

CABINET

8 April 2014

Title: Park Development Project: Central Park, Eastbrookend Country Park and Parsloes Park	
Report of the Leader of the Council	
Open Report	For Decision
Wards Affected: Alibon, Eastbrook, Heath, Mayesbrook & Parsloes	Key Decision: Yes
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Accountable Divisional Director: Robin Payne, Divisional Director of Environmental Services	
Accountable Director: Darren Henaghan, Corporate Director of Housing and Environment	
Summary: <p>This report advises on the results of the public consultation exercise undertaken between December 2013 and January 2014 and focuses on the capital investment issues identified by respondents. The aim of this consultation was to find out what park users like and dislike about Central Park, Eastbrookend County Park and Parsloes Park, and establish what improvements the local community would most like to see in these important green spaces.</p> <p>The results of the consultation confirm that these are well used and much valued green spaces but the local community believes that they have suffered from a lack of investment over the years, and are no longer adequately cared for by the Council.</p> <p>The proposed capital works will provide a response to concerns expressed by local people and will help enhance the parks and provide park users with access to improved open spaces and high quality park facilities in the Dagenham area.</p> <p>There are significant community benefits from these proposals: these are strategic parks and some of the Borough's most important community assets providing high quality green spaces and a wide range of benefits including – economic, social and environmental.</p>	
Recommendation(s) <p>The Cabinet is asked to authorise the Corporate Director of Housing and Environment, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, to act on the results of the public consultation and develop a capital programme of park improvements for Central Park, Eastbrookend Country Park and Parsloes Park.</p>	

Reason(s)

The Borough's parks and green spaces are central to making Barking and Dagenham an attractive place to live and work. The improvement of these valuable community assets will assist the Council in achieving its Vision and Priorities, specifically in relation to encouraging growth and unlocking potential, reducing crime and the fear of crime, and improving health and wellbeing in the Borough.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Good quality parks and open spaces are central to the success of the Borough. They provide residents with a refuge from their busy lives. They are places to exercise, to socialise and to relax. They support wildlife, clean our air and help reduce flooding.
- 1.2 These strategic parks already make a valuable contribution in terms of improving the outcomes for local people; health and wellbeing, the local economy, stronger and more engaged communities and help create a greater sense of pride and satisfaction with where people live.
- 1.3 In 2000 the Council agreed its Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2004 and in the past few years several of the borough's parks have been restored and the value of the parks to their communities recognised.
- 1.4 Although Central Park, Eastbrookend Park and Parsloes Park have all benefitted from some modest investment in play areas, equipment, parking etc these parks remain in need of further improvement to achieve their full potential.
- 1.5 The public consultation exercise undertaken between December 2013 and January 2014 was aimed at the local community, regular park users and key stakeholders and provided an opportunity for people to tell the Council what they like or dislike about these parks, and what improvements they would like to see. The results of the survey are detailed in a later section of this report.

2. The value of parks and green spaces

- 2.1 Parks and green spaces have economic, social and environmental benefits. More specifically the benefits of good quality parks include:

Economic value

- Economic value to homeowners
- Value to business
- Value to local authority

Social value

- Value to individuals
- Value to society

Environmental value

- Sustainability

- Adaptation and mitigation of climate change
- Air quality – green lungs
- Contribution to open space network

2.2 Therefore the borough's parks already directly contribute towards the Council's Vision and the achievement of its Priorities by helping to encourage growth and unlock potential, reducing crime and the fear of crime, and improving health and wellbeing in the Borough.

2.3 However, to achieve their full potential Central Park, Eastbrookend Country Park and Parsloes Park now require additional capital investment. This investment will help further develop the link between peoples' satisfaction with their local park and green space and their satisfaction with their neighbourhood, and if people are satisfied with their local parks they tend to be satisfied with their council.

3. Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2004 (PGSS)

3.1 The aims of the PGSS were:

- Contribute towards making the borough a more attractive place to live and work in;
- Promote healthy activities such as cycling and walking;
- Encourage local people to become more involved in caring for their park;
- Encourage everyone to use parks to learn about the natural world; and
- Encourage people to use parks for events and festivals to celebrate heritage and culture.

3.2 By 2020 the goal of the PGSS was to provide a well connected system of attractive and well maintained parks and green spaces which meet the needs of the local community and contribute towards social, environmental and economic well being.

3.2 **Appendix 1** provides details of the original PGSS recommendations for the three parks. Unfortunately with the exception of limited ad hoc investment many of the recommendations have not been fulfilled.

3.3 Although any improvement works should support where possible the original aspirations for these parks the limited financial resources available will naturally impose a limit on extent of the improvements, and any work must also acknowledge the financial challenges now facing the organisation and the impact of savings targets on current and future revenue budgets which are likely to be significantly less.

3.4 However, as emphasised in the PGSS any investment must be informed by community consultation, supported by demonstrable demand and be guided by a coherent management plan.

4. Public consultation

4.1 The park improvement consultation commenced in December 2013 and closed on 31 January 2014.

- 4.2 The survey questionnaire was available on line via the Council's consultation portal, and as a hard copy. A link to the porthole was added to each of the park web pages and also on the Council's Face Book and Twitter sites. A press release was also printed in the Dagenham Post.
- 4.3 Hard copies of the questionnaire were sent to key stakeholders, all six local schools, various other local clubs and organisations, and hard copies were distributed via various Council venues including the Civic Centre, the Millennium Centre, Barking Town Hall and Broadway Theatre.
- 4.4 In addition, questionnaires were also distributed at a number of community meetings.
- 4.5 On site the survey was promoted with banners displayed at key locations, and some face to face 'interviews' were also undertaken although with limited success due to the exceptionally wet weather during the consultation period, and the associated low number of people in the parks.
- 4.6 **Table 1** below provides a summary of the response to the consultation:

Site	On line responses	Hard copy responses	Total responses
Central Park & Eastbrookend Country Park	75	5	80
Parsloes Park	72	2	74
Total responses:	147	7	154

5. Results and key findings

- 5.1 **Appendix 2** provides a detailed summary of the survey results for Central Park/Eastbrookend Country Park, and **appendix 3** provides a similar summary for Parsloes Park. The consultation identified a range of both capital and revenue issues. However, this report only deals with those issues that can be addressed with capital investment.
- 5.2 As anticipated respondents to the consultation identified a broad range of issues and cited a wide spectrum of potential facility and environmental improvements.
- 5.3 However, from the analysis for the survey results it is possible to identify some common themes and recurring issues.
- 5.4 **Central Park**

Of the options provided in the questionnaire respondents indicated that the main improvements they would most like to see include: public toilet facilities, environmental/habitat improvements, creation of a community hub including refreshments and additional park furniture (e.g. seats, litter and dog bins, signage etc).

In general people enjoy the large open space that the opportunities for informal (e.g. walking) and formal (e.g. sports facilities) exercise that the park provides.

However, a variety of issues had a negative impact on peoples' enjoyment of the park including: a lack of good quality facilities such as play equipment, deteriorating maintenance standards, insufficient seats and bins, inadequate lighting and antisocial behaviour (e.g. irresponsible dog ownership, littering, vandalism and drinking).

5.5 Eastbrookend Country Park

Of the options provided in the questionnaire respondents indicated that the main improvements they would most like to see include: reopen the café, improve the quality and maintenance of path surfaces, additional dog and litter bins, and better security in and around the car parks (e.g. lighting and CCTV), improved signage to promote the park.

The park is valued for the natural environment and opportunities it provides for peaceful relaxation, exercise and informal recreational activities such as dog walking.

However, enjoyment of the park is affected by the poor quality of the footpaths, irresponsible dog ownership, littering, and run down facilities (e.g. Millennium Centre).

5.6 Parsloes Park

Of the options provided in the questionnaire respondents indicated that the main improvements they would most like to see include: public toilets, refreshments, additional park furniture (e.g. seats, bins and signage), increased and better children's play facilities, more flower beds, as well as investment in the footpaths and sport facilities (i.e. sports pavilion and football pitches).

The park provides local people with access to large open space with a lake and wildlife; it's a place to exercise and has historic links.

However, respondents would like anti social behaviour addressed (e.g. vandalism, drinking, irresponsible dog ownership and littering) and an improved range of facilities (e.g. sports pavilion, pitches, toilets, better play equipment, tennis courts, park lighting etc) to help make the park more attractive, safe and family orientated.

5.7 Standard of cleanliness and park environment

Although respondents identified a number of areas for improvement the survey produced some encouraging results in terms of perceptions of cleanliness and the park environments. Overall across all three parks cleanliness was consider to be very good, good or fair by 11.08% (av), 28.74% (av) and 32.40% (av) of respondents respectively.

5.8 Friends Group membership and volunteering

Disappointingly the results demonstrated a degree of reluctance and apathy in terms of support for greater community involvement in the management and maintenance of the parks. In each case over 50% of respondents indicated that they would not be interested in joining a friends group or volunteering. This could be down to a lack of knowledge and understanding of what is involved so obviously there is additional work to be done in these areas to address any misconceptions and engender a greater sense of community ownership and shared responsibility.

6. Financial Implications

Implications completed by: Carl Tomlinson, Group Finance Manager

- 6.1 Following on from the public consultation exercise, and subject to Cabinet's decision, the cost of any improvements would need to be identified and funding options can then be reviewed.
- 6.2 The majority of capital improvements identified by the consultation which include proposals such as additional park infrastructure, environmental enhancements, CCTV installations etc will inevitably have revenue budget implications such as additional maintenance costs i.e. cleaning, grounds maintenance, CCTV maintenance etc. Any revenue costs identified as a result of the agreed programme of works would need to be maintained within existing revenue budgets year on year.

7. Legal Implications

Implications completed by: Paul Feild Senior Corporate Governance Lawyer

- 7.1 As set out in the report and further evidenced in the appendixes to this report the parks and open spaces of the Borough are valued amenities for the community. It is a legal requirement that decisions about the use and development of these assets is carried out with full consultation and inclusion of all the communities and if need be out reach strategies developed and implemented to ensure a full participation and having due regard to any consultation undertaken.
- 7.2 Any decisions which may impact upon existing arrangements for usage of the faculties by clubs and other bodies will need to be in accordance with any agreements entered into or varied.
- 7.3 Finally any procurement issues identified will need to be carried out in accordance with the Council Contract Rules.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1 **Risk Management** – The improvement of the borough's parks will help remove some of the current risks the Council carries in relation to its duty of care responsibilities for the parks.

The key risks associated with this proposal relate to asset management and sustainability. Action has been or will be taken to manage or mitigate these risks.

- 8.2 **Planning** - Subject to agreeing the actual park improvements the viability of aspects of this proposal could be dependent on planning permission being approved for the provision of the proposed public toilets, park lighting, children's play and recreational facilities etc. To help mitigate the risk in this respect meetings will be held with the Council's Property Advisory Group and officers in the planning team to inform the development of these proposals.
- 8.3 **Customer impact** – As a result of the works it is expected that there will be better access to high quality facilities by regular park users and stakeholders, and also the wider community resulting from the enhanced facilities.
- 8.4 **Crime and Disorder Issues** - The Council has a statutory duty to consider crime and disorder implications in all its decision making. The parks will provide a wide range of activities and quality facilities, which will provide positive activities for all residents.

The proposed improvements are therefore consistent with the Council's Community Strategy and the promotion of community cohesion and crime reduction.

- 8.5 **Health issues** – It is well known that a lack of physical activity is one of the main risk factors for heart disease and diabetes. But less well known is the fact that a lack of physical activity can increase risk factors in a range of other health areas, including mental health.

Parks can bring about significant improvements in physical health and well-being from exercise and relaxation, and can also help promote improved mental health and happiness through connection with nature. Therefore, the proposed improvements are consistent with the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy to improve the health and well-being of individuals and build community cohesion through increased participation of children, young people and adults in sport and physical activity.

- 8.6 **Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Children** – parks provide extensive opportunities for positive and diversionary activities for young people.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None

List of appendices:

- Appendix 1 - Parks and Green Spaces Strategy
- Appendix 2 - Summary of consultation results – Central Park and Eastbrookend Country Park
- Appendix 3 - Summary of consultation results – Parsloes Park