

# **STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Service Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

**6 November 2024**

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Green Spaces Strategy Update</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>Councillor Matt Swindlehurst – Portfolio Holder for Leisure &amp; Tourism &amp; Councillor Nigel Yates – Portfolio Holder for Climate Change &amp; Environment</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Gareth Knapper – Senior Strategy &amp; Partnerships Lead</b>
<b>WARDS INVOLVED:</b>	<b>All wards</b>

### **1. Reason for the Report**

- 1.1 To update the Service Delivery Panel on the progress made to implement the Green Spaces Strategy.

### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 For the Panel to discuss the report which sets out progress made to date to implement the Councils Green Spaces Strategy.

### **3. Executive Summary**

- 3.1 A key aim from the Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027 is to produce a new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. This document was later changed to be known as the Green Spaces Strategy and was approved by Cabinet in February 2024.
- 3.2 The 10-year strategy identifies key areas which the Council will focus its resources on, whilst working collaboratively with partners and local stakeholders. Five strategic priorities listed below along with a set of guiding principles to ensure that any development, projects and changes are delivered in an appropriate, affordable and sustainable manner and will help the Council focus its resources effectively and also help to attract external resources to enhance our green spaces.

#### Strategy priorities

1. Make investment in green spaces a priority, protecting our heritage.

2. Use resources effectively and sustainably, maintaining and improving our amenities.
3. Contribute to climate change and biodiversity targets and aims, through planting of trees and managing sites for wildlife, whilst improving flora and fauna.
4. Increase the use and accessibility of green spaces for all, improving health and wellbeing of our communities.
5. Work cooperatively with our communities and effectively with partners through positive community engagement.

### Management Plans

- 3.3 In finalising the strategy, it was agreed to develop specific management plans for the 6 initial sites that are listed below. Management plans are commonly used to summarise the make up of a specific site, including a how it will be maintained and developed, recognising key features, heritage assets, valuable areas, together with an action plan which details what improvements will take place over a period of time.

#### Phase 1

- Halls Road Recreation Ground, Biddulph
- Glebe Road / Brookhouse Way open space, Cheadle
- Birchall Recreation Ground, Leek

#### Phase 2

- Biddulph Valley Park, Biddulph
- Stanfield Crescent Recreation Ground, Cheadle
- Brough Park, Leek

- 3.4 Positive progress is being made to develop management plans as agreed. A project team involving appropriate officers and councillors has been established, with site visits, mapping exercises and identification of priority actions all being completed in readiness to bring each plan review and approval before the end of March 2025 as previously agreed. Three of the six will be completed before the end of the calendar year.
- 3.5 All six sites have been visited by the project team with ideas including new tree and hedgerow planting, mowing regime changes leading to the creation of grassland meadows, wildflower meadows and more taking place. The planting of some new trees and hedgerows at agreed locations will be delivered as part of this year's winter maintenance programme. Once completed the new management plans will be used as working documents to ensure progress on the areas identified are made and monitored effectively#

- 3.6 The effects of Climate Change and the enhancement of biodiversity are key considerations for the future management of our sites. The Council is committed to implementing appropriate actions identified in the Plan for Nature where they are suitable for the land we own and manage. As part of the work to develop management plans, we have started to map out how the six pilot sites can be improved for biodiversity, including new tree and hedgerow planting, mowing regime changes leading to the creation of grassland meadows and wildflower meadows. Some of this work will be planned into this year's winter programme for the planting of new trees and hedgerows.

#### Green Spaces Development Funding

- 3.7 At the time of approving the strategy, it was agreed that a 'Green Spaces Development Fund' to the value of £50,000 (£25k 204/25 and £25k 25/26) would be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and be used to support the development of our green spaces via the actions highlighted in the new management plans. A guidance document summarising how funds will be allocated is nearing completion, but it is seen that the allocation of funds would be considered based on the nature of the project, alignment with priorities in the Strategy, with relatively small amounts being used as a contribution towards larger projects, rather than larger amounts being allocated towards a small number of projects.

#### Sports Pitch Maintenance

- 3.8 On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024, maintenance of Council owned sites which contain formal sports pitches was transferred to AES. This was an agreed change following the expiry of the Leisure Operating Contract with Parkwood Leisure. Extensive work was completed in advance of 1st October to ensure the maintenance specification for these sites better meets ours and user groups requirements, with an affordable and sustainable financial model. Officers used feedback gained from existing users to update the specification for each site.
- 3.9 An example of where we are already improving our green spaces containing sports pitches is at Birchall Recreation Ground in Leek where investment has been made in a new outdoor fitness area, a perimeter footpath with bench seating and additional tree planting. New mowers have also been purchased and improvements to playing pitch quality is already noticeable.
- 3.10 Management arrangements for these sites are the responsibility of the Councils Leisure and Environmental Service team, with bookings for the use of sports pitches being taken by our new council controlled company, Alliance Leisure Limited.

#### **4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 Aim 4 of the Corporate Plan – Protect and Improve the Environment.
- Provision of quality parks and open spaces.
  - Meeting the challenges of climate change.

## 5. **Alternative Options**

- 5.1 As a progress update report, the actions and progress summarised to date follow what was previously reviewed and agreed by the Service Delivery Panel and Cabinet.

Mark Trillo

**Executive Director (Governance and Commissioning)**

### **Web Links and Background Papers**

[Green Spaces Strategy](#)

### **Contact details**

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## 6. **Detail**

### Background

- 6.1 In February 2024 Cabinet approved the new Staffordshire Moorlands Green Spaces Strategy which is a 10-year document that identifies key areas which the Council will focus its resources on, whilst working collaboratively with partners and local stakeholders.
- 6.2 The Strategy identifies five strategic priorities along with a set of guiding principles to ensure that any development, projects and changes are delivered in an appropriate, affordable and sustainable manner and are in line with the agreed approach.

### Strategy priorities

1. Make investment in green spaces a priority, protecting our heritage.
2. Use resources effectively and sustainably, maintaining and improving our amenities.
3. Contribute to climate change and biodiversity targets and aims, through planting of trees and managing sites for wildlife, whilst improving flora and fauna.
4. Increase the use and accessibility of green spaces for all, improving health and wellbeing of our communities.
5. Work cooperatively with our communities and effectively with partners through positive community engagement.

### Management Plans

- 6.3 As part of the new Strategy, it was agreed to develop specific management

plans for the 6 initial sites that are listed below. Management plans are commonly used to summarise the makeup of a specific site, including how it will be maintained and developed, recognising key features, heritage assets, valuable areas, together with an action plan which details what improvements will take place over a period of time.

### Phase 1

- Halls Road Recreation Ground, Biddulph
- Glebe Road / Brookhouse Way open space, Cheadle
- Birchall Recreation Ground, Leek

### Phase 2

- Biddulph Valley Park, Biddulph
- Stanfield Crescent Recreation Ground, Cheadle
- Brough Park, Leek

6.4 Day to day maintenance activities at each site is classed as business as usual and therefore not included in management plans. These tasks are managed on an ongoing basis by the Council Leisure and Environmental Services Team alongside our maintenance provider Alliance Environmental Services (AES). Mowing regimes in some selected locations are being reviewed as part of a report reviewed by this scrutiny panel previously on 5th June 2024 and any key actions arising from these reviews will be included within site management plans to ensure changes are delivered as agreed.

6.5 Positive progress is being made to develop management plans as agreed. An internal project team involving the officers and councillors listed below has been established to oversee the project, with site visits, mapping exercises and identification of priority actions all being completed in readiness to bring each plan forward for review and approval before the end of March 2025 as previously discussed and agreed with this Scrutiny Panel.

### **Councillor Representatives**

Cllr Matt Swindlehurst – Portfolio Holder (Leisure and Tourism)

Cllr Nigel Yates – Portfolio Holder (Climate Change and Environment)

Cllr Mark Johnson

### **Officer Representatives**

Gareth Knapper – Senior Strategy & Partnerships Lead

Andrew Warham – Commissioning Officer (Parks & Open Spaces)

Katie Hampton – Biodiversity Officer

Angela Dale – Partnerships & Engagement Lead

Lydia Naylor – Community Engagement Lead

6.6 All six sites have been visited by the project team with ideas including new

tree and hedgerow planting, mowing regime changes leading to the creation of grassland meadows, wildflower meadows and more taking place. The planting of some new trees and hedgerows at agreed locations will be delivered as part of this year's winter maintenance programme and these additions will be added to the respective management plan where appropriate to ensure they are maintained appropriately.

- 6.7 Once completed the new management plans will be used as working documents by officers responsible for managing and maintaining these sites, to ensure progress on the areas identified are delivered and monitored effectively. These plans will evolve over time and be an ongoing point of development between the Council, service providers and community groups who have an interest in each green spaces. Plans will be reviewed periodically to ensure they continue to deliver against the Green Spaces Strategy priorities and objectives.
- 6.8 The effects of Climate Change and the enhancement of biodiversity are key considerations for the future management of our sites. The Council is committed to implementing appropriate actions identified in the Plan for Nature where they are suitable for the land we own and manage. As part of the work to develop management plans, officers have map out how each of the sites can be improved for biodiversity and an appendix will be added to each of the management plans which sets out key opportunities/actions where biodiversity can be enhanced.
- 6.9 As mentioned above, we have been working to increase the areas of grassland meadow we have on our sites. It has been agreed to use the six pilot sites as a trial for 2025/26, with a plan to scale up the number of sites beyond during the 26/27 financial year and beyond. Changes to maintenance will involve specific areas being left to grow, with one cut taking place during late August / early September. The cuttings will be collected and removed (where appropriate) which helps to reduce the nutrient levels and in turn will improve the growing conditions for different grass species and native wildflowers. More detail about this project will be brought forwards in a future report regarding changes to maintenance regimes.
- 6.10 In advance of the completed management plans coming back to the Panel for review, they will be shared with appropriate stakeholders/interest groups including Town and Parish Council for consultation, with feedback being considered and implemented, to ensure final plans reflect local needs.

#### Green Spaces Development Funding

- 6.11 At the time of approving the strategy, it was agreed that a 'Green Spaces Development Fund' to the value of £50,000 (£25k 204/25 and £25k 25/26) would be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and be used to support the development of our green spaces via the actions highlighted in the new management plans.
- 6.12 Funding could also be used to assist Town and Parish Councils improve green spaces which they own and manage. A guidance document summarising how

funds will be allocated is nearing completion, but it is seen that the allocation of funds would be considered based on the nature of the project, alignment with priorities in the Strategy, with relatively small amounts being allocated as a contribution towards larger projects, rather than larger amounts being allocated towards a small number of projects.

### Sports Pitch Maintenance

- 6.13 On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024, maintenance of Council owned sites which contain formal sports pitches transferred to AES. This was an agreed change following the expiry of the Leisure Operating Contract with Parkwood Leisure. Extensive work was completed in advance of 1<sup>st</sup> October to ensure the maintenance specification for the sites listed below better meets ours and user groups requirements, with an affordable and sustainable financial model.

#### **Biddulph**

Church Road Playing Fields  
Halls Road Recreation Ground  
Mill Hayes Recreation Ground

#### **Cheadle**

MyActive Cheadle (formally South Moorlands Leisure Centre) Grass Pitches  
Stanfield Crescent Playing Field  
Thorley Drive Sports Ground

#### **Leek**

Birchall Recreation Ground  
Brough Park (bowling greens)

- 6.14 An example of where we are already improving our green spaces containing sports pitches is at Birchall Recreation Ground in Leek where investment has been made in a new outdoor fitness area, a perimeter footpath with bench seating and additional tree planting. New mowers have also been purchased and improvements to playing pitch quality is already noticeable. Further work is being progressed to install Active Trails signage which will show those who visit the site how they can be more active in the green space, contain QR codes for videos of exercises and signpost to clubs and activities happening at the site.
- 6.15 Management arrangements for these sites are the responsibility of the Councils Leisure and Environmental Service team, with bookings for the use of sports pitches being taken by our new council controlled company, Alliance Leisure Limited.