

**Public**  
**Key Decision - Yes**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Healthy Open Spaces Strategy

**Meeting/Date:** Cabinet – 22nd October 2020

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Operations and Environment, Councillor Marge Beuttell

**Report by:** Development Manager

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **Executive Summary:**

What is the report about?

To document the journey undertaken to develop a Healthy Open Spaces Strategy for Huntingdonshire. The report will set out the evidence base and subsequent 10-year action plan which will ensure HDC is focussed on delivering healthy open spaces for our communities to enjoy, to include play, nature, access and provision.

Why is it important?

The Strategy sets the direction of focus, development and investment in the Open Spaces in Huntingdonshire. It will demonstrate through an evidence-based approach how Open Spaces support local people to live healthier lives, improve their mental health and wellbeing contribute to the fight against climate change and address social isolation

Since August 2019 a targeted Public and Stakeholder consultation has taken place to inform the themes and Vision of the strategy. Each theme identifying new and innovative way to connect with our communities and shout about our amazing Open Spaces

Vision – Embrace Your Space

Themes; Shape you Space; Create your Space; Celebrate your Space; and Reinvigorate your Space

The Vision and Themes were tested through a second round of stakeholder consultation and drove the comprehensive and collaborative Action Plan

The Cabinet is

**RECOMMENDED**

to endorse the 'Healthy Open Spaces Strategy' and the proposed 10-year action plan.

## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek endorsement of the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy and its vision of 'Embrace Your Space'
- 1.2 Endorse the proposed Action plan.

## **2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY**

- 2.2 Twelve months ago we embarked upon a journey to acknowledge and develop the role of our park and open spaces in our communities. We hoped to connect the more traditional approaches to outdoor play to our desire to encourage and nurture our green environment.
- 2.3 Parks and Open spaces are an essential part of what makes Huntingdonshire a special place to live and work, with 96% of our population live within a 10-minute walk of a park or Open Space. When asked, 96% of our Open Space users said they thought Open Spaces made them and others happier.
- 2.4 The Strategy both qualitatively and quantitatively explores the 500+ open space network in Huntingdonshire, whilst acknowledging that this is not a statutory service. It is hoped that the Strategy will be able to springboard a 10 year Action Plan of innovative projects and schemes to look after our spaces for the benefit of the community now and in the future.
- 2.5 The Strategy clearly demonstrates an evidence driven and tested Vision and Strategic Themes. Each theme is designed to support the vision and benefit our populations health and well being.

### **Vision – Embrace Your Space**

#### **Shape your Space**

Shaping the future of parks, open spaces and play through a community asset based approach to development = local people embracing and shaping space

#### **Create your Space**

Creating Communities through parks, open spaces and play – tackling social isolation, improving physical health and supporting wellbeing.

#### **Celebrate your Space**

Celebrate parks, open spaces and play – shout about their hidden values and increase usage by enabling people to have a life long relationship with these spaces.

#### **Reinvigorate you Space**

Think differently about the delivery of parks, open spaces and play both operationally and strategically.

- 2.6 In support of the Vision and identified themes the Strategy includes a 10 year Action Plan to be reviewed on an annual basis, alongside a Year 5

evidence base refresh. The recent Pandemic has shown how important it is to keep the Action Plan realistic and relevant to our communities. Open Space user priorities can very quickly change and the demand to use Open Space can fluctuate immensely based of social and economic factors. The Action Plan will form part of the Open Spaces Service Plan to ensure accountability and recognised progress.

- 2.7 In support of the Strategy delivery a 'Strategy on a Page' (SOAP) has been developed to quickly and concisely illustrate the development and implementation. To underpin the SOAP a 'Pledge' approach similar to the 'Wigan Deal' has been used to articulate the main parts of the action plan along with a 'Your Pledge' section to incubate community driven change.

### **3. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

- 3.1 The Panel discussed the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy at its meeting on 8th October 2020. Prior to that, some Members of the Panel had met with Officers a number of times to consider the terms of the Strategy, and a number of the areas discussed have been incorporated into it.
- 3.2 In discussing its overall orientation Members have stressed the importance of achieving a balance between the accommodation of wildlife in green spaces and public use. It has been confirmed that wildlife habitats will be protected within the District's open spaces.
- 3.3 Members welcomed the fact that open spaces can be used for social prescribing and helping residents to improve their mental health. Furthermore, the Strategy could help community groups with their open space aims.
- 3.4 Open spaces could be more well used if the Council acts to attract visitors to the less well know open spaces in the District. The Panel will monitor the extent to which the Council is able to expand upon use of the more high-profile open spaces to grow the profile of all open spaces within Huntingdonshire. On a related subject, Members have noted the intention to explain clearly how indirect charging contributes towards the upkeep of open spaces.
- 3.5 The sample of primary school children spoken to is not representative of District. It is accepted that the primary schools visited were the only ones to respond to the offer of a visit. It is suggested that many Members are school governors or have links to schools in other ways and these avenues could be used to achieve greater coverage of communication between Council Officers and pupils.
- 3.6 The Panel has discussed the implementation of the Strategy. Assurances have been received that it has buy-in from Executive Councillors and Senior Officers. Moreover, it reflects the importance residents attach to open spaces and by articulating how they will be run, it will ensure they are well managed. This is because the Strategy will facilitate monitoring, which is something that the Panel will have a role in. The Strategy covers a ten-year period with a review on an annual basis and then a refresh in

five years. Again, the Panel would wish to be involved in these processes.

- 3.7 Members have drawn attention to the enthusiasm of the team and the impressive community engagement that has been undertaken. On the grounds that it is a high-quality piece of work, which has had significant input by Members of the Panel, the Cabinet is recommended to approve the Strategy.

#### **4. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 4.1 Failure to endorse the evidence-based strategy presented will impact the development and direction of the strategic management of Huntingdonshire's Open Spaces in their support for local communities health and wellbeing.

- 4.2 Based on Fields in Trust's Revaluing Parks and Open Spaces Report in 2018 to demonstrate the importance of our Open Spaces,

- The Total Economic Value of the Parks and Open Spaces in Huntingdonshire will be over **£5.3 million per year** per year including benefits gained from using local park or green space and non-use benefits such as the preservation of parks for the future.
- The Wellbeing Value associated with the frequent use of local parks and green spaces by Huntingdonshire's residents is worth **£172.7 million per year** to the population of Huntingdon.
- Parks and green spaces provision in Huntingdon is estimated to save the NHS around **£560,432 per year** based solely on a reduction in GP visits and excluding any additional savings from prescribing or referrals.

#### **5. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- 5.1 PLACE – Create, protect and enhance our safe and clean built and green environment.
- 5.2 PEOPLE – Support people to improve their health and well-being.
- 5.3 Leaders new vision to incorporate – Maintain Pride of place, re-prioritise and re-shape service delivery.

#### **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 **Phase 1** – Focused on understanding peoples use and perception of Parks and Open Spaces aswell as their aspirations for the future through various media:-

Questionnaire (713 completed),

Over 500 Conversations with 4yrs-94yr olds (events, phonecalls, targeted focus groups – schools etc)

6.2 **Phase 2** – Following development of draft strategy we entered a second phase to test Vision, Aims and Actions. This phase took place during the Covid-19 restrictions and therefore took place online.

6.3 Targeted groups for consultation included Children, Young People, Families, Older People, the wider Communities and Non-users

6.4 At two different points in the development of the Strategy we have had the benefit of the comments of an Overview and Scrutiny Working Group which helped to finalise the key Themes

- 11th March 2020 – Emerging Themes and developing Action Plan
- 29th July 2020 – Feedback on supplementary documents to enhance the Strategy delivery using a ‘Strategy on a Page’ and ‘Walk in a Park’

## **7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 To continue to support the current revenue funding for Parks and Open Spaces to ensure the successful implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan.

7.2 In line with the strategy’s Action Plan additional revenue bids may be bought forward in the future to support the implementation of projects and facilities. These would be evidence driven and approved by the Portfolio Holder at the time.

7.3 To further enhance the strategy and drive forward the operational management of each of our Strategic Open Spaces, a series of localised prospectus’ will be developed. Each forming a further building block of evidence to support the strategy and the parks operational needs.

## **8. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 81% of our residents, following Lockdown, believe that parks and open Spaces are keeping them fit and healthy.

8.2 The Health benefit of using open spaces is well documented and acknowledged by our communities. However, those who would most likely benefit are amongst the least likely to use them. The Strategy seeks to deliver partnership working with links such as Public Health, Active LifeStyles and the Living Sport County Sports Partnership to achieve health and wellbeing outcomes

8.3 There are physical and environmental benefits from green infrastructure including improved air quality and less noise pollution. There are also benefits to active users of these spaces, positively impacting health and

mental wellbeing. Strong evidence now supports the fact that green space improves public's health.

8.4 Improving Access to Green Spaces (Public Health England - 2014) captured and evidenced the health benefits from higher levels of physical activity, improved mental health and wellbeing as well as positive physiological effects of better quality environments. A recent analysis and report 'Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces' (Fields in Trust - 2018) again captured and demonstrated these benefits.

8.5 The Local Authority Health Profile (2018) identifies that health of people in Huntingdonshire is generally better than the England average. However excess weight in adults showed significantly worse than England average. Public Health England has identified the priorities in Huntingdonshire to be:

- Reducing excess weight in adults and children
- Improving mental wellbeing in adults and children and
- Supporting older people to live independently safe and well

8.6 Public Health England's 'Everybody Active, Every Day' report in October 2014 set out clear guidance for public sector bodies to promote physical activity, under the four themes of:

- Active society: creating a social movement
- Moving professionals: activating networks of expertise
- Active environments: creating the right spaces
- Moving at scale: interventions that make us active

8.7 In the recent launch of the Tackling Obesity Strategy (2020), the Government has made clear links between living with excess weight and an increased risk of death or serious illness due to Covid-19. Whilst GP's will be actively encouraged to prescribe exercise and more social activities to help people keep fit, the government will keep the health agenda at the heart of its decision making. In turn these interventions will proactively tackle the burden of preventable ill health and empower everyone to make the healthy behaviours they want to make.

8.8 Our Strategy seeks to ensure that our population has access to Open Spaces and their associated communities to support and enhance their health and wellbeing. The Strategy forms part of matrix of policy that cuts across other subject to form part of their foundations, to include the Environment Agenda and planning policy.

8.9 *"Public parks all over the world have become a much-needed pressure valve, through which we can not only get exercise and access to nature and fresh air, but also see and interact with others in movement and from a safe distance. Along with the doorstep Thursday clapping for the NHS and the angst of queuing for essential shopping, visiting a park is one of few public spaces where we can share a moment of humanity."*

(Gilmore, Institute for Cultural Practices, 2020)

## **9. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **9.1 Climate Change – Research shows that (Schottland, 2019)**

*“while the impacts of climate change are daunting, there is growing recognition that parks can be part of the climate solution. Parks reduce harmful carbon pollution that is driving climate change; they protect people and infrastructure from increasingly severe storms, sea-level rise, heat waves and droughts; and they also directly reduce some of the primary public health challenges that are exacerbated by climate change.”*

### **9.2 This strategy will look at defining the role of our Open Spaces in addressing climate change. Our parks and open spaces can be used as a starting point for new projects or innovative ideas to co-exist facilities and experiences that will support this agenda.**

### **9.3 Wildlife and Nature – Natural Cambridgeshire and its partners have a vision to double nature in Cambridgeshire and our Open Spaces again provide a canvas for projects to base themselves in to support our varied biodiversity in Huntingdonshire.**

*“that by doubling the area of rich wildlife habitats and natural green-space, Cambs and Peterborough will become a world-class environment where nature and people thrive, and businesses prosper.”*

### **9.4 Community engagement, during the development of this Strategy, has illustrated a desire to see parks and open spaces support local wildlife which the strategy seeks to support. In an Online vote during lockdown, ‘Wildlife and Nature’ won as the priority for residents, above key themes such as access and climate change.**

### **9.5 In support of the Natural Cambridgeshire Vision and how we will connect with it, the Strategy seeks to push Wildlife and Nature into decision making across the Council whilst recognising that they are non-statutory services which need to be sustained and recognised for their value and impact on our lives.**

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

### **10.1 In the development of the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy, we have identified and tested our Vision and Action Plan through rigorous Stakeholder Consultation.**

### **10.2 The Strategy demonstrates a clear Action Plan informed through an understood environment and an objective view of resources.**

## **11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 – Strategy on a Page – Healthy Open Spaces Strategy



**12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

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