

Cabinet  
Council

8<sup>th</sup> October 2019  
15<sup>th</sup> October 2019

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Policy and Equalities – Councillor AS Khan

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Deputy Chief Executive (Place)

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

**Title:**

Greenspace Strategy April 2019 – March 2024

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**Is this a key decision?**

Yes – The proposals within the report will have a city-wide effect.

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**Executive Summary:**

The importance of Local Authorities developing a strategy for greenspaces is well recognised and key to ensuring that our parks and greenspaces continue to meet transforming needs and demands placed on them such as social and economic changes and that they keep providing value and benefit to our diverse communities into the future.

The City Council's second Greenspace Strategy terminated on the 31st March 2018 after a period of ten years during which it delivered a number of significant achievements. A new greenspace strategy has now been developed which builds on the foundations set by the previous strategy and its successes setting the scene for the management and development of the City's parks and open spaces for the next 5 years.

The strategy has been developed through a number of defined stages which includes a review of national and local policy influencing green provision, an assessment of greenspace quality, quantity and accessibility within the City, stakeholder consultation of the review of the findings, analysis and evaluation.

A number of recommendations are presented which seek to improve the safety, use and access of greenspace, address deficiencies in both the quantity and quality of greenspace, develop partner engagement and income generation and contribute positively to increased biodiversity.

From the recommendations a five-year action plan has been produced which will enable the identification of priorities and progress on the implementation and delivery of the strategy to be monitored and tracked.

This report seeks endorsement of the 'Coventry Green Space Strategy' and that Members delegate responsibility to the Head of Streetpride and Greenspace to deliver actions identified within the Strategy.

**Recommendations:**

Cabinet is requested to recommend to Council to:

- 1) Note that the draft Greenspace Strategy has been considered by the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) and the Board's recommendations have been approved by the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities and incorporated within the draft strategy document.
- 2) Approve the adoption of the Coventry Greenspace Strategy 2019 – 2024
- 3) Approve the Coventry Greenspace Strategy 5-year action plan.
- 4) Delegate authority to the Head of Streetpride and Greenspaces to deliver the actions identified within the strategy.

Council is recommended to:

- 1) Note that the draft Greenspace Strategy has been considered by the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) and the Board's recommendations have been approved by the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities and incorporated within the draft strategy document.
- 2) Approve the adoption of the Coventry Greenspace Strategy 2019 – 2024
- 3) Approve the Coventry Greenspace Strategy 5-year action plan.
- 4) Delegate authority to the Head of Streetpride and Greenspaces to deliver the actions identified within the strategy.

**List of Appendices included:**

Appendix A – Full Draft Strategy

**Background papers:**

None

**Other useful documents**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

Yes – this matter was considered by the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019. The Board's recommendations have been agreed by the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities and incorporated into the draft Strategy document.

**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?**

Yes – 15<sup>th</sup> October 2019

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## **Report title: Greenspace Strategy 2019 - 2024**

### **1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1. At its meeting held during September 2008 the Council approved its second Greenspace Strategy which covered a ten-year period terminating on the 31st March 2018.
- 1.2. There is now increasing tangible evidence which demonstrates how the City's Green Spaces including all of our parks, recreation grounds, playing fields, children's playgrounds, ornamental gardens, golf courses, and woodlands directly contribute to our people's health and wellbeing. In addition to the health benefits they help create thriving communities providing significant opportunities to develop and enhance the social, recreational, environmental, educational and economic wellbeing of our community.
- 1.3. The importance of Councils developing a strategy for greenspaces is well recognised and promoted as good practice by a number of notable bodies including The Design Council (formally CABI Space) and Mayor of London's Open Space Strategies Best Practice Guidance. Social and demographic changes, reductions in government spending and budgets affecting parks and open spaces along with environmental changes such as the impacts of global warming and the strains on wildlife, policy changes and changes in greenspace provision has meant that the city is in a different place than it was 10 years ago. The role and importance of our greenspace is increasing, and we must ensure that it continues to meet the changing needs and demands placed on it and provides value and benefit to the community into the future.
- 1.4. Through its action plan the Greenspace Strategy adopted by the City Council in 2008 delivered a number of significant achievements. These include an increased level of customer satisfaction with the city's greenspaces, an increase in the number of voluntary groups supporting parks, the achievement of 6 national awards, the establishment of successful partnerships, improvement made to over 60 park sites, an increase in the number of sites designated as important to wildlife, the production of management and maintenance plans and considerable success in obtaining external income amongst many other achievements. The 2019 - 2024 Strategy replaces the previous version and builds on those achievements setting the scene for the management and development of our greenspaces over the next 5 years.
- 1.5. The revised strategy has been developed through a number of stages, including:
  - Policy Review
  - An assessment of greenspace quality, quantity and accessibility
  - Stakeholder Consultation
  - Analysis and Evaluation
  - Recommendations and Action Plan
- 1.6. To ensure the revised greenspace strategy is both effective and robust a review of both national and local policy was undertaken and considered as part of the strategy development. Relevant recommendations, guidelines and principles were taken into account and reflected in the strategy. This included the National Planning Policy Framework, Communities and Planning 2012 with particular reference to the quality of greenspace provision and the need to undertake local needs assessments for open space provision. Tackling inactivity, investing in young children, encouraging strong local collaboration and innovation and sharing best practice was drawn from Sport England's Strategy "Towards an Active Nation 2016".

- 1.7. Coventry's 2017 Local Plan includes a number of key objectives relating to open space and relevant to the revised greenspace strategy. These include creating a greener cleaner city, improving the quality and design of spaces to provide attractive and sustainable clean environments, improving health and wellbeing through access to quality health provisions, encouraging healthy lifestyles including activities such as walking and cycling and supporting safer communities ensuring open spaces are designed to reduce opportunities for crime and fear of crime. Coventry's Health & Wellbeing Strategy (2016 – 2019) recognises the city's status as a Marmot City and sets out 3 key priorities. This includes working together to reduce health and wellbeing inequalities, improving the health and wellbeing of individuals with complex needs, and developing integrated health and care systems supporting and enabling people to live their lives well. The city's Green spaces have an important part to play in the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing agenda. Other local strategies considered include Coventry's Sports Strategy (2014 – 2024) and Coventry's Playing Pitch Strategy (2019). Aims included the provision of high quality, accessible sporting opportunities and experiences. Prioritisation of playing pitches, improved maintenance and development of pitch stock.
- 1.8. An assessment of the quantity, quality and accessibility of the City's greenspace was undertaken to inform the strategy and provide the robust evidence needed in making Section 106 claims in relation to housing developments. A greenspace typology was used to classify the greenspace in accordance with their primary purpose and followed Coventry's Local Plan designations of Formal, Informal and Functional space. Greenspaces were also classified within a hierarchy according to their significance. These classifications are City, District, Neighbourhood and Local sites. A further designation was applied according to each sites level of public accessibility and defined as Unrestricted, Limited and Not Accessible.
- 1.9. Only those areas of open space greater than 0.1 hectares were included in the data analysis. 650 individual green spaces sites were recorded totalling nearly 2000 hectares. Full details of sites analysed are given in the draft strategy in Appendix A. The proportion of green space by type is shown in 4.2 of the draft strategy document. Interestingly despite the urban nature of the City, natural and semi-natural green space accounts for nearly all green space.
- 1.10. An assessment of accessibility indicated that two thirds of green space across the city, some 430 sites had no restrictions on public access with almost all the remainder having at least some limited public access. Only 2% of the recorded green space had no public access. The sites with limited access tended to be sports clubs, allotments or school grounds. Section 4.2 of the draft strategy document details the unrestricted greenspace provision. This again indicates that both natural and semi-natural greenspace provision remains prominent.
- 1.11. There is considerable variation in the amount of greenspace by ward across the city. Residents of Henley and Wainbody wards can access over 100 hectares of green space, whereas those living in Upper Stoke, Lower Stoke, Radford and Foleshill Wards have access to provision significantly below the ward average of 62.3 hectares. Overall across the city, the average level of provision is 3.05 hectares per 1,000 population. There is however significant variation in the quantity of provision by ward with Henley Ward having the greatest level of provision at 6.02 hectares per 1000 population and Foleshill Ward the lowest at 0.50 hectares per 1000 population.
- 1.12. A quality assessment was undertaken on 223 spaces based on criteria derived from the Green Flag Award, a recognised national standard and giving an indication of relative quality. The assessment found that the average quality score was 43 out of 100.

Cemeteries and churchyards achieved the highest scores with natural and semi-natural green space attracting the lowest. Interestingly the highest average scores were given for control of dogs and the lowest for conservation of landscape features. Those sites associated with voluntary groups such as friends groups had higher average scores. Overall there appeared to be little correlation between deprivation and greenspace quality with residents of all wards enjoying good access to high quality greenspaces.

- 1.13. Consultation was undertaken in 2 phases. The first included a Household Survey with questionnaires being sent to 5,000 households randomly selected throughout the City, a total 549 postal returns were received (10.9%) and 698 online surveys received. In addition, efforts were made to seek the views of hard to reach groups through a Positive Image Festival Group Survey to boost responses from Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) groups and a Childrens and Young People survey. Two stakeholder workshops were held and included representation from Public Health, Planning, Sport England and the Greenspace & Heritage Forum as well as a number of face to face meetings.
- 1.14. A number of key findings emerged from the consultation. The City's parks and open spaces are well used and valued. Most people walked to parks and greenspaces. There was a strong recognition that they enhance health and wellbeing and their quality of life. The main reasons for visiting included fresh air, walking and jogging, enjoy nature and taking the kids to the play facilities. There were however a number of barriers to use which were recognised. These included dog fouling, places not feeling safe, perceptions of anti-social behaviour, lack of facilities and access overall. Satisfaction with greenspace was typically high however and considered to be good quality although there was low satisfaction amongst young people with regards to provision for teenagers.
- 1.15. The consultation identified a number of improvement priorities. The highest included more and better seating, more wildlife habitats, better dog control and measures to address dog fouling, improved toilet and catering facilities and better provision for children and young people. In terms of maintenance priorities grass cutting, repairs to paths, children's play area maintenance and looking after wildlife were highlighted.
- 1.16. The second phase of the consultation included two further stakeholder workshops to provide feedback on the findings and assisted in developing the strategy vision, aims, identify key issues and the draft recommendations forming the 5-year action plan. The public were also invited to comment on the draft strategy which also formed part of the phase two consultation.
- 1.17. The draft strategy document has been considered by the Council's Scrutiny Board 3 and eleven recommendations were made which have been approved by the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities and have been reflected and incorporated into the draft strategy.
- 1.18. The Strategy presents a number of key recommendations which revolve around key themes. These seek to:
  - Ensure parks remain safe and vibrant spaces to visit, supporting community use and make an important contribution to the delivery of the City of Culture programme.
  - Address barriers to use and encourage greater usage and value through the better reporting and recording of anti-social behaviour including issues relating to the management and maintenance of greenspaces and dog fouling and control.
  - Increase park use, promoting greenspace as venues for activities, developing event and activity programmes, creating community hubs and community champions and provide facilities that appeal to all sections of the community.

- Address deficiencies in the quality, quantity and accessibility of greenspace and playing pitch provision through the adoption of local standards, improve community access to education facilities, increase provision for young people.
  - Address deficiencies in greenspace and quality of facilities through the development of local standards and measure changes delivered through the strategy.
  - Establish effective partnerships to safeguard and enhance biodiversity assets, promote and improve access to green corridors and canals and associated features, creation of flower rich habitats which support invertebrates and implement the Councils Tree Strategy.
  - Support and work with Friends and other voluntary community groups. Fostering the development of new groups and assisting with community led events, securing external funding and opportunities for community asset transfers.
  - Maintain the existing Green Flag Awards and continue to develop management and maintenance plans for greenspaces improving biodiversity and accessibility to greenspace.
  - Establish a robust framework to secure developer contributions in order to maintain and improve greenspace and to explore diverse external funding streams to increase income.
- 1.19. A five-year action plan has been produced which will enable the identification of priorities and progress on the implementation and delivery of the strategy to be monitored and tracked. The action plan is shown in section 7.3 of the draft Strategy document.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 2.1. Option 1 - The option to do nothing and not develop and implement a strategy for the future management and development of the City's greenspaces has been considered and rejected.
- 2.2. Option 2 - The City Council requires a Green Spaces Strategy in order to maximise the use of public parks and open spaces and ensure that they continue to meet the changing needs, demands and aspirations of the City's communities. It will provide the robust framework required to evidence and support developer contribution, other external funding, help to inform policies and proposals and provides a framework for setting the priorities for investment and management action. The option that the strategy is adopted for the City is recommended.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1. In the development of the strategy extensive consultation has been undertaken including household and on line surveys. Additional surveys were also undertaken in order to seek the views of hard to reach groups. Stakeholder workshops were held and included representation from Public Health, Planning, Sport England and the Greenspace & Heritage Forum as well as a number of face to face meetings. Details of the consultations and a summary of the results are outlined in the report

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1. Subject to the strategy's approval it is anticipated that it will become effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020
- 4.2. Copies of the Green Space Strategy will be available for distribution from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020



## **5. Comments from the Director of Finance and Corporate Services**

### **5.1. Financial implications**

The strategy was commissioned from Community First Partnership. Consultant costs have been met from existing budgets.

There is an annual budget of c£8.36m for Streetpride & Parks activities. It is not anticipated that there will be any pressure arising as a result of implementing this decision as the action plan will be built into the operational plan and resources allocated accordingly. External funding, e.g. grant support and developer contributions, will be sought for delivery of the specific actions contained in the plan as well as utilising third party and voluntary sector organisations.

### **5.2. Legal implications**

The comprehensive and robust evidence gathered in the development of the Greenspace Strategy will inform Coventry's Supplementary Planning document (SPD) which looks to protect and enhance green space and sets out existing and proposed local standards for the provision of green space in the city and how these standards are applicable to specific locations. These documents focus on all types of green space found throughout the city. These include formal and informal greenspace, equipped play facilities, and other open land as well as green corridors that connect these areas.

## **6. Other Implications**

### **6.1. How will this contribute to the Council Plan ([www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/))?**

Parks and green spaces are highly valued by the citizens of Coventry and contribute greatly to improving the quality of life to those that live and work in the city, helps address health inequalities and provides valuable wildlife habitats.

### **6.2. How is risk being managed?**

Risk will be managed through the existing Place directorate risk profile.

### **6.3. What is the impact on the organisation?**

None

### **6.4. Equalities / EIA**

In the development of the Greenspace Strategy an Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken

### **6.5. Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

The strategy seeks to ensure that the City's greenspaces are maintained to deliver positive outcomes biodiversity, safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity assets and that we protect and enhance the City's rich heritage of trees.

### **6.6. Implications for partner organisations?**

Many parts of the service are delivered in partnership with other organisations such as Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and Groundwork, Coventry and Warwickshire as well as

community groups. It is essential that communication started with the development of the strategy is maintained through the delivery work.

In order for the Strategy to be successful, assistance from the voluntary sector will be required to improve green space across the City.

**Report author(s):**

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