

Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee	4 July 2017
Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?	Yes

Maidstone Borough Council Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan Draft

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage Culture and Leisure Committee
Lead Director or Head of Service	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jason Taylor, Leisure Manager
Classification	Non-exempt
Wards affected	All Wards

This report makes the following recommendations to the final decision-maker:
 That the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee adopt the Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan at Appendix I.

- This report relates to the following corporate priorities:**
- Keeping Maidstone borough an attractive place for all.
 - Providing a clean and safe environment
 - Encouraging Good Health and wellbeing
 - Respecting the Character and Heritage of our Borough
 - Ensuring there are Good Leisure and Cultural Attractions

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Corporate Leadership Team	20 June 2017
Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee	4 July 2017

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report introduces the final version of the Maidstone Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan, which deals with how Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) will manage the parks and open spaces that are under its control in the future.
 - 1.2 Given the pressure on budgets and resources every part of MBC must consider carefully how its services are delivered; and this is particularly important for non-statutory services, including Parks and Open Spaces.
 - 1.3 This plan sets out how the challenges ahead will be met, using the evidence base produced for the Local Plan and the results of the Residents' Survey. It explains the correlation between it and other MBC strategic documents, and shared targets and objectives.
 - 1.4 The plan introduces priorities and principles that will shape our parks and open spaces in the future, and details how these will be achieved. It presents a Quality: Value Matrix which will help ensure that in future resources are targeted at areas where they will have the biggest impact on the lives of residents and visitors, and provides a route map for the short, medium and longer term, ensuring that MBC Parks and Open spaces are well-prepared for the challenges that lay ahead.
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2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 It was originally agreed in March 2016 that a Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan was needed and a report was brought to HCL Committee explaining how this would be achieved.
 - 2.2 This project has gone through several iterations, with input from Members and senior council officers.
 - 2.3 The final draft was produced by Val Hyland Associates who consolidated the information gathered into a shorter concise document.
 - 2.4 Cllr Pickett, the Chair of Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee and Cllr Lewins, a member of the Committee, have both been involved in the production of the Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan, having met with officers and received regular drafts as the document has progressed.
 - 2.5 On 7 March 2017 a workshop was held which was open to all Councillors, which enabled wider comments and suggestions to be fed into the final document.
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3. PURPOSE OF THE PARKS AND OPEN SPACES 10 YEAR PLAN

- 3.1 The purpose of this plan was set out in the report to HCL Committee on March 1 2016 as follows:

"This project looks at the value and purpose of parks and open spaces in the Borough and how we currently manage them. It will ultimately provide an outline of how we

should manage them in the future to ensure their sustainability.

“Having a clear adopted 10 Year Plan will enable us to make best use of the resources available to us, bid to any relevant funding schemes which become available, have a clear set of objectives which we have agreed with our stakeholders, ensure that we put in place the most effective and efficient management arrangements for the future, and encourage the use of our parks and open spaces by residents and visitors whilst contributing to the health and wellbeing agenda.”

3.2 The report detailed how the work would be carried out in three stages:

3.2.1 Stage 1

A review of our parks and open spaces to include: Parks, Play Areas, Allotments, Sports Pitches, Natural/Semi Natural open space and Events and how we manage and run them. This review will look at our own provision and compare it to how parks and open spaces belonging to others organisations are managed. There will be a review of how the value of green space is measured. This will involve reviewing academic research, online research and looking at case studies, to find good examples of best practice in other organisations that are managing their parks and open spaces with their future sustainability in mind. If appropriate, site visits will be arranged to view best practice elsewhere and to interview those involved in managing these sites.

3.2.2 Stage 2

Identifying any issues we currently have with the ongoing management of our parks and open spaces, compare how others deal with these issues and propose solutions on how MBC can resolve these issues in the future.

3.2.3 Stage 3

Production of a Draft Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan incorporating the work carried out above.

4. PRODUCTION OF THE PARKS AND OPEN SPACES 10 YEAR PLAN

4.1 The initial research for the plan was carried out and a first draft produced by the Parks and Leisure Manger. The research involved a desk top study of available research, evidence and other studies into the provision and management of Parks and Open Spaces, and the changes and benefits that they can have for the communities that live and work near to them and for the people that visit them.

4.2 This investigation included reviewing the considerable amount of data that MBC had collected on existing Parks and Open Spaces in the borough for the production of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, which was adopted in 2016. Data had been updated on the amount of green spaces in the borough, how these were used, who they belonged to, where they were located and the quality of these spaces. This enabled us to get a very good picture of the current stock of green space in the borough.

4.3 Information was also held on what residents thought about the boroughs parks and open spaces from a telephone survey carried out in 2015.

4.4 Through using the adopted green space standards in the Local Plan and by looking at where future development will be located, it is possible to assess not only current

areas of under provision of green space, but also where these would be in the future.

4.5 Following this initial research, visits were arranged to a number of 'exemplar' Parks to see how they were managed to have a positive impact on the lives of their residents and visitors that used them. During these visits the managers of these parks were interviewed regarding how they managed their parks.

4.6 The Parks visited included:

- **Victoria Park, Tower Hamlets.** Serial winner in the People's Choice Award for the Nations Favourite Park.
- **Margham Park, Port Talbot.** This park was voted 2nd in the People's Choice Awards for the Nations Favourite Park.
- **Bewl Water, Kent.** A commercially operated open space.
- **Bedgeburry Pinetum, Kent.** A Forestry Commission site operated through a Friends Group.
- **Dansen Park, Bexley.** A council operated park with commercial activities.

4.6.1 A considerable amount of time was spent looking at the health profiles of the wards in Maidstone Borough and how Parks and Open spaces could be used to improve the health and wellbeing of their residents. This was done with the cooperation of the Kent County Council Public Health Observatory and the MBC Community Partnerships and Resilience Team.

4.6.2 A meeting also took place with the Chair of one of the Local Clinical Commissioning Groups to discuss his thoughts on how Parks and Open Spaces could be used to improve the health and wellbeing of patients.

4.6.3 The cost of managing Parks and Opens Spaces was reviewed and analysis carried out to look at what impact budget cuts would have on service provision.

4.6.4 This work produced an initial document and large body of evidence. It was then agreed to bring in an external consultant to use this work to produce a concise 10 year Parks and Open Spaces Plan.

4.6.5 The document has progressed through a number of drafts including the one which was taken by the consultants to a Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan Workshop in March this year. Comments from this workshop have been added to the final document enclosed as appendix 1.

4.7 **Structure of Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan**

4.7.1 The final document is set out in three parts:

Part 1 - states why our open spaces are so important, and provides some background about Maidstone's open spaces.

Part 2 - sets out the challenges ahead.

Part 3 - sets out the way forward, service priorities and principles and the actions needed to achieve these.

4.7.2 Pages 8 and 9 show how the Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan fits in with the MBC Strategic Plan and how it contributes to delivering Maidstone's supporting strategies.

4.7.3 There are important links with a number of existing MBC documents, particularly the following documents:

4.8 **Maidstone Biodiversity Action Plan 2009-2014**

4.8.1 Local targets for the conservation of wildlife are set through the Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). The LBAP provides the local context for a wider hierarchy, linking into the county Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), regional BAP and national BAP.

4.8.2 This Maidstone BAP identifies Biodiversity Opportunity Areas where available resources can be used to maximum effect to improve priority habitats.

4.8.3 It is proposed that a light touch review of this document will be carried out by the Parks and Open Spaces team in the first year following the adoption of the Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan.

4.9 **Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy**

The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy was produced to provide information for the Maidstone Local Plan. The document is borough wide and provides information on the current quantity and quality of the 5 different types of open space. It sets the open space standards for the whole of the borough.

4.10 **Health Inequalities Action Plan**

This Plan sets out plans to tackle health inequalities across the borough. It highlights how living in areas of low income, poor employment and poor infrastructure increases the risk of ill health. Currently there is a 9 year difference in life expectancy depending on where you live in the borough.

4.11 **The priorities of the Parks and Open Spaces 10 year plan** can be seen in the table on page 14 of the plan but consist of the following priorities and principles:

4.11.1 **Priority 1** Open Spaces supporting Vibrant and Healthy Communities

Principle 1A - Open spaces will be accessible to all residents

Principle 1B - Social, environmental and economic benefits will be maximised.

4.11.2 **Priority 2** Open Spaces Fit for the Future

Principle 2A - The open space needs of future populations will be met

Principle 2B - The long-term management of Parks and Open Spaces will be secured.

4.11.3 **Priority 3** Quality Spaces - Quality Service

Principle 3A - Quality open spaces will serve community needs

Principle 3B - The Service will seek continual improvement - invest and enhance.

5. **DELIVERING THE 10 YEAR PLAN**

5.1 In order to deliver the Priorities, 4 Key Action Areas have been identified:

- 5.1.1 **Action Area 1: An Open Spaces Estate which best serves Maidstone's needs**
This action area details how the Quality: Value Matrix will be used to target resources to the areas where they are most needed.
- 5.1.2 **Action Area 2: Providing Open Spaces for a Changing Population**
The population of the borough is going to increase significantly in the coming years, this action area details how we will ensure that both the quantity and quality of our Parks and Open Spaces adapt to the needs of residents in the future.
- 5.1.3 **Action Area 3: Connected Delivery – Multiple Benefits**
Parks and Open Spaces need to deliver social, environmental and economic benefits better, and to do this means we need to work in partnership with others. This action area sets out how this will be achieved.
- 5.1.4 **Action Area 4: Working Smarter** – This details how we will need to be more effective, efficient and targeted to continue to deliver a good service with fewer resources.

5.2 Annual Forward Plans

On adoption of the Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Strategy, annual forward plans will be produced which set out what will be achieved each year. These will be produced for each of the action areas and will be focussed to achieve the 3 priorities set out in the plan. Responsibility for implementation, and for producing and carrying out the Annual Forward Plans, will be with the Parks and Open Spaces Team.

The implementation will be funded from existing budgets and will form part of the Parks and Open Spaces Service Plan.

6 AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 6.1 HCL Committee adopts the Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan – **this is the recommended option.**
- 6.2 HCL Committee chooses not to adopt the Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan –this option is not recommended.

7 PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The preferred option is that HCL Committee adopt the Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan, for the following reasons:
 - 7.1.1 To ensure high quality, attractive parks and open spaces are provided to serve a range of needs for our current and future residents and visitors, as Maidstone continues to grow.
 - 7.1.2 To ensure that the provision and management of open spaces is sustainable in a future with less public sector funding.
 - 7.1.3 Address the difficult issues we are facing and provide a sound basis for decision-making.

7.1.4 Ensure that parks and open spaces effectively support the delivery of Maidstone’s Strategic Plan.

7.1.5 Provide a clear direction which MBC and its partners can unite around.

8 CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

8.1 A consultation workshop open to all members was carried out on 7 March 2017. At this workshop the latest draft of the local plan was presented to members by Val Hyland Associates. This led to a number of comments and suggestions from members and following this meeting changes were made to the document.

8.2 Cllr’s Picket and Lewins, have represented HCL Committee and had considerable input into the development of this document,

9 NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

9.1 Once the plan is adopted the Parks and Open Spaces Team will implement the plan.

9.2 The first year’s action plan will involve doing the groundwork to produce short, medium and long term objectives for the 10 Years of the plan.

9.3 This will include programming in the evaluation of sites using the Value: Quality Matrix.

10 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>This Plan impacts on a number of priorities under Keeping Maidstone borough an attractive place for all.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing a clean and safe environment ○ Encouraging Good Health and wellbeing ○ Respecting the Character and Heritage of our Borough ○ Ensuring there are Good Leisure and Cultural Attractions 	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development.
Risk Management	None identified.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development.
Financial		[Section 151 Officer & Finance Team]
Staffing		[Head of Service]

Legal	None identified	Team Leader (Contracts and Commissioning) MKLS
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	EIAs will be conducted for any changes to the service provided through the Plan.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development.
Environmental/Sustainable Development		[Head of Service or Manager]
Community Safety		[Head of Service or Manager]
Human Rights Act	None	
Procurement	None	
Asset Management	This plan sets out how we will manage are parks assets over the next 10 years.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development.

11 REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:
Appendix 1 Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None