

To: City Executive Board

Date: 13th February 2013

Report of: Head of Leisure and Parks

Title of Report: OXFORD GREEN SPACES STRATEGY

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To approve the Oxford Green Spaces Strategy that has been updated to reflect responses from public consultation.

Key decision? No

Executive lead member: Councillor Mark Lygo

Policy Framework:

Strong and Active Communities
Vibrant, Sustainable Economy
Cleaner, Greener Oxford

Recommendation(s): To approve the Oxford Green Spaces Strategy (2013-2027).

Appendix 1: Risk Register
Appendix 2: Initial Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 3: Executive Summary
Appendix 4: Oxford Green Spaces Strategy 2013-2027
Appendix 5: Summary of Consultation Results

Introduction

1. The draft Green Spaces Strategy was approved for public consultation by the City Executive Board on the 7th December 2011. The consultation enabled some very useful feedback which has helped to further improve the strategy.

2. The benefit of preparing a strategy is the protection, creation and improvement of Oxford's green spaces. The strategy will contribute to the evidence base for applying the Community Infrastructure Levy (the new planning charge) and it shows our priority's to partners which will help with external funding bids.

3. The strategy focuses on the next four years, but runs to 2027 in recognition of the long term nature of green spaces and to also bring it in line with the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework. The action plan will be reviewed and updated annually so it remains relevant.

4. The Green Space Strategy has been developed over 2011/12 using:

- Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) national best practice guidance on writing Green Space Strategies.
- Feedback from the cross party Leisure Advisory Board.
- Input from the Green Spaces Strategy Steering Group comprising:
 - GreenSpace South East Regional Manager
 - Groundwork, an environmental regeneration charity
 - Representatives from City Development, Corporate Property and Communities and Neighbourhoods
- A review of the work already undertaken to date, such as the Oxford City Green Space Study by Scott Wilson Consultancy, Park Asset Audit by Brunel Surveys Ltd and previous consultation and satisfaction survey results.
- Results from the public consultation
- Results from the URS (formerly Scott Wilson) Oxford Green Space Study 2012 Update Report

5. GreenSpace, the national charity which works to improve parks and green spaces has provided the following quote. *“GreenSpace South East has worked collaboratively with Oxford City Council in the production of this Green Space Strategy. By choosing to work collaboratively Oxford City Council has ensured that this document follows available guidance and good practice. Reviewing progress and priorities at this point will continue to ensure that this strategy is a living document, reflective to the needs of city residents and business. I’m confident that this strategy will be well received by local people and the parks team are focussed on its delivery in the future.”* Michelle Parker. (2011). GreenSpace South East Manager

6. An executive summary of the strategy including its aims is found in appendix three.

Consultation to develop the strategy

7. The consultation period for the draft green spaces strategy was conducted from the 9th January to the 21st February 2012.

8. It was recognised that the strategy is a relatively large document that may put some stakeholders off commenting on it. To overcome this there was a targeted approach with a letter, executive summary and a link to the full strategy was also included for those that wished to view the entire document.

9. The consultation was promoted through two separate press releases, through paper copy (approx 200 letters) and also through direct email (approx 540 emails). In addition, throughout the consultation period the draft strategy was available for comment on the Oxford City Council Web Site through the on-line consultation page, promoted from the front page. The consultation was promoted in Council Matters and was sent to all City Councillors.

10. The following are some of the organisations that were directly contacted;

- Sports Clubs and Teams
- League or other Sports Associations
- Referees or Officials Associations
- National Governing Bodies of Sport
- Sport England
- Oxford Sports Council
- The Playing Fields Association
- Friends / Voluntary Groups / Neighbourhood Action Groups
- Oxfordshire County Council
- Parish Councils
- Education Sector: Primary and Secondary Schools; Oxford University and Colleges, Oxford Brookes University; Language Schools
- Health Sector: NHS Oxfordshire; Surgeries; hospitals
- Police – PCSO's
- Community Centres
- Other City Council departments

Summary of consultation results

11. Alongside with individual responses, there was also a good number of responses from stakeholders in the Green Space sector, including:

- Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association
- Wolvercote Commoners Committee
- Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust
- Campaign to Protect Rural England
- Inland Waterways Association
- Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Oxfordshire British Horse Society
- Consultant Public Health Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust
- Oxford Preservation Trust
- Freeman of the City Oxford

12. Generally the comments were supportive of the strategy, its aims and recommendations. Improvements were suggested and the common themes were:

- **The Quantity Standard:** The figures from the 2005 Scott Wilson report are out of date. Further work is needed on areas of deficit and what will be done to rectify this.
- **Allotments:** The whole section on Allotments needs to be improved to take into account:
 - A commitment to write an Allotment Plan/Strategy
 - Give the section more importance in terms of all the various benefits of allotments
 - A commitment to open disused allotments
- **“Blue Space”** : A new section needs to be included on “blue space” in particular the Oxford Tow Path and Thames Path.
- **Climate Change and Biodiversity:** Greater emphasise on how the strategy can help mitigate climate change and improve biodiversity.
- **Previous Strategy:** There needs to be a section on what was achieved from the previous strategy and what will be carried forward. Plus more information needed on how it will be monitored and reviewed
- **Public Transport:** Greater emphasis on public transport and emerging cycle strategy
- **View Cones:** Reference 10 view cones identified in Local Plan
- Reference to **The Green Belt** and the importance of **Green Corridors**
- Reference **Diversity and Underrepresented groups**

13. It was also decided to wait for up-to-date census statistics which were released in July 2012. They showed that the population of Oxford has grown over past decade from 134,005 in 2001 to 151,900 in 2011; a total increase of 17,895 or 13.35%. This is substantially higher than the 2.8% increase predicted in the 2005 Oxford Green Space Study by Scott Wilson consultants. It is acknowledged that the needs of an expanding population should be addressed, but care must also be taken to protect distinctive and sensitive character and environments of Oxford. The Council has concluded that a standard linked to population does not fulfil this requirement and will focus instead on protecting and enhancing existing green space and ensuring that new developments contribute to the provision of high quality, multi-functional green space where it is required most.

14. The comments that have been raised within the consultation have been summarised along with what action has been taken in appendix five.

Level of Risk

15. The level of risk has been categorised overall as low. However, there is a risk that without the strategy in place we will not have a strategic approach in our management of these valuable assets.

16. The risk register is shown in appendix one.

Climate Change

17. Public spaces play a major role in combating the effects of climate change, from moderating rising temperatures in our cities to help with preventing flooding. Climate change adaptation is increasingly important in policy making for public space. Aim four of the Green Spaces Strategy is to support the Council target to reducing its carbon footprint and act on climate change.

Equalities Impact

18. Aim two of the Green Spaces Strategy is to ensure everyone living, working and visiting in Oxford has easy access to open space, therefore addressing any inequalities of provision across the City. The Equalities Impact Assessment is available in appendix two.

Financial Implications

19. The strategy, once approved, will form a robust document with an evidence base that will help support applications for securing external funding and also for streamlining developer contributions or Community Infrastructure Levy.

20. The action plan highlights a way forward in regards to trying to identify funding for various improvements.

Legal Implications

21. There are no direct legal implications arising out of the contents of this report.

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List of background papers: None

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