

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

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## CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT, WASTE & ENVIRONMENT – COUNCILLOR PHILL LARRATT

Report Title	Consultation draft Parks Development Strategy
Report Author	Simon Bowers, Assistant Director Assets & Environment <a href="mailto:Simon.Bowers@westnorthants.gov.uk">Simon.Bowers@westnorthants.gov.uk</a> Jason Chambers, Head of Facilities, Public Realm & Heritage <a href="mailto:Jason.Chambers@westnorthants.gov.uk">Jason.Chambers@westnorthants.gov.uk</a>

### List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	27/03/2024
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	27/03/2024
Other Director	Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director Place, Economy & Environment	27/03/2024
Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	27/03/2024

### List of Appendices

#### Appendix A – Draft Parks Development Strategy

##### 1. Purpose of Report

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1.1 To seek approval to consult on a draft Parks Development Strategy for West Northamptonshire.

##### 2. Executive Summary

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2.1 The Council owns a large portfolio of parks – urban and country. These are immensely valuable, both to people and nature. However, there are gaps in their coverage, both geographically and

in terms of what they offer. West Northamptonshire would also benefit from there being a clear strategic direction for the parks, to maximise their overall benefits.

- 2.2 To that end, a draft Parks Development Strategy has been prepared. It proposes a series of over-arching actions, a set of new or renewed parks, and enhancement to existing parks. The strategic is intended to give a clear direction of travel for parks, whilst acknowledging that specific initiatives within it will need to have their own business cases.
- 2.3 It is proposed that the draft Strategy be subject to public consultation, seeking to engage park users, prospective users, and stakeholders. The intention would be to then refine the draft taking into account the comments and suggestions received, so that the final document identified and maximised opportunities for the parks to deliver benefits.

### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the draft Parks Development Strategy for public consultation.

### **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- 4.1 To seek public and stakeholder views on the draft Parks Development Strategy, seeking thereby to ensure the final Strategy is as well-founded as possible.
- 4.2 To provide a clear approach to delivering parks and securing the maximum benefits from them across West Northamptonshire.

### **5. Report Background**

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- 5.1 The Council inherited a large portfolio of parks – urban and country – from its predecessor authorities. These are an immensely valuable asset for the communities of West Northamptonshire. Their value to urban residents is immediately obvious, reflected in legislation and activities of councils since Victorian times to create parks for residents to enjoy the benefits of nature. However, they are also of value to rural residents, providing for areas of nature-led countryside which can be enjoyed. Parks deliver a series of benefits, including to physical and mental health, broader well-being, and space for social interaction and community development. Both country and urban parks also provide benefits to wildlife and biodiversity.
- 5.2 To make the best of its parks, the Council needs a strategic view of how they should be taken forward. To that end, a draft Strategy has been devised, taking input from across the Council and integrated care system partners. The Strategy seeks to both maximise the benefits of the parks which exist, and also to fill strategic gaps in current provision. These gaps are both geographic and in the range of options parks provide; where possible, measure are proposed to make parks more attractive to a wide range of users.
- 5.3 The draft Strategy sets out a vision for the parks: “West Northamptonshire’s parks are places for people of all backgrounds to thrive through exercise and relaxation in the open air, enjoying

nature and heritage, building communities, and supporting biodiversity.” This is fleshed out in six objectives:

1. Provide a network of safe and accessible parks serving the whole of West Northamptonshire.
2. Create spaces for health and wellbeing to flourish.
3. Preserve and develop the biodiversity, heritage, and landscape values of all sites.
4. Encourage engagement and participation of communities and partners to develop a sense of pride and community cohesion.
5. Secure investment in our parks.
6. Make good use of public money and assets.

5.4 The draft Strategy goes on to outline three types of actions: (a) Overarching interventions, where actions relate to all parks or several of them; (b) Delivery of new or renewed parks, to fill gaps, meet needs, and take advantage of opportunities; and (c) Enhancing our existing parks.

5.5 The overarching interventions include measures to enhance security and attractiveness of parks to those who might otherwise feel less comfortable using them; a wider range of activities (helping to engage a wider range of people including young people and young adults); enhancing other facilities; further developing engagement with residents and partners; and ensuring the parks team is able to support the range of activities.

5.6 The new or renewed parks identified as desirable are:

- a) Battle of Naseby Country Park
- b) Brackley Country (Linear) Park
- c) Houghton Linear Park
- d) Marefair Heritage Park
- e) Eastern Northampton Park
- f) West Northamptonshire productive woodland

5.7 These new or renewed parks are designed to fill geographic gaps in coverage, take advantage of important heritage assets, respond to increased need for parks flowing from development, and address areas of need. The productive woodland proposal flows from the Estate, and Construction and Maintenance, Climate Strategies, but would create a new public park if established. It would have a key role in mitigating the carbon emissions the Council is otherwise unable to remove from its own operations.

5.8 The final group of interventions address opportunities and issues in existing parks. Proposals are wide ranging, including potential new facilities such as boat hire and velorail, lessening the impact of roads dividing parks, and a sandy beach at Brixworth Country Park.

5.9 It should be stressed that whilst the draft Strategy seeks to give a clear strategic direction, towards maximising the benefit the parks bring to people and nature in West Northamptonshire, the individual initiatives will need their own business cases in due course. It is almost inevitable that not everything in the draft Strategy will eventually be delivered; but without it, it is likely few of them would be.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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- 6.1 The choices for the Council are to:
  - 6.1.1 Option 1: Not proceed with the draft Strategy.
  - 6.1.2 Option 2: Adopt the draft Strategy without consultation.
  - 6.1.3 Option 3: Revise the draft Strategy, prior to consultation or adoption without consultation.
  - 6.1.4 Option 4: Consult on the draft Strategy, with a view to making any suitable amendments after consultation and then adopting.
- 6.2 Not proceeding with the Strategy (Option 1) would leave the Council without a clear direction for its parks. This is likely to result in sub-optimal outcome, with the parks estate delivering less for people and nature than would be the case with a strategy.
- 6.3 Adopting the draft Strategy without consultation (Option 2) would run the risk of missing opportunities and refinements that would come from wider engagement with the community and stakeholders. Whilst the draft is based on knowledge and experience from the parks service and more widely across the Council and taking into account the Council's own strategies and those it shares with partners (notably the Integrated Care Partnership's *Live Your Best Life* strategy), there will be issues and opportunities known to park users, potential users, and stakeholder it would be worth capturing.
- 6.4 Revisions (Option 3) to the draft Strategy prior to either consultation or direct adoption are of course possible. However, at this point nothing has been identified which would materially add to the proposals in the draft.
- 6.5 It is therefore recommended that consultation takes place (Option 4), with a view to refining the document prior to its final adoption. This should maximise the benefits the Strategy is able to bring.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1 Conducting consultation on the draft Strategy would require only minimal resources, all within existing budgets.
- 7.1.2 The approach taken by the draft Strategy itself is to maximise the use of government grants, developer contributions, private sector investment, commercial income, and other opportunities for funding which avoid the need for use of the Council's general resources. Where use of these general resources would be needed, this would be justified on a case-by-case basis with an appropriate business case, subject to Cabinet and/or Council further consideration as appropriate.

## 7.2 **Legal**

The Council provides and manages parks, and services and concessions within them, under a range of powers. As specific proposals are taken forward any legal implications will be assessed, and appropriate action taken.

7.2.1 Consultation can take place under, among other powers, those listed above taken together with Section 111 of the Local government Act 1972 (power to do things ancillary etc. to other duties and powers). It is also consistent with, for example, the duties in the Local Government Act 1999 to consult in connection with the best value duty.

## 7.3 **Risk**

7.3.1 The risk of consulting on the draft Strategy is relatively minimal. The main risk would be that the consultation draft raises expectations which are ultimately not capable of being delivered, with the result that people are disappointed. The consultation will seek to make clear that whilst the Strategy sets an ambitious strategic direction, the delivery of individual initiatives will rest on the ability to fund them (see 7.1.2).

## 7.4 **Consultation and Communications**

7.4.1 Consultation on the draft Strategy is proposed to take place over at least six weeks, with the final timetable to be set taking into account other consultations taking place and other events (such as elections) which may affect it. The Council would make the draft strategy available and provide for both structured and open responses to it. Responses would where possible be by a web portal, for efficient management, but responses in hard copy would also be accepted, for those who find this an easier means of communication.

7.4.2 In addition to directly seeking public comments, stakeholders in the parks, including park management committees, 'friends of' groups, residents' forums, and town and parish councils would be encouraged to provide their views, as well as bring the consultation to the awareness of those they serve. Organisations and businesses with existing or potential interests in the parks would also be encouraged to participate.

## 7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 None.

## 7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 The draft Strategy is designed to support the Council's net zero goals, by supporting activities which retain carbon or remove it from the atmosphere, and by providing places in which habitats allow species affected by climate change to thrive.

7.6.2 Inevitably, use of parks can also create carbon emissions, notably by people travelling to them in cars, in maintenance and enhancement works, and in the supply chain. Some of these impacts

will be mitigated in accordance with the Council's Estate, and Construction and Maintenance, Climate Strategies, as well as proposals to enhance active and public transport to the parks. Those which remain are considered a necessary feature of the use and enjoyment of parks, to be addressed within the Council's target for net zero for West Northamptonshire as a whole by 2045.

## **7.7 Community Impact**

7.7.1 The impacts of the Strategy on local communities would vary from place to place, with impacts being almost exclusively positive. The consultation should enable positive impacts from proposed actions to be maximised, and also any potential negative impacts to be identified and addressed.

## **8. Background Papers**

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8.1 None.