



Service Design Proposal

Parks, Open Spaces & Cemeteries

1. What is the recommendation?

The Council should seek to attract at least £14m of external capital into parks in the next five years through applying for funds, participating in regeneration and seeking commercial opportunities.

A Parks Service should be created which focuses on policy and future plans for parks, setting and monitoring standards, animating parks, and running cost effective contracts and services.

It is also recommended that a package of operational, income and labour cost savings and management improvements be made to make the service more cost effective and efficient .

2. Why is this proposal recommended?

Barking and Dagenham is a green borough with some 32% of land being parks and green spaces. It has 25 parks and open spaces with marginally more than the North East London Strategic Alliance average of green space per head. But whilst it is well provided with green space, the quality of many of these is poor, low quality, dilapidated and denuded. This is partially the result of out of date strategies and plans which are not fit for purpose.

Whilst the Council has attracted some inward investment to parks, significant further inward investment is still needed for both for the basics of maintenance and safety, to halt decline and to reverse the gradually increasing dilapidation.

Barking and Dagenham is seeking to become a destination of choice and it is vital that the public realm looks the best it possibly can if that is to become a reality. A high quality park can play a significant and active part in regeneration adding up to 25% to the value of properties bordering high quality and attractive green spaces and making regeneration schemes work.

To make the most of opportunities there needs to be a parks service within the Council and the policy, capital bidding and funding strategic resources reinstated.

At a practical and operational level the grounds maintenance service is relatively expensive. This is primarily because of the cost of labour (wage rates and employment terms). It also does not have clear standards or performance management accountability.

A proposal for a new cemetery area is half finished and needs a further injection of capital to be used, valued, and generate income.

3. What does the future service look like?

Intelligent - There will be parks expertise and knowledge of the needs, wants and aspirations of current and future populations.

Coherent - There will be a Parks Service with all the relevant functions and the aspects associated with seeking and delivering capital projects will be created.

Go getting - The service will connect with funders and investors - experiment with a number of ways of getting in funding- and play an active part in the regeneration of the borough.

Planned - There will be a clear policy framework and a plan for each park.

Efficient and Accountable - There will be clear standards, quality control and performance reporting.

Parks will feel well kept and cared for and be safe. There will be actual physical and tangible improvements on some sites, and plans for improvements in each area. Local people will know about plans for the future and be involved in making them. There will be facilities, activities and opportunities for all sections of the population to enjoy, exercise, play, eat and relax in parks. There will be opportunities for community schemes and events.

4. What will the service deliver?

- A new parks policy and a plan for each park informed by data on needs and consulted on with the community
- Capital investment of £5-7m or more
- Invest to save revenue from the cemetery of £500,000
- A source of expertise and wisdom on parks and regeneration
- Ideas and actual funding packages for a number of parks
- An enhanced cemetery site at Chadwell Heath
- A more efficient grounds maintenance service
- Performance reports and quality control

5. What are the constituent parts?

- Oversight of the open space, green, grey and riverbank areas of the borough
- Parks policy, strategy and planning
- Parks infrastructure, asset management and buildings
- Specialist and non-specialist horticulture
- Cemeteries

6. What will be different for the customer?

Customers will hear about and be involved in planning for the future of their parks (incorporated in the new strategy). In time they will see physical changes in the boroughs Park and Open Spaces with more facilities and more to do within the parks. There may be more commercially operated facilities in parks. Changes will range from small scale (e.g. paths) to major parks refurbishments. As a result of better planning, improved space/park configuration and a focus on cost efficiencies the upkeep cost will reduce whilst customer satisfaction rises.

The existing cemeteries offer in the Council will be enhanced with improvements in the Chadwell Heath extension making this site more attractive. There will be an increase in cemetery fees to match London averages.

7. What will need to change in the service(s)?

- A single service with a manager will be created with a sense of leadership will be instilled
- Development staff will be recruited and new skills will be available for funding work and delivery of capital schemes
- The vision, ambition and plans for Parks will be established

- There will need to be greater creativity and the service will become more outward looking and will be fully involved in the regeneration of the borough and planning and green space matters
- There will need to be access to, or staff in post, with procurement skills
- Quality control systems will be introduced and regular performance report produced.
- There will be an emphasis on increasing efficiency and saving costs including looking at workforce matters
- A more proactive role will be taken in respect of work with undertakers

8. What will be the impact on the workforce?

The workforce will be restructured into a single service under one management. The workforce savings of £450k come from a mixture of fewer jobs, a more productive and efficient workforce, revised working patterns and revised T&Cs that more closely match the market.

9. When will the changes take effect?

- A new interim service with an interim manager will be created within 6 months
- A complete new service with the required new functions will be established by year end
- Wage rates and terms and conditions can be changed within a year of decision
- Performance systems and quality control will be introduced within 6 months.
- The new consulted upon policy and masterplans will be created in a total of 18 months from the appointment of a specialist
- The integration of specialist and non-specialist horticulture - and the transfer of trade waste to the waste service will take place in 6 months
- The Chadwell Heath works will be completed in 9 months
- The process to seek investment interest will take approximately 9 months to kick off. If successful it is estimated it would be 2-3 years before projects are on site depending on their size and scale. Smaller projects could be initiated much more quickly

10. When will customer outcomes be seen?

Capital investment in the parks infrastructure will vary from between 2 to 10 years.

An improvement in performance particularly in non-specialist horticulture within 6 months.

11. What savings will be made from the changes?

- Capital investment of £5 - £7m or more will be brought into parks.
- Efficiency measures and reductions of labour costs will save £628,000
- Income of £777,500 will be achieved through the cemetery invest to save and other measures.
- Fee increases and £350k investment in cemeteries will raise Income of £500,000 by 2020.

Revenue savings

- Increased income from fees and charges/events/facilities/lease review £33k
- Review of utilities spend £8k
- Endowments from regeneration projects - £100k

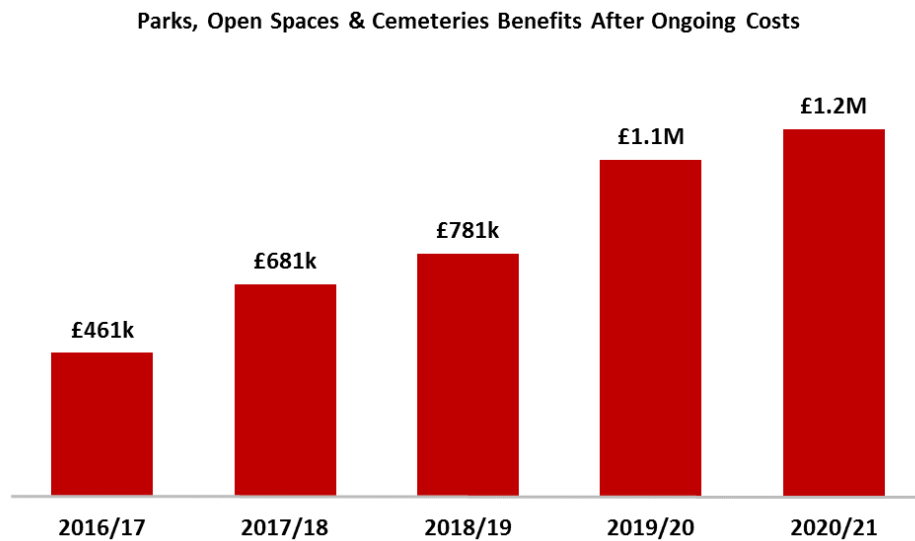
- Cemeteries income - £600k
- Review of wage rates to market rate – up to £312k
- Removal of tea breaks - 130k
- Changes to maintenance regimes - 13k
- Increased revenue from schools - £20k
- Shared access to sites - £25k
- Bin rationalisation - £18k
- Review of vehicles and plant - £47k
- Handyperson service for smaller tasks - £50k
- Service Integration - £50k

Capital assumptions from new model

- Community Investment Levy - £350k
- External Funding Sources - £4.5M
- Regeneration projects contributions - £1M
- If there was success in seeking commercial investment further capital and revenue could be achieved

12. When will the savings be realised?

Savings will be realised from 2016/17 onwards.



Savings from a large scale commercial investment, if the market was forthcoming and proposals acceptable, could be 2 years from the decision with smaller changes being implemented earlier. These potential savings have not been reflected in the graph above.