



**EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT COVER SHEET**

<b>Title of Report:</b>	Year 1 review Parks Development Plan	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
<b>Meeting of:</b>	Corporate Management Team: 16th November 2021	X
	Leader and Deputy Leaders: 22 <sup>nd</sup> November 2021	X
	Leader's / Leader of the Opposition's Advisory Group / Independent Alliance Advisory Group: 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2021	X
	Cabinet 13 <sup>th</sup> December 2021	



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: **Chris Ebberley**

Date ..... Signature .....

Chief Finance Officer: **Sal Khan**

Date ..... Signature .....

**EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Report to Cabinet**

**Date: 20<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

**REPORT TITLE: Year 1 review (Parks Development Plan)**

**PORTFOLIO: Cllr Bev Ashcroft**

**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 first year review of the Parks Development Plan (PDP), a strategic plan for the Boroughs parks. Created in December 2020 the plan set out a series objectives for the development and enhancement of parks across East Staffordshire for the next 10 years.

**2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. 2021-22 has been the first delivery year of the PDP and great progress has been made in the first twelve months. Scores at It's Your Neighbourhood Park awards have increased by 39% with the Borough Council and its partners scooping many accolades. Volunteering opportunities have continued apace with successful links forged with public and private sector organisations. Wildflower, tree and sustainable planting have not only created visual enhancements but have been very well received by the public. Marketing has been a cross-cutting theme that has impacted positively upon open spaces and the utilisation of Section 106 monies has helped to "fast track" improvements that may have been delayed had they been funded from internal budgets.

**3. Background**

- 3.1. East Staffordshire Borough Council has responsibility for over 350 open spaces of various shapes and sizes. The PDP set out to provide a pathway for the improvement and enhancement of open spaces across the next 10 years. As well as setting out the strategic direction the PDP sought to achieve these improvements through a series of actions divided into five distinct categories. These are:
- Volunteering & Community
  - Visual Amenity
  - Climate Change & Biodiversity
  - Operations
  - Market & Promotions
- 3.2. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic a number of actions have been postponed or have not been able to be carried out to their full extent. However, the ten year life span of the plan continues to ensure these objectives remain relevant.

#### **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 strategic aim of the PDP is to utilise open spaces to encourage people to exercise, offer places to relax (mentally and physically), be mentally stimulating and accessible. Alongside this objective are targets relating to sustainability and environmental impact which has come into sharper focus as the council aims to be carbon neutral by 2040.

##### **5.2. Volunteering & Community**

- 5.2.1 Volunteering ambitions have been inhibited by the ongoing pandemic. The pre and post-Christmas lockdown curtailed any substantial volunteering schemes relating to tree planting and as a result have been postponed until winter 2021. Fortunately, this corresponds neatly with the ideal time to plant trees (November-March). Whilst larger volunteer schemes on parks have been affected, the Horticulture Centre team have managed to organise smaller sessions with Wellings Funeral Directors (at Stapenhill Cemetery) and Love Burton group (The Abbots Garden and surrounding area) to name but two. In addition, the wider team have supported volunteer groups associated with Scalpcliffe Woods, Bramshall Park and Rolleston Brook Hollows. Enquires made by other groups continue to be followed up. All new volunteer groups receive an induction along with a briefing on health & safety.
- 5.2.2 'In Bloom' has continued in 2021, albeit with an adjusted format due to the pandemic. Federation meetings, like most meetings over recent months, have been hosted on Zoom rather than in a face to face to setting. This has not inhibited the creative and innovative ideas within the group. Judging for 2021 has also been different with no visits from judges and each entry required to submit a detailed virtual portfolio. Professional support and advice has been

provided by the Council's Marketing Officer who was able to assist with content and ensure a high quality document was presented. Notwithstanding this, the success of the portfolio is dependent on the actual works that took place across the year, therefore, it is pleasing to confirm that Winshill, Burton and Uttoxeter all received gold awards. As an interesting aside, both Burton and Uttoxeter have reached consecutive gold medal standard since before 2010. Winshill have achieved the same feat across the last 5 years. Burton in 2021 was just two marks off scoring the highest ever score for a West Midlands entry.

5.2.3 Under the umbrella of "In Bloom" are a number of community projects to which the Horticulture Centre team have provided expert advice, plants or other significant resource to assist with their aims. Despite the trials and tribulations of the pandemic a total of 22 awards have been received in 2021, with Bramshall Park also retaining a Green Flag award.

### **5.3 Visual Amenity**

5.3.1 First amongst the PDP objectives was the simple but impactful goal of replacing the small 57L bins with large double size recycling bins. This apparently ordinary target has three benefits. Firstly, the number and amount of bins that become full with waste is reduced which in turn reduces the frequency of bin emptying rates as larger volumes of waste can be accepted. Importantly, the split bin design encourages the public to recycle their waste and increases the amount of waste recycled by the contractor. 32 new bins have been installed in 2021/22.

5.3.2 Relaxed mowing regimes have been introduced in 8 parks (Newton Road, Anglesey, Eton Park, Shobnall, Stapenhill Gardens, Beaufort Road Open Space- Brizlincote, Heath Road Stapenhill and Pennycroft Park) and have been combined with wildflower and tree whip planting. As well as providing a visual stimuli, the mowing relaxation and planting combination is advantageous to biodiversity and tackling climate change. These changes have been well received by the general public and the team has received over 20 compliment e-mails. Plans are currently being made to expand the number of locations in 2022.

5.3.3 Lessons have also been learned about the importance of selecting the right location. A similar design scheme in Barton provoked opposition from residents that lived next to the selected open space and as a result the relaxation of the mowing regime had to be reversed.

5.3.4 Traffic islands and gateway areas have also experienced a wildflower and sustainable planting makeover. These include Town Meadows Way and Old Knotty Way traffic islands in Uttoxeter, St Georges Park and Derby Road North islands in Burton as well as Bretby Road Island in Winshill. Like their equivalent on parks these new planting schemes have elicited a great deal of positive comment from residents and visitors. All but four of East Staffordshire's traffic islands are now planted with either wildflowers or with sustainable perennial plants. Perennial plants have been chosen for a wide range of foliage colour and flowering displays which will change throughout

each season of the year. This will result in more interesting displays throughout the year and will require less ongoing maintenance and seasonal watering. However, it should be noted that perennial plantings will take a couple of years to fully develop and mature before giving their best all year round displays.

5.3.5 Tree planting remains one of the foremost objectives and officers continue to identify locations for trees. Selecting a suitable location can be a complex undertaking and the wrong tree or location or both can create future problems for both the Council and residents living nearby. Tree species are being carefully selected in order to ensure that only native trees are planted and that all species are suitable in size and habitat for each location. Those trees which offer habitat and food sources for insects and wildlife are being favoured. In support of this objective, the Horticulture Centre Team have teamed up with an organisation called Carbon Footprint, who facilitate companies carrying out their corporate and social responsibility by organising tree planting. Carbon Footprint provide free tree whips and our teams identify a suitable location and oversee the planting with employees from the aforementioned companies.

5.3.6 Physical enhancements have also been made through the use of Section 106 monies which has seen gym equipment installed on Anglesey Park and new benches and picnic tables installed at Branston Water Park. Partnership working has seen the Council link up with Horninglow & Eton Parish Council who are seeking to introduce gym equipment on parks to encourage exercise and tackle levels of obesity in their ward.

## **5.4 Climate Change & Biodiversity**

5.4.1 Many of the initiatives set out in the previous paragraphs will provide a positive benefit in the Council's efforts to tackle climate change. The intention is not to repeat those details in this section but to look at other steps being taken. One element not covered above is the establishment of a tree nursery in both Burton in Uttoxeter (November 2021). Utilising existing outdoor space at the Greenhouse, volunteers have potted 500 tree whips which have been grown on ready for planting. These containerised trees will establish quicker than bare root. By potting trees, the Horticultural Centre Team are able to plant much bigger, stronger tree whips at minimal additional cost as these are being grown by volunteers. Trees are purchased at an average cost of £1.00 per whip and grown on; both increasing their size and suitability for planting as well as their financial value. This cycle will be repeated each year.

5.4.2 With the grounds maintenance contract expiring on October 31<sup>st</sup> 2021 and the new contract potentially running until November 1<sup>st</sup> 2031 the specification has been designed to encourage suppliers to utilise electric technology and seek alternatives to fossil fuels and the use of chemicals. To achieve this ambition the procurement scoring matrices looked favourably on the use of electric equipment and other suitable options. All bidders were able to articulate some of the industry adaptations that have been made in response to climate change, with the successful bidder(s) expected to move towards carbon neutrality by the end of the contract.

## **5.5 Operations**

5.5.1 Beyond the award of the contract is a need to ensure that standards are upheld. Achievement of this objective involves tiered levels of working. On a day to day basis the Open Spaces Officers monitor the operational delivery of the contract to ensure the correct works take place. From November 1<sup>st</sup> the method of working for Open Spaces Officers is to be changed with each officer having a designated geographical area of responsibility. These are and include:

- Burton (North): Burton, The Washlands, Horninglow & Eton, Rolleston, Shobnall, Stretton, Tutbury & Outwoods.
- Burton (South): Winshill, Stapenhill, Brizlincote, Branston & Anglesey
- Uttoxeter & Rural

5.5.2 Supplementing this front line resource is a requirement to performance manage the contract through a series of weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual meetings and/or reports. Staffing resource is required to address shortfalls in performance, uphold the contractor to the terms of the contract and communicate effectively with elected members and the senior leadership team through biannual report

## **5.6 Marketing & Promotions**

5.6.1 Marketing- as can be seen from the previous sections- cuts across all of the different aspects of the teams' work. The ongoing support and input from the Marketing Officer has been instrumental in raising the profile of open spaces, community projects and gaining award success.

## **5.7 Finance**

5.7.1 Many of the actions and activities set out in the PDP are to be delivered through the use of existing budgets across the span of the plan. The plan was set out to be flexible to allow for financial and staffing pressures but also to ensure a consistent trajectory of parks enhancement. Consequently, section 106 monies when available, provide an opportunity to accelerate some of these schemes. Small examples of this are the replacement of bins, new totems on the Kingfisher trail and a larger cricket ball fence on Anglesey Park. Management of Section 106 funds is through a monthly two part meeting. Part one reviews the financial incomings and outgoings with the Programmes & Transformation Officer who has administrative responsibility for the fund, who also makes the team aware of any sites due for adoption. In addition, sites that have been forwarded for adoption or "sign-off" by a developer but have been rejected and require enhancements are discussed. Part two involves front line officers making recommendations for projects for Section 106 monies to be spent on and updating the team on any procurement actions on previously agreed enhancements.

## **6. Financial Considerations**

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

- 6.1 There are no short term financial issues arising from this Report as the funding will be provided through existing budgets, Section 106 monies and contributions from external partners.
- 6.2 In the long term, the additional trees planted will require a programme of maintenance by specialist tree consultants.

## **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: Caroline Elwood*

- 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 not a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is attached not required.

9.2. **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed.

## 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 note the year one progress on the plan

## 13. **Background Papers**

13.1 Parks Development Plan 2020-2030

14. **Appendices**

14.1 Parks Development Plan