

Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy progress update

Date: 21 March 2024

Report of: Chief Officer, Climate, Energy and Green Spaces

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities).

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

This report provides an update on progress with delivering the actions set out in the *Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy* two year's on from its publication. It covers the period Jan – December 2023. Highlights include:

- 77% of community parks achieving the Leeds Quality Park standard.
- Tree planting taking place at 58 new locations across the city
- New flagship playground opened at the Arium
- Significant external investment in local public green space for improvements to play, sports facilities and nature conservation.
- Over 14,000 hours of volunteer time recorded.

The report also makes proposals for a small number of changes to the actions in the Strategy

Recommendations

- a) For Scrutiny to consider progress so far with delivering the goals and actions set out in the Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.
- b) For Scrutiny to consider the proposed changes to the actions set out in the Strategy as outlined in section 3.1 below.

What is this report about?

1. Background

- 1.1 Following an extensive public consultation process, which included the formal Scrutiny process, the [Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy](#) was published in February 2022.
- 1.2 The strategy sets out a vision for Leeds City Council's Green Spaces Service, and the actions that will be undertaken by the service to deliver that vision over the 10 years from 2022 – 2032.

- 1.3 The vision set out in the strategy is for Leeds City Council to '*provide the best parks and green spaces in the UK.*'
- 1.4 To ensure this vision is achieved, eight priorities for the Parks and Countryside Service are outlined in the strategy:
 - i. Quality
 - ii. Climate and biodiversity
 - iii. Access for all
 - iv. Culture
 - v. Child friendly
 - vi. Working with communities
 - vii. Financial sustainability
 - viii. Health and wellbeing
- 1.5 The priorities support the Best Council Plan and are closely aligned with the 3 pillars of the Best City Ambition – Zero Carbon, Inclusive Growth and Health and Wellbeing.
- 1.6 For each priority, specific goals, and the actions that will be undertaken to achieve them, are identified in the strategy document, along with a time scale for delivery (short term - 1-3 years, medium term – 4-6 years; long term – 7-10 years, for each action).
- 1.7 This report, and the accompanying document in appendix 1, outlines progress on those actions.

2. Highlights

- 2.1 Progress on each action listed in the Strategy is set out in appendix 1.
- 2.2 Key developments that have taken place in 2023 towards the goals set out in the Strategy are outlined below.
- 2.3 **Quality priority - *Providing high quality parks and green spaces.***
- 2.4 All city parks (Roundhay, Middleton, Temple Newsam, Golden Acre, Chevin Forest Park and Kirkstall Abbey) achieved the national Green Flag standard in 2023.
- 2.5 One of the 2 Key Performance Indicators in the strategy is an aspiration in the Quality priority 'For all community parks to reach the Leeds Quality Park (LQP) standard during the life of the strategy'.
- 2.6 In 2023, 50 of the 65 community parks (77%) that were judged, passed LQP. This means the number of community parks reaching the LQP standard has increased year on year since 2010 (when just 22% passed) and that we continue to get closer to our goal for all community parks to reach the standard.



Calverley community park achieved LQP in 2023

- 2.7 Following a decision at Executive Board on 7 February 2024, rather than judging all community parks, cemeteries and crematoria annually, a third of the sites will be judged against the LQP criteria each year on a rota basis with those scoring lowest to be prioritised.
- 2.8 Efforts continue to be made to source and allocate external funding to improve the community parks that are failing LQP to achieve the goal of getting them all to the standard by 2032. In 2023, approximately £1.2 million of external funding from S106 and match (such as CIL, Wellbeing, WBI, Veolia) was committed for investment in community parks.
- 2.9 In 2023, a new process for producing 'Plans on a Page' for community parks was developed focussing on a comprehensive public consultation and engagement process including online surveys and face to face conversations on site and in the local community. Plans for Harehills park, East End park, Burley park and Blenheim Square were completed and Woodhouse Ridge went out to consultation. In 2024, consultations will be undertaken on a further 12 community parks and the plans for those sites should be finalised by the end of the year.
- 2.10 Tropical World passed its zoo inspection with flying colours in 2023 and some new animals were introduced to the refurbished Rainforest Canopy area of the attraction.



Animals newly introduced to Tropical World in 2023.

- 2.11 Climate and Biodiversity priority - *Increasing wildlife and biodiversity and reducing the impact of climate change.*
- 2.12 The second key performance indicator in the Strategy is to help combat the climate emergency by planting 50 hectares of trees each year.
- 2.13 2023 was a year in which we reviewed progress on the ambitious tree planting scheme that commenced in 2020, so there was a focus on re-planting at sites where a number of trees

previously planted had died, and ensuring systems are in place to make certain as many newly planted trees as possible survive in future years. Tree planting also took place at 58 new sites. In total 52 hectares of trees were planted in 2023.

- 2.14 With regards making improvements to our green spaces for the benefit of wildlife, the Tropical World team, in collaboration with the charity Butterfly Conservation, created a new wildflower area in Roundhay Park. Using seed sourced through Natural England, native wildflowers and grasses are now being grown in order to provide areas where British butterflies and other invertebrates can thrive. Accompanying signage was also installed providing educational information about the project and the native butterfly and plant species that can be seen there. Each year, through spring and summer, Tropical World staff record data on butterfly species abundance within the park, which is submitted to Butterfly Conservation, to further the understanding of native butterfly species populations in the UK.



Butterfly conservation area cultivated in Roundhay park in 2023.

- 2.15 2023 was also a significant year for nature conservation in the city because a lot of work was undertaken by our service, in partnership with colleagues in the Planning team, to get the necessary legal and regulatory systems in place so Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) can be delivered on our green spaces. The new BNG planning condition presents an opportunity for significant investment in wildlife habitat improvements such as wildflower meadows, hedges and ponds. The scheme, which has so far been non-mandatory, has already raised £2.5 million for this purpose. A Technical Officer with a background in ecology was recruited in 2023 to help us deliver BNG and the first set of schemes has been identified with habitat improvements on the ground due to be implemented from 2024, starting with woodland improvements at Armley park.
- 2.16 The Green Spaces education team received Healthy Holidays funding in 2023 to provide activities to enthuse and engage children and young people about green spaces, wildlife and nature. Activities including environmental art, den building and nature walks were delivered during August 2023 at Hunslet Moor, Armley Park, Meanwood Park, Tropical World, Temple Newsam, Lotherton and Pudsey Park – 695 children were engaged.



Bushcraft at Hunslet Moor (part of Healthy Holidays), summer 2023

- 2.17 Access for All priority - *Ensuring that parks and green spaces are accessible for everyone who wants to use them.*
- 2.18 In 2023, as per the commitment in the Strategy, a process for undertaking accessibility audits of our green spaces was developed. It was based on wide-reaching background research into what makes a fully accessible public space (e.g. using the *British Standard S8300-1:2018* - a standard of design for accessible and inclusive built environment), and consultation with local experts such as the Council's Disability Officer and the Leeds Disability Hub and it covers things like; how easy our sites are to enter and move around, how welcoming and safe the sites feel and whether they provide a range of facilities to meet the needs and interests of the wide range of people living in Leeds.
- 2.19 Following the production of the access audit, 20 community parks were audited. The findings of the audits will be fed into the park plans and any proposals to invest in the sites in future.
- 2.20 In the 2023 LQP judging, 53 out of 64 community parks (83%) and 18 out of 25 cemeteries/crematoria (72%) achieved 7 or above for *Equal Access for All* criteria.
- 2.21 A new space that is particularly accessible and welcoming was created in Barley Hill park in 2023. Designed as a quieter space that will appeal to all ages, it includes a story telling throne, chess board and raised beds for food growing.



Information about the new 'Gather and Stay' space at Barley Hill park

- 2.22 Culture priority - *Providing exciting, diverse, interesting and enjoyable green spaces that reflect the history and culture of their local communities.*
- 2.23 757 events (including markets, community galas, funfairs, sponsored walks, food festivals and rock concerts) were facilitated by the Green Spaces service in our parks during 2023 with around 650,000 people participating in them overall. Live music concerts – 'Live at Leeds' and 'Slam Dunk' returned to Temple Newsam and the Leeds West Indian Carnival, which is Europe's longest running Caribbean carnival parade, returned to Potternewton

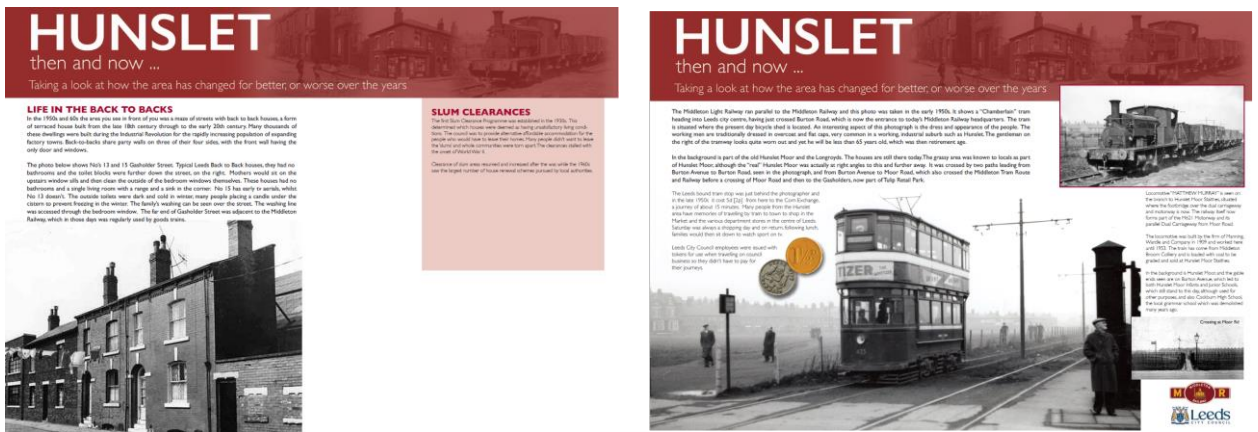
park. We also hosted 25 'My Leeds,' community-led events along with the WOW (Women of the World) Barn at Cinder Moor for the 2023 City of Culture.

2.24 In 2023, the Green Spaces events and activities leaflet 'Out and About' was re-launched. The leaflet, which is widely distributed online and at visitor attractions around the city, is used to promote our events, income generating visitor attractions, volunteer opportunities, sports facilities and the like.



Extracts from Out and About leaflet

2.25 Four heritage interpretation signs were installed at Tulip Street green space in South Leeds which are eventually to form part of a South Leeds heritage trail incorporating Cross Flatts park where the installation of new history signs is due to take place shortly.



Heritage information signs installed at Tulip Street in 2023

2.26 Deer tours were launched at Lotherton in summer 2023. These allowed visitors to join a new programme of tractor-trailer rides among the herd of 45 red deer and learn more about the animals and their habitat. The tours proved very popular and will be repeated in 2024.



Deer at Lotherton

- 2.27 Child Friendly priority - *Providing green spaces that children and teenagers love to visit so that they can gain the health, wellbeing and educational benefits of spending time in them.*
- 2.28 An independent audit of play facilities in parks was undertaken in 2023 – the results of this enable us to prioritise resources for maximum benefit going forward.
- 2.29 Over £1 million of external funding (from S106 and match such as Veolia, Wellbeing and CIL) was invested in local play facilities across the city in 2023 (locations include Meanwood park, Chapel Allerton park, Woodhouse Moor, Meadowfield and Gildersome park). For teenagers, a new multi-use games area was installed at Hunslet Moor and a BMX track was refurbished at East End park and plans for a space aimed at teenage girls at Lewisham park were developed.



Newly refurbished play area at Chapel Allerton park

- 2.30 Working with Communities priority - *Having a positive, open, helpful and collaborative approach to delivering the Parks and Countryside Service.*
- 2.31 The Parks and Countryside Service currently works with over 100 *Friends* (or similar) groups, 30 *In Bloom* groups and 600 sports clubs to engage people with, care for and improve green spaces for recreation, health and nature across the city.
- 2.32 We have recorded a total of 14,796 hours of volunteering being undertaken on our sites involving a range of tasks (e.g. tree planting, hedge-laying, sowing wildflower seeds, pulling Himalayan balsam, improving footpaths) with the Ranger team. We are also extremely grateful for the support of hundreds of other volunteers who contribute many more

unrecorded hours to caring for public parks and green spaces in the city through activities such as litter picking, fundraising and organising events.



Corporate volunteers hay raking at Asket Hill, Sept 2023

- 2.33 Financial Sustainability priority - *Ensuring that quality green space is available for the long term.*
- 2.34 S106 developer's contributions through Planning continue to provide significant external funding for green space improvements with over £2.7million of S106 (and match funding from grants such as WBI, Wellbeing, Veolia, CIL and MICE) being committed to green space schemes such as playground improvements, soft landscaping, path improvements and the installation of benches, bins and fences on a number of sites in 2023.
- 2.35 We continue to invest in our income generating visitor attractions, cafes and shops where we see opportunities to improve the visitor experience and sustain/increase income. As part of this work exciting new playground was installed at the Arium in 2023 which has proved very popular and resulted in a significant increase in visitors to the site and income through the refreshment stall next to it.



New playground at the Arium

- 2.36 Health and Wellbeing priority - *Providing and promoting a wide range of opportunities for people to get the health benefits of spending time in green spaces*

2.37 Investment in sports facilities in 2023 included the installation of a new Multi Use Games Area at Hunslet Moor, a trim trail at Pepper Road, a table tennis table at Yeadon Tarn and non-turf cricket pitches at Roundhay park and Bedquilts. Several other large-scale, community-led schemes still under construction include new rugby pavilions at Stonegate Road (North Leeds Leopards Rugby) and Butt Lane (Farnley Falcons Rugby) and an extension on the changing rooms at West Leeds Rugby League Club in Armley. Investment for these facilities has come from various sources including the English Cricket Board (ECB), Sport England, Rugby World Cup Legacy Fund, local ward members, S106 and Landfill providers, along with contributions from the clubs themselves.



New multi-use games area at Hunslet Moor, installed summer 2023.

3. Proposed changes to action plan

3.1 In light of developments since the Strategy was published 2 years ago, it is proposed that the following new actions are added building on the original agreed priorities and goals.

Priority	Goal	Proposed new action	Timescale	Measuring Success
Climate & Biodiversity	To increase the quantity, quality, size, variety and connectedness of wildlife habitats (e.g. woodlands, meadows, ponds, hedgerows) on our green spaces.	Deliver new and improved wildlife habitats funded by Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).	Ongoing	Number of biodiversity units delivered through BNG.
	To minimise any negative impact the Parks and Countryside Service has on the environment	Switch to electric vehicles and machinery where practicable and install EV chargers for public in the car parks of popular sites.	Ongoing	Proportion of vehicles and machinery that are electric and number of our car parks with EV chargers in them.
		Minimise the use of single use plastic at our cafes, shops and takeaways.	Long	Minimal (only use where no other option) use of single-use plastics at our outlets.
		To put in place systems to recycle/re-use green waste	Medium	For all suitable green waste to be re-cycled in an

		for mulch/compost close to site where possible.		environmentally-friendly way.
	*To manage the impact of climate change on the service.	Produce and implement a Climate Adaptation Plan for the Green Spaces service.	Medium	Plan in place and actions being implemented.
Access for All	For our parks and green spaces to feel safe and welcoming for girls and women.	To use new guidance to improve access to parks and green spaces for women and girls.	Ongoing	Guidance applied when managing and developing parks and green spaces.
Child Friendly	To have a wide range of good quality play facilities for children of all ages and abilities across the city	Develop and implement a Green Spaces Play Strategy.	Medium	Play strategy in place and being implemented.

*Priorities and Goals are unchanged except for this new priority.

3.2 In addition, it is proposed that the current action (See row 14 in *Working with Communities* priority) ‘Continue to organise and run the following city-wide volunteer groups: Leeds Wildlife Volunteers, Leeds Cemetery Volunteers, Volunteer Rangers and Leeds Voluntary Footpath Rangers’ should be changed to ‘Continue to support green space volunteer groups,’ because we have found that it is more effective to be responsive to what works best for volunteers and our sites rather than stick with supporting named groups whatever happens. So, for example, it has proved more effective to support site-based groups in cemeteries than focus on one city-wide cemetery volunteer group. This will also provide us with an opportunity to report all volunteer hours in future rather than just those relating to the named groups.

3.3 It is also proposed that the action to develop an outdoor water play visitor attraction is removed from the Strategy to create capacity for the team to focus on developing a masterplan for Tropical World with the aim of improving the attraction and ensuring it is financially and environmentally sustainable.

3.4 Actions that have been completed, such as removing peat from our operations and supporting the City of Culture 2023, will also be removed from future action plans to ensure the document is as simple and easy to follow as possible.

What impact will this proposal have?

4. The aim set out in the Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy is to provide the best parks and green spaces in the UK.
5. By focussing on the 8 priorities set out in the Strategy and undertaking the actions listed in it, we believe we can achieve that goal.
6. This report demonstrates that the actions are being delivered within the agreed time scales for the benefit of parks and green spaces in the city and the people who use them.
7. We believe that the proposed changes to the actions in the Strategy will contribute further to the delivery of the key priorities of the Service and the Council.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing Inclusive Growth Zero Carbon

8. The Strategy supports the council’s three key pillars.

9. Zero Carbon

10. Climate and Biodiversity is a priority in the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy with a number of actions having been undertaken in 2023 to achieve Zero Carbon including planting 52 hectares of trees, moving to battery-powered tools and putting in place the processes that will allow us to deliver extensive natural habitat improvements through Biodiversity Net Gain going forward.

11. To reflect the importance of the climate emergency to the Council this report also proposes that a number of new actions are added to the Strategy focussed on climate adaptation and caring for the environment (see section 3.1).

12. Health and Wellbeing

13. Health and wellbeing is a priority in the Strategy and a number of actions were taken in 2023 to help deliver the goal of 'providing a range of opportunities to be physically active in green spaces so everyone can enjoy being active outdoors, no matter what their level of ability or interests'.

14. For example, a new externally funded multi-use games area was installed at Hunslet Moor and support was provided for a number of community-led projects to improve sports facilities like a new rugby pavilion which is now under construction at Stonegate Road.

15. Inclusive Growth

16. The Strategy contains several elements that contribute to the Council's inclusive growth priority, particularly in relation to '*understanding that place matters, and positive identity, culture, heritage and pride in our communities are vital assets in a sustainable future for the city and its local centres*'.

17. Evidence suggests that the continued provision of quality parks across the city has a beneficial impact on the local economy. For example, a study by Fields in Trust in 2018 estimated that parks have an equivalent economic value of £30.24 per person, per year based on several objective government measures of non-market goods including willingness to pay, life satisfaction and health.

18. The installation of the flagship playground at the Arium provides a new visitor attraction and aims to increase income for the Council through spend in the café and shop there.

19. The hosting of hundreds of events such as community galas, funfairs, sponsored walks, music concerts and the Leeds West Indian Carnival) contributes culture, heritage and pride in our communities.

20. As also outlined above, the Green Spaces Service is supported by hundreds of volunteers each year (including as part of *Friends* groups, *In Bloom* groups and corporate volunteering schemes) - many of whom gain valuable skills and work experience which can help them into work and better jobs.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: All

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

21. An extensive public consultation was undertaken ahead of producing the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy. Details of this were shared at Executive Board in December 2021 when the content of the Strategy was approved for delivery.

22. As part of this process, Scrutiny (Environment, Housing and Communities) were consulted twice - in September 2019 on the Strategy consultation process itself, and in October 2021 on the draft Strategy.

What are the resource implications?

23. In producing the strategy, the Green Spaces service tried to balance our ambition to have the best parks and green spaces in the UK with a realistic assessment of the resources available to maintain and improve them over the next 10 years.
24. The service will continue to adopt the wider council approach to spending money wisely, for example, by regularly reviewing costs, fees and charges.
25. Also, as referenced in the 'Financial Sustainability' priority, the service will continue to explore opportunities for the Green Spaces service to generate funds to help achieve the aims of the Strategy through enterprises such as shops, cafés and commercial events (whilst being mindful of the other priorities set out in the strategy).
26. The service also continues to explore other external funding opportunities such as developer's contributions for recreation and biodiversity, and grants like the Heritage Lottery Fund.
27. The service has a good track record of working with communities and volunteers with over 100 established groups and thousands of volunteers. The strategy proposes to prioritise 'Working with Communities' – continuing our successful approach of collaborating with volunteers and other organisations to achieve shared goals more effectively than we could do alone.
28. Longer term, having a strategy for local parks and green spaces should improve value for money by focussing on agreed priorities and the most effective way to allocate resources to public green space in Leeds.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

29. The Green Spaces service has recently held a risk workshop that identified operational risks that will be reported to the service's leadership team. Any risks arising from the management of the city's green spaces can be raised for reporting and escalation via the new service risk management arrangements shortly to be implemented.
30. The current budget pressures make it challenging to deliver the actions set out in the Strategy and make substantial improvements across our green spaces. The work with volunteers provides a vital additional resource to help ensure our green spaces are well maintained. The team continue to seek out commercial opportunities to increase income as well as exploring alternative funding streams such as Biodiversity Net Gain funding.
31. Unfortunately, anti-social behaviour continues to present challenges for the service with littering, graffiti and arson still being relatively regular occurrences. The damage is rarely covered by insurance and therefore creates a real financial pressure for the council.

What are the legal implications?

32. None

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

33. Following an extensive public consultation process, the Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy was endorsed for delivery over a 10-year period by the Council's Executive Board in December 2021.
34. Where, due to developments that have taken place since the Strategy was published in Feb 2022, we believe that other options involving adding and removing particular goals and/or actions, is now required, it has been suggested above.

How will success be measured?

35. Success will be measured by delivery of the actions and measurable goals set out in the Strategy within the timescales given in the document.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

36. The Strategy was published in February 2022 and runs for 10 years to 2032.
37. Each action in the Strategy has been given a delivery time scale of either short (1 – 3 years), medium (4 – 6 years) or long term (7 – 10 years).
38. The Chief Officer for Climate, Energy and Green Spaces is responsible for its implementation.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Progress update for each action in the strategy.

Background papers

- [Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy Executive Board report, Dec 2021](#) (item 102)
- [Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy](#)