

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhood & Community Services Scrutiny Panel **DATE:** 10 September 2012

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WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Commissioner for Environment and Open Space -
Councillor Satpal Parmar

PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 For Members to consider the recommendations and provide views on the development of a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

2 Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Panel is requested to:

- a) endorse the designation of land at Herschel Park as a Local Nature Reserve; and
- b) provide views on the indicative masterplans outlined in the report.

3 Sustainable Community Strategy Priorities

3.1 Parks and open spaces benefit communities across all the Sustainable Community Strategy priorities:

- Economy and Skills
- Health and Wellbeing
- Regeneration and Environment
- Housing
- Safer Communities

3.2 Parks and open spaces present opportunities to deliver social benefits to all communities and to contribute to the economic and environmental well being of the Borough. These include spatial planning, landscape management, enhancement/conservation of biodiversity, sport, play, provision of outdoor recreation and carbon reduction initiatives.

3.3 This work responds to two recent government white papers concerning public health and the environment. Both these white papers recognise that parks and open spaces are important to achieving national targets in respect of public health and environmental well-being, and are under-utilised in these regards.

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial Implications

This report has no immediate financial implications.

Herschel Local Nature Reserve – The designation of land at Herschel Park, a Local Nature Reserve, has no additional financial or resource implications. Its management is funded through existing provision for the delivery of the approved Herschel Park Management and Maintenance Plan.

(b) Risk Management

Endorsement of the proposed approach will not give rise to any significant risks. It will create opportunities for the Council to enhance park management and provision. This will then support applications for Green Flag status for key parks.

| <i>Recommendation</i> | <i>Risk/Threat/Opportunity</i> | <i>Mitigation(s)</i> |
|--|---|----------------------|
| Endorsement of the designation of land illustrated on Plan A at Herschel Park as a Local Nature Reserve. | The designation of the site will protect it as a place for the conservation of biodiversity and for people to have access to high quality natural environment. | None required. |
| Endorsement of the proposed approach outlined in the indicative masterplans. | Endorsement of the proposed approach will not give rise to any significant risks. It will create opportunities for the Council to enhance park management and provision. This will then support applications for Green Flag status for key parks. | None required. |

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and amended by Schedule 11 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The Council has powers to acquire, declare and manage LNRs. LNRs must be controlled by the local authority through ownership, lease or agreement with the owner. The main aim must be to care for the natural features which make the site special. The Council owns the freehold of the land at Herschel Park intended for designation as a LNR.

Designation of the land as an LNR will mean the land will be protected under relevant policies in the Development Plan. It is already identified as Public Open Space in that plan and protected under relevant policies.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

The Council seeks to make parks and open spaces equally available to all and accords with current Council equality policies and the law. Parks provide facilities for all sectors of the community. Parks and open spaces benefit everybody but can be of particular benefit to people in relatively deprived areas. They are free at the point of use, bring many benefits in respect of health and well-being and present many opportunities to raise the quality of the places people live in.

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed (Appendix E) and endorsed by the Council's Equality and Diversity Advisor.

5 Supporting Information

Background and strategic context

- 5.1 An update report concerning the parks service was presented by the Assistant Director Environmental Services and Quality to Cabinet in November 2010. Opportunities were identified to raise the standard of Slough parks, notably through better corporate planning, co-ordination and communication where cross cutting services have impacts on these types of facility.
- 5.2 Since that report was approved in 2010, parks and open spaces have seen considerable improvements achieved through improved facility management and maintenance. Three parks have been brought up to Green Flag status; there has been substantial further investment in play provision; and operational changes have been made with Slough Enterprise to improve how services are delivered. A Parks and Open Spaces Management Framework has been developed as an operational plan for parks provision and management.
- 5.3 The development of a new Strategy will build on the Parks Strategy adopted by the Council in 2005/2006. The proposals in this report provide a basis for further consultation with wider stakeholders and the public in order to inform the development of a new strategy for parks and open spaces.
- 5.4 The Council manages approximately 411 hectares of parks and open space. They are diverse in their character, with two heritage parks (Herschel Park and Baylis Park), the large Upton Court Park, with a strong landscape character, and the more formal Green Flag parks at Salt Hill and Pippins.
- 5.5 Council open space is currently managed by different departments of the council, notably Parks, Housing Services and Highways. We intend to apply a consistent principles and management approach to all council open space to achieve a corporate approach.
- 5.6 All park sites have been assessed for condition, their potential for enhancement and their overall quality. A number of other criteria are also measured. This assessment is used to understand how the Council might make best use of each site and the type of investment that is most appropriate to each.

5.7 Currently the highest priority parks are:

- Baylis and Godolphin Parks; Masterplan (Appendix B).
Restoration/conservation need and need to improve overall condition
- Herschel Park; Heritage Lottery Funded requirement to enhance maintenance standards and to conserve the completed improvement works.
- Salt Hill Park; Delivery of Green Flag management plan actions to deliver improved management and maintenance.
- Kennedy Park; Contributing to the regeneration at Britwell
- Pippins Park; Delivery of Green Flag management plan actions to deliver improved management and maintenance.
- Upton Court Park. Masterplan (Appendix C).
Largest park with the most opportunities for enhancement through structured programme of improvements.

5.8 These sites are among the larger and higher profile parks, but the majority of parks and open spaces in the Borough, regardless of their size, have potential to deliver some level of improvement across the social, health, environmental or economic spectrum.

5.9 Grant and award schemes including Green Flag and Heritage Lottery programmes expect Local Authorities to have park management strategies in place to support applications. A strategic approach to resource management is critical to effective management, financial planning and quality control, which will raise the Council's chances of success when seeking external funding or awards.

5.10 Cross-council working is enabling a new generation of schemes including safe transport routes for pedestrians and cyclists at Baylis Park and Salt Hill Park and work on potential flood alleviation measures involving open space land. Service improvements are being developed in respect of park buildings, site specific management plans, and improvements to sports, play and outdoor recreation facilities.

5.11 A strategic approach will help to secure and direct developer contributions received through town planning for park improvements spanning transport, play, landscape quality, property improvement, passive recreation and sport provision. This will also complement a number of related strategic plans, for example those involving play, sport provision, spatial planning, transport planning, health and flood alleviation.

5.12 Park standards have been raised substantially in recent years through better planning of investment, improved management/maintenance and better financial monitoring, and this work is ongoing.

5.13 Changes have been implemented to the management of key park facilities like children's play areas to improve governance, management and maintenance. As a result there is progressive improvement in the standard of these facilities. A complementary Play

Strategy has been developed to co-ordinate their management and maintenance, recognising that the majority of council play areas are part of park or open space facilities. The Play Strategy was adopted by Council in 2011.

5.14 Key improvement to parks in recent years include:

- Herschel Park has been comprehensively improved with funding from the Council and Heritage Lottery Fund;
- Salt Hill café has been restored and brought into beneficial use as a café and high quality restaurant with the benefit of council and private sector investment;
- Salt Hill and Pippins Parks have successfully achieved Green Flag standards demonstrating excellent overall management;
- masterplans have been completed for Upton Court Park, Baylis and Godolphin Parks to lead discussion about their future enhancement (Appendices B and C);
- Hershel Park Nature Reserve is being proposed to be formally designated a Local Nature Reserve (Appendix A);
- enhanced levels of safety inspections and maintenance have been introduced for children's play areas;
- the quality of many outdoor sports pitches and sports facilities have been improved as part of an ongoing programme of investment and enhanced management;
- contamination of land at Upton Court Park has been remediated with the assistance of a grant from the Environment Agency, part of which involved the planting of areas of woodland as a sustainable solution that also conserves the landscape character and quality of the open space;
- five new football pitches with changing rooms and car parking have been secured at Cippenham through new development;
- significant progress has been made to bring redundant park buildings back into beneficial use;
- Friends Groups have been established for Salt Hill, Pippins and Herschel parks; and
- a reviewed Events Policy has been implemented to improve the effective use of parks for community events, maximise revenues from commercial events in parks, provide appropriate support for community events and improve coordination of event management within the Council.

5.15 It is proposed to continue work to improve open spaces, working with other Council services by:

- securing Green Flag status for Herschel Park;
- restoring Baylis and Godolphin parks;
- promoting a Council-wide 'Trees for Slough' initiative;
- planting a sustainable Jubilee Woodland at Upton Court Park (Appendix D);
- continuing to identify and implement improvements to the quality of play sites, play equipment and play environments;
- bringing traditional sports activities back into use, including cricket at Cippenham village Green and Salt Hill Park;
- improving/creating multi-use games areas in appropriate parks in the Borough;
- implementing the Kennedy Park Masterplan through the funding created from the Britwell regeneration project;
- continuing the implementation of Salt Hill and Pippins Park management plans to retain Green Flag status;

- addressing the under-occupancy and poor condition of empty park buildings, working through the Corporate Asset Management Plan;
- considering how parks might contribute more to sustainable urban drainage;
- investigating ways to manage parks in a more environmentally sustainable way. This will include protection of the natural environment, seeking ways to use them more effectively as pedestrian and cycle routes, especially to create safer routes to schools, and minimising the use of non-renewable resources, notably energy and water;
- investigating opportunities to generate increased income and/or reduce costs, especially through opportunities for improved cost recovery; and
- improving links between green spaces in the Borough such as the Jubilee River, Linear Park and the Grand Union Canal.

6 **Conclusion**

- 6.1 This report provides an update on the work that has been undertaken since 2010 to raise the standard of parks and open spaces in Slough, and the proposals, set out in paragraphs 5.7 and 5.15, for taking this work forward through the development of a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

7 **Appendices**

- Appendix A Plan showing the extent of land to be designated by the Council as a Local Nature Reserve.
- Appendix B Park Masterplan for Baylis Park (including Godolphin Park)
- Appendix C Park Masterplan for Upton Court Park
- Appendix D Indicative plan showing proposed Jubilee Wood at Upton Court Park

8 **Background Papers**

1. Parks and Open Spaces management Framework 2012 – 2017. The full framework document is available from the Environmental Services and Quality Team in .pdf format, or if preferred, as hard copy. Please contact Ollie Kelly, 01753 875252 or email Ollie.Kelly@slough.gov.uk
2. Slough Borough Council Sustainable Communities Strategy
3. Slough Borough Council Play Strategy 2011 - 2014

Appendix A: Plan showing the extent of land at Herschel Park to be designated by the Council as a Local Nature Reserve



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Herschel Park, Slough
Area proposed as Local Nature Reserve
Scale 1:2500
October 2011

Slough Borough Council
Regeneration and Environment
51 Bath Road
Slough
SL1 3UF

Appendix D: Indicative plans showing the areas at Upton Court Park to be made available for the planting of the Woodland Trust Jubilee Wood project



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