

Date of Meeting	19 th April 2007
Title of Report	Countryside and Open Space Strategy & Play Strategy
Portfolio	Healthy Lifestyles
Link to Corporate Priorities	Healthy Lifestyles & Bouyant Economy
Key Decision	Yes
Executive Workplan Ref	B294
Public Report	Yes

Summary of Report

This report seeks approval for a revised Countryside and Open Space Strategy. It details the changes to the Strategy and the significant achievements realised through the Strategy during its operational period to date. As part of the Strategy the report seeks delegated authority to the Asset, Design and Regeneration Team Leader to prepare a list of preferred contractors so that a contractor based maintenance regime can be implemented for all the Council managed play areas.

The Report also seeks approval for a draft Play Strategy, developed in partnership with Wiltshire County Council, that will unlock £237,000 of Big Lottery funding for improving play opportunities in North Wiltshire.

Officer Recommendations

To approve Option 1:

2.1 The Executive approves the review and amendment of the Countryside and Open Space Strategy 2004 – 2008 and gives delegated authority to the Asset, Design and Regeneration Team Leader to prepare a list of preferred contractors so that a contractor based maintenance regime can be implemented for all the Council managed play areas.

The Executive also approves the draft Play Strategy 2007 – 2012 as a working document for wider consultation and that adoption of the Play Strategy and agreement of the project portfolio for the lottery bid be delegated to Team Leader(s) in consultation with the Executive portfolio holder.

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
NONE	NONE	YES	NONE	YES

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 4th November 2004 the Executive approved (minute E.113) the Countryside and Open Space Strategy. The life span of the Strategy is five years (from 2004 to 2008 inclusive) but it was intended that a review would be undertaken periodically to ensure that it was kept up to date and relevant. This report details the outcome of a recent review of the Strategy and seeks approval for the updated version.
- 1.2 In 2006 the Big Lottery and Play England announced that funding was to be made available for local authorities to improve the provision for play in their areas. However, to be eligible for this grant it was necessary to prepare a play strategy which would identify how the funding would be used.

2. Options and Options Appraisal

- 2.1 **Option 1:** The Executive approves the review and amendment of the Countryside and Open Space Strategy 2004 – 2008 and gives delegated authority to the Asset, Design and Regeneration Team Leader to prepare a list of preferred contractors so that a contractor based maintenance regime can be implemented for all the Council managed play areas.

The Executive also approves the draft Play Strategy 2007 – 2012 as a working document for wider consultation and that adoption of the Play Strategy and agreement of the project portfolio for the lottery bid be delegated to Team Leader(s) in consultation with the Executive portfolio holder.

Both of these strategies fit with corporate, and wider, priorities and objectives and will enable the improvement of the natural resource, recreation and play opportunities within the District. Option 1, therefore, is the preferred option.

- 2.2 **Option 2:** The Executive seeks further amendment to one, or both, Strategies before approving them. Extra work will be involved in making alterations to either strategies and in the case of the Play Strategy may result in missing the deadline for application to the Big Lottery due to the consultation period required.

3. The Countryside and Open Space Strategy

- 3.1 Prior to the completion of the Strategy in 2004 the Council was involved, both directly and indirectly, in many projects relating to rural issues and open space without any policy context or rationale for doing so. It was, therefore, difficult to justify any project support, either in officer time or through direct funding.
- 3.2 The Leisure Facilities Strategy 2001-2007 also recommended the completion of a Countryside and Open Space Strategy to ensure a strategic approach.
- 3.3 The Strategy was completed in 2004 following the adoption of the North Wiltshire Open Space Study which provides much of the substance for the former document.
- 3.4 The Strategy is arranged into themed sections: Background, Consultation, General Principles, Landscape, Recreation, Open Space, Biodiversity and Taking the Strategy Forward. These are detailed below, along with any significant changes from the previous version.

3.4.1 Background

This section details the policy context – nationally and locally – and has been strengthened in relation to climate change as it is recognised that the Strategy can potentially mitigate against the effects of global warming.

3.4.2 Consultation

There has been no change to this section. Although the research data was collected in 2003 it is still thought to be valid and possibly more relevant now due to the increased awareness of climate change.

3.4.3 General Principles

Again there has been no change to this section as the principles are still sound.

3.4.4 Landscape

This section has been changed in the following areas:

- Wording has been changed in relation to the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which is now run by a Board rather than the previous Partnership.
- The policy towards the Great Western Community Forest has been updated to reflect the stronger partnership between them and the Council.
- The Cricklade Country Way Project has been moved to this section from the Recreation chapter due to the much higher landscape impact and significance of the project. This is reflected in a change to the policy.

3.4.5 Recreation

The only change here has been that mentioned above i.e. the removal of the Cricklade Country Way Project.

3.4.6 Open Space

There are three significant revisions in this section:

- The inclusion of the development of an Open Space Supplementary Planning Document as part of the Local Development Framework process.
- The inclusion of an open space 'Planning and Adoption' process. This process is necessary to ensure that all Teams are aware of their role in the provision of open space. A diagram illustrating this process now forms Appendix 5 of the Strategy.
- A new policy that supports the implementation of a contractor based inspection and management regime for all Council owned and managed play areas.

3.4.7 Biodiversity

This section has had a change of name (from Nature Conservation) to be more consistent with external documents. Apart from this other changes include:

- The inclusion of an introduction which details the legislative framework. It was thought that it would be useful to provide this information following the enactment of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This Act is the first legislation to put a 'duty' on local authorities to have regard for conserving biodiversity outside of designated sites, and so is clearly significant.

- The deletion of the Wetland Habitat Creation in the Cotswold Water Park Project. This project is part of the overall Water Park initiative which appears elsewhere in the Strategy.
- A change in wording of the policies relating to funding of the Biological Records Centre and the Wildlife Sites Project. This ensures that the two projects will be secure and therefore able to continue offering a service to the Council which enables it to undertake its statutory duties.

3.4.8 Taking the Strategy Forward

The original Strategy did not have any Action Plans attached and whilst this is still the case for the majority of policies, Plans have been introduced for some where they are measurable. The Action Plan is attached to the Strategy as Appendix 4.

3.5 Progress and Achievements - As previously stated, the Strategy provides a framework for undertaking many strands of work, many ongoing and without measurable milestones. However, there have been significant achievements over the last couple of years which are noted below in relation to the specific policy.

3.5.1

Policy	Achievement
LP3. The Council recognises the importance of the Great Western Community Forest and the contribution it makes to the well-being of the District. Therefore the Council will continue to work with the Community Forest, make a commitment to sustained funding, and identify new joint projects to further the aims of both organisations.	The Wootton Bassett Forest Festival is scheduled to take place on May 19 th . This will be a major community event along the lines of the Forest Festival in Swindon and will attract a great deal of interest.

3.5.2

Policy	Achievement
LP4. The Council will lead the Cricklade Country Way Project during the lifetime of the Lottery bid through staff time and financial contribution. At the end of the lottery bid period the project will be reviewed.	The CCW Project was successful in gaining a £250,000 development grant. If successful in the next stage a grant of £12m will be awarded, allowing significant investment in the District.

3.5.3

Policy	Achievement
RP2. Opportunities to extend the North Wiltshire Rivers Route and the town and district cycling network will be identified, offering recreational opportunities, as well as the possibility of increased use of cycles for travel to and from places of work.	The Chippenham to Reybridge section of the North Wiltshire Rivers Route (along with restoration of the Wilts and Berks Canal) has been completed.

3.5.4

Policy	Achievement
OSP5. The Council will be more proactive in its management of key sites, particularly Morningside Farm and Castlefields, working with partner organisations and community groups to identify suitable and sustainable solutions for their management.	Morningside Farm is now within the Common Agricultural Policy Single Payment Scheme. Support for the Castlefields project has been increased and a site Management Plan is currently being finalised.

3.5.5

Policy	Achievement
BP5. Working with Natural England and landowners, the Council will designate as Local Nature Reserves those sites that are appropriate, if there is the support of the local community and funding is available for management, and consider other sites as they come forward.	Three Local Nature Reserves have been declared – Corston Pond, Conygre Mead and Mortimores Wood. A fourth (Jubilee Lake in Wootton Bassett) is in the pipeline.

4. The Play Strategy 2007- 2012

4.1 At its meeting of 5th October 2006 the Executive resolved (E.69) that at a future meeting a report be made on the proposed Play Strategy. This then is that report.

4.2 The concept of a Play Strategy is in response to the availability of £155 million to improve play provision in local authority areas. This fund first became available in March 2006 through a partnership of the Children’s Play Strategy and the Big Lottery is response to the Government’s 2004 play review ‘Getting Serious About Play’. Each local authority area has been allocated funds based on the child population and the levels of deprivation. To access this money a Play Strategy is required to set out current and future play provision in the district and an Action Plan to include projects identified for the lottery bid to be put forward in September 2007.

4.3 Wiltshire County Council has taken a lead on the drafting of a county-wide Play Strategy with input from all 4 District Councils. This enables a wide variety of play opportunities to be included, beyond traditional fixed play equipment. Indeed, the Strategy takes a much more holistic approach by trying to encourage play in the widest possible sense. However, fixed play is still an important component but emphasis is on more strategic facilities that offer more exciting play opportunities. Applications to the BIG Lottery will be made separately by each District Council.

4.4 Some of the main components of the Play Strategy are as follows.

4.4.1 Key Policy Statements

As well as meeting the Council’s corporate objective around listening to young people for play, the Strategy links to the Government’s agenda – Every Child Counts, as well as the Childrens Act 2004. These policies have been distilled into the themes of ‘Being Healthy’, ‘Staying Safe’, ‘Enjoying and Achieving’, Making a Positive Contribution’, and ‘ Economic Well-being’.

4.4.2 The Case for Play

This section looks at the benefits of play not just for children but also parents and careers and the community as a whole. It also looks at the barriers to play as well as the changing attitude towards risk associated with play.

4.4.3 Play Provision

An analysis of the current provision is detailed, along with providers and enabling mechanisms such as the Council's own Community Award grant scheme. Examples of recent initiatives supported from this grant are detailed.

4.4.4 Analysis

An analysis of the current provision and the results of various public consultations is made which allows the setting of the approach to be taken to improve provision. From this an Action Plan has been drawn up which is aligned to the themes set out in 4.3.1 above.

4.5 The draft Play Strategy will be sent for wide consultation for a minimum of 8 weeks (as set out in the Wiltshire Compact). Once adopted the Strategy will support the application to the BIG Lottery for funding for projects identified in the agreed Action Plan. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their applications within three months of the 10th September 2007 deadline.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly arising as a result of the Countryside and Open Space Strategy although the inherent support for projects which are funded through the Environmental Grant Fund should be noted.

5.2 The Play Strategy will release £237,000 from the Big Lottery which must be used to improve play provision in the District (an element of 10% of this can be allocated towards management costs).

5.3 Over the life of the strategy, there may be additional resources required to realise the aims of the Strategy, not yet identified. This will be addressed by obtaining external funding, re-prioritising existing resources, or submitting a bid as part of the annual budget process. The annual budget process will take place within the context of the Council Priorities.

6. Community and Environment Implications

6.1 The Strategy essentially acts as a Workplan, which if followed will offer significant support for environmental and community projects and subsequent enhancements of the landscape, biodiversity and recreational opportunities offered in the District.

7. Equality and Diversity Implications

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment for both Strategies has been undertaken and no significant issues have been identified. Indeed, both Strategies incorporate measures that would improve access to facilities for some sections of the community.

8. Risk Analysis

8.1 Risks will be minimised by following the recommended option. This will ensure that the Council is able to meet its statutory obligations relating to the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the provision of environmental information essential for planning purposes.

8.2 With regard to the Play Strategy there is no guarantee of success with the Big Lottery but more officer time will be required to see the Strategy through to the submission stage. None of the proposed projects would be initiated before confirmation of grant is secured. If successful then there will be resource implications for the successful delivery of projects.

Appendices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix A – The Countryside and Open Space Strategy 2004 - 2008 (Revised January 2007) • Appendix B – Play Strategy 2007 - 2012
Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

Report	Committee & Date	Minute Reference
Countryside and Open Space Strategy	Executive Committee 4 th November 2004	E.113
Play Facilities Development and Management	Executive Committee 5 TH October 2006	E.69 (3)