

 <b>Executive – 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012</b>		<b>Agenda Item No.</b>  <h1 style="text-align: center;">12</h1>
<b>Title</b>	Green Space Strategy adoption	
<b>For further information about this report please contact</b>	David Anderson Green Space Team Leader 01926456214 david.anderson@warwickdc.gov.uk	
<b>Wards of the District directly affected</b>	All	
<b>Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?</b>	No	
<b>Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number</b>	Executive 18 <sup>th</sup> April 2012	
<b>Background Papers</b>		

<b>Contrary to the policy framework:</b>	No
<b>Contrary to the budgetary framework:</b>	No
<b>Key Decision?</b>	Yes
<b>Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)</b>	Yes (Ref 432)
<b>Equality &amp; Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken</b>	No (If No state why below)

<b>Officer/Councillor Approval</b>		
<b>Officer Approval</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	28 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2012	Andrew Jones
Head of Service	12 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2012	Ian Coker
CMT	20 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2012	
Section 151 Officer	12 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2012	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer		
Finance	12 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2012	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	12 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2012	Cllr David Shilton
<b>Consultation &amp; Community Engagement</b>		
Household Survey as part of the parks audit. Consultation linked to the emerging Local Plan in June and July 2012 A draft copy of the Green Space Strategy sent to every Ward Councillor in June 2012. Green Space Strategy Park Surveys carried out on the 20 <sup>th</sup> , 21 <sup>st</sup> and 22 <sup>nd</sup> August 2012.		
<b>Final Decision?</b>	Yes	
<b>Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)</b>		

## 1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Following the consultation on the draft Warwick District Green Space Strategy, a final version has been prepared and is submitted for approval and adoption. Within the strategy a framework for prioritising investment in green space has been developed.
- 1.2 This report also details a Green Space Action Plan with estimated costing, and identifies the need to establish a Green Space Working Group to oversee the strategy implementation.

## 2. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That the Warwick District Green Space Strategy is approved, as set out in Appendix 1, and that Members note its alignment with the emerging new Local Plan.
- 2.2 That the framework for prioritising investment in green space be approved, as set out in the strategy, and in section 3.3 of this report.
- 2.3 That the Green Space Action Plan 2013-2016 be approved, as set out in Appendix 2, which includes sixteen prioritised sites and is subject to current and future funding being available.
- 2.4 That a Green Space Working Group be set up to oversee the implementation of the Green Space Strategy and the Green Space Action Plan.
- 2.5 That officers review all funding options to improve the quality of green space, including the option to identify potential sites for disposal, or part disposal, and to bring these findings to a future Executive.

## 3. **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 At present the Council does not have a Green Space Strategy and therefore has no formalised strategic direction. A Warwick District Green Space Strategy will enable the Council to have a strategic overview of the provision, management and enhancement of its green spaces up until 2026.
- 3.2 The Green Space Strategy will also inform the emerging new Local Plan relating to green space, and the associated Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) which will provide 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 green spaces, shelterbelts, 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 Green Space Strategy sits within this framework and specifically deals with how green spaces will be managed. Therefore any green space proposed improvements need to be fully costed.
- 3.3 One of the key outcomes of the green space strategy is the need to improve green space. However it would be unrealistic 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 criteria for prioritising improvements has been developed.

- Sites which have been previously 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.

Details on how 'quality' is measured are outlined in section 7.8. There is need to review the quality of sites on a regular basis.

- 3.4 The Green Space Action Plan is necessary to deliver the vision and recommendations as set out in the strategy. It lists a number of sites for improvements, as identified through prioritisation process detailed in section 3.3 above, some of which are part funded. The sites identified in the Green Space Action Plan will be embedded in future Service Planning and Team Operational Plans.
- 3.5 A cross party working group is necessary to review the progress of Green Space Strategy and its action plans, the issues around financing of the strategy and how this may be resolved and any potential disposal opportunities.
- 3.6 There are several funding options available to both the Council and community groups when looking to improve the quality of green space. Some of this funding can be sourced from external funds such as s106, the emerging Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), lottery and other grants but it is anticipated that there is a need for additional capital funding.
- 3.7 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.

#### 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 Community Infrastructure Levy, 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.

- 5.2 Bids for capital funding will be made as part of the usual bidding process.
- 5.3 Given the Council's overall financial position, and many demands upon the Council's limited financial resources, it may not be possible to fund all the aspirations within the Green Space Strategy. In prioritising resources, it may well be necessary to dispose of some green spaces so as to reduce revenue costs, and also to generate capital receipts that may then be used to improve other green spaces, or used in line with other Council priorities.

## 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 a detailed action plan it would be difficult to implement many of the principles and recommendations set out in the strategy.
- 6.5 The Green Space Strategy and its accompanying action plan could be delivered without a working group, but the experience of similar group called the Play Working Party, which jointly involves members and officers, has proved successful. Therefore the setting up of a Green Space Working Group would seem sensible.
- 6.6 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.

## 7. **BACKGROUND**

- 7.1 Green space is an essential ingredient of successful neighbourhoods and it provides a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits to local communities. There is huge national demand for better quality green spaces. Surveys repeatedly show how much the public values them, while research reveals how closely the quality of green spaces links to levels of health, crime and the quality of life in every neighbourhood. Well designed green space provides space for recreational activities, improving physical health and fitness and improving mental health and well being.
- 7.2 Recent surveys with residents and visitors of the District repeatedly show how much the public value green space. In the Warwick District Council Local Plan Consultation 2011, green spaces ranked in the top six, out of twenty, most important things making somewhere a good place to live in the district. This supports the findings of the parks audit which helped to inform the development of the Green Space Strategy.
- 7.3 In a recent WDC Green Space Strategy Public Survey 2012, the number of responses received from people living from outside the District and visiting our major parks was 43% compared to 57% who live locally. This is a significant percentage and shows the importance of our major parks, including St. Nicholas Park, Jephson Gardens and Abbey Fields, as major tourist attractions, and their importance to the local economy.
- 7.4 The consultation draft of the Green Space Strategy was approved by Executive on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2012. A programme of consultation started in line with new Local Plan and completed at then of July 2012. Of those responses received there was a request to include a full comprehensive list of sites within the strategy, which has now been added. The other was that the draft strategy was too technical in certain areas. Therefore a more simplified user friendly summary of the strategy will be produced and will be made available to the public in the future.
- 7.5 Unfortunately only a few responses were received from this consultation linked with new Local Plan. Therefore additional survey work was carried out with park users in some of the districts major parks in August 2012, to determine people's views measured by a percentage agreement on some of the recommendations as set out in the draft. These included aspects on current provision, both in quantity and quality terms, increasing the levels biodiversity and community involvement in green space and also peoples views on disposal of green space.
- 7.6 A summary of the findings to this survey can be found in Appendix 3. The most striking observation to this survey is the overall positive responses to the statements, which can be seen as an overall support to the strategy principles and recommendations, for which the statements relate. Specific statements relating to further investment in green spaces, developing more and better facilities for teenagers, the importance of heritage and wildlife, all measured highly. One of the less supported statements was in relation to disposal of green space, where it could be demonstrated that were surplus levels of green space, but even this scored above 50% and was higher then anticipated.
- 7.7 From these findings only minor revisions to the strategy content and text were necessary. The final draft for approval can be seen in Appendix1.

- 7.8 The Green Space Action Plan has been prioritised using the quality audit. This 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 a management plan or other documentation and are listed in the table below.

<b>Key quality criteria</b>	<b>Fields assessment criteria</b>
<b>A Welcoming Park</b>	Welcoming
	Good and Safe Access
	Signage
	Equal Access for All
<b>Health, Safe and Secure</b>	Safe equipment facilities
	Personal security in parks
	Dog fouling
	Appropriate provision of facilities
	Quality of facilities
<b>Clean and Well Maintained</b>	Litter and waste management
	Grounds maintenance and horticulture
	Buildings and Infrastructure maintenance
	Equipment maintenance
<b>Sustainability</b>	Arboriculture and woodland management
<b>Conservation and Heritage</b>	Conservation of wild fauna and flora
	Conservation of landscape features
	Conservation of buildings and structures
<b>Marketing</b>	Provision of appropriate information
	Provision of appropriate educational interpretation

- 7.9 The Green Space Action Plan will be reviewed and updated every year until the end of the strategy period. This provides flexibility to react to changes such as political or organisational change and new funding opportunities, without losing sight of the overall green space vision and principles. Monitoring progress made in delivering the principles will be carried out as part of updating and reviewing the action plan.
- 7.10 One of the key elements in delivering the strategy will be the resource requirements. Calculating the investment needed to improve the quality of green space is essential. Considering that there are currently 171 Warwick District Council owned green spaces of varying quality it is anticipated that the overall district wide cost to improve the current 'Average' quality to 'Good' quality would be significant.
- 7.11 There are several funding options available to both the Council and community groups when looking to improve the quality of green space. Some of this funding can be sourced from external funds such as s106, the emerging Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), lottery and other grants but it is anticipated that there is a need for additional capital funding.
- 7.12 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.

- 7.13 The 'Green space strategies – a good practice guide' provides a template for Green Space Strategies and this has been used to provide the structure of the Warwick District Green Space Strategy.
- 7.14 The Strategy considers the current level of provision, public opinions and perceptions on green space, other related policy and sets out a vision for the future along with an action plan to deliver this.
- 7.15 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.
- 7.16 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.

- 7.17 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.