

For General Release:

REPORT TO:	Cabinet 21st March 2016
AGENDA ITEM:	9
SUBJECT:	Ambitious for Parks & Green Spaces in Croydon – working with our communities
LEAD OFFICER:	Jo Negrini, Executive Director of Place
CABINET MEMBER:	Timothy Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Sport
WARDS:	All
<p>CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT: The proposals included in this report contribute to achieving the following strategic outcomes:</p> <p>Growth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to create a place where people and businesses want to be • to grow a thriving and lively cultural offer which engages communities and supports regeneration <p>Independence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to help people from all communities live longer, healthier lives through positive lifestyle choices <p>Enabling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to be innovative and enterprising in using available resources to change lives for the better • to be open and transparent and put communities at the heart of decision making <p>The proposals contained in this report also support the delivery of Croydon’s Community Strategy 2013-18, and the Liveability outcomes outlined in the Corporate Plan 2015-18, in particular the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to create a place that communities are proud of and want to look after as their neighbourhood • to make parks and open spaces a cultural resource • to create a place where people feel safe and are safe • to improve wellbeing across all communities through sport and physical activity 	

AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON & WHY ARE WE DOING THIS:

Ambitious for Croydon describes Croydon's parks as "*key assets for the community*" and this report highlights the role they play in place making, health and wellbeing and the borough's cultural offer, as well as the role the Council sees the community playing in helping shape services, being involved in decision making and having the opportunity to hold events and activities our parks and open spaces. Our vision for Croydon's parks and green spaces is to ensure that these high valued community assets are maintained for future generations. However, with significant financial pressures and the need to reduce expenditure, the current model service delivery is not sustainable in the long-term and significant changes in the way we do things are required. The proposals set out in this document focus on engaging with the community to understand how the Council can enable our residents to do more and get more out of the borough's parks, and through that process identify community assets that will help provide a more responsive efficient service, enable more community participation and management, potentially generate revenue from an exciting and diverse cultural offer and through this ensure that our parks are protected, pleasant and safe for generations to come.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The parks review focuses on improving the efficiency of the grounds maintenance contract, and on opportunities to increase revenue from commercial events, and from other sources. Capital expenditure to improve parks and allotments infrastructure will be from existing capital funding (including S106 contributions from developers) and applications made through the existing processes.

KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.: This is not a Key Decision

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Leader of the Council has delegated to the Cabinet the power to make the decisions set out in the recommendations below. Cabinet is recommended:

- 1.1. To approve the approach set out in the report to engage the residents, community groups and other stakeholders on proposals to maximise the benefits that parks and green spaces provide and their contribution to achieving wider health, regeneration and culture outcomes.
- 1.2. To agree that the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport, be granted delegated authority to use the feedback from the engagement to shape and implement a Parks and Green Spaces Delivery Plan.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. The Council and the borough's residents value Croydon's parks and green spaces and recognise the benefits they provide to our communities. They make neighbourhoods pleasant places to live; they provide space to relax, let off steam, and to get together as a community or for entertainment. Parks and green spaces help improve our physical and mental health and wellbeing, in a crowded urban environment they provide access to quieter, tranquil natural spaces; they support local economies and help reduce the impact of climate change by making our environment cooler and mitigate potential flood risk.
- 2.2. The parks review through research, benchmarking, identifying good and innovative practice has examined how we manage and provide parks and green spaces, and has looked at the potential to use, manage and resource them differently in future. The overall outcomes we are trying to achieve are improving health and wellbeing through participation in sports and physical activity, improving the diversity and attraction of borough's "cultural offer" through a calendar of exciting community events and entertainment in our parks, and introducing greater element of "community stewardship" through community involvement in all aspects of running parks from managing grounds maintenance services, to making improvements, to raising funds for specific projects.
- 2.3. However, to do this well we need to work in partnership with our residents and communities and come to a common understanding about the role we want parks to play in future, what we, as individuals and as a community, want to be able to do and get out of our parks and green spaces, and the relationship between the Council and our communities in making decisions about investment and improvements, about their day to day management, and about events, activities and entertainment.
- 2.4. Through this conversation we will change the way things have been done in the past, but we will also develop a parks service that is fit for purpose and maximises the contribution it makes to the borough's **Ambitious for Croydon** outcomes.

3. VISION

- 3.1. ***Our vision is for Croydon's parks and green spaces to be maintained for future generations, to be enjoyed by local communities, to encourage and enable healthier lifestyles, to preserve and improve the borough's ecology and biodiversity, to provide the space for exciting cultural events and entertainment that attract visitors and support our economy, and to become one of the key factors that make Croydon a great place to live, work and socialise.***
- 3.2. The value of parks to the borough and its communities is given prominence in **Ambitious for Croydon** and the Council's various supporting strategies and plans. **Ambitious for Croydon** describes Croydon's parks as "key assets for the community" and sets out a number of commitments including:

- Keeping parks safe
- Providing a named Park Keeper and a team working with the community
- Enabling local communities to take decisions affecting their parks
- Enabling young people, unemployed, disabled people to learn skills and gain valuable experience through restoring and improving the borough's parks and green spaces

- 3.3. The Parks review contributes to the ambition of “*making parks and open spaces a cultural resource*” and the above commitments. Croydon's Liveability Strategy also recognises the borough's parks and green spaces as cultural resources, and commits to reviewing the facilities in them and to make improvements that meet local need, and to develop the commercial potential of park buildings and facilities for the benefit of local people. Croydon's Local Plan also commits to preserving the borough's parks and green spaces and includes objectives that ensure new developments integrate, respect and enhance the natural environment, and that the Council improves the quality and accessibility of green space and nature, and protects and enhances biodiversity. To achieve this a presumption in favour of development will be applied where applications assist the delivery of a Green Grid - a network of multi-functional green spaces made up of the All London Green Grid and other green spaces within the borough (further details of the policy are provided in **Appendix A** of this report). The Council's policy position, therefore, is firmly in favour of the restoration, improvement of the boroughs parks and green spaces as well as enhancing and protecting the natural environment and biodiversity.
- 3.4. Formal parks have the capacity to provide a wide range of facilities and services offering the opportunity to relax, play sport, for children to play, or to hold community events and activities. They are the perfect place to get out of the house or workplace and de-stress by skateboarding, rollerblading, running, cycling or just walking. Increasingly parks and green spaces are being used as alternatives to the gym, and some provide equipment for exercise including trim trails and resistance exercise machines. More natural areas provide the opportunity to observe wildlife, notice the seasons change and to feel in closer contact with nature. These areas are increasingly important in providing urban residents with respite from busy and noisy environments and improving physical and mental wellbeing and quality of life. Local authorities also have a statutory duty¹ of care to manage, protect and preserve the biodiversity value of these natural sites.
- 3.5. The borough is fortunate in having a wide variety of parks and green spaces ranging from formal parks and gardens through to countryside, woodland, ponds and meadows. Over a third of the borough is green space, higher than the average in London. The Council's Parks Service is responsible for managing and maintaining over 1000 hectares of parkland, playgrounds, sports and other facilities. Croydon has 127 different parks and green spaces, as well as 17 allotment sites (including two private sites).

¹ Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

- 3.6. Croydon is very fortunate that our volunteers give up over 7,000 days a year working to improve and maintain our parks, woodlands and green spaces – an in-kind contribution (if valued at the average national wage²) of nearly £500,000. Croydon's parks are highly valued by our residents. Previous surveys have found that over 70% of Croydon residents were satisfied with the quality of green space provision, and over 90% considered open spaces to be very or fairly important to them as residents. A recent survey found that over 80% of residents polled used a Croydon park at least once a week.
- 3.7. Parks and green spaces rank high among the factors people take into account when choosing somewhere to live or move to. Natural England, the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, estimates that if everyone in the country had easy access to green space, it would save the healthcare system £2.1bn every year. However, despite the benefits to local economies, housing values, the environment and public health, public parks and green spaces are receiving less and less funding. Local authorities and other public bodies across the country are struggling with the difficult choices between retaining popular and valued discretionary services and making savings. However, some are not just settling for cuts and are taking a more innovative approach by changing the way they have traditionally done things. NESTA³ recently published the learning from its Rethinking Parks programme which includes a number of innovative approaches that show promise: Burnley for example has changed its park maintenance regime from more intensive formal planting to less intensive meadows and perennials; Darlington has encouraged regular volunteering by local businesses to improve parks; and Bristol has supported a number of participants into employment or training through their in-park horticultural skills and work experience programme. In London, Lambeth has been working on enabling the local community to become involved in decision making and the direct management of parks, and Havering has made significant progress in involving their community, transforming their approach to parks funding, reducing subsidy and in changing the traditional model for the provision of allotments, sports pitches and bowls clubs.
- 3.8. Croydon's parks service is a traditional, contracted out model with a small team of Council officers directing and managing grounds maintenance, cleansing, facilities management and tree works contracts. The overall expenditure on parks green spaces is £1.83m, however, this has reduced considerably in recent years through the retendering the grounds maintenance contract and through service restructure (including the reduction of the staff complement by three Greenspaces Development Officers). Grounds maintenance services (including horticulture, sports provision, and general cleansing and safety services) are provided by Quadron, and

² £26,000 per year

³ National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts <http://www.nesta.org.uk/about-us/our-history>

facilities management of parks buildings and infrastructure is provided by Interserve. In summary the annual expenditure breaks down as follows:

- £1.2m goes towards routine works specified under the grounds maintenance contract (including horticulture (including to housing land, highways and education playing fields), sports provision, cleansing, and the Park Rangers and Countryside Wardens)
- £132,000 goes towards unexpected grounds maintenance and tree works that are required from time to time
- £224,200 goes towards employing staff to manage the parks service, and to manage the grounds maintenance, tree works and facilities management contracts
- £280,000 goes towards general office and other costs including water, electricity etc.

3.9. The Council is committed to ensuring Croydon's parks and green spaces are maintained for future generations, however, the current model of service delivery does not fit with the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. Croydon is facing a significant challenge in trying to maintain high quality services, while at the same time accommodating increasing demand and being expected to considerably reduce its expenditure by the government. The Croydon Challenge is the Council's response to these pressures and requires each service, including parks, to review how it does things, to challenge traditional methods of service delivery and come up with new ways of meeting need and achieving our agreed outcomes. The way we use, maintain and pay for our parks and green spaces can make a contribution to this target through developing a new fit for purpose future service that moves away from the traditional 'input/output' contract monitoring towards a model that makes use of the communities' assets, is more inclusive and enabling towards the local community needs, and is responsive to opportunities to improve the borough's cultural offer.

3.10. The information set out in the paragraphs above explain how the parks review has examined current provision, looked at Croydon's potential, identified examples of good and innovative practice, and set out the scope and mechanisms to transform the parks service. The following sections of this report go on to set out the outcomes we aim to achieve, how the proposed transformation will be shaped through a "big conversation" with residents, communities and stakeholders, and then goes on to set out further detail on the actions already underway and planned that will go into a delivery plan for Croydon's parks and green spaces.

OUTCOMES

3.11. The borough's vision for parks will be delivered by focusing on the achievement of the following outcomes:

- **Improved health and wellbeing** – parks and green spaces that support and encourage active lifestyles, provide high quality sports facilities, give children a space to play in, address inequalities and host a range of well publicised activities for all (walks for health, outdoor gyms, etc.)

- **An exciting attractive cultural offer** - parks and green spaces that provide a contrast to the busy urban environment, that offer the opportunity to do everything from take a pleasant walk, to be surprised by community art, give support to a community event, or take in a show, a concert, or open air theatre, with a calendar of exciting events throughout the year that attract visitors, and help support the local economy
- **Community stewardship** – developing a partnership with local communities where groups and volunteers are supported and encouraged to take an equal role in and responsibility for the improvement and direct management of parks and green spaces - from raising funds, to volunteering, right through to full management via Community Asset Transfer
- **Environmental sustainability and biodiversity** – where the essential role parks, woodlands and green spaces play in reducing the effects of climate change – urban heat reduction, improving air quality, providing sustainable drainage systems (SUDS), and preserving biodiversity – are recognised, valued and preserved. As well as the vital role they play in providing access to green space and nature, protecting and enhancing green space and biodiversity, promoting conservation, environmental education, and recreation
- **A sustainable service delivery model** – a way of maintaining the boroughs parks and green spaces that ensures resources and investment are allocated in a way that supports and enhances wider outcomes with mixed financial models of service delivery in place

A big conversation about parks

- 3.12. In line with Ambitious for Croydon and the Opportunity and Fairness Commission's final report the Council is committed to ensuring our residents and stakeholders in the borough have opportunity to shape, influence and engage in decisions affecting services and in their delivery. The Council proposes to launch a multi-channel big conversation with residents, community groups and stakeholders about parks using surveys, focus groups, existing forums and groups, and social media. This big conversation will enable the Council to reach a wide range of stakeholders and establish a shared view on how we can use our parks to their full potential. It will also ensure that the proposed approach and actions not only improve outcomes outlined above but also reflect local residents' needs and preferences.
- 3.13. The big conversation will ask residents and organisations about how they use parks now, and will ask if they want to become involved in managing and improving services in the future, how can the Council help enable this engagement and participation to happen, and how can we work together to do things differently.
- 3.14. The big parks conversation will be launched in summer 2016 and will continue until the winter of 2016 with regular promotions and reminders for people to get involved and provide their feedback. It is anticipated that more localised engagement will then focus in on particular work streams and projects that flow from the overall review. The feedback will inform the development of the delivery plan overall and particular work streams going

forward.

3.15. The opportunity to take part in the big parks conversation will be publicised through:

- Items on the council's website including a web banner on the homepage;
- Posters and flyers in libraries, leisure centres, community centres and in Access Croydon;
- Emails to stakeholders, residents' groups and residents associations;
- Publicity in the Your Croydon monthly e-magazine
- Posts on the Council's I love Croydon Facebook page
- Tweets on the Your Croydon Twitter account @yourcroydon
- Putting information on the plasma display screens in Bernard Weatherill House including in the Corporate Reception and Access Croydon
- Including information in the standard footer of emails sent out by the Council

3.16. **IMPROVING HEALTH & WELLBEING**

We will ensure that our parks and green spaces support and encourage active lifestyles, provide high quality sports facilities, give children a space to play in, address inequalities and host a range of well publicised activities for all (walks for health, outdoor gyms, etc.) We will also focus on food growing initiatives in parks and improve allotments provision, including reviewing the opportunities to convert other open land to allotments

3.17. We know that parks and green spaces can have a beneficial impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing across the lifecourse. The benefits include better self-rated health; lower body mass index, overweight and obesity levels; higher levels of physical activity; reductions in some long term conditions; improved mental health and wellbeing as well as increased longevity. Parks can play a role in addressing inequalities. It is worth reiterating here that Natural England, the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, estimates that if everyone in the country had easy access to green space, it would save the healthcare system £2.1bn every year.

3.18. However, we also have some evidence that Croydon residents do not tend to use parks for exercise or health as much as residents of other boroughs according to a recent survey⁵. Good quality and well maintained parks are more likely to be used and local residents more likely to report higher 'neighbourhood satisfaction' and better health as a result. There is scope to improve the rate at which our residents use parks and green spaces for exercise and physical activity, and making improvements in this area will help tackle some significant health concerns including diabetes and heart disease. We can make this happen in a number of ways including improving facilities in the parks residents want to exercise in, improving awareness and publicity,

⁵ Taken from the 2013/14 Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey – Croydon results compared with England's average of 17.1% and London's average of 11.8%.

and working with colleagues in Public Health, the health service and with GPs in the Croydon Clinical Commissioning Group. We are not starting from scratch as there are some well-established and popular local health activities that can be built upon to contribute to this improvement; for example, there are over 32,000 people who regularly participate in physical activities in Croydon's parks and open spaces including: park runs, British military fitness, health walks, football, cricket, outdoor gyms / trim trail, volunteering in parks and sailing.

- 3.19. We also need to know more about the current use and future demand for sports pitches, and to use this information to engage with organisations looking to invest in new sports facilities in Croydon. Local information on the level of bookings of football pitches indicates that demand for grass sports pitches, particularly football at the weekend, is in decline. The same can be said for council bowls greens with a number already having to be closed down due to lack of demand. However, there is healthy demand for good quality sports facilities that are floodlit and available in the evenings. A needs based approach, better promotion and awareness of the facilities available will enable us to provide the right mix of facilities to maximise opportunities to participate in sports and physical activities in Croydon.
- 3.20. Allotments are a popular community resource that are in high demand and also provide a wealth of health and wellbeing benefits. Croydon has seventeen allotment sites, six of which are directly let by the Council, nine managed by allotment societies, and two are private sites. Allotment Societies with management leases appear to provide a cost effective, popular model for the management of allotments sites, and the Council will review the directly managed sites and capacity to transfer them to Allotment Societies with full management leases.

Proposed actions:

- i) Produce a playing pitch assessment and investment plan: Work has already started on a playing pitch assessment (a consultant was appointed in December 2015). The assessment will be completed in August 2016 and will be used to develop an Outdoor Sports Facilities and Playing Pitch Plan to guide investment in outdoor sports provision and facilities in the future which will be completed in December 2016.
- ii) Explore additional sources of funding: Identify and secure additional sources of funding for investment in improved sports and other facilities in parks and green spaces (sensitive to the local environment).
- iii) Develop leasing opportunities for sports pitches: Build on our knowledge and relationships with local sports organisations and leagues and investigate alternative managing arrangements such as transferring sports pitch assets to full community management model or leasing facilities.
- iv) Map sports and physical activity: Update our knowledge of current organised activities taking place in parks, collect data on participation that will make it easier to engage with and promote healthy lifestyle initiatives available to residents.

- v) Increase awareness and uptake: Improve the awareness of activities available to local residents through advertising, promotion and marketing and through the sports development service
- vi) Develop alternative management models for our allotment sites: Develop different options for our directly managed allotment sites and decide which one to take forward.

3.21. **AN EXCITING ATTRACTIVE CULTURAL OFFER**

We will ensure our parks and green spaces provide a contrast to the busy urban environment, offer the opportunity to do everything from take a pleasant walk, to be surprised by community art, give support to a community event, or take in a show, a concert, or open air theatre, with a calendar of exciting events throughout the year that attract visitors, and help support the local economy

- 3.22. Parks and green spaces provide the opportunity to relax and unwind, to get in touch with nature and escape from the busy urban environment. They stitch together the urban fabric providing respite, relaxation, and contrast. They also provide a community space that enables people to come together to celebrate, learn and get to know one another. And they can also provide excitement and entertainment with everything from bouncy castles for children, to funfairs, circuses, fireworks, open air theatre and cinema, and music concerts and festivals. There has been considerable growth in the variety of events held in London's parks and green spaces in recent years including Christmas markets, outdoor cinema screenings, ice rinks, and specialist festivals focusing on food, beer or other similar products.
- 3.23. Croydon's parks and green spaces already host a range of community and commercial events over the course of the year – from smaller community events and fairs, to theatre in the park, funfairs, circuses and music concerts – and a lot of hard work goes into organising returning events and looking for new ones. We recognise there is potential for Croydon to further extend and diversify its cultural and entertainment “offer”, building on the 2015 Ambition festival, and using our parks and green spaces as the places to provide it. We recognise there are constraints and risks to be taken into account and built into this approach going forward including the location and accessibility of Croydon's parks, available resources, the tolerance/support of local residents towards larger scale events, and crucially the need to develop and grow a “following” and sustained interest in music, entertainment and cultural events held in the borough's parks and open spaces over a period of years, sensitive to the environment and residents.
- 3.24. In order to take this part of the review forward the Council proposes to undertake initial market testing to gauge the interest of event promoters and to assess what opportunities there may be for them to develop events within the borough. The market testing will explore the potential to build an audience over a number of years, financial risk, infrastructure/development requirements and the preferred type of arrangement for organising and marketing a larger scale event/festival in Croydon.

- 3.25. The review will also work with newly appointed cultural director and other stakeholders such as existing groups in the borough to develop the arts programme that can be delivered in parks, with the aim to create a seamless approach between the town centre and the districts in term of outdoor arts and culture offer.

Proposed actions

- i) Produce a parks events prospectus and market test: Update out existing guidance on holding events in parks, and create a prospectus setting out the opportunities in Croydon for commercial events' organisers. We will undertake market testing exercise, possibly linking with local businesses.
- ii) Advertise and promote events and entertainment: Promote and advertise events and activities held in our parks and green spaces to maximise attendance and encourage participation in organisation and management
- iii) Expand the calendar of events held in parks: Identify new events and suitable locations in which to hold them

3.26. **ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP**

We will develop a partnership with our local communities to ensure groups and volunteers are supported and encouraged to take an equal role in and responsibility for the improvement and direct management of parks and green spaces - from raising funds, to volunteering, right through to full management via Community Asset Transfer

- 3.27. An essential part of the parks review and its work going forward is developing a new relationship with community group and volunteers. Many of the proposed actions described in this report will require a greater role for the community and residents in organising, managing and taking responsibility or projects, event and services.
- 3.28. Croydon is very fortunate that volunteers give up over 7,000 days a year working to improve and maintain our parks, woodlands and green spaces – an in-kind contribution (if valued at the average national wage) of nearly £500,000. There is a wide variety of voluntary groups active in Croydon including Parks Friends Groups (that have recently come together in a Parks, Woodlands and Greenspaces Forum), Community Gardeners, Surrey & London Wildlife Trusts and The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) and the Downlands Countryside Management Project. There are currently 33 Parks Friends Groups at work in the Borough, and they vary in size and the types of activity they undertake. Some groups carry out practical woodland/nature conservation work on a weekly or monthly basis with 5-15 volunteers each time, and other groups cultivate community gardens (for example, in Park Hill, Wandle, Thornton Heath Recreation Ground and Westow parks). In other parks the Friends of groups act as the Council's "eyes and ears" and help monitor the quality of service delivered, resolve problems, and run community events and activities

(for example, Weytern Tree Garden or Haling Grove).

- 3.29. There are two parks in the borough that provide case studies of how the new approach to encouraging community stewardship could work. Friends of Grangewood Park, formed in 2010 with the *“aim of raising the profile of the park and encouraging park users to take an active role in future planning and upkeep of the park”* is a good example of local volunteers taking action and delivering long-term benefits to their local community. They have set up a website (see link below) which promotes the park and encourages volunteers to take part in a range of activities. Friends of Grangewood Park are committed to preserving, maintaining and enhancing their park, working with the Council to promote its use and enjoyment, encouraging volunteering and thereby improving social inclusion, health and wellbeing. Another example is the Friends of Grange Park who have been raising funds for a new play area in Old Coulsdon. The fundraising has been widely supported by the local community and donations currently amount to more than £50,000. The council has also contributed £5,000 to the project from the Active Communities Fund and they are also awaiting the outcome of a recent funding application to a major grant funder. The trustees in consultation with local communities chose a design for the new play area and aim to complete the project in 2016. Both of these examples demonstrate that with support for voluntary groups in place, long-term capital investment in the upkeep and improvement of the park, local community groups working in partnership with the Council can mobilise local resources, secure additional funding, and ensure their park is sustained as a valuable community asset.
- 3.30. The parks review will build on the considerable array of community assets across the borough, and work to develop the social capital that will enable this relationship between communities and the Council to develop and flourish. This work will include campaigns to encourage volunteering, engaging local businesses around volunteering and participation in local events, support and mentoring from already established organisations, and providing opportunities for people seeking work to develop skills and experience through volunteering.

Proposed actions

- i) Develop social capital: Work with CVA and the VCS in Croydon to develop social capital and the infrastructure to support it
- ii) Support the Croydon Parks, Woodlands and Greenspaces Forum: Support the continued development of the independent Parks, Woodlands and Greenspaces Forum
- iii) Develop and support volunteer capacity: Work with the parks volunteer organisation and to bring together current activity / projects and explore the potential for increasing the capacity of volunteer groups and diversity of activities achieved
- iv) Support funding bids: Identify and support sites/areas/projects that local groups would like to contribute to either by securing external funding or volunteering

3.31. **BIODIVERSITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

We will ensure the essential role parks, woodlands and green spaces play in reducing the effects of climate change – urban heat reduction, improving air quality, providing sustainable drainage systems (SUDS), and preserving biodiversity – is recognised, valued and preserved. As well as the vital role they play in providing access to green space and nature, protecting and enhancing green space and biodiversity, promoting conservation, environmental education, and recreation.

- 3.32. As described above Croydon's Local Plan commits to preserving the boroughs parks and green spaces. It also acknowledges that in planning for the borough's green space over the next 20 years there are significant challenges including access to local parks and green spaces in the north of the borough and an increasing pressure on parks and play grounds with the levels of growth planned.
- 3.33. In response to these challenges the Council will protect and safeguard the extent of the borough's Metropolitan Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Local Green Spaces, and will apply a presumption in favour of development provided applications assist in the delivery of a Green Grid and meet the requirements of Policy SP7 and other applicable policies of the development plan. The Council will establish a network of multi-functional green spaces, a 'Green Grid', comprising those parts of the All London Green Grid together with other green spaces within the borough.
- 3.34. The Council will continue to work with TCV and other voluntary groups to support conservation work in Croydon.

Proposed actions:

- i) Conservation work with TCV: Work in partnership with TCV to deliver conservation work renewing our commitment to core funding the project
- ii) Support for conservation work: we will look for ways to continue to support and fund the conservation work delivered by the network of organisations, friends of groups and third sector partners working in our parks and open spaces.
- iii) Continue with our support for the Downlands Project in delivering conservation, habitat and green infrastructure improvements in the borough
- iv) Work with the GLA on environmental sustainability: working with the GLA on environmental sustainability projects including applying for funding for conservation work
- v) Actively manage our woodlands, heathland and downland to create bio diverse accessible places
- vi) Improve access to nature in deprived areas through habitat creation and improvements and/or infrastructure improvements
- vii) Seek out opportunities to work with new partners in regional

projects that benefit the borough such as : Beeline for London with Buglife, & Great North Wood Project with London Wildlife Trust

3.35. **A SUSTAINABLE SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL**

We will proactively work towards seeking and establishing new partnerships, encouraging community engagement and securing additional funding to ensure that by allocating resources more strategically and investing where we can increase functionality and income generation we encourage operation of different financial models that support a sustainable and flexible service.

3.36. As has been set out throughout this report the future of the borough's parks and green spaces lies in developing a mixed model of service delivery that focuses on improving outcomes. Employing a mixed model approach will mean resources and investment being targeted towards a number of well used "strategic parks", while other areas are supported and managed by the local community and, or potentially community trusts. Parks will be developed to deliver a variety of functions and uses; some focusing on health and wellbeing by encouraging participation in sports and physical activity, or on entertainment and culture, while others will continue to focus on the borough's ecology and biodiversity.

3.37. This mixed model will require an efficient allocation of resources and a change to the way some of the borough's parks are managed and maintained, and it will also see an increased focus on generating income (from events, activities, commercial leases and other sources), and crucially on supporting volunteers and communities to develop their capacity to become more directly engaged in the asset management approach.

Classifying our parks – a management tool

3.38. The council proposes that alongside the big conversation, a parks classification is developed as a mechanism by which we ensure that the Parks Service going forward is delivered according to a systematic asset management framework that allocates expenditure and investment in line with strategic objectives. The proposed classification groups the boroughs parks into three main categories: strategic, neighbourhood and local parks. Expenditure on grounds maintenance, facilities management, sports provision, and investment in improvements and infrastructure will be tailored to the category each park is placed in. Within establishing a more sustainable model of parks delivery there is scope to improve current services including the responsiveness of maintenance to parks gates, paths, facilities and other infrastructure, programmed maintenance and improvements to bring parks up to a certain standard (within the framework of a sustainable service delivery model), and modernising the processes for applying for an allotment, an event licence, and for making payments.

- 3.39. These improvements will not only improve the quality and attractiveness of our parks, but also remove traditional service delivery models that are inefficient and keep experienced, skilled parks officers away from tasks that add value and support our volunteers involved in the management and improvement of parks. The Council will also review the existing grounds maintenance, FM and other contracts and seek improvements from the current providers, as well as examining alternative provision from other existing contracts. The Council will also work with other local authorities in the sub-region to explore opportunities for alternative service provision.

Proposed actions

- i) Review the ground maintenance and other contracts: Undertake a review of the current ground and facility maintenance contracts and align resources with the classification
- ii) Work with sub-regional partners: work with sub-regional partners to explore alternative provision of parks services
- iii) Improve the effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness of current contractors: review current performance and identify improvements to current services provision
- iv) Classify parks: Complete the work to classify parks and green spaces according to their use and potential in order to strategically allocate resources and investment
- v) Embed an asset management approach to parks and green spaces: Use the classification to embed an asset management approach and provide evidence for strategic management of park

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1. While at this stage there is no requirement to formally consult the Council is committed to engaging with local residents and other stakeholders to enable them to take part in the decisions that affect their parks and has a range of forums and engagement mechanisms to seek feedback and comment from residents and stakeholders. As set out above the Council will launch a Big Conversation engagement event in the summer of 2016 which will continue until the winter of 2016. The feedback gained from that engagement will be taken into account in shaping and implementing the Parks and Green Spaces Delivery Plan.
- 4.2. Croydon's Parks, Woodlands and Greenspaces Forum met for the first time in March 2015 and since then has been meeting regularly to discuss shared issues and interests, and share their ideas and experience. In January 2016 the Parks, Woodlands and Greenspaces Forum engaged in a workshop session on the parks review and made clear its priorities to Council officers which included (but were not restricted to) the importance of:
- protecting the borough's ecology and biodiversity

- providing sufficient, quality parks and green spaces for the borough's growing population
 - enhancing and improving the boroughs parks and green spaces
 - supporting and making investment funds available to volunteers
 - recognising the difference in terms of needs and approach between parks and green spaces in more built-up urban areas, and those in woodland areas
- 4.3. It is anticipated that the Parks, Woodlands and Greenspaces Forum will play a valuable role in helping to shape the vision, direction and implementation of the parks review, and Council officers will discuss this with the forum and the best way to take it forward at future meetings of the forum.

5. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report as it is envisaged that the consultation work with residents will be undertaken within existing resources within the Place Department. However, the outcome of the consultation will help inform the £100k saving relating to the Parks Review.
- 5.2. As the different elements of the overall review progress additional capital expenditure may be required (for example, to provide additional or improved facilities in the borough's parks), however, this funding would be drawn from S106 monies contributed by developers and "ring fenced" to expenditure on parks and green spaces and subject to the usual application and approval process or, if appropriate funding may be sought from the Croydon Challenge transformation budget.

(Approved by Lisa Taylor – Head of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer)

6. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

- 6.1. The Council Solicitor comments that there is no statutory requirement for local authorities to provide parks and open spaces. The Public Health Act 1848 provided a legal power for local authorities to provide parks and open spaces to tackle public health problems. The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides for developer contributions towards parks and open spaces through section (the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) can also play a role). Local authorities also have a responsibility to maintain cemeteries in good order, and to provide allotments under the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, but the extent and nature of provision is discretionary.
- 6.2. In terms of future actions that may emerge in the Delivery Plan consideration will need to be given to any covenants or legal restrictions that may be in place for individual parks and open spaces concerning how they are used which could impact implementation.

- 6.3. The Council has a statutory duty of care (under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) to manage, protect and preserve the biodiversity value of its parks and open spaces. The Council is also fortunate to have green spaces which are of regional and national importance (Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and which therefore carry with them specific obligations with regard to the use and management of these spaces.

(Approved by Gabriel Macgregor, Acting Council Solicitor and Acting Monitoring Officer.)

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 7.1. There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

(Approved by: Adrian Prescod, HR Business Partner - Place Department)

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1. Croydon is a borough with a growing population that is increasingly diverse, and includes a higher proportion of younger people and older people than London and England. Much of the south of Croydon is affluent green belt; the metropolitan centre is a strategic business, retail and transport hub; and the north of the borough is inner city in character with some prosperous neighbourhoods. Areas with marked deprivation and lack of opportunity are concentrated in the north of the borough and in small pockets in the east and south. The borough is becoming more deprived according to the latest findings of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2015). Access to good quality parks and green spaces is not evenly distributed across the borough, and those in more deprived areas have poorer provision.
- 8.2. A high level initial equalities assessment has been carried out and a number of the proposed actions included in the review could potentially result in a negative impact, however, this analysis will be informed by the proposed engagement with residents and stakeholders.
- 8.3. The implementation of the detailed proposals included in the review will require further equality analysis as the implementation progresses and mitigating actions will be identified and developed as part of the implementation process.
- 8.4. Summary of the high level impact:
- Improving access to high quality parks and green spaces, improving take up of physical exercise, an improved cultural offer and more opportunities to volunteer should have a positive impact

on all the borough's residents

- Rationalising sports provision in certain parks may impact on younger people taking part. Reduction in bowls provision may impact on older people however. Mitigation may be possible through alternative provision, or through community initiatives and volunteering.
- Increasing allotment rents may also impact on older people disproportionately. Mitigation will be possible through concessions being made available

8.5. Summary of the detailed proposals and analysis

- Sustainable service delivery model – a more efficient allocation of resources to priority parks thereby improving provision
- Improving health and wellbeing – better facilities and promotion of sports and physical activity available, which should improve health outcomes
- Improving the cultural offer – more activities and entertainment should make the borough a more interesting lively place to live, plus stimulate the local economy and potentially local employment.
- Community Stewardship of the boroughs parks – will increase opportunities and awareness of volunteering

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 9.1. No specific adverse environmental impacts have been identified resulting from the proposals contained in this report.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

- 10.1. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires at section 17: It shall be the duty of each authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. There are no specific recommendations in the report that impact on the prevention of crime and disorder.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

- 11.1. The basis for the recommendations set out in this report are the opportunities presented in Section 3 to deliver real benefits to local people through improved outcomes, a stronger relationship with local communities and partnership in delivering services to our parks and green spaces, and a sustainable service model for the future.

12. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 12.1. Do Nothing: The Croydon Challenge requires discretionary expenditure and service delivery methods to be challenged in order

to meet the £100m savings target, and therefore doing nothing

- 12.2. Disposal of parks for development: The Council is committed to retaining the boroughs parks for future generations and has rejected the disposal of parks and green spaces as an option.

CONTACT OFFICER: Stephen Tate, Director of District Centres and Regeneration, Ext. 63344

BACKGROUND PAPERS - LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None

Appendix A: Croydon's Local Plan – Strategic Policies Partial Review (preferred and Alternative Options)

GREEN GRID

Policy SP7: Green Grid SP7.1 In order to deliver new and enhanced green infrastructure commensurate with growth the Council will apply a presumption in favour of development provided applications assist in the delivery of a Green Grid and meet the requirements of Policy SP7 and other applicable policies of the development plan.

Green spaces

SP7.2 The Council will protect and safeguard the extent of the borough's Metropolitan Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Local Green Spaces.

SP7.3 The Council will establish a network of multi-functional open spaces, a 'Green Grid', comprising those parts of the All London Green Grid together with other green spaces within the borough as shown in Figure 6.2 and Section 7 – The Places of Croydon. The Council and its partners will:

- a. Seek the provision and creation of new green spaces. With particular focus for areas deficient in access to nature, play areas, and publicly accessible recreational open space;
- b. Improve access and links to and through green spaces to encourage walking, cycling and horse-riding;
- c. Assist in the delivery of the Mayor's All London Green Grid through the implementation of the London Downlands and Wandle Valley Area Frameworks;
- d. Maintain and improve the quality, function and offer of open spaces across the borough for all users; and e. Maximise opportunities for street tree planting, green roofs, green walls and green landscaping to assist urban cooling in a changing climate.

Biodiversity

SP7.4 The Council and its partners will enhance biodiversity across the borough, assist ecological restoration and address spatial deficiencies in access to nature by:

- a. Protecting and enhancing sites of importance for biological and geological diversity;
- b. Improving the quality of current sites through habitat management;
- c. Exploring options to increase the size of wildlife areas of existing sites and creating new areas for wildlife;
- d. Enhancing connections between, or joining up sites, either through direct physical corridors, or through a series of linked sites;
- e. Reducing the pressures on wildlife and sensitive sites by improving the wider environment around wildlife sites by establishing buffer areas; and
- f. Promoting the naturalisation of landscapes and the enhancement of Croydon's natural landscape signatures. Productive landscapes

SP7.5 The Council and its partners will support the role of productive landscapes by:

- a. Protecting and enhancing allotments, community gardens and woodland; and
- b. Supporting food growing, tree planting and forestry, including the temporary utilisation of cleared sites; and encouraging major residential developments⁶⁴⁴⁹ to incorporate edible planting and growing spaces at multiple floor levels; and
- c. Ensuring landscaping is flexible so that spaces may be adapted for growing opportunities.

Proposed amendments to the Policies Map

Each of the designations set by this policy is shown on the Policies Map. These designations are largely the same as the designations of the existing Croydon Local Plan: Strategic Policies adopted in April 2013. However there are a number of amendments. These changes are summarised in Table 6.1 and full details including maps of each amendment can be found in *Changes to the Policies Map arising from proposals contained within the Croydon Local Plan: Strategic Policies – Partial Review (Preferred and Alternative Options)* and the *Croydon Local Plan: Detailed Policies and Proposals (Preferred and Alternative Options)* that is published as part of this consultation.

