



## Environment Committee

11 January 2016

<b>Title</b>	<b>Draft Parks &amp; Open Spaces Strategy</b>
<b>Report of</b>	Commissioning Director - Environment
<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Status</b>	Public
<b>Urgent</b>	No
<b>Key</b>	No
<b>Enclosures</b>	Appendix 1 – The draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy Appendix 2 – The draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy Summary Document
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## Summary

### **Draft Parks and Open Spaces Policy**

It is predicted that the Borough is to change in a most dramatic fashion in the forthcoming decades with increased population, increased housing and commercial infrastructure.

The Council recognize that good quality parks and open spaces are to play a major role in its continued drive to improve and secure a sustainable future for the built and natural environments of the Borough and that investment in its green infrastructure is as important as investment in its built infrastructure.

This is set against a background of budget reductions across the Council and for Environment in particular where a £0.8million saving has been identified to come from the Green Spaces budget.

To ensure that the Borough parks and open spaces are prepared to meet these increased demands and pressures the Council is preparing a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy that will set the Council's vision for its parks and plan for their future as major community

assets.

The draft strategy has assessed the current provision of green spaces in terms of quantity and quality, public benefit or public value and accessibility. The strategy sets out details of current and future challenges including; future funding, demographics change, climate change and green infrastructure demands.

The strategy sets out the economic, social and environmental benefits of good quality parks and open spaces for Barnet and it describes the ways in which people who live and work in Barnet have contributed to the development of the strategy through an engagement process.

To help advance the parks and open spaces as community assets and be best placed to contribute to the wellbeing of the borough's residents, the draft strategy outlines a capital investment strategy identifying; investment opportunities and priorities, targeted investment themes and sites, investment programme and the revenue implications.

To meet the varying demands to be placed on these spaces the draft strategy looks at various future funding and governance models to enable the strategy to be effectively and efficiently carried through, these include; Council management, Trusts, third party/private management, precepts and local taxation, social enterprise and endowments.

A framework of policies is also included to guide the future planning of the service and support the decision making processes relating to the future development of the service.

With a strategy in place site specific plans will be drawn up for individual sites and these themselves will be subject to detailed public consultation and appropriate Member approval before implementation.

### **Revision to the Events in Parks Policy**

The Events in Parks Policy was approved by cabinet in 2012 and delegated the powers to approve any future changes to the Lead Member for Environment. In moving to a committee system this recommendation can no longer be utilised.

The recommendation will be that authority is amended to be delegated to the Street Scene Director in consultation with the Chair of the Environment Committee to approve the review and amendment of the Events in Parks Policy.

## **Recommendations**

- 1. That the Environment Committee note the draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy**
- 2. That the Environment Committee approve and instruct that the Commissioning Director for Environment to release the draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for public consultation**
- 3. That the Environment Committee approve that authority be delegated to the Street Scene Director in consultation with the Chairman of the Environment Committee to review and amendment of the Events in Parks Policy**

## **1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED**

### **Draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy**

- 1.1 As part of the approach this Council is taking to address the demands of a developing Borough and the impacts on its built and natural environments the Council is developing a number of strategies. Alongside the Parks and Open Spaces strategy will also sit strategies on waste and recycling, enforcement against environmental crime as well as a new cleansing framework. These will ensure that we are well placed to respond to these challenges now and be in a position of preparedness to manage the issues in the future; all this against a background of financial stringency.
- 1.2 The Council has, therefore, developed this draft strategy for parks and open spaces which reflects the needs and aspirations of residents, businesses and visitors to the Borough and ensures a sustainable financial basis for the service.
- 1.3 This draft strategy will also compliment and support other strategies that the Council has produced including The Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Family Friendly Barnet and the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy.
- 1.4 Producing this strategy gave an opportunity to re-think the role that parks and open spaces play within the borough and recognize they have the potential to support a wide range of other cross-cutting strategic priorities, including the environment, biodiversity, education, employment, community safety, regeneration and community engagement.
- 1.5 The strategy will enable the Council to:
  - prioritise, plan and commit resources to improve green spaces across the borough,
  - make the case to funders for increased external resources,
  - make informed decisions about the future management of the service and
  - ensure future development is informed by open space needs and requirements and aligns with other corporate priorities.
- 1.6 A draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has now been produced and to proceed to the next stage of the final approval process the draft strategy will be subject to an eight week formal public consultation.
- 1.7 In the past there has been insufficient evidence or sources of investment to target those assets with the greatest potential to increase resident satisfaction, generate income or deliver social or economic benefits. The adoption of the strategy provides the platform for the maximisation of potential investment from regeneration schemes and other external bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).
- 1.8 To inform the development of the draft strategy a complete assessment of the parks and open spaces was undertaken creating an accurate picture of the quality and condition of the parks and open spaces. A review of the budget

allocations through an Activity Based Costing exercise is being undertaken at the moment and this will provide a clear operational and financial baseline for the service.

- 1.9 The development of the draft strategy has provided an opportunity for the Council to set a clear vision and way forward for the parks and open spaces and to guide that vision will formulate a number of policies. Through committing to these policies and implementing this strategy, we will ensure that these key assets are enhanced and continue to tell a positive story about Barnet as a place to live, now and in the future. These policies will be around:
- Bring provision levels up to Core Strategy target level,
  - Funding and governance of newly created spaces within development areas,
  - Developing a design-led service that enhances town centres and neighbourhoods, preserves heritage and builds green networks,
  - Public safety and security,
  - Enhancing play provision,
  - Improving facilities and the 'park offer',
  - Using parks to support health and education outcomes,
  - Building climate change resilience through parks and open spaces,
  - Building stronger relationships between the Council and users and
  - Considering new ways of funding and managing parks.
- 1.10 Customer insight and engagement has provided an understanding of the priorities of residents and tapped into proposals the community may have had to re-think their local green spaces. It has identified a spectrum of opportunities for empowering local community involvement, ranging from increasing the level of volunteering in parks, supporting Friends of Parks groups or other volunteering groups to building new relationships with local sports clubs.
- 1.11 The analysis of the survey data so far has enabled an assessment to be made of the quality and public benefit or value of each park or open space. The application of a scoring matrix has identified a series of Key themes that are important to people and what they feel need improving. They are:
- Cleanliness of parks
  - Maintenance of parks
  - Quality of facilities for parents and children
  - The care and protection of nature and wildlife
  - Feeling safe
  - Toilet facilities
  - Café facilities
- 1.12 This matrix also graphically illustrates those sites that are most in need of improvement enabling the targeting of resources to raise the rating from poor to good in terms of quality and public benefit or value and to meet the demands of future need.

- 1.13 The draft strategy build up has also identified untapped opportunities to derive greater public benefit from parks and open spaces; increasing their level of use for health or recreational purposes, supporting more private events and building closer partnerships with national sports bodies such as the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and Football Association (FA).
- 1.14 Since the advent of the 'austerity economy' central government grant support for local authorities has been consistently reduced. The total Council budget for 2015/16 is £276million. Following the Policy and Resources Committee on 16th December 2015 the Committee resolved that subject to consultation that between 2016 and 2020 further savings of £81 million will need to be identified. The Environment Committee, whose remit includes parks and open spaces, will identify savings of £10.5 million over this period of which £0.8 million of those savings are expected to be secured from the Green Spaces budgets. The gross budget for parks and open spaces in 2015/16 is £4,629,682 with an income of £1,699,224.
- 1.15 Against this background a key outcome for parks and green spaces set by the committee is to ensure:
- 'Barnet is seen as a national leader in developing attractive suburban parks with its communities that promote health and wellbeing, conserve the natural character of the area, and encourage economic growth.'* (Environment Committee Commissioning Plan 2015-2020, p9)
- 1.16 It is clear that this strategy will be important for the parks in the Borough in taking the service forward, to address the identified issues of residents and meet the budget constraints facing the Council.
- 1.17 The draft strategy has examined Alternate Delivery Models, ADM, options that could be adopted in whole or in part that will enable the Council to progress the aims and objectives for the service in the most effective manner and deliver its vision. Models that have been identified are:
- Retaining and improving the status quo
  - Shared public services
  - Third party contract management
  - Social enterprises and partnerships
  - Trusts and foundations
  - Area based precepts and levies
- 1.18 Whichever model is adopted it will need to ensure that any investments that are made in our open spaces, delivers targeted positive outcomes, and protects our parks and open spaces for the future.

The consultation process will seek views from the public on the current and future demands on the parks and open spaces. It will seek views on the Council's vision for the parks of the future on the policies and possible ADM options for the future governance and management of the parks. In May 2016

the results of the consultation and the finalised Strategy will be presented to Environment Committee.

### **Revision to the Events in Parks Policy**

- 1.19 In 2012 Cabinet approved the Events in Parks Policy and delegated the powers to approve any future changes to the Lead Member for Environment, in moving to a committee system this recommendation can no longer be utilised. Recommendation three within this report will allow for the Street Scene Director to review and update the Events in Parks Policy
- 1.20 Since the events in parks policy was adopted in 2012 the Street Scene delivery unit has noted some areas within the policy that require review. Some key sites that host long standing community events were not included in the original document, some of the wording used to differentiate between the types of events was unclear and resulted in some events being given the wrong classification and the restrictions imposed against the private events have created barriers to anyone wishing to host a private event. The Street Scene delivery unit will look to update the current policy in order to address these issues after which a formal public consultation would be undertaken on the proposed revisions to the Events in Parks Policy. This consultation would be focused in the local area to:
- Hendon Park (NW4)
  - Scratchwood (NW7)
  - Edgwarebury Park (HA8)
  - Princes Park (NW11)
- These are the parks already agreed within the Events in Parks Policy, as suitable for private events. This report is not suggesting a change to locations where private events are permitted,

- 1.21 An Officer Delegated Powers Report from the Street Scene Director in consultation with the Chair of the Environment Committee will be used to record the decision.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Recommendations 1 and 2 authorise a period of public consultation on the draft strategy.
- 2.2 Recommendation 3 relates to updating an existing delegated power from the previous system of Lead Portfolio Members in order to bring it in line with the council's committee system.

## **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

- 3.1 The Council has the option of not consulting on the draft parks and open spaces strategy, however, this will mean that the public will not have an opportunity to influence the future provision of Barnet's open spaces. This is not recommended.

## **4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 If the Committee is so minded to approve the draft's release to public consultation carried out as described in paragraph 5.7.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

- 5.1.1 To increase the percentage of people satisfied with Barnet's parks, playgrounds and open spaces, both across the borough as a whole and within parks currently scoring the lowest levels of satisfaction
- 5.1.2 Driving an increase in overall resident satisfaction with Barnet as a place to live to amongst the highest of any Outer London borough
- 5.1.3 Facilitating economic growth and the success of residents, and removing any barriers or unnecessary costs to growth for successful local businesses
- 5.1.4 With the help of residents protecting, conserving and enhancing green space and the leafy character of Barnet for current and future generations
- 5.1.5 Supporting and improving the health and wellbeing of the population by linking with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, by providing safe green spaces to play by making them more family friendly and linking with the Safer Communities Strategy, participate in sports and physical activity, walk and cycle by linking with the forthcoming Sport and Physical Activity Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy.
- 5.1.6 Establish Barnet as a place that supports growth in a way that allows both existing and future residents to succeed, and which drives satisfaction with the Borough as a place to live to amongst the highest in the country

### **5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

- 5.2.1 To reduce the council's net expenditure on Green Spaces by looking at how Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) savings can be achieved and how additional income or investment can be brought into the service
- 5.2.2 The adoption of the strategy provides the platform for the maximisation of potential investment from regeneration schemes and other external bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

### **5.3 Social Value**

- 5.3.1 The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2013 requires people who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Before commencing a procurement process, commissioners should think about whether the

services they are going to buy, or the way they are going to buy them, could secure these benefits for their area or stakeholders.

## 5.4 Legal and Constitutional References

5.4.1 Local authorities have a number of different statutory powers in relation to parks and open spaces, including the Public Health Act 1875, which permits the purchase and maintenance of public walks or pleasure grounds and the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, which gives wide powers to provide recreational facilities. The Open Spaces Act 1906 provides that local authorities shall hold and administer open space in trust to allow the enjoyment of it by the public and shall maintain and keep the open space in a good and decent state.

5.4.2 The Council's Constitution, in Part 15 Annex A, Responsibility for Functions, states in Annex A the functions of the Environment Committee including:

- To include specific responsibilities for commissioning the following:
  - Street Scene
  - Parks and Open Spaces
  - Trees
- To approve fees and charges for those areas under the remit of the Committee

## 5.5 Risk Management

5.5.1 The management of risk is done on a continual basis and reported as part of the Council Quarterly Performance regime and considered as part of the Performance and Contract Management Committee quarterly monitoring report.

5.5.2 Risks are managed through the project boards and review and revised at its meeting. The current key risk areas are regarding :

	Rating Criteria	1: Low	2: Med	3: High
1	Total investment required		X	
2	Potential benefits		X	
3	Return on investment		X	
4	Level of risk	X		
5	Political sensitivity		X	
6	Fit with corporate objectives		X	
7	Users / DU's impacted	X		
	Total Score	12		

## 5.6 Equalities and Diversity

5.6.1 The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equalities Duty which requires Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to:



- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- foster good relations between people from different groups

5.6.2 Relevant protected characteristics are – age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

5.6.3 The purpose of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy is to ensure that the broad diversity of our resident and communities in Barnet continue to enjoy the benefits of these community assets and their needs and aspirations are reflected in the provision that Barnet makes.

5.6.4 An initial EIA is being developed and this is showing a positive impact on the Borough's communities. This EIA will be kept under review, updated to take account of feedback from the consultation exercise and will be developed as the strategy takes shape. A final EIA will be published in May 2016 together with the Parks and Green Spaces strategy when Environment Committee will be asked to recommend the implementation of the strategy. In addition, any specific EIA necessary for a specific aspect of the strategy will be undertaken ahead of implementation.

## **5.7 Consultation and Engagement**

5.7.1 The Council is proposing to consult the public on the draft parks and open spaces strategy. Such consultation must be carried out fairly. In general, a consultation can only be considered as proper consultation if:

- Comments are genuinely invited at the formative stage;
- The consultation documents include sufficient reasons for the proposal to allow those being consulted to be properly informed and to give an informed response;
- There is adequate time given to the consultees to consider the proposals;
- There is a mechanism for feeding back the comments and those comments are conscientiously taken into account by the decision maker / decision making body when making a final decision;
- The degree of specificity with which, in fairness, the public authority should conduct its consultation exercise may be influenced by the identity of those whom it is consulting; and
- The consultation is clear on the reasons why, and the extent to which alternatives and discarded options, have been considered.

5.7.2 Barnet Council is committed to involving residents, businesses and service users in shaping the borough and the services they receive. Consultation and engagement is one of the key ways the council interacts with and involves local communities and residents, providing them with opportunities to:

- Gain greater awareness and understanding of what the council does

- Voice their views and understand how they can get involved
- Feed in their views to the democratic decision making process.

### **Preliminary consultation and engagement**

5.7.3 The council has already undertaken a range of consultation and engagement to inform and to develop the Draft Strategy.

5.7.4 Insight data has also been used to inform the development of the strategy and to verify the assumptions being drawn from the various user survey conducted.

### **Formal Public Consultation**

5.7.5 If the draft strategy is approved formal public consultation will commence following Environment Committee on the 11 January before the final strategy is agreed by Environment Committee on the 12 May 2016.

5.7.6 A summary document of the draft strategy has also been produced and can be seen in Appendix 2. This draft document will have its final design stage in January to ensure it meets corporate design guidance, before the consultation starts.

5.7.7 The consultation will run for eight weeks and will include:

- An online consultation -published on Engage Barnet which will include a link to the full strategy and a consultation document which summarise the strategy and key questions. Residents will be able to give their views via an online questionnaire. Alternative formats will also be made available on request,
- Public consultation events in the three large Barnet shopping centres (Brent Cross, The Spires and Boardwalk Centre) where officers will be available to answer questions and help members of the public complete the questionnaire,
- As meeting calendars permit; attendance at Area Resident's Forums to make presentations and answer questions
- Further events and workshops for specific groups with an interest in Barnet parks. This will include working with young people by holding workshops in schools and attending the Youth Forum; having an event for all of Barnet's Friends groups so that they can come together and share views; and host focus groups for protected groups such as those with disabilities or faith groups.

5.7.8 If the strategy is approved in May 2016 specific engagement programmes will take place for each programme as necessary.

## **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Cabinet Report 17 July 2012 – Events in Parks Policy](#)

[Full Cabinet Report Pack July 2012](#)