5. Summary

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Development Services, on 16th February, 2009, considered the draft Green Space Strategy report, and referred the report to the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel for information.

The report has been prepared setting out proposed standards for green space provision and is submitted for consideration prior to being taken to wider consultation with the public and main stakeholders.

6. Recommendation

- That the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel notes the draft Rotherham Green Space Strategy and the details of the proposed wider consultation, together with the pilot study being undertaken in one ward during the consultation period to explore methods for site prioritisation and possible change of use.
7. Proposals and Details

Background
Over recent years there has been increased awareness nationally of the value of green space in improving people’s health and quality of life, and environmental sustainability. However, it has become increasingly difficult to provide green spaces that meet people’s expectations in Rotherham, as elsewhere. This is due largely to resource limitations, but also reflects a lack of comprehensive information about the quantity, distribution and character of green spaces, and how people access and use them. Consequently, the government has issued planning guidance (PPG17) that sets out how local authorities should assess local demand for green space and plan future provision to meet this. The Green Space Strategy aims to do this by proposing standards for provision of sites and associated services and activities, and recommending how these can be achieved.

Vision, Aims and Objectives
The Strategy is based upon the following vision for Rotherham:-
“a place where people’s lives are improved by having access to a network of well-used green spaces offering a wide range of recreational and learning opportunities in high quality, sustainable environments”.

Four strategic aims are proposed, as follows:-
- To increase the proportion of the people living within easy walking distance of green spaces meeting defined quality standards
- To increase the number of people who regularly visit green spaces
- To increase the proportion of the population who are satisfied with green space provision in Rotherham
- To increase the number of people participating as volunteers within green spaces.

The strategy also embraces the principles of sustainable development, fairness and community involvement. These aims and principles lead to eight specific objectives:-
1. Provide sufficient accessible green space to meet current and future demand efficiently and sustainably
2. Make Rotherham a safer, healthier and more attractive place to live and visit by ensuring green spaces are secure, clean and well designed, managed and maintained
3. Target existing resources and secure new funding to improve priority green spaces and maintain them to high standards
4. Bring together different providers of green spaces and other partners to work towards agreed standards and priorities for green space provision
5. Actively involve communities in the development and management of green spaces to ensure that local needs are respected and valued
6. Raise people’s awareness of green spaces by making sites and activities within them accessible and attractive to all groups and individuals, thereby increasing use and satisfaction and contributing to community cohesion
7. Improve the environmental sustainability of Rotherham through biodiversity, landscape protection, reducing surface water runoff and other measures
8. Exploit opportunities to link green spaces to develop a green network across the borough

How the Strategy was Developed
Current supply of sites was assessed by a Green Spaces Audit undertaken by consultants and completed in 2005. This considered sites that are publicly accessible, regardless of ownership, including town parks, country parks, sports pitches, recreation grounds, public open space, countryside sites, woodlands and cemeteries. A total of 429 accessible green spaces were mapped, measured, and categorised by type. Each green space was given a quality score, based on the results of site inspections. A value score was also generated for each site based on its size, the number of people living within a five minute walking distance
of it, and the availability of alternative green spaces within walking distance of it. This analysis was used to grade each site provisionally using the following system:-

- Borough Green Spaces – large sites with intrinsic special interest attracting visitors from across the borough and beyond
- Neighbourhood Green Spaces – mostly large sites offering a range of features and used by people from across a settlement
- Local Green Spaces – appropriately maintained simple sites providing safe and clean areas for informal recreation for people living in the immediate vicinity

Information from a number of residents and green space user surveys was analysed to assess how people access and use green spaces, and how satisfied people are with different aspects of green space provision in Rotherham. Reasons for not using green spaces were also investigated.

Arrangements for managing green spaces in Rotherham were reviewed, including resource availability. A Playing Pitch Strategy was undertaken separately, and its conclusions and recommendations were also considered in the Green Space Strategy. Additionally, a study of sites of high biodiversity value was completed recently and is being used as the basis of a new Local Wildlife Site system that will supplement evidence within the Green Space Strategy in determining how to protect, manage and develop green spaces in future.

What we found
The Strategy produced a large amount of evidence to inform recommendations. Some of the major issues identified are listed below:-

- Accessibility is an important factor for people when deciding whether to use a green space
- Local people are mostly happy with the quantity of green space, but want it to be maintained better and improved
- Satisfaction with design, appearance and maintenance of green spaces is below the national average
- Safety and security are amongst people's top priorities for green spaces
- Rotherham has a large amount of accessible green space per person compared to other metropolitan districts where similar data exists
- Some Assembly Areas contain a lot more green space than others, and the proportions of different types of green space varies between them
- There are large variations in the quality of sites, and many are assessed as being high value but low quality suggesting that improvement is needed
- The Council has a successful track record of gaining external funding for green space improvement
- Revenue funding for green space management and maintenance in Rotherham has fallen over recent years, and is amongst the lowest compared to other metropolitan districts

Recommendations
The Strategy Report contains 31 recommendations. Amongst the most important of these are the following:-

- Adopt accessibility standards in new planning policy aimed at ensuring that all new homes are within 280 metres of a Local Green Space and 840 metres of a Borough or Neighbourhood Green Space
- Consider change of use at low value sites in areas with plentiful supply of green spaces
- Introduce quality standards for design, maintenance and management of sites
- Establish a prioritised programme of site improvement
- Review and simplify the ownership of Council green spaces by different departments
• Integrate grounds maintenance and management of key recreational green spaces
• Ensure all capital investment is matched by appropriate revenue budgets
• Introduce planning policy or guidance to help achieve proposed standards of green space provision, for example through Section 106 agreements
• Establish a Green Spaces Board including principal providers of green spaces to co-ordinate and monitor implementation of Green Space Strategy
• Create new opportunities for volunteering in green spaces
• Protect and enhance existing green links and create new links between existing green spaces

Further Consultation
After the draft Green Space Strategy Report has been approved, a period of wider consultation is proposed lasting approximately three months and including the following methods:-

• Meetings with Area Assembly Co-ordinating Committees
• Strategy Report made available on Rotherham MBC web-site with feedback instructions
• Strategy summary and feedback leaflet produced and distributed via libraries and other Council buildings
• Strategy Report sent to key stakeholders, including relevant statutory organisations, local MPs, Friends Groups and other local special interest groups

Pilot Study
A number of recommendations will require the development of new methodologies, for example to identify candidate sites for possible change of use and to assess their suitability for such treatment. It is proposed that a pilot study be undertaken in one ward containing a representative range of green space types. By doing this in parallel with the consultation period, it will allow more rapid progress to be achieved when the final Strategy is adopted and then implemented.

8. Finance

A consultation leaflet will cost approximately £1,500 to produce, and it is proposed that this be funded from the existing service budget. Further costs relate to delivering and sustaining the necessary improvements in green space provision. Work currently underway to determine the future of the Council's ground maintenance service will also need to take account of the recommendations of the Green Space Strategy and any resulting standards and policies and could have a financial impact which as yet can not be quantified.

It is proposed that the Service seeks to work in partnership in order to access all available external funding and developer contributions, but it will also need to make bids to the Council's Capital Programme in future years to secure funding to support the strategic development of green space sites. It is expected that the implementation of the Strategy will also generate income to the Capital Programme through the sale of sites of little strategic value.

Reprioritisation of maintenance programmes and savings from the cessation or reduction of service at some sites, based on informed decisions relating to the strategic value of sites, will be necessary to support the increased costs that will result from providing and sustaining higher standards of provision and priority sites.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Without significant capital and revenue investment it is unlikely that the proposed quality and accessibility standards can be achieved. Delivery of strategic improvements will be heavily dependant on the development of effective partnerships and the availability of external
funding opportunities and developer contributions. Whilst every effort will be made to ensure success in these areas, it is not possible to predict at this stage the availability of either. Future local need for green space provision and the impact of development activities are difficult to predict in the long term and as such the strategy will need to review green space audit data at agreed intervals in order to take account of changing circumstances.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The Green Spaces Strategy will have extensive policy and performance implications.

- **Rotherham Achieving**: It will contribute to regeneration by shaping the new local development framework, supporting bids for inward investment, improving and promoting the image of Rotherham, and by contributing to sustainable neighbourhoods of quality, choice and aspiration.
- **Rotherham Alive**: The audit provides a basis for ensuring adequate site provision to support increased active use thereby contributing to improved health.
- **Fairness**: It will seek to reduce inequalities by setting borough-wide standards for accessibility to green spaces.
- **Sustainable Development**: A fundamental purpose of this audit has been to identify a more sustainable approach to green space provision. This includes setting provision standards that can be maintained over a long time and environmentally sustainable management.
- **Performance Indicators**: The audit will feed into a green spaces strategy which should have a positive impact on BVPI 119e – Satisfaction with Cultural Services – Parks and Open Spaces, by improving access to good quality green spaces across the Borough.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Rotherham Draft Green Spaces Strategy – A copy will be provided for consideration by Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Development Services
Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open space, Sport and Recreation – *Department of Communities and Local Government, 2002*
Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to PPG17– *Department of Communities and Local Government, 2001*

Consultation has taken place with a number of other directorates and departments during the preparation of the draft Green Spaces Strategy, including Neighbourhood and Adult Services, Children and Young People’s Services, Planning and Regeneration, Streetpride and Asset Management. Financial and Legal Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

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