

Appendices:
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NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET REPORT

Report Title	Cabinet response to Scrutiny Panel 1 – Improving the Town's Parks
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	12 March 2014
Key Decision:	No
Within Policy:	Yes
Policy Document:	No
Directorate:	Customers & Communities
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Councillor Mike Hallam
Ward(s)	All

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to respond to the recommendations in the Overview and Scrutiny report on Improving the Town's Parks.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the recommendations included in the Overview and Scrutiny report for Improving the Town's Parks are implemented in accordance with the actions outlined in 3.2 below including the identification of suitable sources of finance where appropriate.
- 2.2 That the Scrutiny Panel are formally congratulated on a high quality and comprehensive report and thanked for the time and effort given to produce it.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 Following approval of its work programme for 2013/2014, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to include a review of the town's parks and the

proposal to develop management committees for certain parks. Scrutiny Panel 1 undertook the review between June and November 2013.

- 3.1.2 A number of meetings were held to gather evidence from a broad range of stakeholders. During this process a significant amount of evidence was heard.
- 3.1.3 30 recommendations are included in the report. They focus on communications, the development of Park Action Plans, and the role and membership of proposed Park Management Committees

3.2 Recommendations and Service Responses

Communications

- 3.2.1 Communication with Friends Groups is enhanced by improved links with Northampton Borough Council's webpage and Friends Groups' webpages, coupled with improved communications with Enterprise Managed Services; such as sharing of maintenance schedules for parks.

Action: *The content about parks on the Borough Council's Website will be reviewed and updated by 1 April 2014, links to Friends Group sites will be added and information from Enterprise Managed Services will be incorporated into the content. Arrangements will be put into place to ensure that the content is updated and reviewed on a regular basis in conjunction with the Park Management Committee. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.2 A programme of community events is produced in association with the stakeholders, published on the Council's webpage and promoted to the community.

Action: *All major events planned on parks will be incorporated into the existing NBC Events Calendar which is published on the NBC website. The listing will indicate information about event organisers and the scale and nature of the event. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.3 Information relating to facilities available in the town's parks is accessible on the Council's webpage.

Action: *As outlined in point one above, the content of the NBC website will be reviewed and more detailed information about the facilities available will be added to the site. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.4 A uniform on-line booking process for sports pitches and events is introduced.

Action: *An online booking system for sports facility hire is currently being developed and it is proposed to be in place during 2014. It is planned that this facility will incorporate all bookings for activities in parks. The financial implications of this are to be determined.*

- 3.2.5 The town's parks are clearly identifiable on Internet search engines, such as Google, and highlighted as points of interest on satellite navigation software such as Garmin and Tom Tom.

Action: *Contact will be made with the operators of these systems to ensure that the facilities are properly displayed. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.6 Obsolete signs, in place around the town's parks, are removed and all relevant signage and visitor information is in situ and is clearly visible.

Action: *A review of signage in all parks has been undertaken, obsolete signs have been removed and other signs have been cleaned. The design and placement of new signs will be agreed with the parks management committees following appropriate checks with planning regarding any necessary consents. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.7 The Highways Agency and the Highways Authority is asked to update its brown tourist signage that detail points of interest across the town; specifically ensuring that signage for the town's parks is clear.

Action: *Contact will be made with Northamptonshire County Council by April 2014 to investigate mechanisms by which this signage is put in place. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.8 The Scheme "Dog Watch" organised by Northamptonshire Police is promoted.

Action: *This scheme has been promoted to Friends Groups and a link will be added to the NBC website as part of the review of content. There are no financial implications to this action.*

Town's Parks

- 3.2.9 Cabinet is asked to ensure that where appropriate, initiatives and ideas from parks are monitored in order for them to be mirrored in others.

Action: *A database of park events, actions and programmes has been established, and is coordinated by the full time Park Ranger. This information is shared with Friends' Groups through the Friends' Forum. There are no financial implications to this action.*

Park Action Plans

- 3.2.10 Appropriate sources of funding are identified for the restoration and contingency of scheduled monuments.

Action. *The importance of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other historic sites present in the town's parks are recognised. Work is ongoing to take forward Conservation Management Plans for the Hunsbury Hill Iron Age Hill Fort and the Northampton Battlefield site (which is located partly in Delapre Park). Project Plans are being developed and sources of funding for restoration are being explored. External funding sources are yet to be determined.*

- 3.2.11 Lighting and footpaths are well maintained in the town's parks and upgraded where necessary.

Action: *Park Rangers undertake regular inspections of paths and lighting in parks and any defects noted are reported for action. A proportion of the available parks capital funding is reserved for upgrading of paths on a priority basis and is built into the 2014/15 capital programme.*

- 3.2.12 Footpaths are installed in the town's smaller parks to improve disabled access.

Action *A variety of potential sources of funding for the installation of new and upgraded paths are being explored including Section 106 funding and Capital Programme on a priority basis. New paths have been installed at Eastfield Park utilising Section 106 funding. Sources of funding are yet to be determined.*

- 3.2.13 Responsibility for the bridle way that runs through West Hunsbury Country Park is clarified.

Action: *– clarification is being sought. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.14 The mowing scheme for West Hunsbury County Park, Cherry Orchard, Hardingstone clearly states that the whole area is not to be mowed, only the informal walkways.

Action: *Enterprise Managed Services have been requested to amend the mowing arrangements for these parks to mow the informal walkways and leave the meadow areas unmown. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.15 The pond in Ecton Brook Pocket Park is cleaned out and the condition of other water features in the town's parks is assessed and appropriate action taken.

Action. *The pond in Ecton Brook Pocket Pond was actually cleaned out in November/December 2013. No immediate action is therefore required but, as for all ponds and lakes in the Borough's parks, it will be kept under review to ensure standards are maintained. Any extensive works identified would be subject to individual capital bids.*

- 3.2.16 Where present in the town's parks, hard standing tennis courts are refurbished.

Action: *Provision has been made in the current parks capital programme for the refurbishment of tennis courts on a priority basis. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.17 Where possible, litter and dog bins are located side by side in the town's parks.

Action: *Where practical this action will be taken when bins are renewed and any costs absorbed in the operational budget. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.18 Bins with lids / slots are installed in some parks, such as West Hunsbury Country Park, to prevent wildlife accessing the contents of the bins. *There are no financial implications to this action.*

Action: *All new and replacement bins will meet this specification*

- 3.2.19 Picnic areas and permanent hard standings for BBQs are installed in some of the town's parks, together with litter bins and measures to prevent fire and damage.

Action: *The Parks will be surveyed and if appropriate, potentially suitable areas for the installation of hard standings will be identified by September 2014. Funding for this work will be found within existing revenue budgets or considered in the Capital Funding process. The financial implications are yet to be determined.*

- 3.2.20 A set standard for the provision of toilet facilities within the town's parks is introduced.

Action: *The standard of toilets provided in the town's parks will be maintained at the same specification as the other public toilets provided across the Borough. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.21 The opening times of the toilet facilities within the town's parks are advertised.

Action: *This information will be included on the Council's website and advertised within the parks. There are no financial implications to this action.*

- 3.2.22 A funding pot is identified to be allocated to Community Groups that maintain toilets within their local park.

Action: *Work will be carried out before June 2014 to identify if any potential sources of funding that are available. This will be subject to a separate report.*

- 3.2.23 In order to make contact with the Park Rangers easier, a central office located close to the town's Parks, or the provision of regular advertised surgeries in the park is provided.

Action: *Investigations are in hand to identify a suitable location that can be used to provide an office presence for the Park Rangers. In the interim a programme of regular surgeries has been established and these are advertised in the parks and on the NBC website. Any financial implications identified will be reported back in a separate report.*

- 3.2.24 Administrative support is provided for the Park Rangers to enable them to spend more time in the town's parks.

Action: *Administrative support is provided to Park Rangers and arrangements have been made for them to access their emails remotely. A review of the Park Ranger's role has been carried out and the amount of office based work that they are required to undertake has been reduced. There are no financial implications to this action.*

3.2.25 Contact details and a report of the activities of the Park Rangers are published on the Council's webpage and promoted to all stakeholders.

Action: *The website content has been reviewed and updated to include this information. An updated activity report will be added once a quarter. There are no financial implications to this action*

3.2.26 The role of the Park Ranger is clarified and details disseminated to all stakeholders.

Action: *As mentioned in point 24 the role of the Park Rangers has been reviewed. A summary of their key duties has been added to the website. There are no financial implications to this action*

Key roles of the Park Management Committees

3.2.27 The key role of the Park Management Committees include:

- Producing, implementing and maintaining Management and Action Plans
- Park management
- Monitoring role
- Organising events and activities
- Oversee the maintenance of parks
- Provide support to voluntary groups
- To seek and maintain funding for the parks, where appropriate, work with Friends Groups in securing external funding
- Promoting the park and its facilities
- Create strategies for the local management of the parks, linking to the Council's wider policies and strategies
- Debating issues, such as how volunteers in the town's parks can work alongside the maintenance contract
- A listening role
- Intelligence gathering

The Scrutiny Panel highlights the need for meaningful and outcome driven terms of reference for the Park Management Committees and has produced a draft terms of reference, for Cabinet's consideration.

Action: *The Terms of Reference as agreed and outlined in the Scrutiny Panel Report will be used as the governing document in taking the management committees forward. These terms of reference indicate the outline arrangements for funding and support of the committees. It is recognised that all parks are different and one size does not fit all. The Council is committed to establishing Park Management Committees for the three Main Parks to ensure that local communities have a stake in how our parks are managed and developed. It is recognised that there will be some flexibility in the precise structure of these committees. Appendix A illustrates how the process will operate. There are no financial implications to this action*

3.2.28 In addition to Park Management Committees, an annual Park Forum is held.

Action: Arrangements will be made for an annual Park Forum drawing together representatives from all management committees and other stakeholder groups. There are no financial implications to this action.

Membership of Park Management Committees

3.2.29 Membership of the Park Management Committees consists of around ten members, typically drawn from representatives from:

- Friends Groups
- Ward Councillor(s)
- Parish Council representatives where appropriate
- Park User Group representatives and individuals that manage areas of parks
- Park users
- Park personnel
- Young people representatives
- Representatives from Agencies
- Representatives from Enterprise Managed Services (EMS); for example Manager / Team Leader
- Representatives from Northampton Borough Council
- Representatives from Sports Clubs
- Residents' Associations

Action: In accordance with Appendix A, preliminary discussions have been taking place to identify possible members for the Management Committees for the three Main Parks (Abington, Delapre and The Racecourse). The representatives of EMS, Northampton Borough Council and Agencies will act in their professional capacity as advisors to the committees. Initial meetings of these committees will be held early in the new financial year. The membership of the committees will be reviewed in five months time and the outcome of this review fed back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of their review of the impact of their report. There are no financial implications to this action.

3.3 Issues

3.3.1 As detailed in 3.2

3.4 Choices (Options)

3.4.1 Cabinet may choose to adopt some, all or none of the recommendations of Scrutiny Panel 1 as outlined above. The actions being required to bring forward each of the recommendations is outlined in 3.2 above. Some of these actions have cost implications and as indicated they can either be funded from existing budgets or may be the subject of Bids through the Capital Programme.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

4.1.1 None at this stage

4.2 Resources and Risk

4.2.1 Financial implications of this report are noted against each of the Actions in the body of the report.. A number will require to be reviewed in light of the pending reviews and current financial constraints.

4.3 Legal

4.3.1 None specifically highlighted.

4.4 Equality and Health

4.4.1 The issues highlighted around the provision of toilet facilities and inclusive access to all parks will be addressed through the Parks Management Committees.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

4.5.1 A wide range of stakeholders were consulted with and evidence collated to inform this piece of work:

List of consultees / stakeholders

NBC Contract Partnership Unit
Asset Management
Planning and Regeneration
Legal Services
Enterprise Managed Services
Representatives of all current Friends of Parks Groups

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

4.6.1 NBC Corporate Plan – Invest in Safer, Cleaner Neighbourhoods; Creating Empowered Communities; Responding to your Needs.

4.7 Other Implications

4.7.1 None

5. Background Papers

5.1 Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee January 2014

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