

Report of the Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture)

Improving York's Green Spaces: Progress in 2010 and future actions

Summary

1. This report provides an update to the Improving York's Green Space: Response to the Open Space Sport and Recreation Study presented to the Executive Member for Leisure, Culture and Social Inclusion in December 2009.
2. The Executive Member is asked to:
 - a) Note the past and current actions
 - b) Agree the future actions as set out in the report

Background

3. The Policy Planning Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) – Open Space Sport and Recreation Study (The Study) was commissioned as part of the Council's Local Development Framework evidence gathering exercise. Over an eighteen-month period open space consultants, PMP, surveyed and assessed open space across the city with the outcome presented to the Local Development Framework (LDF) working group in December 2008. The results of the Study inform both Core Strategy and Allocations development plan documents.
4. Land was then categorised according to the primary purpose of the site in line with the nationally agreed typologies of a) city parks, b) local parks, c) natural and semi natural greenspace, d) amenity green space, e) provision for children, f) provision for young people, g) outdoor sports facilities and h) allotments. This audit is stored on the Council's electronic mapping system, and linked Access database and can be updated annually.
5. The final exercise was the production of local provision standards (quantity, quality and accessibility) for each type of open space. These were set in accordance with local needs of people living, working and visiting the City of York which was established through a series of consultations, including household surveys, workshops and stakeholder meetings.

6. Plans detailing open space provision in December 2008 will be on display at the meeting. A copy of the report can be found at:

http://www.york.gov.uk/environment/Planning/Local_development_framework/LDF_Evidence_base

7. The following sections provide an update on the work undertaken to meet the agreed actions and projects since December, and sets out a future work programme.

Parks and Gardens

8. The key issues for parks and gardens identified in the study are “*Just over 50% of residents perceived the quantity of local parks to be insufficient. The quality of parks is perceived to have improved over recent years, reinforced the by the achievement of several green flag awards across the City. Residents highlighted that improvements to the ancillary provision within parks would further enhance their quality. Maintaining and enhancing the quality of the parks was of greater importance than increasing the overall quantity of facilities*”. City Parks include both the major venues like Rowntree Park and the Homestead and small sites like Glen Gardens. The local quantity standard was set at the existing level of provision so there are no issues of over or undersupply. Quality issues were raised, with St George’s Field (Tower Gardens) and Hull Road Park being specifically mentioned as needing improvement.

9. Recent and current actions:

- In July four of the Council’s parks and gardens now have green flag awards – Rowntree Park, West Bank Park, Glen Gardens and Clarence Gardens. Clarence Gardens achieving the standards for the first time in 2010.
- The toilets at West Bank Park were refurbished in the spring.
- The pavilion in Hull Road Park has been improved with better storage and staff welfare facilities, and the children’s playground has been improved with new equipment.
- The pavilion in Clarence Gardens has been painted, and a start made on repainting the perimeter railings and re-landscaping the area where Haxby Road meets Wiggington Road
- At Scarcroft Green Bowling facility work has started with the Bowls Association and the York Probation Trust. This work could provide the basis for a Green Flag application in 2012 for Scarcroft Green and surrounding area
- The exterior of Rowntree Park lodge is due to be repainted and new windows installed

10. Future actions:

- St George’s Field was identified as a low quality local park in need of improvement. A site development plan will be drawn up over the autumn

that will identify investment priorities and actions to introduce more colour and vitality to the site including the removal of unnecessary vegetation.

- Submit a pre-application enquiry form to the Heritage Lottery Fund “Parks for People” programme for possible funding for the Ark in the Park project in association with the Friends of Rowntree Park.
- Enter Hull Road Park for a Green Flag award in 2012 (further time is need to get the site up to standard). Work in preparation includes painting the beck side railings, reviewing the need for the bowling greens and redevelopment of the old ranger base.
- Enter Scarcroft Green and surrounding area for a Green Flag application in 2012.

Natural and semi natural open space

11. These locations include the strays, riverbanks and nature reserves, key issues for natural and semi natural open space identified in the study are “There are variations in the perceptions of the quantity of natural and semi natural open space across the City. The quality of natural sites is important to residents and the wider benefits of these sites were recognised. Natural sites were perceived to have a particularly important role in enhancing biodiversity and developing habitats”. Applying the local quantity standards to existing provision shows that there is sufficient provision, efforts are therefore being concentrated in raising the quality of existing sites.
12. Recent and current actions:
 - The Council’s Countryside Officer submitted three bids to Natural England for Environmental Stewardship in July. The bids cover a) Walmgate Stray, b) Bootham Stray and Clifton Backies, and c) Hob Moor and a small section of the Knavesmire. The outcome of which is expected to be known by the end of the year. The scheme commits the Council to managing the land in set ways in return for grant aid which is to be used to improve the sites for nature, educational and recreational
 - A new grazier has taken on the Council’s grazing rights, which has resulted in improved stock levels and restoration work being undertaken at Monk Stray.
 - The Friends of St Nicholas Fields have been awarded a Green Pennant ward for the management of open space. The award is part of the national Green Flag scheme and is open community groups. This the first such award in York.
13. Future actions:
 - As yet the service is not fully represented within the Wild Flowering of York Project (a community partnership to improve and expand the range of wild flower sites in York). This will be followed up over the winter.

Amenity greenspace

14. Amenity spaces are informal, often smaller sites used by local people e.g. Acomb Green, Clifton Green, Poppleton Village Green. Key issues are –

“Amenity green spaces were perceived to be particularly important for the qualities that they bring to the landscape and character of the local area. The quality of provision was perceived to be as important as the quantity and there is a greater variation in the current quality of these open spaces than in any other type”. Applying the local quantity standards to existing provision shows a citywide sufficiency of provision; however, this masks a shortfall in the amount of amenity greenspace in specific areas including Heworth Without, Huntington and Acomb.

15. Recent and current actions:

- The Friends of Acomb Green have been supported to hold their first summer event and working with the Parks and Open Spaces staff, are drawing up a development plan for the site.
- Rawcliffe County Park was awarded a Green Flag for the second consecutive year.

16. Future actions:

- At Rawcliffe Country Park an introductory off road / mountain bike track could be built with £12k funding subject to approval from the Big Lottery Fund. In addition a fitness trail could be built possibly in partnership with sport and fitness users of the site.
- The Council has been invited to nominate sites for The Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge, which will give communities an opportunity to vote for playing fields in their area and be permanently protected as a tribute to the Queens Diamond Jubilee in 2010. Melrosegate Playing Field is suggested as a site, which could be put forward for consideration. See <http://www.qe2fields.com/QueenelizabethIIcharityfieldschallenge.aspx>

Children and young people

17. Children’s facilities are defined as the “traditional playgrounds”; young peoples facilities include skateboard sites and older age group playgrounds. Key issue the study highlighted are- *“The quantity of provision for children and young people was the overriding theme of the consultation with the majority of residents highlighting that the quantity of provision is poor. Several issues regarding the quality of existing provision also emerged. The majority of comments focused around the need for provision to be more challenging and innovative”.* Applying the local quantity standards to existing provision shows a shortfall of children’s playgrounds and young person facilities. Specific areas with no provision for children include Skelton, middle Strensall, south Haxby / Wigginton, Monk Stray, Woodthorpe and Dringhouses, Bishopthorpe, Naburn and Elvington. Young peoples facilities are in particularly short supply with only 5 sites in the city.

18. Recent and current actions:

- 11 play areas were built, expanded or refurbished under the 2009/10 programme including Elvington, Naburn, Bishopthorpe, Skelton, Huntington, Barfield Road, Viking Road, Chesney’s Field, Ashton Avenue, Sowerby Road and Balfour Street

- 1 play area has been expanded under the 2010/11 programme at Copmanthorpe. The remainder of the scheme is subject to a review by the Department for Education
- The Rawcliffe climbing boulder was officially opened in 11th June adding a new dimension to what is on offer in the City.
- The possibility of offering a dedicated maintenance and inspection service was tested out with local Councils, with several parish councils expressing interest in the idea.
- The knowledge of teenager facilities in the City has increased through the work of Leisure and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review of Casual play opportunities.
- An audit of future investment needs for the Council's playgrounds is being compiled detailing both opportunities for expansion and an estimated life expectation of the current equipment.

19. Future actions:

- To offer local councils an option to buy into a play ground inspection service instead of receiving double taxation payments
- Further development of the "Playbuilder" sites subject to the revised grant allocation being available.

Allotments

20. Key issues from the study are - "Analysis of demand for allotments highlights that some sites are nearing capacity and that there are waiting lists at some existing facilities. The quality of allotments is also varying". Applying the local quantity standards to existing provision shows there is a shortfall of about 1 hectare. Specific areas with no provision include Skelton, south Strensall, south Haxby / Wigginton, Clifton Moor, Westfield, Woodthorpe and Dringhouses, Wheldrake and Elvington.

21. Recent and current actions:

- The new drainage at Howe Hill allotments has allowed disused ground to be brought back into cultivation, providing plots for 18 new tenants.
- Speedier action on unused plots and division of plots as they come vacant, has considerably reduced the long waiting lists for Low Moor and Hempland allotments. 20 additional tenants have been accommodated on small starter plots.
- New raised beds for gardeners with disabilities have been installed at Glen allotments, funded by the Heworth ward committee.
- The general standard of gardening on council allotments sites continues to improve, illustrated by Low Moor Community Kids Allotment Yorkshire in Bloom entry; and, the Council's Allotment Garden Competition.
- The Council's allotments information leaflet has been updated to include 20 parish and independent sites.

- A bid to the Big Lottery Reaching Communities fund for community-based restoration of Bootham Stray allotments has been accepted for further consideration. The allotment association committee and Council officers are preparing a full bid for this £50,000 project jointly.
- A new 20 plot private allotment site is opening in Bishopthorpe in January 2011 and is being promoted through the Council's allotments web page
- Three sites are under consideration for possible new allotments in areas of high demand.

22. Future actions:

- Continue to investigate possible new sites in urban and rural areas.
- Continue to support initiatives by allotment tenants for grant funding and site improvements.
- Investigate possibilities for accessible allotment gardening on more sites.

Outdoor sports facilities

23. Facilities include grass and synthetic pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens. Key issues are *“There is high demand for outdoor sports facilities across York and the existing facilities are perceived to be of varying quality. An increase in the level of provision will be required over the LDF period to 2029 to facilitate higher levels of participation in sports. There is potential for this to be delivered to an extent through community use at school sites”*. Applying the local quantity standards to existing provision shows a shortfall of nearly 16 hectares, this is equivalent to about 8 full size football pitches. Specific areas of the city have specific shortfalls for example there is a shortfall of pitches in Fulford and Dringhouses.

24. Recent and current actions:

- The findings of the study are totally consistent with the research carried out by Active York, the city's sport and active leisure partnership in 2005 and updated in 2010. Since 2005 the Council and other Active York partners have been working with community clubs, schools and developers to make a start on addressing the qualitative and quantitative shortfalls. It is also recognised that if the challenging targets for increasing participation in sport and physical activity are to be met then the city must offer high quality facilities for these new participants.
- The Football facilities project officer appointed in May 2009 is currently working on 16 facility projects, which will provide new pitches, improved pitches and/ or new or enhanced changing and ancillary facilities across the city.
- The football facilities project officer has established and worked with a steering group of local league officials, the county FA and school sport representatives to develop a football facilities development plan. This is due to be published later this month and sets out the priority football projects in the city.

- The football facilities project officer has worked with “Play Football” at Clifton Moor to ensure that they fulfil their planning obligations and provide grass pitches for community use. This has seen the creation of one senior and three mini pitches. These pitches are now the subject of a partnership agreement between the commercial sector, the Council and one senior and one junior community football clubs.
- During 2009/10 the Council negotiated community access to an additional 3 school sites through the development and adoption of community use agreements. These include the development of shared sports facilities on one site, which will provide for both community and school sport.
- Tennis courts and a fitness trail (funded by Hull Road Ward Committee) have been opened in Hull Road Park.
- As part of the LDF land allocations process Active York consulted community clubs about their aspirations for additional pitches and facilities. A number of clubs and sites have been requested for additional sporting open space. The need for additional sports space has been identified in the core strategy documents and will continue to be included in planning documents.

25. Future actions:

- Update and publish a 2010 edition of Active York’s playing pitch strategy document setting out priority projects. Share this document with community groups and governing bodies of the relevant sports to encourage engagement in delivering these projects.
- Continue to seek opportunities for new sports facilities, for shared use of sites and for integrating informal sporting opportunities into other community settings, such as mapped running routes etc.
- Encourage schools to offer community access to their sports facilities and where possible to assist with facility improvements in return for guaranteed community access.
- Seek external funding to support our sports facility and pitch projects to enable the city to make the best use of the resources available to us.

Cross Cutting issues

26. The Council continues to obtain Section 106 contributions from new housing developments and these are used to improve capacity, access and standards of open space across all 8 categories. Depending on the locality of the development the money is either spent by the Council or passed on to third parties who manage open space including parish and town councils, voluntary sports clubs and community groups. Section 106 moneys have been transferred to Parish and Town Councils to improve their green spaces including Haxby, Elvington, Skelton, Clifton Without, Dunnington, Wigginton, Osbaldwick, Stockton on the Forest Copmanthorpe, Knapton, Strensall and Heslington.
27. The City has again entered the Yorkshire in Bloom Award, with the results due on 14th September. The judges visited the city in spring and again in mid-

summer, combining the scores from the two visits to give the overall standard. The spring and summer routes extend from Bishopthorpe through to Haxby and include voluntary and community activity, meeting children and young people, as well as visiting religious, residential, commercial, transport, shopping, council and higher education sites. As part of the Committees work programme membership of the York in Bloom committee has been expanded, the number of flora displays has been increased in the city centre and support has been given to community groups entering Yorkshire in Bloom.

Consultation

28. Considerable consultation was undertaken to produce the Study. Site-specific improvements are in most cases undertaken in consultation with local users, friend groups or associations, or sporting organisations as appropriate.

Options

29. The options available for the Executive Member are:
- Option 1: Agree the future actions suggested above in Paragraphs 10, 13, 16, 20, 23, and 26.
- Option 2: Suggest further and/or alternative actions for investigation.

Analysis

30. Option 1 offers the means of continuing to respond to the challenges raised by the Study. Many improvements rely on funding becoming available and therefore a degree of flexibility is required as to which project can move forward at any given time; however the Executive Member may be able to be able to suggest further areas for consideration.

Corporate Priorities

31. The actions and initiatives set out in the report relate to several of the Council's corporate priorities including:
- Sustainable City:* We will improve the quality of the local environment and the condition of York's public spaces.
- Inclusive City:* We will improve opportunities for third sector involvement in the shaping, influencing and delivery of services through consultation and partnership working to deliver open space improvements
- City of Culture:* By providing safe, well maintained and fit for purpose venues capable of holding city wide and local events
- Healthy City:* By providing safe, well maintained and fit for purpose venues which support the Just 30 campaign

Implications

32. **Financial** – There are no specific financial implications of the report's recommendations. Where any individual project has financial implications it will be approved through the scheme of delegation and monitored by appropriate budget managers.

33. **Legal and Property** - Where specific projects have property implications e.g. lease or lettings Legal Services will be involved in any arrangements
34. There are no Human Resources, Equalities, Crime and Disorder, Information Technology or Property Implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

35. Failure to continue invest in existing and new open space will mean that the ambitions of the Local Development Framework will not be met.

Recommendations

36. The Executive Member is asked to:
- Note the work currently being undertaken
 - Agree the proposed actions summarised in paragraph 29
 - Suggest any additional projects and priorities for investigation

Reason: To develop sufficient high quality open space that meets the needs of the City's residents and visitors.

Contact Details

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		Report Approved	✓	Date 02.09.10
Specialist Implications Officer(s): N/A				
Wards Affected:				All ✓
For further information please contact the author of the report				

Background Papers:

The Open Space Sport and Recreation Study can be found at:

http://www.york.gov.uk/environment/Planning/Local_development_framework/LDF_Evidence_base