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| Subject: | The Open Spaces Strategy (2017/27) Update | | |
| Date of Meeting: | 24th November 2020 | | |
| Report of: | Executive Director, Economy, Environment & Culture | | |
| Contact Officer: | Name: | Paul Campbell | Tel: 01273 294754 |
| | Email: | Paul.campbell@brighton-hove.gov.uk | |
| Ward(s) affected: | (All Wards); | | |

FOR GENERAL RELEASE.**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Open Spaces Strategy (2017/27) and also seeks approval for three projects arising from the strategy.
- 1.2 These projects are all linked to the Open Spaces Strategy but further to this also link to the council's priorities of increasing biodiversity and becoming a Carbon Neutral City by 2030.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the committee approves the initiation of Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) statutory consultations to introduce car parking charges for car parks in several city parks listed in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 That the committee approves the initiation of a consultation in relation to a refresh of the Allotments Strategy 2014- 2024 Delivery Plan, to ensure transparency and a refocus on delivery of the objectives of the strategy.
- 2.3 That the committee approves a trial of wildflower areas on grass verges in the Stanmer Park and Hollingdean ward in response to a letter by Councillor Martin Osbourne for the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Open Spaces Strategy (2017/27) Update**

- 3.1 The updates for Open Spaces Strategy can be found at Appendix 2.
- 3.2 Some of the key updates from the Strategy to date include:
 - the completion of the city's very first draft Tree Strategy,
 - the imminent completion of Stanmer Park restoration of the walled garden project and partial completion of the Valley Gardens project (led by CityTransport),
 - the planting of thousands of bulbs along the London Road,

- two new accessible toilets added to our parks maintained by third parties,
- the completion of the Volunteering website with Community Works
- over £100,000 in savings made through assets being transferred to sports clubs,
- completion of a Woodland Management Plan for Stanmer Park and related income from logging and a Forestry Commission grant.
- A new Volunteer Path Warden Scheme, now with 80% coverage of the countryside rights of way network.
- 64 countryside gates replaced. 3.7km of paths resurfaced and a new bridleway at Hove Golf and a new footpath at Ovingdean Grange. ROWIP Road Crossing, Wilson Avenue / Roedean Road – new Toucan crossing and cycle path
- 46 new waymark posts installed.
- New online Paths & Green Spaces access map on the council website

Car Parking Charges

- 3.3 As part of the Open Spaces Strategy, City Parks had objectives to identify savings and or increase revenue opportunities. The Finance and Assets Management section of the report encouraged City Parks to ‘build resilience and prioritise potential new funding’ and ‘identify new ways of funding the city’s open spaces. Overall, there was a strong emphasis for City Parks to seek out new funding to make the service more resilient.
- 3.4 At present car parking charges exist in East Brighton Park and Preston Park. Car parking charges are to be introduced at Stanmer Park early next year. This provides an important source of income for investment in parks where other budgets have reduced over time. The income from parking charges will help to support City Parks budgets and avoid a potential reduction in services. estimate of the net income that could be generated from introducing parking at the sites listed in appendix 1 is up to a maximum of £50,000 per year.
- 3.5 Further to this, wherever possible the council wants to encourage people to avoid travelling to parks by car and to use public transport or active travel options such as walking and cycling. It is hoped that The introduction of car parking charges should encourage this shift which is an essential part of the decarbonisation of the city. Provision will be made for designated disabled parking for those residents and visitors for whom car travel is the only option.
- 3.6 In addition, some park users and staff report to us that the free car parking in many parks is being used by non-park users as a source of free parking for lengthy periods of time. Introducing paid car parking will help to address this problem.
- 3.7 If agreed the Traffic Regulation Order consultations are planned to take place over the next 15 months with an anticipated date of 31st March 2022 for the implementation.

Allotment Strategy 2014-24

- 3.8 Brighton & Hove City Council provides approximately 3000 allotments plots and has around 4000 plot users. There are currently 2000 people on the waiting list for an allotment plot. Allotments are a significant asset to the city, enabling: residents to grow their own food; reducing food miles and therefore the carbon costs of food production; increasing biodiversity in the city and providing substantial health, social and wellbeing benefits to residents and communities.
- 3.9 It is worth noting that there are also 207 vacant allotment plots in the city. The demand for plots in the city centre is much higher. Empty plots are typically available in locations at the edges of the city.
- 3.10 In 2014/15 City Parks and the Brighton and Hove Allotment Federation (BHAF) worked with allotment holders to consult on the development of the service. Details of the vision and objectives can be found in Appendix 3. This resulted in the Open Spaces Strategy 2017/27 commitments to: a) Work collaboratively with the Allotment Federation, b) Review the Allotment strategy principles, c) Reduce water leaks across sites and d) Work with allotment holders to explore water saving opportunities. We invested £15,000 to reduce leaks at two allotment sites in 2017, we worked with BHAF and housing to investigate recycling guttering for plot holders, we offered water butts for plot holders and we explored with councillors water catchment opportunity's on large roofed buildings near allotments. We also installed a new water system at East Brook Farm.
- 3.11 Unfortunately, the council has not progressed some of the actions in the Allotments Strategy to the extent that we and other stakeholders such as BHAF would have wanted to.
- 3.12 Recent discussions with stakeholders suggest that this is in part due to a lack of time frames and unclear accountability and relationships between council officers and other stakeholders such as BHAF, Allotments Associations, plot holders, site reps and volunteers.
- 3.13 It is therefore recommended that we undertake a consultation with all stakeholders including those people on the waiting list with a view to developing a new refreshed time banded delivery plan for the strategy. The plan will also provide clarity on roles and responsibilities. The council is also proposing to involve a facilitator to assist with the consultation and to promote improved working relationships between all parties.
- 3.14 City Parks anticipate a draft of the new delivery plan will be ready for March 2021.

Wildflower Verges

- 3.15 The Open Spaces Strategy consultation identified 70% of the responders agreed or strongly agreed that City Parks should cut grass verges less. Only 4.9% said City Parks should spend more resource on them in the future.
- 3.16 A letter presented to Environment Transport & Sustainability Committee by Cllr Martin Osborne is attached at Appendix 4. He has asked the City Parks explore

cutting grass verges less across the city to promote wildlife and to trial this aspiration in Stanmer and Hollingdean area.

- 3.17 City Parks have been implementing wildflower grass areas across the city for over twenty years. One of the largest examples of this is in Saltdean Oval which was completed around ten years ago. City Parks also have added bulbs and wildflowers to the verges of the Lewes Road leading up to Stanmer Park.
- 3.18 More recently City Parks and City Transport have worked with the country's leading wildflower expert, Nigel Dunnet, on wildflower planting in Valley Gardens.
- 3.19 The benefits of wildflower verges go beyond the anticipated biodiversity improvements they would make. It is anticipated there will be minimal financial savings for City Parks. However, there could be some reasonable and scalable environmental benefits such as: less cutting leading to a reduction in fossil fuels burned, fewer pollutants entering the local environment and reduced noise pollution. Staff would be exposed to less vibrating machinery, and there is the potential for revenue savings. In our experience, not all residents are going to agree with reductions in grass verge cutting.
- 3.20 It is important to note that for City Parks to deliver change, significant sections, rather than individual small grassed areas, would need to be adopted as wildflower verges at once.
- 3.21 A plan for engaging with ward councillors and residents to implement this is set out in Appendix 5.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Car Parking

- 4.1 The council could continue to allow free parking in the city parks listed in Appendix 1. However, there is a risk that without new income generated for our parks, budget savings will lead to reduced investment and a deterioration in the facilities that we are able to provide to residents. Other sources of income generation and/or cost reduction continue to be investigated and progressed where possible, such as grant funding applications and the use of S106 contributions. However, parking income will provide a reliable and consistent source of income that can be used across all of the city's parks as needed – including those parks that will not attract S106 or grant funding for specific projects.
- 4.2 If this recommendation was not supported, the failing infrastructure of playgrounds, trees, paths etc. would proceed at a greater pace. In addition, communities that do not have access to S106 funds would lose another opportunity for investment, making the city even more unequal for investment.
- 4.3 Furthermore, the council would continue to lose revenue from on-street parking as people avoid charges by using open spaces to park their cars.

Allotments

- 4.4 A new Allotment Strategy Delivery Plan is essential to provide clarification and transparency for service users and other stakeholders. Best practice requires a

consultation with stakeholders to ensure the policy is fit for purpose and adopted by all. The alternative would be to continue without a new delivery plan, but this is not recommended as the current situation is not satisfactory and not productive.

Wildflower Verges

- 4.5 The implementation of wildflowers in grassed areas has already been steadily progressing across the city in an ad-hoc manner by City Parks. The proposal provides a focus prior to implementing a more systematic approach of change across the city where that can be monitored.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 **Carparking:** City Parks have identified that The Opens Spaces Strategy consultation seeks them to secure new funding streams and maximise their assets. Each car parking scheme will be subject to a statutory TRO consultation.
- 5.2 **Allotments:** The recommendation seeks to hold a consultation as the most transparent means of engagement with members of the public with an interest in the service.
- 5.3 **Wildflower:** The Opens Spaces Strategy consultation provided one of the strongest steers to reduce the cutting of grass verges in the city as well as recognising that the second most common reason people used the city's parks was for contact with nature. In addition, engagement through ward councillors and local residents will also be sought to develop the detail of the proposal.

6. CONCLUSION

Car Parking

- 6.1 In line with the outcomes of the Open Spaces Strategy and the significant investment requirements facing City Parks, it is recommended that the introduction of car parking charges in parks is extended to the car parks set out in **Appendix 1** via TRO consultations and use any car parking revenue secured to mitigate some of the financial challenges facing the department.

Allotments

- 6.2 A new Allotments Strategy Delivery Plan will provide clarity and transparency to all parties is essential to move the service forward and to deliver the outstanding strategic goals.

Wildflowers

- 6.3 It is proposed that grass verges be converted to encourage wildflower areas in Stanmer and Hollingdean is trialled. This will be in line with Councillor Osborne's letter and subject to further engagement with ward councillors and residents.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The costs of implementing the three recommendations of this report (the initiation of Traffic Regulation Order statutory consultations to introduce car parking

charges for car parks in several city parks, the initiation of a public consultation to develop a new Allotments Delivery Plan and a trial of wildlife areas on grass verges) will be contained within existing Parks Services budgets. This will be reviewed and monitored as part of monthly budget monitoring.

- 7.2 The introduction of car parking charges for five additional parks sites will potentially generate net additional income. Further work to estimate the likely net value of this income - after parking enforcement and set-up costs (for example, signage) - is required.

Finance Officer Consulted: Jess Laing

Date: 10/11/2020

Legal Implications:

- 7.3 There are no direct legal implications arising from the report. Should it be decided that TROs are to be progressed, these will be made under the provisions of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and include a period of statutory public consultation.

Lawyer Consulted: Hilary Woodwood

Date: 28/10/20

Equalities Implications:

- 7.4 Investment in car parking could improve equalities as parts of the city which currently do not attract section 106 investment would benefit. Furthermore, the improved car parking space would ensure better facilitates for blue badge holders and provide more accessible surface for all.
- 7.5 A more transparent allotment service would benefit all members of the community who can access the spaces.
- 7.6 It is important to ensure that grass verges which are cut less don't become a hazard with long grass flopping and blocking pavements for pedestrians and car users in their vicinity.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.7 These Wildflower increases on grass verges and less rigorous cutting regime would benefit the environment and all residents with less noise and fossil fuel pollution and support greater biodiversity.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

1. Parks being considered for parking charges and or enforcement:
2. Open Spaces Strategy Update 2017-27
3. Allotment Strategy 2014-2024 - Vision and Objectives
4. Letter from Cllr Osborne
5. Wildflower timetable for implementation

Background Documents

1. Allotment Strategy 2014-2024
2. Open Spaces Strategy as a Background document 2017 -2027

