

AGENDA ITEM 9

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| TITLE OF REPORT - Parks & Green Spaces Strategy Key Decision No - NH R39 | |
| CABINET MEETING DATE (2021/22) 24 May 2021 | CLASSIFICATION: Open If exempt, the reason will be listed in the main body of this report. |
| WARD(S) AFFECTED All | |
| CABINET MEMBER Cllr Caroline Woodley - Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks and Play | |
| KEY DECISION Yes REASON Affects two or more wards | |
| GROUP DIRECTOR Ajman Ali - Group Director, Neighbourhoods and Housing | |

1. CABINET MEMBER'S INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Hackney has one of the largest expanses of parks and green space in inner-London, with 58 sites across the borough totalling some 282 hectares - ranging from major parks and green spaces such as Hackney Marshes, Clissold Park and Abney Park to small gardens such as Hoxton Square and Church Street Gardens.
- 1.2. In addition, the Council's Housing Service is responsible for 247 Housing amenity green spaces. From 2021, the Parks & Green Spaces Service will take on responsibility for these Housing estate amenity green spaces in addition to the 58 Parks and Green Spaces that it currently maintains.
- 1.3. The Council has long recognised the impact that quality parks and green spaces can have on the achievement of its vision and objectives and has therefore placed a high priority on improving them, with over £25m of investment in parks and green spaces since 2010.
- 1.4. The Council is committed to continuing to deliver improvements to its parks and green spaces and has produced a new Parks & Green Spaces Strategy (see Appendix 1 to this report) to guide the Parks & Green Spaces Service over the next ten years.
- 1.5. The proposed Strategy outlines a number of initiatives to improve the way we work with the community, to make more welcoming parks and green spaces, and to respond to the climate emergency and ecological crisis.
- 1.6. When adopted, this Strategy will cover the work of the Service over the period 2021 - 2031.

2. GROUP DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report seeks endorsement for a new Parks & Green Spaces Strategy to guide the work of the Parks & Green Spaces Service over the next ten years.
- 2.2 Hackney's last Parks Strategy was published in 2008/09, and ran until 2012/13. Since the last strategy was produced, there have been a number of political, economic and technological changes that have affected how a modern parks and green spaces service is run. These changes are starting to have an impact on how people use Hackney's parks and green spaces, and a new strategy is required to guide the Service over the next ten years.

3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 3.1 Approve the new Parks & Green Spaces Strategy as attached to Appendix 1 of this report.
- 3.2 Approve delegation to the Head of Leisure, Parks and Green Spaces, in order to make any future minor amendments to the new Parks and Green Spaces Strategy and associated policies

4. REASONS FOR DECISION

- 4.1 Hackney's parks and green spaces are incredibly popular, and incredibly well-used. During the COVID-19 pandemic their importance to the people of Hackney has been highlighted even further, especially for those residents without gardens.
- 4.2 During the pandemic hundreds of thousands of people relied on Hackney's parks and green spaces for their daily exercise, to get out of the house, to meet friends, to walk the dog and to improve their mental health. During some periods Hackney's parks were so well-used that this use had a negative impact on local people, and the Service had to become quite reactionary to deal with the impact of illegal events, excessive littering and a high volume of complaints.
- 4.3 As we move out of lockdown in 2021 it is important for the Service to be less reactionary, and to ensure it is proactively planning for the future. With the Parks & Green Spaces Service taking on responsibility for maintaining Housing green space in 2021, it is vital that there is a clear vision and set of priorities to guide the joint Service, as well as responding to some of the challenges highlighted in this report, such as the climate emergency and ecological crisis.

5. DETAILS OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 5.1 Do nothing – this option was rejected as it would not provide a clear direction for the future management of the borough's parks and green spaces.

6. BACKGROUND

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The Need for a Strategy

- 6.1.1.1 Hackney's Parks & Green Spaces Service has not had a Parks Strategy since 2013, and the world is a very different place since the last strategy was in place. Specifically:

- Technology has changed. People are using electric bikes, electric scooters and drones in our parks and green spaces. Affordable electric trimmers, leaf blowers and electric vehicles are all now available.

Mobile phones enable quicker, more efficient communication with our park users, but users in turn often expect quicker responses.

- There is a greater focus on sustainability. Hackney Council declared a climate emergency in 2020, and our residents are increasingly concerned about air pollution, the use of chemicals, single use plastics and the loss of biodiversity.
- People are using our parks and green spaces differently. There has been an increase in cyclists, in professional dog walkers and people using outdoor gym equipment, for example.
- As Hackney's population continues to grow, and it becomes an increasingly desirable place to live, work and visit, the pressure on its parks and green spaces has grown. The increase in use of our parks and green spaces often means more litter, more damage to park facilities, greater compaction of the ground and higher operating costs.
- Coupled with an increase in use, austerity has meant that we need to think differently about how our service is delivered. We may need to work more in partnership with volunteer groups to help look after our green spaces, and look at alternative income generation models to maintain our existing high standards.

6.1.1.2 Finally, the integration of Hackney's Parks and Green Spaces Service with the Housing Grounds Maintenance Service is due to be undertaken in 2021. A strategy is required to provide direction to the joint service, with commitments that cover both services, and that recognise that all Parks and Green Spaces in Hackney are part of a wider network of green infrastructure.

6.1.2 The Process

6.1.2.1 Starting with a blank page, a focus group of residents, staff, young people and subject experts helped us discuss, debate and decide the topics the new Strategy needed to cover towards the end of 2019. The focus group suggested key people we should be speaking to, how and where we should be hearing from them, and the themes and issues we should be asking people about.

6.1.2.2 We then read everything that was shared with us, and organised over 50 meetings and focus group sessions with key staff, stakeholders and local people. The transcriptions from these meetings and the insight, feedback and ideas that were shared about Hackney's parks and green spaces helped us create a draft vision and set of commitments to guide the work of the Service over the next 10 years. Although the pandemic changed the way we undertook engagement, we were able to adapt and meet with large numbers of people virtually.

6.1.2.3 We distilled everything that people told us and created a first draft of the Strategy. The draft contained 30 commitments grouped under three themes - ensuring our communities are more actively involved in our parks, ensuring

that our parks and green spaces are activated, and ensuring that the Service is more environmentally sustainable.

- 6.1.2.4 The Strategy was designed from the outset to be concise, readable and attractive. It relies heavily on graphics to make it an accessible document that the public will engage with and is focused largely on the actions that we will implement over the next ten years.
- 6.1.2.5 A public consultation exercise on the draft Strategy was launched in December 2020 and ran until January 2021. A total of 967 people took part in the public consultation. 645 people completed the online survey, with 95% of online respondents being Hackney residents. 270 Hackney residents also took part in 16 focus group sessions and feedback meetings, 15 people emailed in feedback or filled in the survey over the phone and 37 contributed to polls and other online engagement.
- 6.1.2.6 The response to the consultation was overwhelmingly positive, with 95% of respondents reporting that they like or love their local park. There was broad support for the Strategy as a whole, with just a few suggestions for amendments.
- 6.1.2.7 28% of people wanted us to address the amount of litter in green spaces, 20% were concerned about cyclists riding too fast, and 19% highlighted irresponsible dog owners and dog mess as an issue. People also wanted better toilet facilities, more benches and more places to buy food and drink. Essentially, people wanted to ensure we were getting the basics right, and we responded by introducing a new theme into the Strategy committed to creating 'A Welcoming Park', with new commitments linked to launching a litter campaign, and committing to upgrade all of our park toilet facilities.
- 6.1.2.8 The majority of the remaining feedback we received was supportive of the commitments that we had already made - 30% of people wanted us to include a wider range of people when improving green space for example, 18% of people wanted better publicity and promotion of volunteering opportunities, activities and events, and 35% wanted us to make parks and green spaces wilder and more natural. The full consultation analysis is available as a separate report.

6.2 Policy Context

- 6.2.1 The Mayor has identified 5 priorities for the Council, one of which is "prioritising quality of life and the environment...protecting our parks and green spaces".
- 6.2.2 The Leisure, Parks and Green Spaces Service's vision is 'Delivering excellent places and services that improve people's environment, lifelong learning and wellbeing'. The Parks & Green Spaces Strategy will help achieve this aim.

- 6.2.3 The Parks & Green Spaces Strategy also supports a number of the priorities of the joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. These include 'Improving the health of children and young people', 'tackling childhood obesity' and 'focusing on relieving depression and anxiety for working age adults'.
- 6.2.4 The Parks & Green Spaces Strategy will feed into the Council's forthcoming "Green Infrastructure Strategy", and alongside the forthcoming "Local Nature Recovery Plan", and reflects both emerging documents.

6.3 Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.3.1 An Equality Impact Assessment of the new Parks & Green Spaces Strategy has been undertaken (and is included in Appendix 2 to this report). The Strategy will affect anyone that uses parks and green spaces in Hackney (including Housing amenity green space), and those who may wish to use them in the future. It also affects Council staff who work in parks and green spaces.
- 6.3.2 The new Strategy seeks to make parks and green spaces more accessible to all, with commitments to involve young people in decision-making and engage people in improvements, with a special effort made to reach and hear from underrepresented groups. The Strategy commits to undertaking a review of Hackney Parks Forum to ensure that it is fit for purpose and representative of our diverse local communities.
- 6.3.3 The Service will also develop a work experience and apprenticeship programme and explore supported opportunities for people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The Service will also involve older people in designing and improving Hackney's parks and green spaces to reflect the recommendations of the Ageing Well Strategy.

6.4 Sustainability

- 6.4.1 The importance of sustainability is reflected in the third theme of the Parks & Green Spaces Strategy, that commits the Council to be more environmentally sustainable by responding to the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis.
- 6.4.2 During consultation there was broad support for the Service becoming more environmentally sustainable. In particular, 36% wanted us to make parks and green spaces wilder and more natural. 20% called for more recycling and composting, 15% wanted us to plant more trees and significant numbers also wanted us to increase biodiversity, reduce/stop the use of weed killers and provide more wildlife habitats.
- 6.4.3 To be more environmentally sustainable, the Strategy commits to responding to the climate emergency by:

- Working towards becoming a Zero Carbon Service
- Aiming to re-use more green waste within parks and green spaces
- Eliminating single use plastic from all of our park cafes and kiosks
- Replacing all single use bins with dual use bins
- Introducing new sustainable drainage solutions in parks and green spaces.

6.4.4 It also commits to responding to the biodiversity crisis by:

- Increasing biodiversity across Hackney in line with the Local Nature Recovery Plan, creating more wild areas across our parks and green spaces
- Eliminating all annual planting and replacing it with more sustainable and drought tolerant planting schemes
- Significantly reducing the use of Glyphosate, and continuing to explore alternatives
- Following the recommendations of the Green Infrastructure Strategy where they relate to parks and green spaces, including identifying opportunities to connect parks and green spaces together
- Developing and delivering an extensive training programme for staff around biodiversity and sustainability.

6.5 Consultations

6.5.1 A group of experts, staff and young people helped us to start the process towards the end of 2019. They told us who we should be speaking to, how and where we should be hearing from them, and the themes and issues we should be asking them about.

6.5.2 In 2020 we held 23 meetings and sessions with people working in environment, conservation sustainability, planning, housing, sports, NHS, community organisations and 7 meetings and sessions to gather insight from public health and recent commissions and consultations with residents, older people and young people.

6.5.3 We held 3 team meetings with parks staff, park managers and heads of service, 8 focus groups with young people, people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and staff working in the Parks, Culture and Heritage, Events and Sports and Physical Activity teams.

6.5.4 We also undertook 12 weeks of research using planning and insight from consultations with Hackney residents and communities and other strategies relating to green space, play development and environmental sustainability.

6.5.5 Public consultation was launched on 1 December 2020, running until 18 January 2021. A total of 967 people took part in the consultation. 645 of these gave feedback via the online consultation platform (Citizenspace),

270 Hackney residents took part in 16 focus group sessions and feedback meetings, 15 people emailed in feedback or filled in the survey over the phone, and 37 contributed to polls and other online engagement. Further detail on the results of consultation is outlined in 6.1.2.

6.6 Risk Assessment

6.6.1 Hackney's Leisure, Parks and Green Spaces Service maintains a Risk Register which includes any risks relating to the implementation of the new Parks & Green Spaces Strategy. The key risks associated with the Strategy are as follows:

- **Financial:** The new Parks & Green Spaces Strategy deliberately does not commit to significant specific park improvement projects over the next ten years, as the financial outlook for the Council and Service is difficult to predict over a ten year period. Some commitments will require funding from existing revenue and capital budgets, however, and will be at risk if the Leisure, Parks and Green Spaces budget is reduced in the next ten years.
- **Operational:** There is a risk that some park and green spaces users will expect all problems and issues to be resolved following the adoption of the Strategy. Given the complex nature of parks use, that is an unrealistic expectation, and communication around the implementation of the Strategy will need to manage such expectations.
- **Operational:** Consultation on the Parks & Green Spaces Strategy highlighted a concern from residents on Hackney's Housing Estates that Housing Green Space is very different from Parks, and should not be treated as the same. The Strategy was updated to provide further clarity on this distinction, but site specific engagement will be key to getting the support of Housing tenants if and when any Estate-based improvements are proposed.
- **Reputational:** Support for the new Parks & Green Spaces Strategy was high when people were consulted on it, with most people supporting the proposed commitments. Reputational risks are more likely to come from the implementation of specific commitments where it may impact on particular groups or locations. Again, thorough engagement with local communities will be key to managing such risks when such commitments are implemented.

7. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES

7.1 This report recommends that the Cabinet adopts the Parks & Green Spaces Strategy to guide the service over the next ten years.

- 7.2 The Council fully recognises the impact that quality Parks and Green Spaces has and is committed to continue to deliver improvements and adapt to the changing needs that are required from this Service.
- 7.3 With Parks & Green Spaces taking on responsibility for maintaining an additional 247 Housing amenity green spaces, it is vital that there is clear focus and vision to guide this joint service forward, as part of a far wider network of green infrastructure. The strategy recognises the need to respond to external factors, such as climate change and the ecological crisis and to make the Parks and Green Spaces more environmentally sustainable.
- 7.4 The Parks & Green Spaces Strategy will feed and work alongside other Council strategies providing a consistent message and approach to enhance the sustainability and use of this Service Area.
- 7.5 Delivering the strategy will require resources if all of these activities are to be undertaken. These will need to be factored within the individual service budgets and any additional resources required will need to be secured before any commitment is made.
- 7.6 Consideration needs to be given to the Council's current financial position and the need to make savings and it should not be assumed that resources that exist in the current year will be available in future years.

8. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & GOVERNANCE SERVICES

- 8.1 Currently the Mayor's scheme of delegation reserves to the Mayor and Cabinet, approval of the Parks Strategy.
- 8.2 Further, approval of the recommendations as set out in paragraph 3.1 above, are key decisions affecting two or more wards.
- 8.3. In order for the Head of Leisure, Parks and Green Spaces to approve any minor amendments to the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy (and any associated Policies) going forward, the recommendation in paragraph 3.2 is required.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - [Hackney Parks & Green Spaces Strategy 2021-2031](#)

Appendix 2 - [Equality Impact Assessment: Hackney Parks & Green Spaces Strategy 2021-2031](#)

EXEMPT

N/A

CONFIDENTIAL

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

In accordance with The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) England Regulations 2012 publication of Background Papers used in the preparation of reports is required

Description of document (or None)

1. [Parks & Green Spaces Strategy Consultation Report](#)

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