

 Executive 18th April 2012		Agenda Item No. 7
Title	Green Space Strategy draft	
For further information about this report please contact	David Anderson X6214 david.anderson@warwickdc.gov.uk	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Overview & Scrutiny Committee Tuesday 13 th September.	
Background Papers	None	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	Yes
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes Ref 186
Equality & Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken	No (If No state why below)
EIA will be undertaken at an appropriate time in the process outlined below.	

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	8 th March 2012	Andrew Jones
Head of Service	29 th Feb 2012	Ian Coker
CMT	12 th March 2012	
Section 151 Officer		
Monitoring Officer		
Finance	6 th March 2012	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	29 th Feb 2012	Cllr David Shilton
Consultation & Community Engagement		
Household Survey as part of the Parks Audit Ongoing consultation on emerging Local Plan.		
Final Decision?		Yes
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To seek the endorsement of the draft Green Space Strategy for public consultation with external stakeholders and to approve the approach taken to prioritising future investment plans.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 Executive approve for consultation the Green Space Strategy summarised in this report and attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Executive approve that the draft Green Space Strategy is included within the New Local Plan consultation process.
- 2.3 Following the outcome of the consultation the Head of Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Development Policy Manager, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and the Deputy Leader, bring a further report and a final draft of the Green Space Strategy for approval.
- 2.4 That Council officers identify potential sites for disposal, and provide a future report detailing the sites recommended for sale.
- 2.5 That Council officers use the Community Forums as a future consultation partner on the delivery of the Green Space Strategy.

3. **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 The need to develop a strategy has been driven by a number of factors. At a national level, Planning Policy Guidance requires local authorities to undertake an audit of green space provision, and the assessment of local needs in order to develop local standards based on the supply of, and demand for green space. The Council has taken this approach and the evidence collected underpins the development of the Green Space Strategy.
- 3.2 At a local level green spaces are a valued and important community resource. It is therefore essential that the Council has a strategic overview of the provision, management and enhancement of green space. It is also important to ensure that our green space remains relevant to the community's needs in an ever changing world.
- 3.3 The strategy sets out how the Council will provide, manage and develop green space in the future. It will bring together various research work undertaken, set out a long term vision for green space and will include the establishment of a number of principles and local standards to manage and enhance green space. Due to the complex nature of the district's green space with respect to the number, size, type, distribution and quality there is a need to develop a strategy that can;
- Establish and communicate a clear vision.
 - Improve quality, quantity and accessibility.
 - Establish policy and prioritise future investment.
 - Ensure the green space needs of the whole community are met.
 - Encourage the community to use green space and participate in local decision making.

- 3.4 The Strategy does not present detailed proposals for individual green spaces at this stage. Instead it sets out a series of key principles. These will be used to implement the recommendations of the Strategy within a separate Green Space Action Plan, which will be updated every five years, and will provide an opportunity to monitor and review progress.
- 3.5 The Green Space Strategy will be one of many strategies that will form part of the evidence base used to inform the Council's new Local Plan. The timetabled new Local Plan consultation, which will be carried out throughout early summer 2012, is the most comprehensive consultation to be undertaken and for these reasons it makes sense that the Green Space Strategy forms part of this consultation.
- 3.6 The following table outlines the provisional timetable for formal consultation and adoption of the Green Space Strategy.

Consultation and adoption steps	Timescales
Executive approval of draft	18 th April 2012
Undertake external consultation	June – August 2012
Review consultation returns and redraft strategy	September 2012
Executive approval of final draft	October 2012
Launch Green Space Strategy	November 2012

- 3.7 The detailed consultation plan will take account of the need to ensure that key partners, service users, community and voluntary organizations and a wide and diverse cross section of the community are provided with the opportunity to comment on the strategy.
- 3.8 The Green Space Strategy is consistent with the Council's aim of developing 'sustainable garden towns, villages and suburbs' as set out in the Strategy for the Future and Sustainable Prosperity of Warwick District. Both these strategies seek to maintain and enhance the District as a distinctive and attractive place in which to live, work and visit. The Green Space Strategy principles and recommendations will help to inform a study that is currently being undertaken that will define, explain and visualise the Council's aim of promoting and encouraging 'sustainable garden towns, villages and suburbs' in the Warwick district over the next 15 years.
- 3.9 It is recognised that the development of any prioritised action plan will have inherent cost implications contained within the proposals. Some of this funding can be sourced from external funds such as s106, the emerging Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), lottery and other grants but there is a need for additional capital funding.
- 3.10 One possible funding option to consider is the disposal of green space and the generation of capital receipts from the sale of land. Warwick District has a large quantity of green space when compared regionally and nationally, though it is acknowledged there is variance across the District. If this approach is to be taken then the Council would need to identify those sites that are of low value and do not contribute positively to a neighbourhood.
- 3.11 The achievement of the strategy will be geared to the pace at which capital can be generated, hence disposal of some land is essential if ambitious quality improvements are to be realised. The level of disposal is anticipated to be small

as net loss of green space area, though this cannot be quantified until further investigative work is undertaken.

- 3.12 Through the quality audit there are large variations in the quality of green space across the district, with many sites being measured as average quality, highlighting the need for further investment. The audit identified that the types 'neighbourhood' and 'parks and gardens' had the lowest range of quality scores when compared to other hierarchy and types of green space combined. The household survey and other consultations have also raised specific issues on quality.
- 3.13 It must be acknowledged that it would not be realistic to raise the quality of all the green spaces across the district in the short or medium term, but it should be strived for in the life time of the strategy. Therefore to achieve the greatest impact the following is proposed as the preferred methodology for prioritising improvements and any subsequent action plans to be implemented.
- Sites which have been judged to be valuable to local communities, but for which are currently poor or average quality.
 - Neighbourhood parks and gardens which have the lowest range of quality scores.
 - Sites where local community groups have developed improvement plans, in consultation with the Council, which can be used to attract external funding, e.g. Friends of The Dell and Community Spaces funding.
 - Availability of external funding targeting certain projects, e.g. Playbuilder funding to improve play areas.
 - Projects that need to address issues in relation to emergencies, such as community protection, e.g. flood alleviation, security in parks.

The above criteria are in no particular order of preference and will need to be reviewed on a regular basis.

- 3.14 The Strategy does not identify exactly what facilities will be improved in any particular area but sets a framework for making those decisions, and could include for example, infrastructure improvements, play area refurbishments, facilities for young people and facilities for all age groups and abilities.
- 3.15 Involving the Community Forums to deliver the Green Space Strategy is the preferred way of engaging with local residents, park users and non users. It will help to identify the value of green space within certain localities, help to support the prioritisation of future improvements, complemented by the findings of parks audit, input into any future development and management plans, and where appropriate, identify sites for disposal.

4. **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 4.1 **Policy Framework** – A Green Space Strategy will form part of the Council's Policy Framework.
- 4.2 **Fit for the Future** – The Council's purpose is to improve the quality of life for everyone who lives in, works in or visits Warwick District. With our partners, we aspire to build sustainable, safer, stronger and healthier communities. Ensuring we have good accessible green space will contribute towards these aims.

5. **BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK**

- 5.1 As previously stated capital improvements could be funded from a range of sources including s106, the emerging CIL, New Homes Bonus monies, external grants and the capital receipts from the disposal of green space. The Council will be developing an Infrastructure Delivery Plan as part of the Local Plan Process, which will include green infrastructure requirements for the district and that of green spaces.

6. **ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S) CONSIDERED**

- 6.1 The Council could decide not to adopt a Green Space Strategy, to ignore the Parks and Open Spaces Audit and to continue with present arrangements. This however is not recommended by Planning Policy Guidance and ignores best practice. Without a Green Space strategy the Council lacks the clarity, direction and prioritisation needed to deliver accessible high quality green spaces, and for these green spaces to be fit for the future. Without a strategy we will fail to address the deficiencies in green space, and the concerns raised by the people of Warwick district. Having a Green Space Strategy will maximise the benefits of green space.
- 6.2 Other options could be considered on how to prioritise any improvements within action plan. This could take the form of a hierarchy of green space, where the major parks are dealt with first followed by less significant parks etc. There is credibility in this approach in that two parks, namely St. Nicholas Park and Abbey Fields already have established plans to improve and conserve respectively, and that these green spaces are well used. However, evidence also suggest that people want accessible green space and value local provision, and that many people are having to travel by car to the larger destination sites. This could be due to the lack of quality local and neighbourhood green spaces.
- 6.3 Another alternative option is deliver geographically, where by Area 1 is improved, followed by Area 2, etc. This option would not necessarily address the most highly valued sites of the poorest quality. The most suitable time this geographical approach could be used is for those areas of deprivation within the District, combined with the sites of poor quality but high value.
- 6.4 Without disposal of green space it would be more difficult to significantly invest in green space and raise the quality. The Council could rely purely on other external grants and developer contributions, but these alone will not address the funding requirements for delivering the Strategy.
- 6.5 Without the involvement of the Community Forums it would be difficult to identify the local value of green space and identify local community priorities. The Council could engage solely with established parks groups, but these are limited in number, and these groups tend to be more focussed on individual parks rather than all green spaces within a locality.

7. **BACKGROUND**

- 7.1 The Council has undertaken a comprehensive open space study in accordance with the requirements of Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, July 2002) and its companion guide (September 2002). The study was undertaken to expand policy SC13 of the Local Plan

1996–2011; inform the development of the Supplementary Planning Document on Open Space and the Green Space Strategy for Warwick District.

- 7.2 The comprehensive study assessed the quantity, quality and accessibility of different green spaces including parks and gardens, natural and semi natural green space, amenity green space, provision for children and young people, outdoor sports facilities, allotments and community gardens, cemeteries and churchyards and green corridors.
- 7.3 In addition the study included a desk top review of national and regional policies, relevant green space guidance and existing local strategies and policies. Local residents were also consulted to ascertain satisfaction levels, usage trends and problems associated with green space. The study recommended a number of quantity standards and these have been carried forward into the Local Development Framework/SPD Open Space. The study further recommended opportunities to tackle quantity, quality and accessibility deficiencies across the range of open spaces.
- 7.4 The completed parks audit has revealed that there is 688 Hectares of unrestricted green space spread across 311 sites within the district, much of which is owned by Warwick District Council, Town and Parish Councils. This is the equivalent of 5.47Ha per 1000 population which compares very favourably to other local authorities, though there is much variance across the District. 544 Hectares of this land is on 171 sites owned and managed by Warwick District Council.
- 7.5 The quality of green space is variable across the District with some 'good' quality sites and some being measured as 'average', with much variance between wards. This variable quality of green space is comparable to many other Council's.
- 7.6 The quality audit looked at 171 Warwick District Council sites using the field assessment criteria used for the Green Flag Award, the national quality standard. There are 8 key criteria for the Green Flag Award, under which there are 27 field assessment criteria. Of these 6 key criteria and 19 field assessments can be judged on site without management plan or other documentation and are listed in the table below.

Key quality criteria	Fields assessment criteria
A Welcoming Park	Welcoming
	Good and Safe Access
	Signage
	Equal Access for All
Health, Safe and Secure	Safe equipment facilities
	Personal security in parks
	Dog fouling
	Appropriate provision of facilities
	Quality of facilities
Clean and Well Maintained	Litter and waste management
	Grounds maintenance and horticulture
	Buildings and Infrastructure maintenance
	Equipment maintenance
Sustainability	Arboriculture and woodland management
Conservation and Heritage	Conservation of wild fauna and flora

Marketing	Conservation of landscape features
	Conservation of buildings and structures
	Provision of appropriate information
	Provision of appropriate educational interpretation

- 7.7 Currently we have a grounds maintenance budget in region of £1.2M and a limited resource to invest in improvements to green space.
- 7.8 The emerging Local Plan will have an associated Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) which provides supporting evidence on the infrastructure requirements relevant to the plan. A key element of the IDP relates to "Green Infrastructure" and details the ways in which open spaces, shelter belts, canal, road and rail embankments and other areas of the natural environment relate to each other within the District and connect with neighbouring areas. The Warwick District Council Green Space Strategy sits within this framework and specifically deals with how areas belonging to the District Council will be managed.
- 7.9 In addition the parks audit has already supported the development of the Open Space Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which gives planning guidance for developers on how new housing and commercial developments are required to provide or enhance green spaces. This SPD is being used to good effect to gain offsite contributions for improvements to existing green spaces.
- 7.10 The information gathered as part of developing the strategy has been used to develop key principles to guide the future provision, management and maintenance of green space. By doing this we will also link to the Council objectives such as health, sustainability and community engagement as identified in the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 7.11 The strategy is split into five sections, lists seven key principles and twenty five recommendations.

Section 1 - explains the purpose of the strategy, its links to the Local Development Framework, the value of green space, the scope of the strategy and how it was developed.

Section 2 - sets out the strategic context for green space and examines and identifies national, regional and local policies and initiatives, links to local planning policy and links to other relevant strategies.

Section 3 - sets out the vision for green space and the outcomes

Section 4 - outlines the Parks and Open Space Audit, including the various consultations undertaken.

Section 5 - details the seven key principles to guide the future provision, management and maintenance of green space.

- 7.12 The seven key principles and twenty five recommendations are listed below.

A) Provide – We will seek to provide sufficient accessible green space to meet current and future demand.

A1: Ensure the District standard of 5.47 hectares of unrestricted green per 1000 population is maintained through affective management.

A2: In the parts of the district where there is deficiency in the district quantity standard, to increase the levels of unrestricted green space in specific geographical areas through acquisition or change of type/use of green space.

A3: In the parts of the district where there is a surplus to the district quantity standard, provide a robust review and evaluation framework for potential change of use or disposal.

B) Improve – we will seek to maintain and raise the quality of all green spaces

B1: Develop a quality standard for management and maintenance based on green flag criteria

B2: Adopt the approach presented in the strategy to prioritising investment within green space

B3: Ensure that green space is actively managed through appropriate long term management planning.

B4: Develop specific facilities, opportunities and challenging green spaces for young people.

B5: Increase the play value of green spaces for children and young people.

B6: Measure success through national quality benchmarks such as the Green Flag Award.

C) Connect – we will work in partnership to develop and manage a continuous network for people and wildlife.

C1: Develop and approve a Green Infrastructure (GI) Plan to inform housing growth and future local development framework requirements.

C2: Work with partners, stakeholders and developers to protect and enhance connectivity between green space throughout the District.

C3: Work with partners, stakeholders and developers to increase connectivity between green space throughout the District.

C4: Review green space by-laws in respect of cycling and horse-riding

D) Involve – we will work in partnership with the community, governing bodies and stakeholders to develop, manage and promote green spaces.

D1: Work with communities to make green spaces better for everyone.

D2: Actively promote volunteering and participation in management of green spaces.

D3: Explore the transfer of ownership, management and maintenance of green space.

E) Resource – we will seek to ensure sufficient resources are available to develop, manage and maintain green spaces.

E1: Develop a rolling investment programme for green space improvements

E2: Ensure annual revenue is sufficient to meet demand.

E3: Seek to secure external revenue and capital finance through new partnerships and funding opportunities.

E4: Maximize developer contributions through the robust Open Space Supplementary Planning document, by either s106 agreements or the emerging Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

F) Sustain – we will work to ensure that the management of all green spaces have a positive impact on people, the local economy and the environment.

F1: Adopt and promote maintenance and management practices that contribute to the sustainable management of green spaces.

F2: Adapt to and mitigate the impact to climate change

G) Conserve – we will ensure that green space biodiversity, landscape and natural heritage is protected and conserved

G1: Safeguard and conserve habitats and species within the framework of local Biodiversity Action Plan, including sites identified through the Habitat Biodiversity Audit.

G2: Conserve and restore green spaces with high historical and archaeological value.

G3: Consider opportunities for increasing and enhancing biodiversity in all planning, designing and management of all green spaces.