

West Wiltshire District Council

Cabinet

5 May 2004

Recommendations from the Parks & Open Spaces PPG

1. Purpose

To brief Cabinet on those recommendations of the Parks & Open Spaces Policy Project Group (POSPPG) that can be implemented now.

2. Background

The POSPPG was established to develop proposals and policies for providing and managing our open spaces and parks. It has recently completed this work, and a comprehensive report has been compiled by Trevor Askew - this is available on the Council's website, in the members' room, or on request.

In April, Cabinet approved supplementary planning guidance (SPG) that picked up some of the POSPPG's recommendations. Many of the group's conclusions will inform the recreational needs assessment (RNA) recently agreed by Cabinet and cannot be implemented until this has been completed. However, there are some things we can do now. Some are addressed in this report, some have been addressed by Corporate Team, and there will be a further report to Cabinet in June on the specification for grounds maintenance and cleansing.

3. Key Issues

3.1 *Play areas:* whilst safety issues are addressed and forward maintenance is identified on an annual basis, there is currently no longer-term planned maintenance programme nor a strategy for covering the increasing cost of maintaining equipment on the many play areas the Council maintains - both its own and local councils. Local councils may be willing to help cover the costs.

3.2 *Allotments:* these are well used and valued, but the POSPPG concluded these should be run locally.

3.3 *Cemeteries and closed churchyards:* the Council has been improving the standard of maintenance, largely to ensure that it is complying with its health and safety responsibilities. However, there is a lack of funding for this.

- 3.4 *Parish and town councils:*** the POSPPG learned that many local councils are very interested in the open space in their areas, and some have already taken responsibility for these spaces. Others are interested in doing the same, and it was felt that this was worth exploring. It would be worthwhile having a standard arrangement that suited both local councils and ourselves.
- 3.5 *Underused open space:*** the POSPPG noted the policy previously adopted by the Council to sell open space that is not much used or valued, using the proceeds to fund better provision. It recognised that this was still a valid approach, particularly given the expense of maintaining these areas. However, little progress has been made in implementing this policy.
- 3.6 *Improved enforcement:*** the POSPPG agreed there was a need to improve enforcement, particularly in relation to dog fouling, litter and fly tipping. Currently the Council devotes very little resource to these areas: the dog warden is currently spending most of his time on pest control. Enforcement against litter and fly tipping is a very subsidiary part of the role of grounds maintenance and cleansing staff.

We employ officers to patrol our car parks, and in the past they have undertaken a broader range of enforcement work. Research by our Transport Officer indicates that devoting more resources to enforcement in our car parks would be more than covered by the increased income because more people would buy tickets. Corporate Team has already identified that dog fouling is an increasing problem, and enforcement activity is low.

4. Options

The POSPPG proposed the following options for the Cabinet:

4.1 *Play areas*

- We develop a planned maintenance programme for all the play areas we maintain and are likely to maintain for the next ten years.
- The financial and resource implications are assessed.
- We assess, through benchmarking, whether the service is cost effective.
- We explore with local councils what contribution they are prepared to make, and assess what contribution they should make.
- We develop a realistic formula for calculating the amount required from developers to maintain play areas on new housing developments.
- The money received from developers is placed in a fund exclusively for this.
- The revenue budget is increased year on year to reflect the additional cost of maintaining new play areas as they are taken on.
- A report covering these aspects is brought to Cabinet by the head of professional and technical services by November 2004.
- Professional and Technical Services are consulted on all developers' proposals for play areas as soon as possible in the planning process.

- When the results of the recreational needs assessment are available, we reconsider the level of provision of play areas, their distribution, and who should own and run them.

4.2 *Allotments*

- The Council transfers all allotments to allotment associations or local councils so that they are managed locally, and preferably by those who use them.
- This proposal has no financial implications.
- There should be a standard transfer or lease that protects the Council and ensures the allotments are properly run for the benefit of users.

4.3 *Cemeteries and closed churchyards*

- Burial fees should be increased to the upper quartile for similar authorities by January 2005 (generally from £278 to £355).
- Income to the Council should increase by approximately £23,000 a year.
- This additional money should be used to provide and maintain cemeteries and churchyards.

4.4 *Parish and town councils*

- We conduct a thorough consultation with all local councils to establish which would be interested in taking responsibility for open spaces, or some spaces, in their area, and on what basis (Head of Leisure and Head of Professional & Technical Services).
- We develop a standard legal agreement (Head of Legal).
- A report is brought back to Cabinet by October 2004, recommending a course of action and covering the financial and legal implications.

4.5 *Underused open space*

- The Cabinet confirms the existing policy to sell underused and undervalued open space.
- The Head of Professional and Technical Services develops a proposal for a timed programme to identify those pieces of land which are underused and undervalued and offer them for sale. He should also bring a report to Cabinet setting out a procedure for consulting on, and getting authority for, such sales by August 2004.
- The first call on the net sale proceeds should be for providing or improving open space - this might make the sale of existing open space more acceptable to local residents. Normally the money would be added to the Council's capital funds and used as decided in the budget process.
- Revenue costs should be covered by the sale proceeds, leaving a surplus.
- A standard transfer should be used - amongst other things, it would ensure that the Council shared any increase in value were the land to be developed in the future.

4.6 Improved enforcement

- To improve enforcement against dog fouling, litter, fly tipping and in our car parks
- The Heads of Regulatory Services, Commercial Services and Legal Services produce a joint report on the best way to do this
- The report to be submitted to Cabinet in August 2004
- Financial and other implications should be set out in that report.

4.7 Financial implications:

4.1 Play areas	None at this stage. To be covered in a future report to Cabinet.
4.2 Allotments	None.
4.3 Cemeteries	Income increased £23,000 p.a. to cover burial costs and contribute to maintenance.
4.4 Parish and town councils	None at this stage. To be covered in a future report to Cabinet.
4.5 Underused open space	Revenue costs should be covered by sale proceeds, leaving a capital surplus. The first call on the net proceeds of sale should be for providing or improving open space. A future report to Cabinet and the Medium Term Financial Plan will address this.
4.6 Enforcement	None at this stage. Future report to Cabinet will cover.

4.8 Timetable:

Play areas	Report to Cabinet by November 2004
Allotments	Five days from the Cabinet meeting
Cemeteries and closed churchyards	By January 2005
Parish and town councils	Report to Cabinet by October 2004
Underused open space	Report to Cabinet by August 2004
Enforcement	Report to Cabinet by August 2004

5. Key Decision

Reason for key decision	To improve the provision and management of open space.
Options considered and rejected	These are set out in the reports to and notes of the POSPPG.
Date of implementation	As set out in section 4.8 of the report.

6. List of background papers

The reports to and notes of the meetings of the POSPPG.
The report “More People, More Active, More Often”.

7. Recommendations

That the proposals set out in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.6 above are agreed.



Plain English guidance given

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