

COMMITTEE	ENVIRONMENT AND FRONT LINE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE	2 SEPTEMBER 2004
TITLE OF REPORT	GREEN SPACES REGENERATION STRATEGY
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	John Edwards Assistant Director Frontline Taskforce

1. Summary

- 1.1. Cabinet agreed, at the meeting on 18 February 2003, the development of a policy framework for green spaces regeneration to be completed by June 2005. This report provides information on progress of this work.
- 1.2. This report provides more detailed information about the play areas part of the strategy following a task group visit to play areas.
- 1.3. The report provides information on the findings of a task group requested to comment on a petition to construct a skateboard park in Cozenton Park.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The committee is requested to:
 - 2.1.1. Consider and comment on progress in developing the policy framework for green spaces regeneration, including the proposal for a second Greenspace seminar.
 - 2.1.2. Consider the comments of the task group following the visit to play areas in Medway.
 - 2.1.3. Consider the comments of the task group following the visit to Cozenton Park with regard to the petition requesting a skateboard park on the site.

3. Background

- 3.1. In response to a growing awareness of the contribution quality open and green spaces can make to urban renaissance, and recognition of a national decline and under investment in their development and management, the Government established an Urban Green Spaces Taskforce in January 2001. The purpose of the Taskforce was to lead the debate on green spaces and how they can be made safe and accessible for everyone.
- 3.2. The taskforce also considered how the inclusion of green spaces in the strategic planning for an area could be improved, especially

where there are plans for new housing and economic regeneration, such as the Thames Gateway.

3.3. The Government Taskforce concluded that:

Diversity of green spaces provision is important and there is a need to:

- ❑ concentrate on regenerating existing green spaces
- ❑ ensure provision is responsive to the needs of local people
- ❑ make best practice and new resources available
- ❑ develop new partnerships to assist in creating and managing green spaces
- ❑ improve the dissemination of information
- ❑ promote strategic approaches to planning, designing, managing and maintaining green spaces
- ❑ ensure leadership is forthcoming to galvanise change

3.4. The Taskforce published a report in May 2002 highlighting the causes of decline in green spaces as:

- ❑ lack of investment in the asset over the past 20 years
- ❑ provision is not a statutory function
- ❑ lack of a national agency to champion the cause
- ❑ weak policy framework
- ❑ poor skills base
- ❑ lack of reliable data
- ❑ slow response of providers to changing demands of geography, patterns of use, expectations and leisure patterns
- ❑ slow recognition of the importance of ecology and biodiversity
- ❑ lack of commitment and resources to engage local people
- ❑ low public expectations
- ❑ poor public image

3.5. The Government taskforce made a series of recommendations that became incorporated into a policy report titled 'Living Places, Cleaner, Safer, greener' published by the ODPM in October 2002. This report considers the research and recommendations of the taskforce but broadens the remit beyond that of the green spaces debate by setting a vision for achieving overall cleaner, safer, greener public spaces in the urban and rural environment. The government set up a new agency CAGE Space to take this forward.

3.6. Local Authorities have guidance through PPG17 (Planning Policy Guide): Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation to enable the planning process to assist in providing and connecting quality green spaces. PPG17 promotes the importance of well-planned and maintained green spaces and good quality sports and recreational facilities as a tool to achieving social inclusion, community cohesion, health and well-being. The importance of quality green space

recreational facilities within easy walking or cycling distance of peoples' homes supports the government's sustainable development agenda and lies at the heart of the guidance note.

3.7. Cabinet agreed to the development of a modular Green Spaces Regeneration Strategy, that the Green Spaces Regeneration Strategy should be developed as a policy framework document and would be recommended to Council in due course, with the timetable in the appendices implying a completion of the project by June 2005. The Cabinet also agreed to the establishment of a member cross party Green Spaces Regeneration Advisory Group, working with officers to oversee the process of policy development and project implementation and encourage partnership working and community participation. It was agreed that this group report on progress to the Cabinet and the Environment and Regeneration and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

3.8. The modular concept identified seven key areas for potential consideration:

3.9. Green spaces for Biodiversity

3.9.1. This module was to consider the state of the natural environment in both the urban and rural areas of Medway, including the management of the existing countryside resource held in public ownership and local priorities for the protection of habitats and species across the whole of Medway including the feasibility of developing a regional park across the North Kent Gateway area.

3.10. Green spaces for Outdoor Sports

3.10.1. This module covers the current level and quality of formal outdoorsports facilities in Medway, involving The Medway Towns Sports Council, local sports clubs, leagues and other interest groups and individuals in shaping the module to consider local people's aspirations for the future of outdoor sports facilities and set out an action plan for the council and its partners to provide improved facilities for all.

3.11. Green spaces for Play

3.11.1. Play is an area where there is a recognised gap between existing provision and local people's aspirations. This module analyses the current level and quality of outdoor play facilities for children and young people in Medway.

3.12. Green spaces for Parks and Gardens

3.12.1. This module will analyse the current level and standard of provision of parks and gardens at both a town and neighbourhood level. Local

people will be asked to tell us what they think about their local neighbourhood park and the type and quality of facilities provided. The rural area will be considered and the needs of people living in villages for local parks

3.13. Green spaces for Community Gardening

3.13.1 This module looks at the current level, standards and location of allotments in Medway. Interested groups and individuals will be given the opportunity to visit high quality allotment and community gardening schemes across the south of England and to explore innovative, self sufficient community gardening projects.

3.14. Green spaces: Design for Living

3.14.1 This module will look in-depth at the way people use green spaces in both the urban and rural environment in their everyday lives. It will investigate what it is that makes some parks and play areas work well and others fail miserably. Design guidelines will be produced that consider personal and community safety, design in conservation areas and best practice for siting facilities in green spaces. We will involve all major stakeholders, partners and local people in these investigations through a series of workshops and seminars in order to develop clear guidelines and set design and quality standards for the Council, partners and developers to follow when developing new and enhancing existing green spaces in Medway.

3.15. Green spaces Connecting Places

3.15.1 This module is concerned with improving access and open spacenetworks to encourage walking and cycling. Along with the Regional Park project it is recognised as a priority project for the North Kent Area Investment Framework.

4. Progress

4.1. The Medway Community Plan (04– 07) prioritises the target to ensure there is a “partnership wildlife, countryside and greenspaces strategy in place” by June 2004. This target is monitored by the Sustainable Development Partnership / LA21 Environmental Partnership. These partnerships encouraged the Council to re-consider the modular approach in favour of establishing a key, over-arching council document.

4.2. Medway Council was successful through a bidding process, in gaining assistance from CABE Space in the form of free consultancy time to develop a Green Space strategy. One of the early recommendations made by CABE Space was that an over arching strategy document would assist the development of the modules, and this could incorporate the Design for Living module elements. The

work on the modules would form into action plans to set targets and priorities. Consequently the work has been modified to incorporate an over arching document, the Medway Open Spaces and Wildlife Strategy.

- 4.3. During the summer of 2003 a major a public consultation took place using a Medway document called "Green Spaces Liveable Spaces", and one part of this was a Green Spaces Pledge setting out the authority's principles and basis for a vision for the authority's open spaces and wildlife (*Green Spaces Liveable Spaces pp.6-7*).
- 4.4. Medway's first green spaces seminar took place on 22 November 2003. The seminar launched the finalised Statement of Intent to develop the green spaces regeneration framework, reported back on the issues raised in the public consultation, and developed the modules further by a combination of professional speakers and mixed working groups. Feedback from those attending the seminar suggested that more time could have been usefully allocated to the working group sessions.
- 4.5. The next seminar is proposed for Saturday 9th October 2004 at which the work on the various modules will be reported in detail, and discussion groups will used to ascertain comments and recommendations of the public and interested groups.
- 4.6. Officers are working with CABI Space to develop a draft overarching document with a target to produce a draft by January 2005, and to complete a set of six action plans for the modules for June 2005:
 - Medway Biodiversity Action Plan(well advanced)
 - Outdoor Sports Action Plan (well advanced, and liaison is taking place with officers working on the general Sports Strategy)
 - Young people and Play Action Plan (well advanced)
 - Allotments and Community Gardening (well advanced)
 - Parks and Amenities Action Plan (not commenced)
 - Green Grid Action Plan(not commenced)

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1. The costs of developing the strategies were identified in the Cabinet report to be in the region of £146,000 mostly to be identified from Green space Services revenue, and a significant part of this was forecast to be needed for publishing the separate modules. This phase has not been reached yet, and the range of pressures on the Greenspace revenue budget the methods of communicating the work once completed, will need to be given further consideration.
- 5.2. The other forecast costs are a combination of officer time and the use of consultants for specific projects. £7,500 was obtained from external grant aiding for consultant work on the outdoor sport module,

and £22,449 has been committed over two years to a consultant to develop the Play Areas module.

- 5.3. The proposed member/ officer advisory group has not been progressed.

6. Play Areas

- 6.1. The Environment and Frontline Service Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 May 2004 received a report on closed play areas and decided to set up a task group to look at closed play areas and to provide comments to contribute to the Play module.
- 6.2. The task group met on two occasions, including on 12 August 2004 when a tour of play areas was made to assess their condition. The summary notes made during the tour are attached as Appendix 1.
- 6.3. Play area standards come in two forms. There are European Standards that cover the design, implementation and maintenance of play areas from a technical safety point of view and are very specific about setting minimum standards. The standards are very exacting and many authorities have play areas that they are aware do not conform to these standards, and consequently their capital programmes are designed to remedy this situation. The provision and maintenance of safety surfacing and fencing are particular areas of difficulty and expense. The Health and Safety Executive use these standards when investigating accidents and are unsympathetic to the financial plights of local authorities when they discover breaches.
- 6.4. The second set of standards are those established by the National Playing Fields Association. These standards set out minimum expectations for the provision of play areas (referred to as the six acre standard – they suggest 6 acres of space for every 10,000 people) and for the sort of provision that should be made at a play area. These standards are incorporated into most authorities planning advice, and became the Audit Commission performance measure for local authorities. The Audit Commission have now dropped the requirement to report on play area provision against these standards, and there are now questions about whether these standards provide facilities to meet the needs of young people, and design expectations from for example CABESpace and ILAM (Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management).
- 6.5. There are 84 play areas in Medway, at the time of the report to the committee 10 of them were closed. The reasons for closure are a combination of damage to the equipment through vandalism, and requests from the public to deal with sustained anti social behaviour problems caused by users of the play area. The appearance of a closed play ground can range from one where no equipment is present, to one where equipment is present but in disrepair.

Play Area	Reason not currently open
Otway Street	Arson/ persistent neighbour nuisance.
Teynham Green	Persistent neighbour nuisance requires refurbishing if to be reopened
Sanctuary Road	Persistent neighbour nuisance/ requires refurbishing if to be reopened
Winchester Way	Vandalism/ persistent neighbour nuisance/ requires refurbishing if to be reopened
Edwards Close	Persistent neighbour nuisance requires total refurbishment if to be reopened
Craigie Walk	Vandalism/ persistent neighbour nuisance/ requires refurbishing if to be reopened
Lyall Way	Vandalism/ persistent neighbour nuisance/ requires refurbishing if to be reopened
Copperfields	Vandalism/ requires refurbishing if to be reopened
Rushdean Road	Vandalism/ neighbour nuisance
Hook Meadow	Closed at time of committee meeting due to arson requiring some remediation. Reopen for school holiday period.

- 6.6. For the 2003-04 financial year Greenspace Services had a capital budget of £300,000 for play area refurbishment. Details of the larger refurbishment works undertaken are:

Play Area	Works	Cost
Cozenton Park	Full refurbishment	62,000
Woodchurch Crescent	Part refurbishment	13,200
Hook Meadow	Full refurbishment	47,500
Knights Place	Partial refurbishment	22,600
Academy Drive	New fencing	5,000
Holding Street	Partial refurbishment	5,800
Parkwood Green	Partial refurbishment	36,000
Mill Road	Partial refurbishment	23,000
Cherry Trees	Partial refurbishment	7,800
Goudhurst Road	Surfacing	10,000
Kingsfrith	Camera	3,700
Riverside	Swings	2,000
Beechings Way	Installation of Skateboard Park	17,000
Capstone Park	Surfacing	6,900
Hamilton Road	Surfacing	2,700
The Strand	Partial refurbishment	2,300

- 6.7. In addition the service had a revenue budget of £96,000 for 2003-4 for undertaking minor repairs. Detailed below are some of the major categories of expenditure against this budget. Also as a part of this budget there is a maintenance inspection with minor repairs undertaken in each play area every 4 weeks. There is a major

independent safety inspection undertaken on an annual basis by RoSPA.

Item	Approximate Spend
Cleaning off graffiti and steam cleaning of substances hazardous to health	4500
Repairs to fences and gates	5000
New swing seats and chains	7200
Supply and fitting of parts	17,500
Repairing and refitting small items of equipment	25,000

6.8. A detailed survey of all play areas was undertaken in 2003-04 by a play area consultant as a part of the work to develop this module for the strategy, to provide an objective view on the fitness for purpose of the play areas. A follow on public consultation exercise is being carried out to ask Medway residents what they like and don't like about their local outdoor play area. The consultation has been available in all local libraries from August and residents are able to fill in a questionnaire and/or attend a meeting if there is sufficient interest for a particular play area.

6.9. The provision of CCTV cameras to protect play areas and users and to assist in the detection of criminal damage is being investigated. Cameras with recording devices on the site and dummy cameras as a deterrent are relatively cheap but are really limited to the deterrent effect. Better are cameras that relay the image to a central control centre, but this can be extremely expensive for play area locations. Technology advances mean of microwave or broadband use are bringing down the costs. Discussions with the CCTV team indicate that capital costs would start in the region of £10,000 per playground. Specific examples are

- Riverside £21k
- Cozenton £10.5k
- Vinall Park £9.5k
- Knights Place £41.5k
- Parkwood £16.2k

6.10. The Environment and Frontline Service Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 July 2004 received a petition organised by Tariq Khan requesting that the Council consider constructing a skateboard park at Cozenton Park. The committee agreed that the task group would investigate this request as a part of the tour on August 12th.

6.11. The task group visited the site and concluded that the site was large enough to contain such a skate park but members did have concerns about where such a skate park could be positioned bearing in mind the existing leisure centre, the play area, the nursery and the marked out football pitches. They felt if a skate park was situated at the perimeter of the park it would be difficult to use in winter as it would

not be lit. If it were built on the site they felt it may be more appropriate to place it near to the existing leisure centre. They also noted the fact that the only other skate park in Medway was not that far away from Cozenton. Members felt that officers from the youth service should be asked to look at the request.

Contact for Further Details:

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Background papers:

Greenspaces Better Places: The Urban Greenspaces Taskforce: *DTLR*

The value of parks and open spaces. Social inclusion and community regeneration: *LGA*

Living Places. Cleaner, safer, greener: *ODPM*

Working with the grain of nature. A biodiversity strategy for England: *DEFRA*

PPG17. Planning for open space, sport and recreation: *ODPM*

Green spaces liveable places: *Medway Council*

BRIEF NOTES OF THE MEMBER VISIT TO PLAY AREAS **ON 12 AUGUST 2004**

Those present: Councillors Baker, Fearn, Luckhurst and Mrs Shaw and Councillor Hicks for two of the Strood play areas (see below)

Officers: John Edwards, Assistant Director (Front Line Task Force)
Paul Schmoeger (Allotment and Play Area Officer)
Rosie Gunstone (Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator)

CUXTON SYCAMORE ROAD, STROOD

This was an example of a playground in use. Members were advised of the cost of surfacing under the play equipment as being £70 per square metre. While noting that the litter inside the play area is removed daily, Members expressed concern at the amount of litter around the perimeter of the play area.

RUSHDEAN, RUSHDEAN ROAD, STROOD (Councillor Hicks present)

Members were advised that the area is locked at 7pm. Councillor Hicks stated that there had been considerable complaints from neighbouring properties about anti-social behaviour in and around the play area. He thought screening around the play area may be beneficial. The play area appeared to be a meeting point between youths in Cuxton and Strood. Members agreed that the siting of the play area was not good. Officers advised that the proposal was to move the equipment from this site to the Lilac Road site. Members agreed with this suggestion.

LILAC ROAD, LABURNHAM ROAD, STROOD (Councillor Hicks present)

This large site has been closed for approximately two years but this appeared not to deter the public from accessing the site. The padlock on one of the gates had been smashed and there had been a recent incident of a youth using a motorbike on the site causing the death of a dog. Members were concerned to note that since the incident the use of motorbikes in the play area had not ceased and discussed the cost of securing the area which Paul Schmoeger stated would be in the region of £30k to £50k.

MAIDSTONE ROAD, BOURNVILLE AVENUE, CHATHAM

There are a number of trip hazards on the site due to uneven surfaces under the play equipment. This was scheduled for refurbishment this year. The likely cost would be £50k not including the fence. To include a total revamp this would be in

the region of £80k. Members agreed that the surface needed to be dealt with urgently.

HOOK MEADOW, WALDERSLADE

This site was refurbished last year at a cost of £45k. Since then the fence has been vandalised. The surfacing had been churned up by a motorbike and then set fire to previously. CCTV is in place but not working. There are plans to repaint the barriers yellow – this will be done once the children return to school and will cover the graffiti.

OTWAY STREET, GILLINGHAM

This site has been severely vandalised but in spite of being surrounded by a six foot fence was in use by two young people at the time of the visit. Members agreed there was no point reopening the site which was also poorly situated and suggested consulting ward members to consider alternative ideas and remove the existing equipment.

HILLYFIELDS, GILLINGHAM

The site has been closed for two years due to complaints from neighbours and vandalism. Ian Fleming, Parks Development Officer, has plans to turn the area into a park with sections for young children, teenagers and a nature area. Paul Schmoeger referred to a bid some years ago for funding and undertook to let members know what happened to the bid.

COZENTON, BLOORS LANE, RAINHAM

Members considered the suggestion made at the last meeting of Environment and Front Line Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee by Tariq Khan who had petitioned the committee, that a skate park be created at Cozenton Park.

While members accepted that the site was large enough to contain such a skate park they did have concerns about where such a skate park could be positioned bearing in mind the existing leisure centre, the play area, the nursery and the marked out football pitches. They felt if a skate park was situated at the perimeter of the park it would be difficult to use in winter as it would not be lit. If it were built on the site they felt it may be more appropriate to place it near to the existing leisure centre. They also noted the fact that the only other skate park in Medway was not that far away from Cozenton. Members felt that officers from the youth service should be asked to look at the request.

During the visit members commented on the good condition of the play area.

RAINHAM REC. STATION ROAD, RAINHAM

Members noted that this was a well used play area and did not need particular refurbishment. Officers stated that to replace the existing equipment would cost

£45k. As the tubular steel equipment deteriorates it was explained that it is no longer manufactured so would all need to be replaced.

EDWARDS CLOSE, RAINHAM

This site was completely devoid of equipment and is just a fenced in area. Officers explained that the site had been closed for approximately 18 months. Councillor Fearn referred to a consultation which had taken place with local residents some time ago – there had not been a large response but those who did respond had requested that the play area be reopened. There had been extensive vandalism on the site including on the sub-station which is on site. Members felt this area should be left as an open space and not be re-opened.

KINGSFRITH, BREDHURST ROAD, RAINHAM

This was a sample of a very successful and well used site. Members noted there is CCTV working on the site and this had stopped the vandalism which had previously occurred. The site was refurbished two years ago and is in good condition.