

**PAPER NO. 5**

**REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE MEETING OF 7 NOVEMBER 2011**

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**Status:** For Approval  
**Title:** Open Spaces Strategy  
**Originator:** Matthew Bills – Public Spaces Manager  
**Where from:** Management Board  
**Where to next:** Implementation

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1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To seek approval for adoption of the Open Spaces Strategy 2011, the Policies and Proposals for open space and associated Action Plan, as at Appendix A.

2 Recommendations:

2.1 **That Executive approves the Open Spaces Strategy 2011, Policies and Proposals and associated Action Plan.**

3 Summary of Reasons for the Recommendations

3.1 The adoption of the Open Spaces Strategy to give communities certainty that their open spaces will be managed in a consistent and accountable way.

3.2 The Open Spaces Strategy will

1. Highlight the importance of open space in the District.
2. Give a clear vision for open space into the future
3. Give opportunity for communities to become more involved in the management of all typologies of open space, and have a say in how the available amenities are delivered.
4. Set out policies and proposals for the management of open space
5. Provide an action plan for achieving the vision and proposals

4 Impact on Communities

4.1 Communities will be given the opportunity to become involved in the management and maintenance of open space. Communities will be assured that there is a consistent management approach towards open space across the District.

## 5 Key Facts

- 5.1 Harborough District Councils open spaces are currently maintained through the grounds maintenance contract with FOCSA. The current contract is for 7 years with a possible extension of 7 years and commenced in April 2009.
- 5.2 Improvements have been made to many of the open spaces through the capital programme and the proposed open spaces strategy will help direct future spending into projects that will support the vision and proposals.
- 5.3 The open spaces strategy builds on the consultation work that was undertaken for "Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation". The open spaces strategy consultation document (2009) was made available to all Parish Councils in the District and all elected members were provided with a copy. The consultation document was also advertised on the Council website and made available for comment to residents and others. The final version of the strategy has been amended to take account of the comments received.
- 5.4 The Cemeteries and Open Spaces Task Panel have advised on the content and direction of the open spaces strategy, and the final version has been amended to reflect the panel's comments.

## 6 Legal Issues

- 6.1 Most of the services relating to open spaces are discretionary, however there is a legal obligation to maintain closed churchyards, if asked to do so by Parish Councils, and also to continue to provide allotments.
- 6.2 All Local Authorities have an obligation under the Occupiers Liability Act to maintain their open spaces in a safe condition.

## 7 Resource Issues

- 7.1 The delivery of the open spaces strategy action plan will be dependant on sufficient and suitable resources being available either through the grounds maintenance contract or through external funding.
- 7.2 The action plan has been produced to show where proposals are funded from existing resources, or whether external funding will need to be realised. Approximate costs have also been applied to those projects where external funding is required.
- 7.3 Reallocation of existing resources with the grounds maintenance budget may be used to meet changing priorities, although it should be recognised that major renovations or improvements will need external funding to be sought. Reallocation of resources within the grounds maintenance contract will be

dependant on achieving agreement from the contract provider and meeting the legal obligations of the integrated contract.

## 8 Equality Impact Assessment Implications/Outcomes

8.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed for the open spaces strategy and it has not highlighted any areas of concern that are not recognised within the strategy.

8.2 Open spaces are freely available to all, however accessibility to open space and facilities within them needs to be monitored to ensure that inclusion is maintained. The policy on play area renovation has allowed for an item of inclusive play equipment to be provided.

8.3 Burial Grounds will also need to provide facilities suitable for different faith groups, and this has been identified in the equality impact assessment.

## 9 Impact on the Organisation

9.1 Well maintained and free to use open spaces are an expectation of residents and visitors to the District and are highly valued by users.

9.2 Securing the future of open spaces owned by Harborough District Council will reduce the reputational risk to the Authority.

## 10 Community Safety Implications

10.1 Well maintained open spaces can help reduce the incidence and perception of crime and anti social behaviour.

## 11. Carbon Management Implications

11.1 Items within the open spaces strategy such as water collection and additional sustainable planting will help reduce the carbon footprint of the parks and open spaces function.

11.2 The open spaces strategy seeks to promote sustainable development of open spaces through additional planting and sustainable management.

## 12. Risk Management Implications

12.1 Failure to ensure that sufficient and suitable resources are made available to maintain the current open spaces in Harborough District will lead to a decrease in quality of sites.

12.2 Failure to continue to undertake statutory requirements to maintain open spaces in a safe condition under the Occupiers Liability Act will lead to increased risk of litigation against the Authority.

13 Consultation

13.1 The open space strategy consultation document was made available to all Parish Council, Elected Members, and staff and also on the Council website for public comment during 2009. Hard copies were made available if requested.

13.2 The Open Spaces and Cemeteries Task Panel has advised and guided officers to the final version of the strategy, with the Panel's comments and suggestions being included.

14 Options Considered

14.1 *Not applicable*

15 Background Papers

15.1 *None*

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**Previous report(s):**

**Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure: Y/N**

**Ward Members Notified: Y**

**Appendices:**

**A. Open Spaces Strategy**