spaces has significant beneficial impacts on physical and mental wellbeing of the population. Open spaces provide opportunities for formal and informal sport and recreation and accommodate a wide range of facilities from sports pitches to playgrounds. Access to public open space can have significant positive effects on mental wellbeing. Officers from City Parks and Public Health already work together, (for example on the allotment strategy) and will continue to do so in the development of this Open Spaces Strategy.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. None