

Environment, Housing and Communities Consultation on Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy to 2030

Summary Note of the Working Group Meeting 30 September 2019

Introduction

1. On 12 September 2019 the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board received a report in relation to the Consultation on Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy to 2030.
2. In order to allow members to have a more detailed discussion of the paper than time allowed it was agreed that the matter would be discussed by a working group with an invitation extended to all Board members.
3. This meeting was held on 30 September 2019 with Sean Flesher (Chief Officer, Parks & Countryside) and Emma Trickett (Senior Project Manager, Communities & Environment) in attendance.
4. This summary note sets out the key issues raised at the board. The proposals made by members for officer consideration are included in the table below.

Summary of key issues

Climate Change

5. Members acknowledged the important role of public green spaces in the development of a strategic response to the city's declared climate emergency.
6. Improving the natural environment, promoting biodiversity and contributing to greater carbon storage through tree planting were areas of particular interest to members.
7. Members sought clarification of the distinction between local, regional and pan-northern tree planting initiatives, and considered how new woodlands would be managed. An update on the amount of new woodlands planted in Leeds this year was welcomed.
8. It was suggested that the planned consultation should highlight to consultees that there will be changes to how their community space may look in future in order to achieve ambitions around mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Recreational Use of Green Spaces

9. Whilst recognising the significance of climate change within the developing vision for Parks and Green Spaces, members also stressed the importance of recognising the value of those spaces within sustainable communities for recreational, health and wellbeing purposes.
10. Plans to consult with councillors about individual green spaces in their wards were noted. Members discussed the need to retain playing fields and manage green areas for community use within their individual localities.

11. Reassurance was sought and received in regard to the new Parks and Green Spaces Strategy being consistent with the city's Playing Pitch Strategy, and vice versa.
12. The working group considered shared use of green spaces including the implications for other users of an increasing number of professional dog walkers and sought clarification about the ability of parks' staff to easily communicate with colleagues in the wider organisation.

Planning

13. The establishment and maintenance of green spaces and woodland areas was discussed in relation to new housing developments. The Board reiterated the need to ensure that better account is taken of the community need for green space in the planning of new housing developments – both in terms of the needs of those living there to access recreational space and in terms of anticipating potential concerns in years to come with, for example, maturing trees on the boundaries of developments.
14. The need for organisational consistency was highlighted in relation to the prioritisation of green spaces and tree planting within the planning process from its earliest stages.

Strengths and constraints of the service

15. Members were keen to highlight the success of the Parks and Countryside department and felt greater prominence should be given to the awards and recognition received in relation to the work of the service.
16. Board members highlighted the skills, dedication and enthusiasm of parks staff.
17. It was further suggested that the paper includes some analysis of success in relation to securing funding bids and monies leveraged into the city as a result of working in partnership with local groups of volunteers.
18. Further consideration was given to practical constraints on the ability of the service to deliver the aspirations for Parks and Green Spaces that may be reflected in consultation responses.
19. The Chair proposed that more explicit budgetary information was provided for consultees, setting out potential sources of funding. It was proposed that the document highlights the implications of changes to the current S106 arrangements and the need for local recipients of development funds, such as parish councils, to contribute funding for the upkeep and development of their green spaces.

Links to Other Plans and Strategies

20. Members were keen to understand the 'plan on a page' approach to community green spaces and welcomed the planned engagement with community groups, who have already showed considerable interest in the future development of parks and green spaces in their areas.
21. The need for consistency with other corporate plans and strategies was acknowledged as is illustrated by the diagram set out on page 5 of the current Parks and Green Spaces strategy. Those plans and strategies of particular interest to members included the Biodiversity Action Plan, Playing Pitches Strategy and Urban Forest Strategy.

22. The Board noted the need for consistent terminology across different strategies produced by different areas of the organisation. Members requested that terminology in the draft strategy was compared to the Core Strategy, sections G1, G2, G8 and G9.
23. It was suggested that hyperlinks are included in either the consultation document, or a more detailed supporting document, to relevant sections of other key strategies such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Inclusive Growth Strategy.
24. The potential to engage with CCGs was raised and Board members were informed that further discussion is due to take place with the Director of Public Health.

Green Flag Status

25. Reassurance was sought in relation to the impact of proposed changes on the ambitions to achieve and sustain Green Flag awards at parks throughout Leeds.

Equality of Access

26. Officers outlined the timeline for consultation and the main consultation events planned, including engagement with Community Committees.
27. It was noted that consideration needs to be given to how best to engage with those who are digitally excluded. It was suggested that the consultation could be promoted via the library service, including in areas receiving a mobile library service.
28. It was suggested that ward members could play a role in disseminating information to groups they engage with locally to help target those who may not be digitally engaged.

Consultation Document

29. Members suggested the consultation should provide more clarity about the scope of its remit and, equally, what is beyond its remit.
30. The links to the Culture Strategy were considered with members proposing that more information is provided about the need to share space in parks on occasions in order to enable the wider events programme to go ahead.
31. The working group requested that question 3 on the draft questionnaire was expanded to 'parks' rather than 'park', and asked for the inclusion of a broad question about the views of consultees on parks they currently use.
32. It was suggested that an extra question about climate change should be included.

Recommendations

1	Strengthen the emphasis on climate change within the consultation document, including the insertion of an introductory paragraph on the climate emergency.
2	Incorporate the information provided in the Executive Board report 'Adapting Parks and Green Spaces for Climate Change' within the consultation paperwork – potentially within a more detailed supporting paper, signposted within the consultation paper.
3	Include more information about the success of the service – both in terms of awards received and monies leveraged into the city through work with external partners including local volunteers.
4	Include information about budget constraints including the sources of potential funding to deliver the ambitions, which may be reflected in the consultation responses, and the implications of changes to S106 arrangements.
5	Advise consultees on the need to share space on limited occasions to enable the wider events programme to go ahead.
6	Compare the terminology used in the draft documentation with the Core Strategy – sections G1, G2, G8 and G9.
7	Encourage ward members to promote the consultation with local interest groups.

Additional member requests:

- **Cllr Gabriel** requested information about which volunteers rangers have been engaging with in relation to Holbeck Cemetery.
- **Cllr Collins** requested a copy of the Urban Forest Strategy
- **Cllr Khan** requested that officers review the contact details provided outside parks.