

3rd September 2014

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Culture, Leisure, Sports & Parks) Councillor A Khan

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director, Place

Ward(s) affected:

Whoberley

Title:

A Vision for Allesley Park Walled Garden

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

Allesley Hall Park is one of the Area Parks within the City, with a rich history and the Council is supported in its management and ongoing maintenance by very enthusiastic local people who are members of the Allesley Park Residents Association, Allesley Park Walled Garden Group and the Friends of Allesley Park.

All these groups have been working over the past three years with City Council officers on a Visioning document for the Walled Garden, an integral and historical element of this well used park. This report seeks approval to adopt this document as a framework for the future development of the Walled Garden and to submit an external funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for Stage 1 of the restoration works.

The park is under the control of the Parks Service within the Place Directorate.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member (Culture, Leisure, Sports & Parks) is recommended to:

1. Approve the adoption of "A Vision of Allesley Park Walled Garden" as a framework for the future development and management of the Walled Garden.
2. If recommendation 1 is approved, to agree to the submission of an external funding application (first-round) to the Heritage Lottery Fund for c£480,000.

3. Agree that if successful at the first-round stage, a further report is submitted to a future meeting outlining the proposed project, financial implications and seek approval to enter into a contract with the Heritage Lottery Fund for the funding offered to deliver this proposed project.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 – A Vision for Allesley Park Walled Garden

Appendix 2 – Allesley Park Walled Garden Cost Estimate

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel, or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 For a number of years, residents and groups that use Allesley Park have taken a keen interest in the management of the park. In 2000, the Council adopted a "Proposal for the Walled Garden", which permitted the newly formed Allesley Park Walled Garden Group to lease part of the garden in order to lay it out as it may have looked when the garden was first built in c1786.
- 1.2 This lease was for an initial 5 year term after which it would be reviewed if resources both in the form of the number of volunteers and in financial terms indicated that the Group could manage a larger part of the Walled Garden. Although the Group was willing to take on the whole garden at the end of the initial lease period, they did not however demonstrate to the satisfaction of the council that they had sufficient resources to do so. From that time the Walled Garden group has continued to manage and maintain approximately one quarter of the garden area.
- 1.3 At this time, it was decided that the management of the whole garden would be investigated with a shared objective by all those interested, to develop a management plan (subsequently referred to as 'A Vision for Allesley Park Walled Garden') that would be supported by the majority of park users.
- 1.4 The need for a Vision for the Walled Garden developed following discussions with the Friends of Allesley Park and Allesley Park Walled Garden Group, whose members wished to have greater clarity as to how the garden was to be managed in the future and their role in its management. A key issue was the desire of the Walled Garden Group to have a building within the garden which could be used for both the storage of their equipment and as a classroom for visiting school groups.
- 1.5 The City Council was also keen to see a closer working relationship between the two groups and consequently invited representatives of each and also a representative of Allesley Park Residents Association to a meeting to discuss the garden's future. At this meeting it was agreed that a new group should be established under the title of the Allesley Park Walled Garden Working Group. The principle aim of the group was to agree a plan for the development of the garden over the next ten years. The aim of this process would be known as 'A Vision for Allesley Park Walled Garden'.
- 1.6 The Working Group agreed that other users of the garden should be consulted on its future, to include the general public and the garden's immediate neighbours. A questionnaire was devised by the Working Group and this was distributed to local residents within 0.5 miles of Allesley Park through local newsletters and at local community centres including libraries, shops and similar outlets. The resultant data was analysed and the results were shared with the groups.
- 1.7 The historical importance of the Garden and the strongly held opinions of the two volunteer groups suggested that a specialist consultant may be required to help in the design process. The Parks Service identified the necessary funding and sought a suitable consultant with the requisite experience in arbitration and the necessary skills in historical landscape design and development. 'The Parks Agency' was subsequently commissioned to help draw up the Vision. In a series of meetings led by the consultants, facilitated by members of the Parks Service, the Working Group then worked on the Vision document. Over 18 months, the Working Group considered the key factors affecting the garden, including the results of the consultation, each group's hopes for how the garden would appear and be used in the future and the practical

limitations on the Garden's development (especially the economic and physical constraints). Following further detailed discussions, the Vision document was adopted by all the members of the Working Group in April 2014.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 Option 1: To leave management of the garden as it is. The retention of the status quo would mean having a quarter of the garden managed (under lease) by the Walled Garden Group with the remainder of the garden managed in an ad-hoc fashion by the Friends of Allesley Park, apart from essential work such as grass-mowing which would be carried out by the City Council. This lack of formal management for three quarters of the garden has already proved to be undesirable as it causes friction between the two groups. This option is not recommended.

Option 2: Adopting the Vision. The Vision for the Walled Garden has been agreed by all parties as a workable management framework. By adopting the Vision, the groups will work in partnership with the City Council to deliver the actions outlined in the Vision including seeking external funding to deliver the new design proposal.

It is recommended that this option is approved so that the Vision document is adopted, allowing external funding to be sought so this Vision becomes a reality.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

Almost four years of consultation and discussion have been undertaken during the development of the Vision document. This consultation was led by the City Council and involved the Allesley Park Residents Association, the Friends of Allesley Park and the Allesley Park Walled Garden Group. The groups carried out consultation with the wider public through questionnaires, distributed within 0.5 miles of the park and via events where members of the public have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals.

The Vision document, as attached in Appendix 1, has been overwhelmingly agreed by all parties as a framework for the future development of the Walled Garden.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 If approved, it is proposed to submit an external funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund when the next application "window" opens in February 2015.
- 4.2 Other action plan elements within the Visioning Document will be delivered as resources, both financial and personnel permit.

4.3 Heritage Lottery Fund/Project Timetable (indicative)

Date	Milestone
February 2015	First-round application to HLF
June 2015	Announcement from HLF on first-round application
July/Aug 2015(Assuming success at first-round application)	To draft a further report to Cabinet Member outlining the project and finance support needed and to seek approval to enter into a contract with the Heritage Lottery Fund to accept their funding offer
September 2015 – August 2017 (if approved by Cabinet Member)	Development phase preparation
August 2017	Second-round application to HLF
December 2017	Announcement from HLF on second-round application
Early 2018 (Assuming success at Stage 2)	Tendering process: consultants, sub-consultants and contractors
Mid 2018	Work starts on site
Autumn 2019	Works completed and official opening of redesigned Walled Garden

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 Financial implications

The Visioning Document proposes the redesign of the Walled Garden. The design includes a costed proposal (as attached in Appendix 2) for the works concerned which, it is proposed will be the subject of an external funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund of c£480,000.

If successful, the Council's "match" contribution will be 5% of development costs and a further 5% of the delivery costs totalling c£48,000, which will be the subject of a further report if the first-round application is successful.

It should be noted, at the first-round submission stage there is no commitment being entered into by either the Council or the Heritage Lottery Fund. If successful, at the first-round stage a further report to fully cover all financial and administrative issues will be tabled at a future Cabinet Member meeting for consideration, as per the indicative project timetable at para 4.3 above.

At this time it is intended that the match funding indicated above could be funded from a combination of parks revenue and possibly s106 contributions and probably spent across two financial years.

5.2 Legal implications

It may prove necessary to enter into further agreements with the groups depending on any conditions arising from the Heritage Lottery Funding. Otherwise there are no particular legal implications from this report.

6. Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

This work demonstrates the Council's ongoing commitment to support residents to help improve their local environment.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

Via the normal Council practices and procedures for such projects

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

The Visioning Document will provide an agreed and supported focus for the development of an important historical element within a local park and have a positive impact for both the council and local people.

6.4 Equalities / EIA Implications for (or impact on) the environment

The improvements proposed have been supported by the Residents Association, Friends Group, Walled Garden Group and other local people following three years of meetings and discussions. The representatives of the groups are a mix of different genders and issues concerning people with disabilities have been considered at each stage of the Vision's development.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

The ecological content of the Walled Garden will be improved by planting of more diverse species including plants of historical and ecological interest, native wildflowers and unusual local variants of more common species (such as varieties of rare Warwickshire / Coventry apple trees, traditional English herbs and food-plants including those used in the 1700s etc.). This will help boost the biodiversity of the park and the city as a whole. The new garden will be used to educate visitors, both formally through school visits and through classes in horticulture for adults, stimulating further interest in the environment. The proposal includes interpretation both in the garden and in the wider park; this will reference the park's rich heritage, which dates back to Norman times. All these elements will help stimulate interest in the Garden and the park, encouraging more visitors who will be able to learn more about the park and the local environment as a whole.

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

The Vision document is the result of working closely with the Residents Association, Friends Group and Walled Garden Group. Its successful implementation will bring about strongly positive links with these volunteer groups and help stimulate greater interest with all park users.

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This report is published on the Council's website:

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Appendices

1: Allesley Park Walled Garden – A Vision for the Future

2: Allesley Park Walled Garden Cost Estimate