


|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Grants Determination (Cabinet) Sub-Committee</b><br><br>18 September 2024 | <br><b>TOWER HAMLETS</b> |
| <b>Report of:</b> Simon Baxter, Corporate Director of Communities            | <b>Classification:</b><br>Unrestricted  |
| <b>Renewal of Service Level Agreement of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park</b>     |   |

**Proposed Decision Path (indicate) – Delete Section Before Publication:**

|  | Step [Delete as applicable] | Date       |
|--|-----------------------------|------------|
| DLT Level (Tier One)                     | DLT / CD                    | NA         |
| CLT Level (Tier Two)                     | CLT / CE                    | NA         |
| Discussion with Mayor (Tier Three)       | MAY                         | 08/04/2024 |
| Discussion with Lead Member (Tier Three) | LM                          | 27/02/2024 |
| Member Level (Tier four)                 | MAB / 121                   | NA         |
| Decision (Tier five)                     | Cabinet / IMD               | NA         |

**Proposed Decision Path (indicate) – Delete Section Before Publication:**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Lead Member</b>                       | Councillor Kamrul Hussain, Cabinet Member for Culture & Recreation                                  |
| <b>Originating Officer(s)</b>            | Catherine Boyd, Head of Arts, Parks & Events & Mohammed Raja, Parks Development Officer (Community) |
| <b>Wards affected</b>                    | Blackwall & Cubitt Town, Island Gardens, Canary Wharf   |
| <b>Key Decision?</b>                     | No  |
| <b>Reason for Key Decision</b>           | This report has been reviewed as not meeting the Key Decision criteria.                             |
| <b>Forward Plan Notice Published</b>     | TBC   |
| <b>Exempt information</b>                | NA  |
| <b>Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome</b> | 4. Boosting culture, business, jobs, and leisure  |

**Executive Summary**

Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park is a unique, important, and much-loved open space managed by a community-based charity (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park,

registered charity number 1107136). The site forms part of the borough’s physical heritage and is a much-valued community asset. Although the land is owned by the Council, the management has been in the hands of the community since 1990.

Tower Hamlets Council has provided the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park with funding from the Parks Department’s revenue budget in the form of a service level agreement to support the management and maintenance of this important open space site for many years. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for a 1-year service level agreement to come from the Parks Department’s revenue budget for this organisation.

**THIS SECTION TO BE DELETED BEFORE PUBLICATION**

**Decision Type**

| <b>Key Decision?</b> | <b>Urgent Decision?</b> | <b>Exempt from Call-In?</b> | <b>Restricted Report or Partially Restricted (e.g. appendix)?</b> |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| No                   | No                      | No                          | No  |

\*If the answer is yes make sure the forthcoming decision on the website states this or else the decision cannot be taken.

**Guidance Documents**

Further details on the procedure for Urgent Decisions can be found in the [Intranet Library](#) and the Guide to Report Writing [guidance note](#).

**Specific Issues for Pre-Decision Meetings**

(Officers may use the following table to add points of note for internal meetings such as CLT, MAB or DMTs. Content can be deleted at any stage and, in any case, will be before publication for the decision making meeting.)

|                                    |
|------------------------------------|
| <b>Directorate Leadership Team</b> |
|                                    |
| <b>Corporate Leadership Team</b>   |
|                                    |
| <b>Mayor/Lead Member</b>           |
|                                    |

|                       |
|-----------------------|
|                       |
| <b>Communications</b> |
|                       |

**THIS SECTION TO BE DELETED BEFORE PUBLICATION**

**Recommendations:**

The Grants Determination Sub-Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the Service Level Agreement (appended) for the Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park (£31,900 from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025).

**1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park is a unique, important and much-loved open spaces managed by a charitable community-based organisation.
- 1.2 For many years, Tower Hamlets Council has provided the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park with funding from the Parks Department's revenue budget in the form of a service level agreement to support the land management and maintenance of this important open space.
- 1.3 The Council's Legal Department have advised that the service level agreement should be treated as a grant.

**2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 **Cease providing support for the maintenance and management of this site.** This would have a very negative impact on the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park and the valuable services the charity provides to the local community. Although, as is pointed out in section 3, the Council's contribution to the organisation's income does not represent a high percentage of their turnover, the support of the local authority is essential for unlocking other funding sources, and cessation of this support could potentially have a negative knock-on effect resulting in the reduction (or loss) of other funding. These projects are extremely valued by local

residents, and well embedded in the community, and cessation (or, indeed reduction) of this support is likely to elicit considerable protest from local residents.

- 2.2 Through the SLA, the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park provide a range of in-kind and match funding towards the management and maintenance of the open space.

### **3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

- 3.1 Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park plays a unique role within the open space portfolio of the borough. The site is owned by the local authority and has managed by the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park for many years.
- 3.2 To provide support to the organisation for the maintenance, upkeep and ongoing community access, the Council has had a service level agreement with the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park for over 20 years. Not only does this charitable community group provide excellent value for money in the management of this unusual site, but they increase the sense of community ownership and engagement with parks and open spaces.
- 3.3 Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park do not receive any other grants from the Council and have not received any funding from the Parks Service to deliver any other activities this financial year. Council departments, including Parks and the family Hubs, do occasionally commission Tower Hamlets Cemetery Parks to deliver activities and workshops. Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park have also received s106 funding towards improvements to the site (2023/24).
- 3.4 Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park is a historic cemetery located in Mile End. The cemetery opened in 1841 and closed for burials in 1966. It is regarded as one of the seven great cemeteries of the time (now known as the "Magnificent Seven"). It was originally named The City of London and Tower Hamlets Cemetery but was called Bow Cemetery by locals. It is now a nature reserve, and other land has been added to the park, including "Scrapyard Meadow".
- 3.5 The Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park is a designated local nature reserve, open to the public. It resembles natural woodland, with many bird and insect species making it their home, although there are still a large number of gravestones and funerary monuments.
- 3.6 Tower Hamlets Council took over the ownership of the park in 1986. It was declared a Local Nature Reserve in May 2000 along with adjacent open land on Cantrell Road and Ackroyd Drive. It has also been designated as Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation and a Conservation area. The high brick walls which surround it are on the national register of listed buildings as are 7 individual memorials (all Grade II).
- 3.7 The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park are a group of local people who came together in 1990 because they were concerned over the increasing

neglect of the site by successive owners. Their main objectives are to encourage greater use of this inner urban green space as a sanctuary for people and a place of biodiversity. The Friends manage the park under a service level agreement with the borough.

- 3.8 A leaflet produced by the Friends guides visitors around the reserve and some of the more notable graves and many residents and visitors benefit from access to this unique open space.
- 3.9 In 2023/24 the Friends group provided free educational sessions for over 5,000 school children (through 180 school visits). The Friends also hold approximately 170 events per year through which 3,000 people visited in 2023/24.
- 3.10 The Friends group also work with approximately 3,000 volunteers per annum to help undertake the grave recording, site maintenance and habitat management. The Cemetery Park is regarded by other historic cemeteries in London as the most effective at community involvement and wildlife management.
- 3.11 There is an annual management plan for the site, which is monitored by the Council's Parks service through quarterly site inspections. This is to ensure that the charity is managing and maintaining the open space to a good standard. The following aspects are monitored at the inspection meetings: litter management; management of trees, shrubs and hedges; pathway maintenance; promotion of biodiversity; lighting; signage and maintenance of benches etc. The site continues to hold Green Flag status, an external award, through which a high level of good land management and community engagement must be demonstrated.

#### **4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The service level agreement makes several references to equalities. Organisations are required to have Equal Opportunities policies, and special requirements are contained within the SLA to ensure the organisations actively promote participation and comply with the Equality Act 2010.
- 4.2 The service level agreement actively promotes the involvement of local residents in managing open space. It creates opportunities for people from different communities to work together around a shared enthusiasm for open space, wildlife, animals, ecology and so on. Research has demonstrated that communities with a greater 'stake' in their areas are more likely to feel a sense of engagement and participation. Enabling local community groups, run by local people, to manage open space is an important tool to helping individual and group empowerment.
- 4.3 Tower Hamlets is a borough with high levels of deprivation and high population density. Although the wards in which these two open spaces are

located are not the most deprived in the borough, the borough is a patchwork of areas of high and low deprivation, so access to green space is relevant across the whole of the local authority. Moreover, the population of Tower Hamlets is set to grow exponentially, particularly the surrounding areas of the ward. In this context open space is essential. Not only does it offer a green 'lung' for the area and help mitigate pollution, but it offers residents an opportunity to come together in an era when children can no longer play in the street and the absence of a traditional town centre deprives communities of shared space.

## **5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
  - Consultations,
  - Environmental (including air quality),
  - Risk Management,
  - Crime Reduction,
  - Safeguarding.
  - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.
- 5.2 **Best value:** the SLA provides excellent good value for money with the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park managing 27 acres of open space for a very modest sum. The Parks and Open Spaces service would not be able to maintain this site with a comparable budget, and the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park are able to provide match funding through volunteer hours and fundraising activities that support the wider upkeep of the site. The organisation brings extensive community benefits to the borough as outlined in paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9. Paragraph 3.10 outlines how the SLA outcomes are monitored.
- 5.3 **Consultations:** although no formal consultations are required, through the SLA, the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park are encouraged to work with residents to inform the management of the space.
- 5.4 **Environmental:** through the SLA, the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park support the upkeep of the site through litter management, hedge and shrub maintenance and report any tree related issues to the LBTH Tree Officer. The charity promotes biodiversity through the clearance of invasive plants, plant bulbs, wildflowers, maintenance and development of grassland and woodland habitats.
- 5.5 **Risk Management:** under the SLA the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park must comply with the requirements of the Health & Safety and Work Act 1974 and of any other Acts Regulations or Orders about Health & Safety. Furthermore, the charity has a risk management policy and procedures, monitored by a board of trustees.

- 5.6 **Crime Reduction:** the SLA supports crime reduction by ensuring the site is well maintained and used. The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park work with the Parks Service and Community Safety to address any anti-social behaviour issues.
- 5.7 **Safeguarding:** under the SLA it is the responsibility of the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park to take appropriate measures to protect the public when recruiting staff and volunteers. The charity has a safeguarding policy in place. All employees must be appropriately vetted through the Disclosure Barring Service.
- 5.8 **Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment:** under the SLA, the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park must conform to all existing and new legislation including the Data Protection Act 2018.

## **6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 6.1 The report seeks the Grants Determination Sub-Committee approval to award an annual grant of £31,900 to Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park for a period of 1 year from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. If approved, the grant will continue to be funded through the renewal of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the charitable community-based organisation.
- 6.2 Highlighted within the report are the benefits that the SLA provides the council contributing towards the community plan priorities, whilst providing the basis for objectives to be monitored. There is sufficient provision within the Parks budget to support the grants. However, the extent to which the grant funding of the community-based organisations continues to remain a commitment will need to be considered alongside the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy as part of the budget process in future years.

---

### **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

#### **Linked Report**

- NONE

#### **Appendices**

- NONE

#### **Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012**

- NONE

**Officer contact details for documents:**

Mohammed Raja

Parks Development Officer (Community)

Mile End Play Pavilion

Locksley Street

E14 7EJ

[Mohammed.raja@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:Mohammed.raja@towerhamlets.gov.uk)