



EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	Parks Development Plan 2020-2030	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
Meeting of:	Corporate Management Team 17 th November 2020	X
	Leader and Deputy Leaders 23 rd November 2020	X
	Leader's / Leader of the Opposition's Advisory Group / Independent Alliance Advisory Group December 2 nd and 3 rd	X
	Cabinet December 14th	



Is this an Executive Decision:	NO	Is this a Key Decision:	NO
Is this in the Forward Plan:	YES	Is the Report Confidential:	NO
If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A LGA 1972:	N/A		

Essential Signatories:

ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN THE NAME OF A HEAD OF SERVICE

Monitoring Officer: **Angela Wakefield**

Date Signature

Chief Finance Officer: **Sal Khan**

Date Signature

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

Date: December 14th 2020

REPORT TITLE: Parks Development Plan

PORTFOLIO: Cllr Ed Barker

HEAD OF SERVICE: Mark Rizk

CONTACT OFFICER: Michael Hovers Ext. No. x1776

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. This report sets out a strategic plan, supported by operational objectives, for the development and enhancement of parks across East Staffordshire for the next 10 years.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Open Spaces are a prominent feature across East Staffordshire and provide space for residents to rest and play. The strategy outlined in the unfolding paragraphs seeks to create places that are interesting and provide mental and physical stimulation to residents and visitors alike. Key to this ambition is efficient operational delivery that enables green spaces to be clean, tidy and free of vandalism.
- 2.2. This strategy also aims to look to the future with a commitment to introducing new types of play equipment and an emphasis on contracted suppliers reducing their use of polluting fuels and chemicals. The environment and climate change is a major theme throughout the plan with objectives around reduced mowing, wildflower planting and tree planting.
- 2.3. Reaching the aims set out in the plan cannot be achieved with the resources available to ESBC alone; although the annual budgets and Section 106 funds play a pivotal role. Therefore, an emphasis is placed on continued joint working with internal departments and the forging of partnerships with Parish

Councils and other community organisations.

3. Background

- 3.1. East Staffordshire Borough Council has responsibility for over 350 open spaces of various shapes and sizes that are used for a broad spectrum of activities. All of these- no matter how small- help to make the borough greener and more welcoming as well as contributing to reduced carbon emissions. A number of parks are also old having been passed to the Council by benefactors at the turn of the last century; Stapenhill Gardens and Bramshall Park are two prime examples. These parks are well regarded (and used) by generations of residents with many holding fond memories.
- 3.2. Over the past decade parks, like many government services, has felt the impact of austerity. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has seen something of rejuvenation in parks with many people using open space for the first time. Whilst welcome, this increased interest in parks has raised a series of challenges that are not just economic but also social and environmental.
- 3.3. Subsequently, this report aims to provide a strategy for the development of parks and open spaces over the forthcoming decade.

4. Contribution to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1. Environment and Health & Well Being

5. Developing and Enhancing East Staffordshire's Open Spaces

5.1 Strategic Direction

- 5.1.1 The provision of parks or open spaces was initially conceived by the Victorians during the industrial revolution to provide workers with access to fresh clean air, opportunities to exercise and escape from the demands of work. Despite the passing of many decades these aims still resonate today. However, in the 21st century residents also face new challenges that can impact upon their mental health and well-being.
- 5.1.2 Consequently, the strategic aim of this plan is to utilise open spaces to encourage people to exercise, offer places to relax (mentally and physically), be mentally stimulating and accessible. These developments, whilst helping to improve mental and physical well-being for the population, will also seek to have a positive impact on the environment through sympathetic planting and/or grounds maintenance regimes.

5.2. Operational delivery- introduction

- 5.2.1 The strategic ambition for parks is to be underpinned by a series of operational actions. Taken in isolation these actions or activities should provide some localised benefit, but as a collective, make a significant contribution to overall strategic objectives. Each action/activity is explored in further detail below.

5.3 Clean, tidy and free of vandalism

- 5.3.1 In order to encourage greater use of parks they need to be free of litter, clean and promote feelings of safety. Realising this aim will involve a number of factors- some of which are covered in later sections- but this aspect considers the physical actions ESBC can undertake.
- 5.3.2 October 31st 2021 will see the current grounds maintenance contract expire and a new specification introduced. Contained within the existing specification, for example, are rates of bin emptying and litter picking across all parks. This rate predominantly stands at one or two litter picks a week and one bin emptying. Generally, this ratio is acceptable and yields few complaints and it should be noted is constrained by budgetary limits. Following the upsurge in the use of parks during the COVID19 lockdown this particular regime came under significant pressure and the smaller 57 litre metal bins proved inadequate. Consequently, the aim is to maintain a standard schedule but with temporary uplifts in frequency based on intelligence gathered by officers, and feedback from Councillors and members of the public. As part of a rolling programme across all parks, larger double sized recycling bins will be introduced, replacing the smaller metal version. These larger bins have already been introduced to the council's Green Flag Parks and on a number of other sites.
- 5.3.3 Information and observations from a variety of sources are crucial to maintaining safe parks. ESBC operate a comprehensive range of inspections. These take place daily via the grounds maintenance contractor, monthly through the Open Spaces team, three-monthly play equipment inspections by a third party provider, and annual play equipment inspections undertaken by a specialist inspection company. However, even with this regime in place, there will be times when the Council need the 'eyes and ears' of the public and councillors to spot items that need repairing, cleaning, removing or renovating. With this in mind, the intention is to further actively promote the open spaces hotline (01283 508013) so that awareness levels increase on how to report an issue to the Council.
- 5.3.4 Other physical protection measures to keep parks safe include height barriers and locking of entrance gates. These items help to reduce incidents of crime, ASB and trespass. When an incident occurs, these defensive measures are reviewed and if required, upgraded or replaced with alternative methods of security.

5.4 Play equipment (new and old)

- 5.4.1 Play equipment is often the first port of call when people consider developing parks. Where space allows, the context is right, and there is need presented by young families or teenagers then ESBC will look to enhance the provision. Where the Council will diverge from previous approaches is in the type of new equipment installed. Rather than swings and slides, new varied pieces are to be considered to vary the experience; including pieces that allow inclusive play. A recent example is the installation of a Tech Ball table at Newton Road Park; the first of its kind in East Staffordshire. Older pieces of kit will not be neglected, maintenance programmes determine that they are repainted

regularly and the inspection regime (set out in 5.24) ensures old and new alike remain in working order. Across the life of this plan, members may consider the re-establishment of a capital programme for the replacement of play equipment items.

5.5 Volunteers and volunteering

5.5.1 The Council has a healthy cohort of volunteers and projects stretching across the borough. Examples include Scalpecliffe Woods Friends of Group, GO Garden and Winhill Bloomers. These volunteer groups have been set up to add value to parks and open spaces. Leadership of these groups are provided by members of the community and ESBC often take a consultative or advisory role. The Open Spaces team have continuously adopted a stance that volunteering should enhance open spaces and not be a replacement for reduced or withdrawn council services; as has happened in some local authorities. Subsequently, the aim is to encourage further volunteering.

5.5.2 One area of focus for encouraging volunteering is tree planting. Burton especially is lacking in tree coverage; something identified in the I-trees survey of 2016. In a bid to increase tree coverage, boost volunteering and reduce carbon emissions the FOREST (Friends of Restoring East Staffordshire's trees) project will enable local residents to become actively involved in tree planting. The initial planting of trees started in the spring of 2020 with the Council's own staff and councillors planting trees at Stapenhill Gardens and Shobnall Fields respectively.

5.5.3 Aside from the improvements to parks, volunteering can yield a range of benefits to an individual's physical and mental well-being. Volunteers can meet like-minded people, make new friends, get active and be part of something that will be a lasting legacy on their park. The ESBC team has significant experience of managing volunteers and have worked with groups ranging from the local WI to combat veterans suffering from PTSD.

5.6 Trees

5.6.1 Trees play a number of important roles in parks and the lives of residents. When set within open spaces, the breadth and range of tree specimens provide a visually stimulating aspect to a park and older examples help to illustrate the history of a particular area: Stapenhill Cemetery and Bramshall Park being two notable examples.

5.6.2 However, the 2016 I-trees survey illustrated that Burton particularly is lacking in tree cover and a varied range of species and ages. Organisationally, ESBC employee the Tree Wise database that provides officers with an accurate understanding of the age, location and potential risks associated with a tree. Although the I-trees project is now dated, the Open Spaces Team aim to continue with the objectives and ethos of this project and incorporate positive action, specifically relating to trees, in the wider parks development plan. National government in June 2020 launched a consultation on a national tree strategy for England, once finalised this strategy will also influence the Council's tree programme. Subsequently, the resulting action plan will look at planting of new trees, engaging volunteers and protection of existing tree

stocks. Fortunately, of the latter item, ESBC have a strong and robust Tree Management Policy that has acted as a bulwark against the more vociferous calls for tree removal.

5.6.3 Previous paragraphs (5.2.7) have highlighted the volunteering ambitions set out with the FOREST scheme and the physical and mental health benefits associated with volunteering. Once planted trees have a positive environmental impact that has been well documented in various studies around the globe and will therefore not be re-iterated in this report. However, what is clear, is that the planting of more trees and protecting existing stocks provides a visible and tangible demonstration of the council's commitment to the climate change agenda.

5.7 Places of interest with sustainability at their centre

5.7.1 Parks can occasionally become formulaic in their makeup, consisting of a play area (normally with a swing and slide), football pitch or MUGA or both, pathways, benches, a few trees, some grassed areas and possibly shrub beds. Whilst this are perfectly adequate facilities there is a need for open spaces that are visually and mentally stimulating, but that are sustainable.

5.7.2 Relaxation of the mowing regime in parks is one simple method that can be employed. Large tracts of grass are cut but rarely walked upon by members of the public; grass at the edges of parks are a particular example. Consequently, rather than cut the grass across the entirety of the park it is proposed to reduce the regime and allow grass to grow. Once the grass has grown to a sufficient level pathways and mazes can then be mown into the grass and changed every year. This would provide an interesting experience for visitors of all ages. Furthermore, a more relaxed mowing regime will help to increase biodiversity and provide another visible illustration of the council's commitment to climate change.

5.7.3 Planting of wildflowers has been another tactic that has been utilised to increase biodiversity and is at the centre of the council's 'Bee Friendly' campaign. These have been sown across various sites across East Staffordshire and create a visually stunning display when at their peak. Moving into 2021 and beyond the aim is to expand the number of locations where wildflowers are planted. Wildflowers will help to encourage plant pollinators and increase the diversity of wildlife – especially when coupled with additional tree planting. Once established, wildflowers can also have a community safety benefit with displays discouraging groups from gathering on the edge of parks or to the rear of residents' properties.

5.7.4 Allied to this initiatives is an ongoing drive to reduce the amount of annual bedding used by ESBC. Where appropriate, annual bedding will be phased out and replaced by more sustainable permanent planting.

5.7.5 Previous sections have highlighted the potential that exists with the re-tendering of the grounds maintenance contract. This re-tender enables the Council to set objectives for the successful bidder around reducing their carbon footprint, the phasing out and eradication of chemicals and pollutants

and the encouragement of new or innovative solutions that promote more environmentally friendly operational practices.

5.8 Joint working (Internally and Externally)

- 5.8.1 The Open Spaces team have received invaluable support from a number of other Council teams over the years, ranging from Waste Managements' litter picks, bin emptying and sweeping, to reports from the Community and Civil Enforcement team. These internal links will continue to be important to ensure that parks and open spaces remain safe, clean and tidy.
- 5.8.2 Outside of ESBC a number of projects have been delivered through successful collaborative working between the borough council and external partners such as Parish Council's. Notable examples include the installation of gym equipment on Heath Road Park in conjunction with Stapenhill PC and the award winning "Peace Wood" at Mill Hill Park via joint working with Winshill PC. The latter project provides a clear illustration of how an area of grass can be transformed into something truly inspirational that the local community can be proud of. Subsequently, the aim across the forthcoming decade is to continue to explore joint working opportunities with external partners.
- 5.8.3 Central to joint working will be the ongoing operation of the "In Bloom Federation" which operates as a platform for sharing information and best practice between the council and our various in bloom partners. The achievements of this forum are illustrated in the decade of gold medals for Uttoxeter and Burton, six straight years of gold for Winshill, numerous special recognition awards for individuals and groups and entry into the UK national awards 3 out of the last 4 years. Sitting alongside the In Bloom entry will be Green Flag award submissions for upper tier parks, Bramshall Park and Stapenhill Gardens. Underneath this sits "It's Your Neighbourhood" Parks awards for Community Parks and Stapenhill Cemetery.

5.9 Finance and funding

- 5.9.1 The above paragraphs have set out some ambitious improvements for parks in East Staffordshire. However, budgets are limited and any future work needs to be grounded with realism over what is affordable and when. Conversely, some of the proposals such as relaxed mowing, wildflower planting and a reduced reliance on annual bedding has the propensity to yield a small saving.
- 5.9.2 Consequently, the funding of these aims will be met by existing budgets, S106 monies and joint working with partners (the Stapenhill PC example set out in paragraph 5.2.17 saw the PC fund the new equipment with ESBC taking on the ongoing maintenance costs). Projects are to be staggered across a number of years to not only alleviate the financial burden but also enable officers to have the capacity to deliver an ongoing programme. Inevitably, some projects may be delayed if normal in year costs do not allow for these further improvements.

6. Financial Considerations

This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit: Anya Murray

There are no financial issues arising from this Report as the funding will be provided through existing budgets, Section 106 monies and contributions from external partners

Revenue	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23

Capital	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23

7. Risk Assessment and Management

7.1. The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:

7.2. **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits):

7.2.1. Supports the Council's ambitions around climate change

7.2.2. Creates opportunities for volunteering and encourages physical activity amongst residents.

7.2.3. Provides a framework for the physical enhancement of parks and open spaces

7.3. **Negative** (Threats):

7.3.1. Budgetary restraints may delay or prevent some of the objectives in the plan from being achieved

7.3.2. Reduced grass cutting regimes to encourage biodiversity can be subject to complaints about being unsightly.

7.3.3. Wildflowers, whilst spectacular at their peak, need time to establish and can look tired towards the end of season.

7.4. The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

8. Legal Considerations

This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:

Angela Wakefield

8.1. There are no significant legal issues arising from this Report

9. Equalities and Health

9.1. **Equality impacts:** The subject of this Report is a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is attached as Appendix B.

9.2. **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question requires a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed. An equality and health impact assessment is attached as Appendix B.

9.3. The main equality or health issues arising from this Report are as follows:
None

9.4. The equality and health impact assessment identified the following actions to be carried out: None

10. Human Rights

10.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report

11. Sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures)

11.1. Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures) Yes

11.2. Positive (Opportunities/Benefits)

11.2.1 Wildflower and tree planting along with relaxed mowing regimes can make a positive contribution to climate change.

11.2.2 Increased recycling rates for waste from parks will reduce the Council's carbon footprint

11.2.3 Procurement measures and contractual commitments set out a pathway for suppliers to become carbon neutral, in line with the aspirations of ESBC

11.3 Negative (threats)

11.3.1 Some changes that are beneficial to the environment and make a contribution to climate change are not aesthetically pleasing to some residents.

11.3.2 Use of alternatives to red diesel and other fuels/chemicals may increase operating costs which in turn will reduce the scope for investment in other parts of the plan.

12. **Recommendation(s)**

12.1. Members consider and approve the plan

13. **Appendices**

13.1. Appendix A : Parks Development Plan

13.2. Appendix B: EHIA Parks Development Plans