

PAPER NO. 4

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE MEETING OF 11th January 2016

Meeting: Executive
Date: 11th January 2016
Subject: Open Spaces Strategy 2016 – 2021
Report of: Matthew Bills
Portfolio Holder: Cllr King Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration
Status: For Decision
Relevant Ward(s): All Wards

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To inform Executive of the representations received during consultation on the Draft Open Spaces Strategy and for consideration of the final version Open Spaces Strategy for adoption.

2 Recommendations:

2.1 That the representations made during the consultation period on the draft Open Spaces Strategy and responses as detailed in Appendix 3 be noted.

2.2 That the revised and final version of the Open Spaces Strategy 2016 – 2021 (Appendix A) and Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation 2015 (Appendix B) be adopted.

2.3 That a Playing Pitch Strategy be commissioned as recommended by Sport England and funding to undertake this work be allocated from the Local Development Framework reserve.

3 Summary of Reasons for the Recommendations

3.1 Executive approved the publication of a Draft Open Spaces Strategy and companion document “Provision for Open Space, Sport and Recreation” at its meeting on 13 July 2015. Consultation responses (Appendix C) have informed the amendments made to the final version of the Open Spaces Strategy 2016 - 2021.

- 3.2 The Open Spaces Strategy 2016 – 2021 has been prepared for adoption by the Authority. The Open Spaces Strategy 2016 – 2021 will support the Local Plan and provide a framework for provision, enhancement and enabling of open space throughout the District.
- 3.3 Sport England have made representations that they consider more robust quantitative and qualitative assessment is undertaken of future outdoor sport facilities. They recommend that the Council undertakes a Playing Pitch Strategy for the District and officers propose that this be undertaken in 2016. There is further detail about a Playing Pitch Strategy in the section below.

4 Key Facts

- 4.1 The Open Space Strategy 2016 – 2021 has been prepared to reflect the changes in local and national policy. A draft Strategy was approved by Executive at its meeting on the 13 July 2015.
- 4.2 An Open Spaces Strategy ensures the Authority is following best practice when addressing open space issues. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012 states that local planning authorities should:

(Para 114) set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure;

and

(Para 75) Planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.

The National Planning Practice Guidance (issued in 2014) gives further clarification by stating: (Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 37-001-20140306)

Open space, which includes all open space of public value, can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks. It can provide health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby; have an ecological value and contribute to green infrastructure, as well as being an important part of the landscape and setting of built development, and an important component in the achievement of sustainable development.

- 4.3 The proposed Open Spaces Strategy 2016 – 2021, attached at **Appendix A**, has been written as a strategic document. It does not address the detail of, for example:
- maintenance of open space, or
 - disposal of open space,

The document does, however, provide a framework for further detailed policies to consider these and other issues relating to open space.

- 4.4 The companion document to the draft Open Spaces Strategy 2016 – 2021 is the **Provision for Open Spaces Sport and Recreation 2015** which forms an appendix to the Open Spaces Strategy and will also run for a period of 5 years with review after 3 years. This document sets out the mechanism and circumstances in which new open space will be sought when there is new development in the district. This document is attached at **Appendix B**.
- 4.5 The Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation 2015 and Open Spaces Strategy 2016 – 2021 do not form Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), but will help provide evidence to inform the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document and the new Local Plan.
- 4.6 The consultation for the Open Spaces Strategy and Provision for Open Spaces Sport and Recreation commenced on 10th August 2015 and ended on 2nd October 2015.
- 4.7 The representations received during the consultation period have been collated using the Strategic Planning Consultation Portal, and a detailed report giving the representation, officer response and amendment to the Open Spaces Strategy/Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation Documents is attached at **Appendix C**.
- 4.8 The final Open Spaces Strategy has an updated vision, aims and objectives. An Action Plan to achieve the objectives has also been proposed and can be found starting on page 30 of the Open Spaces Strategy 2016 – 2021 (**Appendix A**). The entire Aims and Action plan with HDC team and partner responsibilities indicated can be found at **Appendix D**.
- 4.9 The majority of representations were for minor changes to the draft Open Spaces Strategy and Provision for Open Spaces Sport and Recreation previously presented to Executive on 13th July 2015.
- 4.10 However, the comment from Sport England (a statutory consultee) was that the Open Spaces Strategy:
 - *does not constitute a robust quantitative and qualitative assessment of the need for sport and recreation facilities. Notwithstanding the above Sport England understands that plans may be developing to undertake a Playing Pitch Strategy we would strongly support the development of such a strategy to address this issue.*
- 4.11 Officers are aware of the need for additional evidence about the future demand and supply of playing pitches (for football, rugby, cricket, hockey etc) It is proposed that the Council undertakes a detailed needs analysis of outdoor sports facilities throughout the District and develops a Playing Pitch Strategy.
- 4.12 A playing pitch strategy is based on detailed liaison with local sports teams and organisations, looks at the condition and location of available playing

pitches and puts together a strategy for investment in new facilities taking account of future population growth and participation in team games, whether that be for additional pitches, improving all weather provision and installing floodlighting and changing facilities. Appendix F contains guidance from Sport England and a checklist in terms of what is necessary to carry out a Playing Pitch Strategy.

4.13 Whilst such a Strategy is principally aimed at supporting and developing sports provision in the District, it will additionally assist in supporting the evidence base for the Local Plan on future land requirements for sport and recreation. It is proposed therefore that funding be allocated from the Reserve Account used to support the Local Plan preparation. It is therefore being recommended that up to £20,000 be identified in the Local Plan resource plan for 2016/17 to fund such a Strategy from external consultants and the work is commissioned to take place in the period March - September 2016.

4.13 This assessment will follow the broad principles of the Sport England methodology who's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance can be found at Appendix F; however the approach will be tailored to be appropriate for Harborough District. National Planning Practice Guidance states:

Authorities and developers may refer to Sport England's guidance on how to assess the need for sports and recreation facilities.

4.14 The need for a Playing Pitch Strategy was already identified in the draft Open Spaces Strategy (Chapter 4 – Policy Context – page 6 of 13th July Executive report version of the Open Spaces Strategy 2016 to 2026).

5 Legal Issues

5.1 None relating to this report. The Open Space Strategy and companion guide "Provision for Open Space, Sport and Recreation" are non statutory documents which guide the Councils approach to future development of open space and land for sport and recreation.

6 Resource Issues

6.1 Funding for the playing pitch strategy is to be allocated from the reserve account used to fund evidence gathering and examination of the Local Plan. This work is of a specialist nature and will require employment of a consultant. The cost to undertake this work may be up to £20,000 based on experience from other Authorities.

6.2 The delivery of the Open Spaces Strategy Aims and Action Plan will be dependant on officer time from several teams across the Authority. These include:

- Contracted Services,
- Asset Management Team,

- Leisure Team,
- Community Partnerships,
- Planning Services,
- Legal Services.

6.3 The Aims and Actions Plan as set out in **Appendix D** details where HDC teams will need to deliver the actions contained within the Strategy. The Strategy has been written to place as little additional burdens on teams as possible, and to capture the work that teams already undertake in helping to deliver open space in the District.

6.4 The cost of delivering the Open Spaces Strategy has been considered during its preparation. While the District Council should be committed to provision of high quality, accessible open space it is recognised that budgetary constraints may mean that potentially difficult decisions need to be made about how open spaces owned by Harborough District Council are delivered in the future. The Open Spaces Strategy has given scope for these considerations.

7 Equality Analysis Implications/Outcomes

7.1 Initial Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) attached (**Appendix E**).

8. Risk Management Implications

8.1 If the documents are not adopted, the Council will be at risk of not having an up to date statement of policy on Open Space matters which may prejudice its approach to securing open space in new development. Adopting the Open Space Strategy without the recommended Playing Pitch Strategy is not deemed a risk. The Open Space Strategy already refers to the need for such a Strategy and this is a principal action emerging.

8.2 There is a risk that, without a Playing Pitch Strategy, Sport England may object to the Local Plan and contest that the element of the Local Plan that deals with sport and recreation facilities, and by definition the infrastructure schedule that demonstrates how and where the sport and recreation facilities will be delivered may not be robust.

8.3 There is a risk that Sport England will object to future funding applications by sports clubs in the District if the Authority does not have evidence of need. This risk can be mitigated against by production of a Playing Pitch Strategy. A Playing Pitch Strategy will also provide robust evidence when seeking contributions from development towards outdoor sports facilities, and ensure that such facilities are directed towards the geographical area with the most need and towards sports that cater for the widest cross section of the community.

9 Consultation

- 9.1 A consultation period on the Draft for the Open Spaces Strategy and Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation 2015 commenced on 10th August 2015 and ended on 2nd October 2015. The consultation documents were hosted on the Strategic Planning Consultation Portal with pdf copies sent to respondents upon request. An easy to read version was also made available to encourage responses.
- 9.2 Email representations were accepted by officers, with these representations input into the Consultation Portal.
- 9.3 48 responses were received and these are tabled within the consultation response report which can be found at **Appendix C**.

10. Options

- 10.1 Not to adopt the Open Spaces Strategy 2016 – 2021: Although an open spaces strategy is not a statutory document it will allow the District Council to plan for the provision and future management of open space. To not adopt an Open Spaces Strategy is not considered a reasonable approach.
- 10.2 A new Open Spaces Strategy will give a framework in which further policies relating to open space can work, and give elected members and officers some confidence that the priorities of the community and Council are being met, and, in addition opportunities for local, accountable and cost effective management of open spaces are being realised.

11 Background Papers

- 11.1 Open Spaces Strategy and Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation: draft documents – Full Version and Easy to Read version.

Previous report(s): Open Spaces Strategy: Executive Report of 13th July 2015

Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure: Y/N

Ward Members Notified: Y/N

Appendices:

- A Open Spaces Strategy 2016 - 2021**
- B Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation 2015**
- C Consultation response report**
- D Open Spaces Strategy Aims and Action Plan**
- E Equality Impact Assessment**
- F Sport England Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance Checklist**