

# 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) which can be implemented now.

**2. Background**

The POSPPG was established to develop proposals and policies for the provision and management of our open spaces and parks. It has recently completed this work, and a comprehensive report has been compiled by Trevor Askew. This report is available on the Council's web site, in the Members Room, or on request. In April Cabinet approved Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) which picked up some of the POSPPG's recommendations. Many of the POSPPG's conclusions will inform the recreational needs assessment (RNA) recently agreed by the Cabinet, and cannot be implemented until this has been done. 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 on the specification for grounds maintenance and cleansing in June.

**3. Key Issues**

- 3.1 *Play Areas:*** there is currently no planned maintenance programme, nor a strategy for covering the increasing cost of maintaining the 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 best 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 & Town Councils:*** the POSPPG learned that many local councils are very interested in the open space in their areas. Some of these councils would be interested in taking responsibility for these spaces. Some already have. It was felt that this was worth exploring. It would be worthwhile having a standard arrangement which 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 which is not much used or valued, using the proceeds to fund better provision. They recognised that this was still a valid approach, particularly given the expense of maintaining these areas. However little progress had been made in implementing this policy.

## **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
- A realistic formula is developed 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 transfer all allotments to allotment associations or local councils so that they are managed locally, and preferably by those who run them
- This proposal has no financial implications
- Legal implications: there should be a standard transfer or lease which protects the Council and ensures the allotments are properly run for the benefit of the users.

### **4.3 *Cemeteries and closed churchyards:***

- Burial fees should be increased to the upper quartile for authorities in the South West region by January 2005
- Financial implications: the income to the Council should increase by approximately ? 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 & 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, and
- Brings a report to Cabinet setting out a procedure for consulting on, and getting authority for, such sales
- The net sale proceeds could be ring fenced for the provision or improvement of 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.
- Financial implications: the revenue costs should be covered by the sale proceeds, leaving a surplus
- Legal implications: 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.

### **5. Key Decision**

(Add the key decision box later)

### **6. List of background papers**

The reports to and notes of the meetings of the POSPPG.

The report "More People, More Active, More Often".

The draft specifications for grounds maintenance and cleansing.

### **7. Recommendations**

The proposals set out in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.5 above are agreed.

Cabinet decided whether the proceeds of the sale of open space (see 4.5 above) are ring fenced for the purchase or improvement.

### **Plain English guidance given**

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