

HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Executive

1 July 2021

TITLE:	Parks Strategy
EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR:	Councillor Damien Greenhalgh - Deputy Leader & Executive Councillor for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure Councillor Jean Todd - Executive Councillor for Climate Change, Environment and Community Safety
CONTACT OFFICER:	Robert Wilks - Principal Officer (Leisure and Recreation)
WARDS INVOLVED:	All

Appendix 1 – Parks Strategy

Appendix 2 – Park Management Plans

Appendix 3 – Parks Strategy Consultation Summary

Appendix 4 – Park Management Plans Consultation Responses

Appendix 5 – Play & Outdoor Sports Facilities Investment and Delivery Plan

Appendix 6 – List of HPBC parks and green spaces

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To present documents which deliver on the corporate priority of Develop a Parks Development Plan as part of Aim 4 of the Council's 2019-2023 Corporate Plan to protect and improve the environment, including responding to the climate change emergency.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Executive approves the following:
- New Parks Strategy and associated Park Management Plans.
 - The proposed introduction of a Parks Development Fund.
 - Play and Outdoor Sports Facilities Investment and Delivery Plan.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 Aim 4 of the Council's 2019-2023 Corporate Plan sets out an aspiration to protect and improve the environment, including responding to the climate

change emergency. One of the key actions within this aim was to develop a Parks Development Plan and following further scoping work, this has been refined to include:

- Development of a new Parks Strategy and individual Park Management Plans for an initial set of formal parks.
- Proposal to establish a Parks Development Fund.
- Development of a 'Play and Outdoor Sports Facilities Investment and Delivery Plan'.

3.2 Since April 2020 the maintenance of the Council's parks and green spaces has been undertaken by the Council's service provider, Alliance Environmental Services (AES). The Council retained overall responsibility for the management and ongoing development of its parks and green spaces, supporting AES and valuable community partners such as 'Friends of the Park' groups.

3.3 The community, individual and wider benefits of parks and green spaces, set alongside the recent transfer of maintenance responsibilities to AES supports the need to develop a strategy and management plans for our formal parks. Having these documents will ensure these spaces develop and are maintained effectively in the future given their size, individual features and assets.

3.4 Creating a Parks Strategy will:

- Set the overarching context and direction for the management and development of our parks and green spaces.
- Outline the approach for managing, protecting and developing parks and green spaces which is considerate to the Council's resources, management and maintenance responsibilities, including the contributions made by community and interest groups.
- Highlight a set of principles to guide future maintenance, investment, community engagement decisions and actions regarding our parks and green spaces.
- Agree a set of priorities and objectives which focus effort, resources and decision making to ensure that parks and green spaces remain high quality spaces for everyone to enjoy.
- Help secure additional investment and external funding to enhance the parks infrastructure, facilities and opportunities for the benefit of the community.

3.5 The vision for our parks and greenspaces is that they will be vibrant, attractive and appropriately maintained spaces for the whole community to enjoy for a wide range of benefits.

3.6 The Parks Strategy uses an evidence base to identify four Strategic Priorities:

- 1) Make investment in parks and green spaces a priority.
 - 2) Use resources effectively and sustainably.
 - 3) To increase the use of parks and green spaces for all.
 - 4) Work effectively with our communities and partners through positive community engagement.
- 3.7 A set of 4 Principles have also been developed for use when considering any changes that affect the current or future management or maintenance of parks and green spaces. The reason these principles have been developed is to ensure that any changes to the management and ongoing development of parks and green spaces are appropriate, affordable, sustainable and deliver clearly against the aspirations of the Parks Strategy.
- 3.8 Feeding out of the priorities and principles is a set of 8 Objectives that contribute significantly towards delivering the priorities of the Strategy. These objectives are carried forward into action plans within each park management plan, from which local actions or projects will be developed.
- 3.9 Park management plans have been developed for the formal parks listed below due to their size, key features and complex maintenance regimes (Appendix 2). Management plans for Ashwood Park and Bankswood Park will be developed during 2021/22.
- Buxton: Pavilion Gardens including The Serpentine.
 - Glossop: Howard Park and Manor Park.
 - Whaley Bridge: Memorial Park.
- 3.10 Park management plans will be working documents, each containing action plans that detail how the objectives of the strategy will be delivered. These will evolve over time, be developed between the Council, service providers and community groups who have an interest in each park and be reviewed annually to ensure they continue to deliver against the Parks Strategy priorities and objectives.
- 3.11 It is important to highlight that the Council owns and maintains many other highly valued parks, recreation grounds and green spaces (Appendix 6). These assets will be managed and developed using the principles of this strategy and existing maintenance regimes already in place that are specific to each site. Opportunities for future development, including work with community groups to improve or care for them will also be prioritised.
- 3.12 As the Parks Strategy and Management Plans are new strategic documents for the Council, a period of 4 weeks public consultation was completed between Monday 18th January 2021 and Sunday 14th February 2021. A total of 85 responses were received to the parks strategy consultation and a further 33 responses were received regarding park management plans. A summary of the responses can be found in Appendices 3 and 4.

- 3.13 A summary of the Parks Strategy consultation responses is included in Appendix 3 but the headline results for the main sections of the consultation are included below:
- **Priorities** - 61.54% strongly agreed or agreed that the priorities proposed in the strategy were the right ones.
 - **Principles** - An average of 82.72% strongly agreed or agreed that the principles proposed in the strategy were the right ones.
 - **Objectives (commitments)** – 63.29% strongly agreed or agreed that the commitments (objectives) proposed in the strategy were the right ones.
- 3.14 Where people disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed priorities or objectives, the majority of responses suggested that a greater emphasis should be placed on enhancing biodiversity.
- 3.15 The Council is committed to producing a biodiversity strategy during 2021/22 which will identify priorities for how the Council will enhance biodiversity as part of its commitment to tackling climate change. Whilst we wait for this document to be completed, opportunities to enhance biodiversity in our parks will continue with actions included in each action plan, under objective 1.
- 3.16 To help take forward ideas that have been suggested via the public consultation process, consideration should be given to establish a Parks Development Fund. The suggested amount of £50,000 is proposed and would be allocated to be spent during the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years. If approved, the fund will be used support the development of projects which deliver against the priorities and objectives set out in the strategy.
- 3.17 Should a parks development fund be agreed, the approved amount would be managed by Service Commissioning, seen as a revenue growth item and need to be factored into the MTFP accordingly.
- 3.18 Play and outdoor sports facilities are important assets in many of our parks and it is important these facilities are provided, maintained and developed effectively. To ensure this happens, the proposed investment and delivery plan at Appendix 5 has been developed and highlights a proposed programme of refurbishment or/and replacement of selected facilities over a 4 year rolling period.
- 3.19 The overall cost to deliver the first 4 years of this plan is estimated to be £393,000 and this would need adding to the recently approved medium term financial plan (MTFP) as a growth item. Where feasible these costs will be offset by Section 106 monies secured from housing developments where improvements to play or outdoor sports facilities is required. The impact of this results in additional revenue borrowing costs that are detailed in section 6.4.

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

- 4.1 Aim 4 of the Corporate Plan is to provide “Effective provision of quality parks and open spaces”. In order to deliver this objective a commitment was given to develop a Parks Development Plan to support the widest community use of parks and support community / friends of the park groups.

Aim 2 of the corporate plan is to be “A responsive, smart, financially resilient and forward thinking council”

5. **Alternative Options**

- 5.1 There are three options available to the council:

1. To recommend that the Executive approve the documents within the scope of this report to help deliver on Aim 4 of the Council’s 2019-2023 Corporate Plan which sets out an aspiration to protect and improve the environment, including responding to the climate change emergency. **(Recommended)**
2. Option to review areas of the proposed documents where there is concern or changes required with these documents brought back to committee for further review at a later stage. (Not Recommended)
3. Do nothing (Not Recommended)

6. **Implications**

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

Parks provide a range of opportunities for people of all ages to engage in positive activities. Outdoor play and sports facilities can provide an outlet for young people and help deter them from antisocial behaviour, therefore it is important these facilities are provided and kept in a good condition.

6.2 Workforce

None

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

An EIA has been completed in accordance with the Council’s policy.

6.4 Financial Considerations

There is no budgetary provision for introduction of a Parks Development Fund in the current financial year as this was identified via the public consultation process earlier this year. Consequently any spend in 2021/22 would need to be met from within existing resources; ideally savings within the service. In-year spend in excess of that which can be accommodated from such savings, would need to be funded from general reserves and balances. The 2022/23 budget cycle would allow the opportunity for inclusion of a growth item in the Medium Term Financial Plan to

cover the proposed spend in 2022/23 and any on-going requirement for future years.

The proposed Play and Outdoor Sports Facilities Investment and Delivery Plan includes a request for £390,000 of capital funds to improve identified facilities over the course of the next 4 years. This is a growth item and results in additional revenue borrowing costs of £50 (2021/22) £3,576 (2022/23), £16,593 (23/24) and £26,593 (24/25). Where it is appropriate to do so, s106 receipts will be used to reduce the reliance on the Council funding. The risk remains that should there be a delay or shortfall in anticipated s106 funding the on-going costs would have to be met by the Council.

AES are responsible for the maintenance of play and outdoor sports facilities which the Council owns. The maintenance costs associated with these schemes can be contained within existing revenue budget provision.

Key objectives proposed in the strategy may have a financial implication, however, until further scoping works are undertaken these implications are unknown. Further reports detailing any projects which have a financial implication for the Council would need to be brought forward at the appropriate time.

6.5 Legal

There are no specific legal considerations at this stage.

6.6 Climate Change

Aim 4 of the Council's 2019-2023 Corporate Plan sets out an aspiration to protect and improve the environment, including responding to the climate change emergency. Development of a 'Parks Development Plan' was highlighted as a key action.

6.7 Consultation

A period of 4 weeks public consultation was completed between Monday 18th January 2021 and Sunday 14th February 2021. A web based survey collected responses via the Council's website.

6.8 Risk Assessment

Appropriate assessment will be made as per each project within the strategy

Mark Trillo

Executive Director (People) and Monitoring Officer

Web Links and Background Papers

[High Peak Corporate Plan](#)
[High Peak Local Plan](#)
[High Peak Open Space Study \(2017\)](#)
[High Peak Tree Strategy \(2016\)](#)
[Towards an Active High Peak \(2017\)](#)
[Green Flag Award Framework](#)

Contact details

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7. Detail

7.1 Aim 4 of the Council's 2019-2023 Corporate Plan outlines an aspiration to protect and improve the environment including responding to the climate change emergency and one of the key actions within this aim was to develop a Parks Development Plan.

7.2 Our parks and green spaces have a major part to play in community and family life. They are places for us to socialise, enjoy being active, connect with nature and wildlife, relax, and reflect. Many parks contain heritage features which tell a story about the past. They can also play a part in providing a more sustainable future, contributing towards wider aspirations and priorities which the Council has.

7.3 Since April 2020 the maintenance of the Council's parks and green spaces has been undertaken by the Council's own company and service provider, Alliance Environmental Services (AES). The Council retained overall responsibility for the management and ongoing development of its parks and green spaces, supporting AES and valuable community partners such as 'Friends of the Park' groups.

7.4 The community, individual and wider benefits of parks and green spaces, set alongside the recent transfer of maintenance responsibilities to AES, supports the need to develop a strategy and management plans for the formal parks. Having these documents will help ensure these spaces develop and are maintained effectively in the future given their size, individual features and assets.

8.0 Parks Strategy

8.1 For any new Parks Strategy to be effective, it is important to recognise the key evidence base and supporting documents which frame the provision, protection and development of our parks. It is also equally important for people to understand the current context in which our parks are managed and maintained as this will play a part in decision making and delivery of future projects.

8.2 In the absence of a national Parks Strategy, there are a number of key strategies, plans and frameworks which help to set context and will inform the development of a new Parks Strategy. These are listed below:

- Corporate Plan (2019-2023)

- High Peak Local Plan (2016)
- High Peak Open Space Study (2017)
- High Peak Tree Strategy (2016)
- Towards an Active High Peak (2017)
- Green Flag Award Framework

8.3 The vision for our parks and greenspaces is that they will be vibrant, attractive and appropriately maintained spaces for the whole community to enjoy for a wide range of benefits.

8.4 The Parks Strategy uses this evidence base to identify four priorities;

- 1) Make investment in parks and green spaces a priority
- 2) To use resources effectively and sustainably
- 3) To increase the use of parks and green spaces for all
- 4) Work effectively with our communities and partners through positive community engagement

8.5 In order to meet the objective of creating a Parks Development Plan and following further scoping work, this has been refined to include:

- A new Parks Strategy and individual Park Management Plans for an initial set of formal parks.
- Proposal to establish a Parks Development Fund.
- Play and Outdoor Sports Facilities Investment and Delivery Plan.

8.6 Creating a Parks Strategy will:

- Set the overarching context and direction for the management and development of our parks and green spaces.
- Outline the approach for managing, protecting and developing parks and green spaces which is considerate to the Council's resources, management and maintenance responsibilities, including the contributions made by community and interest groups.
- Highlight a set of principles to guide future maintenance, investment, community engagement decisions and actions regarding our parks and green spaces.
- Agree a set of priorities and objectives which focus effort, resources and decision making to ensure that parks and green spaces remain high quality spaces for everyone to enjoy.
- Help secure additional investment and external funding to enhance the parks infrastructure, facilities and opportunities for the benefit of the community.

8.7 A set of guiding principles have been developed for use when considering any changes that affect the current or future management or maintenance of parks and green spaces. The reason these principles have been developed is to make sure that any changes to the management and ongoing development of parks and green spaces are appropriate, affordable, sustainable and deliver clearly against the aspirations of the Parks Strategy.

8.8 The guiding principles are as follows:

- Use key strategies and industry recognised evidence as a base to inform decision making so that any changes, improvements or projects are the right thing, in the right place and for the right reason.
- Ensure that any projects to protect or enhance our parks and open spaces are in keeping and proportionate with the overall purpose and heritage of our parks and deliver against one or more of the priorities listed in the strategy.
- Any projects or improvements are developed with accessibility in mind, ensuring that wherever practical our parks are accessible to all.
- Any new projects which have an impact on the ongoing maintenance of our parks are both affordable and sustainable.

8.9 Feeding out of the priorities and principles is a set of 8 objectives that will contribute towards delivering the Strategy. These objectives are carried forward into action plans within each park management plan, from which local actions or projects will be developed.

Objective 1: We will review maintenance regimes to ensure our parks and green spaces are maintained to a high standard, in an affordable and sustainable way and consider improvements to increase and enhance biodiversity and positively affect climate change. (addresses priorities 1, 2 and 4).

Objective 2: We will ensure that infrastructure and heritage features are protected and well maintained, in accordance within the resources available to the Council (addresses priority 1, 2, 3 and 4).

Objective 3: Encourage and enable positive physical and mental wellbeing by developing strong partnerships with community groups, sports clubs and other stakeholder groups to ensure parks fulfil their potential for enabling healthy lifestyles for all ages (addresses priority 3 and 4).

Objective 4: Ensure parks are safe, welcoming and accessible places for the whole community and that the highest possible standards of

health and safety are maintained by our service providers, event organisers and when engaging the community in projects (addresses priority 3 and 4).

Objective 5: Actively encourage community engagement and involvement in the protection, maintenance and development of our parks (addresses priority 3 and 4).

Objective 6: Effectively manage internal budgets and attract external funding wherever possible towards the ongoing maintenance and the future development of our parks (addresses priority 1,2,3 and 4).

Objective 7: We will review park management plans and their associated actions plans annually to ensure these objectives are being delivered against effectively (addresses priority 1,2,3 and 4).

Objective 8: We will create a Parks Development Fund to be used to make improvements to our parks and green spaces. (addresses priority 1,2,3 and 4)

9 Park Management Plans

9.1 Park Management Plans provide clear direction for the future management and maintenance of specific formal parks, ensuring they are maintained and developed effectively, whilst balancing the needs of residents and visitors alike.

9.2 Due to the significant number of formal parks, informal parks, recreation areas and green spaces that the Council has responsibility for managing, it is not possible to have detailed management plans for all of them. Park management plans have been developed for the formal parks listed below due to their size, key features and complex maintenance regimes.

- Buxton: Pavilion Gardens including Serpentine Walks, (Ashwood Park to be completed in 2021/22)
- Glossop: Howard Park, Manor Park and Bankswood Park (to be completed in 2021/22)
- Whaley Bridge: Memorial Park

9.4 Management Plans for Ashwood Park and Bankswood Park will be completed during 2021/22 as there are currently a number of projects within both parks that are in development and these could fundamentally affect the contents of both plans.

9.5 It is important to highlight that the Council owns and maintains many other highly valued parks, recreation grounds and green spaces (Appendix 6). These assets will be managed and developed using the principles of this new strategy and existing maintenance regimes already in place which are specific

to each site. Opportunities for future development, including work with community groups to improve or care for them will also be prioritised.

9.6 Park Management Plans will:

- Take a holistic approach to the future management of the park by assessing professional and community needs and desires.
- To establish a shared vision and objectives for the park.
- Ensure community involvement within the development and management of the park.
- Establish standards that are effective and accountable to ensure clear management and maintenance objectives are identified and implemented.
- Benchmark the park and analyse the management regimes and policies against best practice.
- Prioritise resources and action to ensure effective management of the park and the success of any future developments.

9.7 Park Management Plans include detailed information on a wide range of issues specific to each park, including heritage features, assets, historical information and facilities. Each plan also details how each park interacts with the communities surrounding them and highlights opportunities for their future development.

9.8 As a result Park management plans will be working documents, each containing action plans that detail how the objectives of the strategy will be delivered. These will evolve over time and be developed between the Council, service providers and community groups who have an interest in each park.

9.9 Action plans will be reviewed annually to ensure they continue to reflect the local circumstances and opportunities and that they are delivering successfully against the objectives outlined in the parks strategy and opportunities highlighted locally.

9.10 The Green Flag awards scheme recognises and rewards well managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces. Whaley Bridge Memorial Park is currently the the Council's only park which holds this award and has done so for six successive years. Should Members wish to consider applying for a Green Flag award at other parks, officers would be able to advise on which park would be best positioned to achieve this and what implications may need to be considered further in order to achieve the award.

10 Consultation

10.1 As the Parks Strategy and Management Plans are new strategic documents for the Council, a period of 4 weeks public consultation was completed between Monday 18th January 2021 and Sunday 14th February 2021.

10.2 The consultation process provided an opportunity for residents, friends of park groups, interest groups and partners to provide feedback on the documents

via the Council's website. Direct communications, press releases, regular social media posts, email circulars to partners and professional networks were the main methods used to ensure as many people as possible had the opportunity to engage in the consultation process.

- 10.3 A total of 85 responses were received to the Parks Strategy consultation, with some choosing to respond each of the 13 questions asked and others only replying to a selection of the questions.
- 10.4 A summary of the parks strategy consultation responses is included at Appendix 3 but the headline results for the main sections of the consultation are included below;
- **Priorities** - 61.54% strongly agreed or agreed that the priorities proposed in the strategy were the right ones.
 - **Principles** - An average of 82.72% strongly agreed or agreed that the principles proposed in the strategy were the right ones.
 - **Objectives (commitments)** – 63.29% strongly agreed or agreed that the commitments proposed in the strategy were the right ones.
- 10.5 Where people disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed priorities or objectives, the majority of responses suggested that a greater emphasis should be placed on enhancing biodiversity.
- 10.6 The Council is committed to producing a biodiversity strategy during 2021/22 which will identify priorities for how the Council will work to enhance biodiversity as part of its commitment to tackling climate change. Whilst we wait for this document to be completed, work to identify opportunities to enhance biodiversity in our parks begins and that action plans within each park management plan will be delivered under objective 1 of the parks strategy.
- 10.7 Once a biodiversity strategy has been developed, the parks strategy and management plans will be reviewed to ensure that biodiversity is sufficiently recognised. New objectives can be taken into account via a refresh of these documents at the appropriate time.
- 10.8 A total of 33 responses were received for the individual park management plans and each of these responses detailed comments and ideas as to how each park could deliver against the objectives outlined in the strategy. Many of these responses were extremely relevant and changes to the management plans have been made to reflect these.

11 Parks Development Fund

- 11.1 Projects involving biodiversity, habitat creation/preservation, physical activity and accessibility were highlighted in a number of the consultation responses. To help these ideas develop, consideration should be given to establish a parks development fund. The fund would be an approved amount of funding which could be utilised to deliver some of the ideas suggested via the

consultation. This fund could also be used as match funding to attract external funding to enhance our parks.

- 11.2 A suggested amount of £50,000 to be spent during the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years should be considered to support the development of projects which contribute towards delivery of the strategy. A different amount and focus for the Parks Development Fund could be considered, should Members feel there is an alternative approach to take.
- 11.3 Should a Parks Development Fund be approved, the agreed budget would be managed by the Service Commissioning Team. The agreed budget would be classed as a revenue growth item and need to be factored into the MTFP at the appropriate time.

12 Play and Outdoor Sports Facilities – Investment and Delivery Plan

- 12.1 Play and outdoor sports facilities are important assets in many of our parks and green spaces. They are key attractions that help children, young people and adults keep active, build confidence, physical literacy and social skills.
- 12.2 It is important that these facilities are provided, maintained and developed effectively. To ensure this happens, the proposed investment and delivery plan (Appendix 5) has been developed and highlights a proposed programme of refurbishment or/and replacement of selected facilities over a 4 year rolling period.
- 12.3 To develop the plan, quality assessments of existing Council owned play and outdoor sports facilities have taken place. This highlights the facilities which require improvements, the approximate timeframe for when these improvements need to be delivered by and a budget estimate for how much the improvements are likely to cost.
- 12.4 Delivery of the plan will be managed by Service Commissioning and this will include an annual review process where projects that have been delivered will be reclassified and any new projects included into the cycle for delivery in future years.
- 12.5 The overall cost to deliver the first 4 years of this plan is estimated to be £393,000 and this amount would need adding to the recently approved medium term financial plan (MTFP) as a growth item. The impact of this results in the additional revenue borrowing costs detailed in section 6.4.
- 12.6 There is scope to offset these costs by utilising section 106 monies that have been secured from housing developments where improvements to play or outdoor sports facilities is required. Where section 106 monies have been received by the Council, budget estimates take this into account and the request for funds has been reduced accordingly.
- 12.7 Where section 106 monies have been requested from housing developers but not yet received, these have not been taken into account. However, as trigger

points for these monies to be paid to the Council are achieved in the future, the amount of capital funds required can be reduced accordingly.

- 12.8 It also may be possible in some cases to secure external funding towards some of these projects and by doing so, budgets could be adjusted down accordingly. Whilst there are no guarantees external funding can be secured at this stage, and full costs included on that basis, the Council does have an excellent track record in partnership working and securing external funding to develop improvements to open space and sports facilities such as the example from Furness Vale where the Council has worked collaboratively with Community Organising Green Space (COGS) to enhance maintenance and facilities, including attracting significant amounts of external funding towards this work from a wide variety of sources.