

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet

13 February 2024

TITLE:	Green Spaces Strategy
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Nigel Yates - Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Environment & Councillor Matt Swindlehurst Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism
CONTACT OFFICER:	Gareth Knapper – Service Development Officer
WARDS INVOLVED:	All Wards

Appendices Attached:

Appendix 1 – Green Spaces Strategy

Appendix 2 – Strategic Context

Appendix 3 – Site List

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet on the progress made to develop a new Green Spaces Strategy for the Council.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Cabinet approve the Green Spaces Strategy and associated Green Spaces Development Fund.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 Aim 4 of the Council's 2023 - 2027 Corporate Plan highlights an aspiration to protect and improve the environment. Key objectives within this aim include the 'provision of quality parks and open spaces' and 'meeting the challenges of climate change'. One of the priority actions to help deliver on this aim was to develop a Parks and Open Spaces strategy and following further scoping work, the draft strategy is now in a position to review, including a title change to the Green Spaces Strategy.
- 3.2 The many benefits our green spaces have on individuals, the wider community and the environment supports the need to develop a green space strategy. By

developing this strategy and subsequent management plans, we will ensure these spaces develop and are maintained effectively in the future.

- 3.3 The Green Spaces Strategy includes our vision statement - *Our green spaces will be vibrant, attractive, robust and actively maintained spaces for the whole community to enjoy. Future proofed to provide climate resilience and biodiversity while supporting health and wellbeing for our communities.*
- 3.4 Creating a Green Spaces Strategy will help the Council focus its internal resources and also help attract additional external resources and funding to enhance our green spaces further and to deliver the projects detailed in the individual park management plans, which will accompany this strategy.
- 3.5 The Green Spaces Strategy uses an evidence base to identify five Strategic Priorities:
 1. Make investment in green spaces a priority, protecting our heritage.
 2. Use resources effectively and sustainably, maintaining and improving our amenities.
 3. Contribute to climate change and biodiversity targets and aims, through planting of trees and managing sites for wildlife, whilst improving flora and fauna.
 4. Increase the use and accessibility of green spaces for all, improving health and wellbeing of our communities.
 5. Work cooperatively with our communities and effectively with partners through positive community engagement.
- 3.6 A set of Guiding 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 our green spaces are appropriate, affordable, sustainable and deliver clearly against the aspirations of the Strategy.
- 3.7 Feeding out of the priorities and principles is a set of nine Objectives that contribute significantly towards delivering the priorities of the Strategy. These objectives will be carried forward into a specific number of action plans within each of the management plans, from which local actions or projects will be developed.
- 3.8 Five site management plans will be developed during the 2024/25 financial year. These initial sites are some of our largest and/or offer good opportunities for how we can improve the current maintenance and enhance the diversity of the site. It should be noted that there are no sites for the Cheadle area as the significant green spaces are managed by Cheadle Town Council.

- 3.9 Management plans will be working documents 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 green space and be reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to deliver against the Green Spaces Strategy priorities and objectives.
- 3.10 It is important to highlight that the Council owns and maintains many other highly valued green spaces (Appendix 2). These assets will be managed and developed using the principles of this strategy and when and where appropriate site plans will be produced. Any remaining sites will use maintenance regimes 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.
- 3.11 The effects of Climate Change and the enhancement of biodiversity are key considerations for the future management of our sites. The Council is committed to implementing appropriate key themes identified in the Plan for Nature where they are suitable for the land we own and manage. This will be done with consultation and engagement to inform the community and users about any changes.
- 3.12 To help take forward changes to our sites which will come from the action plans, consideration should be given to establish a Green Space Development Fund. The suggested amount of £50,000 is proposed and would be allocated to be spent during the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years. If approved, a clear criteria for how the fund can be used will be developed and the fund will be used to support the development of projects, which deliver against the priorities and objectives set out in the strategy.
- 3.13 Should a green spaces development fund be agreed, the approved amount would be managed by Officers within Service Commissioning and seen as a revenue growth item which would need to be factored into the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) accordingly.
- 3.14 The next steps for the Green Spaces Strategy, once approved, will be sent to the design team to complete the finished document. The Strategy will then be launched through our Communications Team.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 Aim 4 of the Corporate Plan – Protect and Improve the Environment.
- Provision of quality parks and open spaces.
 - Meeting the challenges of climate change.
- 4.2 One of the main objectives of Aim 4 is the production of a new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy – now changed to the Green Spaces Strategy.
- 4.3 Aim 2 of the Corporate Plan - Use resources effectively and provide value for money.

- Effective use of financial and other resources to ensure value for money.

5. **Alternative Options**

- 5.1 To review and approve the adoption of the Green Spaces Strategy and approve the request for a new Green Spaces Development Fund to be included in the MTFP for £50,000 to be used over financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26. **RECOMMENDED.**
- 5.2 To not approve the adoption of the Green Spaces Strategy and not approve the request for a new Green Spaces Development Fund. **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 facilities can provide an outlet for young people and help deter them from antisocial behaviour.

6.2 Workforce

Officers have developed the basis of this strategy, with involvement from relevant Portfolio Holders.

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

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

6.4 Financial Considerations

The 2024/25 budget cycle would allow the opportunity for inclusion of a growth item in the Medium Term Financial Plan to cover the request for a new Green Spaces Development Fund. It is proposed that £50,000 is allocated as a new revenue growth item, which would be managed by Service Commissioning and cover spending over two financial years (2024/25 and 2025/26).

AES are responsible for the maintenance of our parks and green spaces 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, outside of the remit for the Green Spaces Development Fund, 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 2023-2027 Corporate Plan sets out an aspiration to protect and improve the environment, including responding to the climate change emergency. Development of a 'Green Spaces Strategy' was highlighted as a key action.

The Council will look to make best use of its own land to help fight Climate Change and improve biodiversity working alongside the Plan for Nature.

6.7 Consultation

Following review by the Service Delivery Panel, a period of consultation with town and parish councils will be undertaken, following which the final strategy will be taken forward for final approval by Cabinet.

6.8 Risk Assessment

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

Mark Trillo

Executive Director (Governance & Commissioning)

Web Links and Background Papers

[Corporate Plan 2023 - 2027](#)

[Local Plan](#)

[Plan for Nature](#)

[Move More Staffordshire Moorlands](#)

[Staffordshire Moorlands Open Space Study](#)

[Green Infrastructure Strategy](#)

[Sport England: Uniting the Movement](#)

[Green Flag Award Framework](#)

Contact details

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7. **Detail**

- 7.1 Aim 4 of the Council's 2023 - 2027 Corporate Plan highlights an aspiration to protect and improve the environment. Key objectives within this aim include the 'provision of quality parks and open spaces' and 'meeting the challenges of climate change'. One of the priority actions to help deliver on this aim was to develop a Parks and Open Spaces strategy and following further scoping work, the draft strategy is now in a position to review, including a title change to the Green Spaces Strategy.
- 7.2 The Staffordshire Moorlands is a beautiful place to live with so many valuable green spaces, parks and recreation areas on our doorstep. The challenge over the coming years is to protect, maintain and improve these wonderful assets to ensure they meet the current and future needs of our residents, whilst also delivering on some of the Council's wider aspirations, such as enhancing biodiversity. The many benefits of our green spaces have on individuals and the wider community support the need to develop a green space strategy and by developing this strategy and subsequent management plans, we will ensure these spaces develop and are maintained effectively in the future.
- 7.3 Since April 2020 the maintenance of the Council's 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 green spaces, supporting AES and valuable community partners such as 'Friends of the Park' groups who undertake day to day management and maintenance tasks as well as helping to organise events.
- 7.5 The Green Spaces Strategy includes our vision statement - *Our green spaces will be vibrant, attractive, robust and actively maintained spaces for the whole community to enjoy. Future proofed to provide climate resilience and biodiversity while supporting health and wellbeing for our communities.*
- 7.6 For this strategy to focus on the future effectively, it is important to recognise the key influencing documents and evidence base which frame the provision, protection, and development of our green spaces. It is also equally important for people to understand the current strategic context in which our green spaces are managed and maintained as this will play a part in decision making and the delivery of future projects. (Full details of the documents below can be found in Appendix 1).

Key Strategies and Documents:

- Corporate Plan (2023-2027)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020 - 2033)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Open Space Study (2017)
- Move More Staffordshire Moorlands Strategy (2023 – 2033)
- Play and Outdoor Sports Facilities (2022 – 2026)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Tree Strategy (2016)
- Climate Change Emergency (2019)
- Staffordshire Moorlands "Plan for Nature" (2022 -2030)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Green Infrastructure Strategy (2018)
- Sport England: Uniting the Movement (2021- 2031)

7.7 Creating a Green Spaces Strategy will help the Council focus its internal resources and also help attract additional external resources and funding to enhance our green spaces.

Overall the strategy will:

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

7.8 The Green Spaces Strategy uses an evidence base to identify five Strategic Priorities:

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

7.9 A set of Guiding Principles have also been developed for use when considering any changes that affect the current or future management or maintenance of our green spaces. The reason these principles have been developed is to ensure that any changes to the management and ongoing development of our green spaces are appropriate, affordable, sustainable and deliver clearly against the aspirations of the strategy.

- 7.10 Feeding out of the priorities and principles is a set of nine Objectives that contribute significantly towards delivering the priorities of the Strategy. These objectives will be carried forward into a specific number of action plans within each of the management plans, from which local actions or projects will be developed.
- 7.11 Management plans for the sites listed below will be developed during the 2024/25 financial year. These initial sites are some of our largest and/or offer good opportunities for how we can improve the current maintenance and enhance the diversity of the site. It should be noted that there are no sites listed for the Cheadle area as the significant green spaces are managed by Cheadle Town Council.
- Biddulph Valley Park, Biddulph
 - Birchall Playing Fields, Leek
 - Brough Park, Leek.
 - Halls Road Recreation Ground, Biddulph.
 - Pickwood Recreation Ground, Leek.
- 7.12 Management plans will be working documents 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 green space and be reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to deliver against the Green Spaces Strategy priorities and objectives.
- 7.13 Further management plans could be developed following the first set of five and any lessons we learn from the first tranche of plans will be used to ensure we produce a concise but useful plan. This approach could also be adopted by others wishing to maintain and develop their green spaces within a similar context.
- 7.14 It is important to highlight that the Council owns and maintains many other highly valued green spaces (Appendix 2). These assets will be managed and developed using the principles of this strategy. These remaining sites will use maintenance regimes 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.
- 7.15 The effects of Climate Change and the enhancement of biodiversity are key considerations for the future management of our sites. The Council is committed to implementing appropriate key themes identified in the Plan for Nature where they are suitable for the land we own and manage. This will be done with consultation and engagement to inform the community and users about any changes.
- 7.16 There will be new considerations around Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for our sites and we need to ensure that all relevant Council departments are linked to ensure a smooth transition in to the benefits this will offer. We will use the

Green Spaces Strategy and site management plans to ensure proposals are suitable and link with the Staffordshire Moorlands Plan for Nature.

- 7.17 To help take forward changes to our sites which will come from the action plans, consideration should be given to establish a Green Space Development Fund. The suggested amount of £50,000 is proposed and would be allocated to be spent during the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years. If approved, a criteria for its use will be developed and the fund will be used support the development of projects which deliver against the priorities and objectives set out in the strategy. Should a development fund be agreed, the approved amount would be managed by officers within Service Commissioning and seen as a revenue growth item and need to be factored into the MTFP accordingly.
- 7.18 The next steps for the Green Spaces Strategy, once approved, will be to have the document proof-read to ensure plain English, spelling and grammar. It will then be designed, from a plain Word document to one with photographs, infographics and colour to complete the finished document. The strategy will then be launched through our Communications Team.