

<b>Committee/Meeting:</b> Overview & Scrutiny Council	<b>Date:</b> 10 <sup>th</sup> January 2012 25 <sup>th</sup> January 2012	<b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted	<b>Report No:</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Stephen Halsey, Corporate Director CLC  <b>Originating officer(s)</b> Heather Bonfield, Service Head Culture, Learning and Leisure		<b>Title:</b> Open Space Strategy  <b>Wards Affected:</b> All	

<b>Lead Member</b>	Cllr Rania Khan
<b>Community Plan Theme</b>	A Great Place to Live, A Healthy & Supportive Community
<b>Strategic Priority</b>	Improving the Public Realm, Helping People to Live Healthier Lives

## 1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Open Space Strategy (OSS) received Cabinet approval in December 2005 to operate from April 2006 to 2016. A commitment was given to review the strategy at its mid-term point.
- 1.2 The strategy has been highly successful in leveraging approximately £20m of investment in parks and open spaces, including significant sums from the Heritage Lottery Fund for Victoria Park and St George's in the East Gardens. Investment has resulted in improved satisfaction with parks and open spaces (as measured by the ARS) increasing from 39% rating the service good, very good or excellent in 2005 to 60% in 2011.
- 1.3 This mid-point review has confirmed the positive impact of investment over time on resident perception over a period where there has been no net increase in open space across the borough. The review has also resulted in:
  - identification of investment priorities for the second phase of implementation
  - identification of sites for new open spaces
  - the OSS forming a key part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) evidence base.

## 2. **DECISIONS REQUIRED**

*Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:*

- 2.1 Comment on the draft Open Space Strategy in Appendix 1, in accordance with the Budget and Policy and Framework Procedure Rules contained in Part 4 of the Constitution
- 2.2 Note that detailed action planning for the strategy will be aligned with the annual budget cycle in light of the medium-term reductions in funding from central government.

*Council is recommended to:*

- 2.3 Adopt the Open Space Strategy in Appendix 1, subject to any amendments made by the Mayor in line with 2.1 above.
- 2.4 Note that detailed action planning for the strategy will be aligned with the annual budget cycle in light of the medium-term reductions in funding from central government.

## 3. **REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

The Open Space Strategy is a key reference document guiding investment in the borough's green spaces and development negotiations for new or better open spaces, and open space service improvements. This is an essential role as the borough remains significantly deficient in open space and the density of population planned for the borough will increase substantially over the next ten years. Local residents are becoming increasingly sensitive to this deficiency as a limited number of parks and open spaces will be required to cope with ever increasing use and demand.

The Open Space Strategy is part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework and is subject to the Budget and Policy and Framework Procedure Rules contained in Part 4 of the Constitution. Adoption of the strategy is reserved to Full Council following consultation with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

## 4. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

If the Open Space Strategy is not refreshed, the Council will risk its ability to plan effectively for open space provision in an area that is expected to see significant housing, employment and population growth. The Council will also risk not adhering to National Planning Policy Guidance, the emerging National Planning Policy Framework, and the Mayor of London's 'London Plan' around the responsibilities of Planning Authorities. Taking no action will also mean that the Open Space Strategy will not be properly aligned with the Council's

2011 Community Plan review and the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy.

The Council might revise the Open Space Strategy in different ways, but the proposed revisions are considered to be the best way forward for reasons set out in the report. A different approach might require further analysis.

## **5. BACKGROUND**

- 5.1 The Cabinet Meeting of 7th December 2005 adopted the OSS to run from April 2006 to 2016. The Cabinet agreed that there should be a review of the OSS at its midterm point.
- 5.2 This review has been timed to link with the development of the LDF Core Strategy 2025, the related Development Plan Documents (DPDs), and the work undertaken to develop the Green Grid (GG) Strategy. The OSS review has been progressed in conjunction with the DPD development processes and is cited in the LDF as being part of the evidence base that underpins planning for publicly accessible open space in the borough.
- 5.3 Officers have reviewed and updated the OSS in relation to the Community Plan and LDF developments. An independent quality audit has been completed and relevant findings incorporated. Analysis of the impact of 'Place level' localised neighbourhood planning has been undertaken with reference to projected population growth and other demographic information.

## **6. BODY OF REPORT**

### ***Access to Publicly Accessible Open Space & Needs Assessment***

- 6.1 Open spaces are categorised in planning terms by their function and size. The Mayor of London's 'London Plan' states that Londoners should have access to a local park (of 2ha or above allowing for active recreation) within 400 metres of their home. The 2006 OSS identified that due to size and location factors, most spaces in Tower Hamlets are required to serve the community as though they were in a larger size category meaning they are used more intensively than parks and open spaces elsewhere in country.
- 6.2 Tower Hamlets has a very limited number of spaces of 2ha and above and even the number of spaces above 1ha – the absolute minimum to provide for active recreation – does not provide full coverage of the borough, leaving residents in some areas of the borough without decent access to open space.
- 6.3 As the population grows, existing open spaces will be more intensively used. The Core Strategy established an open space monitoring standard of 1.2ha/1,000 residents based on the provision that existed in 2006. Population growth means that since then, the amount of open space has

fallen to approximately 1ha/1,000 residents. This trend is set to continue with the population projected to grow substantially to 2025. The current strongly supported campaign to protect King Edward Memorial Park from being used as a major construction site by Thames Water for a number of years demonstrates the importance residents are increasingly placing on access to limited open space.

- 6.4 A well structured strategic approach supported with clear policies must be maintained if the Council is to continue to be able to develop and improve open spaces to support different uses. The major investment required to bring together sites to provide for significant additional open space or major new parks in the borough is unlikely to be forthcoming from any quarter. Therefore priority investment in its existing parks and open spaces must be the key to managing local perceptions, maximizing access, coping with increasing levels of wear and tear, and addressing the diverse demands on space which are often in conflict (such as sports use, quiet enjoyment, bio-diverse habitat, and site security fears).

### ***Quality Audit & Report***

- 6.5 The 2006 OSS set out a prioritised schedule of sites for investment. This was based on site scores obtained through a comprehensive quality audit along with a set of weightings that included local access to open space, local levels of deprivation, access to alternative sites, conservation needs and other factors. Over the last five years there has been a sustained programme of improvements delivered across the borough which has sought to address the qualitative deficiencies identified in the study.
- 6.6 The OSS has proven to be very effective in supporting investment. Around 87% of the most deficient spaces have received some degree of investment in the last five years. To ensure that the OSS remains an effective reference tool for future investment planning, the qualitative assessment has been updated through a full quality audit of the borough's existing and potential open space and the findings have been incorporated into the strategy.
- 6.7 Based on the revised quality assessment a prioritised list for investment has been developed to guide resource allocation during the second phase of implementation (2011 to 2016). This can be found at Appendix E of the strategy.
- 6.8 The 2011 update of the OSS is largely a technical exercise to review the strategy and ensure it provides sound technical assessment of demand and supply in support of the emerging Development Plan Documents. The strategy does not make recommendations to day to day management of parks but identifies areas of future open space provision and site improvements based on clear geographical assessment.

## **Consultation**

- 6.9 Formal consultation on the strategy was held from 19<sup>th</sup> September – 28<sup>th</sup> October 2011. During the consultation process residents had the opportunity to complete a survey online or a hard copy by post. A number of drop-in sessions were held at Idea Stores and libraries across the borough, and separate workshops were organised specifically for key stakeholders, young people, and a Members drop-in session.
- 6.10 Consultation focused on:
- what sorts of improvements should be made to those sites that had been highlighted as being areas for priority investment
  - what kinds of functions that future open spaces should cater for
  - how the Council should balance the competing priorities of different stakeholders and interest groups, given the limited resources.
- 6.11 The latest data relating to Parks from the Annual Residents' Survey and Park User Survey was considered in parallel to this consultation activity. Formal consultation findings were broadly line with survey results, in particular around the desire to see:
- existing facilities upgraded
  - improved safety and security
  - more areas set aside for relaxation
  - more areas set aside for children and young people

## **7. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

- 7.1 The report sets out the purpose and scope of the Open Space Strategy midterm review which will assist in guiding and managing investment priorities in new and existing green spaces within the borough.
- 7.2 Whilst the strategy has been successful in levering in approx £20m of investment since 2006, it is unlikely that future resources will be forthcoming to support significant investment. The changes to the Capital funding arrangements will impact on the available capital resources along with determining the prioritisation of Section 106 funding for Supplementary Planning Document proposes mentioned in section 13.
- 7.3 The OSS will therefore need to continue to underpin the key decisions in relation to the allocation of the limited resources available set against the investment priorities.

## **8. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL SERVICES)**

- 8.1 It is important for the Council to have policies which are up to date and reflect the changing landscape of the borough. To this end, the revisions to the Open Space Strategy, which was adopted over 5 years ago, are necessary to ensure the strategy remains relevant and can be relied on to represent the current policy situation. The Open Space Strategy plays a key role in assisting the Council to accord with Government Guidance in PPG 17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation) insofar as the Strategy will be a key document informing future Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents including the Managing Development DPD and Site.
- 8.2 The Open Space Strategy has been added to the Council's policy framework pursuant to the power in regulation 5 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000. The effect of this decision is that the Open Space Strategy may not be approved by the Executive (the Mayor), but must instead follow the statutory decision process as set out in the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules at Part 4.3 of the Council's Constitution. This requirement informs the recommendations set out in section 2 of the report.
- 8.3 Should full Council adopt the updated Open Space Strategy, it will serve as an overarching strategy that guides investment in green spaces and informs the Local Development Framework and in turn local development. It will not attract the same weighting in terms of the Council's local planning policy. However approval by Council will see the Strategy approved as a key strategic policy tool to inform Local Development Framework documents.
- 8.4 Before adopting the strategy, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. Information relevant to this is set out in the One Tower Hamlets section of the report, in the strategy itself and in the associated action plan.

## **9. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS**

- 9.1 The OSS is about providing access to high quality open space within easy reach for all residents of the borough. The Strategy identifies areas of greatest deficiency and limited accessibility to open space and prioritises these areas for future investment. Implementation of the strategy will increase accessibility to, and provision of, parks and open spaces across the borough for all sections of the community. It is recognised that due to the high density of the borough, equality of physical access remains a challenge.

## **10. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT**

- 10.1 Biodiversity and sustainability are two of the key issues that the OSS addresses. Although demand for biodiversity and sustainability is not easily measurable in specific terms, the strategy recognises the significant body of evidence around the need for people to have contact with nature in their everyday lives.
- 10.2 Open spaces are therefore considered to be fundamental to the environmental and social health of the borough. For example, how trees and other plants can help reduce pollution and improve air quality, or how diverse habitats provide educational resources in an area where many schools have limited or no outdoor space of their own.
- 10.3 Biodiversity was also one of the criteria used in the quality audit, in order to assess which current open spaces should have highest priority for investment

## **11. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 None

## **12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 Resident surveys suggest that the fear of crime in parks is low compared to more general community crime concerns. However, the OSS includes objectives associated with designing out crime as part of the investment cycle.

## **13. EFFICIENCY STATEMENT**

### **Capital**

- 13.1 As a consequence of changes to Capital funding made by the Chancellor in the October 2010 Spending Review, Councils will have less capital available to spend, and borrowing will be more expensive. A capital allocation of £1,816,000 has been identified to support the Victoria Park project for the next two years, but there is no allocation to improve other borough parks. In the current financial climate some charitable sources of funds are also being reduced. The strategy is designed to target limited capital resources more effectively.
- 13.2 The slow-down in housing and other commercial development means that there may be fewer schemes generating funds through developer contributions over at least the medium term. This has been offset to some degree through more effective monitoring systems and identification of

developer contribution requirements for publicly accessible open space for all relevant developments.

- 13.3 The Council has prepared a new Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which will set out the approach to be taken for calculating those obligations arising from development. Social Housing remains a clear priority and it does make reference to on site provision of new publicly accessible open space, or (where this is not possible) it sets out the calculation of sums to be spent on acquiring or improving publicly accessible open space off site. This SPD will enable a considered approach to securing contributions.

### **Revenue**

- 13.4 Due to medium-term financial uncertainty annual action plans will be developed and aligned with the budget cycle. The action plan associated with the OSS details overarching objectives rather than specific actions for this reason.

## **14. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Open Space Strategy

---

### **Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended) List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report**

Quality Assessment

Thorsten Dreyer  
Tel: 0207 364 2862  
Anchorage House  
2 Clove Crescent  
East India Dock  
London E14 2BE