

28 January 2021**Agenda Item:4****REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE****REVIEW OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S GREEN SPACES****Purpose of the Report**

1. To enable the Communities and Place Review and Development Committee to review the Authority's Green Spaces and to consider potential opportunities to enhance their value for wildlife and people.

Information

2. This report is accompanied by a presentation that will provide Members with further information and details about the County Council's Green Spaces and their current management.
3. The County Council's Green Spaces currently comprise over 80 sites across the County, equating to approximately 1600 hectares of land. The majority of this land (just over 1250 hectares) is managed for wildlife and people and these sites are listed in the attached Appendix. 40 sites are wholly or partly designated as Local Wildlife Sites, 6 are Local Nature Reserves and 5 are legally protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).
4. The Green Estate Development Strategy 2013-2023 was approved by Culture Committee at its meeting of 8th October 2013 and subsequent reports in 2014 and 2016 set out, and updated, the status of the Green Spaces portfolio. The primary aim of the strategy was to reduce, as far as possible, the management burden and revenue cost to the Council whilst maintaining value to local people, enhancing visitor experience and delivering biodiversity benefits for the County.
5. Following approval of the Strategy in 2013, an assessment of the sites' recreational and biodiversity value was carried out and sites prioritised accordingly. A number of "Intermediate" and "Low" priority sites have since been wholly or partly released from the portfolio to enable resources to be focussed on the higher priority sites.
6. Where appropriate, the service has also supported the transfer of higher priority sites to external organisations. Several restored pit tip sites, for example, have been transferred to the Forestry Commission as part of the legacy of the British Coal Deal. Work to transfer a further two sites (Ollerton Pit Wood and Shirebrook Pit Wood) is nearing completion.
7. Income generation opportunities have been sought, including leasing of sites under farm business tenancies and grazing leases; licences for local community clubs, such as fishing

clubs; forestry operations and energy crops. All income received has supported the ongoing management requirements of the County Council's Green Spaces.

8. Since 2018, the service has made important steps towards improving public health and safety on the Council's Green Spaces:
 - A new tree inspection procedure and programme has been established and a thorough site-by-site risk assessment undertaken, together with a new inspection programme introduced to facilitate the surveying of all major structures (bridges, culverts and other drainage structures) across the Green Spaces sites.
 - A water safety procedure outlining the approach to the management of sites with a presence of open water. In some cases, the procedure has been accompanied by site-specific safety strategies describing the precise measures taken (for example where open water is actively used for fishing and sailing). The work forms part of Nottinghamshire's combined effort to reduce incidences of drowning in the county.
9. The nature of some Green Spaces sites, however, means that flooding, fly-tipping, antisocial behaviour, rough sleepers, unauthorised access from adjacent properties and off-road vehicles are all occasionally or regularly encountered issues. These issues have cost and other implications.
10. The Council's Green Spaces play an important role for both wildlife and people in the County. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many more people have discovered their local sites this year and there has been an increased interest in volunteering opportunities. In pre-pandemic circumstances, working alongside partnerships such as the Greenwood Community Forest and Biodiversity Action Group, both hosted by the County Council, has enabled more capacity to be directed towards supporting the involvement of community groups and volunteers in the ongoing management of their local sites. This includes habitat management, species surveys, tree planting and invasive non-native species control work.
11. Since its formation in 1991, Greenwood Community Forest has planted more than 2.1 million trees (1342 hectares) across its area. This has included planting on at least 15 Green Spaces sites, of which 5 are now leased to the Forestry Commission. Further planting on Green Spaces has continued whenever possible, including 2,800 trees on 4 sites since 2016 achieved through the free tree scheme operated by the Woodland Trust. It is anticipated that more Green Spaces sites will be planted with trees under the DEFRA funded 5-year Trees for Climate programme, including over 17 hectares of new woodland in the first year.
12. Where funding can be secured, the service has proactively sought to deliver enhancements to the network of sites, for example the Cotgrave Greenway, opened in April 2019 and providing a 3km long off-road link between Cotgrave Country Park and Holme Lane at Radcliffe on Trent.
13. The presentation will focus on a number of key areas for consideration, for example the management issues that the sites can present and potential opportunities to deliver enhancements (as outlined in paragraphs 8 to 12 above). Also the role that the Council's Green Spaces can play in delivering the objectives of the County Council's Environment Strategy, particularly in relation to the following ambitions:

- Achieving favourable condition for the 5 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) under the Council's management and ensure habitats on all sites are in a healthy state and conserved by the Council's management.
- Protecting and enhancing habitats and populations of species on the 46 Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) under the Council's control and listed as under threat by Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.
- Eradicating harmful invasive non-native species of plants on Council land as part of a wider, co-ordinated approach with partners for Nottinghamshire.
- Planting ¼ million trees in the next 7 years.
- Designating a new tranche of Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) that are of significant value for wildlife and people from the Council's Green Spaces portfolio, in addition to the 7 LNRs currently under the Council's ownership and/or management.
- Achieving net gains in biodiversity on Council land, supporting the delivery of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Developing the proposed new 'national forest' in Sherwood, offering benefits to the environment, health and visitor economy in Nottinghamshire.
- Establishing nature recovery networks across the County to increase the resilience of biodiversity to the negative impacts of a changing climate.
- Promoting environmental volunteering opportunities and widening community participation.

Other Options Considered

14. The options for consideration are set out in this report and the accompanying presentation. The option to continue with the arrangements as they are has been considered but this would represent a missed opportunity in contributing towards the delivery of the Council's Environmental Strategy.

Reason for Recommendation

15. The Committee's findings will enable the County Council to reconfirm its commitment to enhancing Nottinghamshire's biodiversity through the management of its Green Spaces and inform future priorities for both wildlife and people.

Statutory and Policy Implications

16. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

17. The financial implications of this report will be dependent upon the findings and recommendations of the Committee. Any findings may form the future recommendations to the Communities and Place Committee.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

18. The implications for sustainability and the environment are set out in the report and will be discussed during the presentation.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) It is recommended that Committee reviews the information contained in this report - and its accompanying presentation – and reports its findings and recommendations to Communities and Place Committee in due course, for further consideration.

Adrian Smith
Corporate Director, Place

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Heather Stokes, Conservation Team Manager

Constitutional Comments (SJE 12/01/2021)

19. This decision falls within the Terms of Reference of the Communities & Place Review & Development Committee to whom responsibility for the review and development of all functions falling under the remit of the Authority's Communities & Place Committee, including environmental awareness and sustainability, have been delegated.

Financial Comments (RWK 07/01/2021)

1. The report seeks the views of Committee on the Authority's management of its Green Spaces and asks Committee to consider potential opportunities to enhance their value for wildlife and people. Consideration of the recommendations of this Committee, including any financial implications, will be the subject of future reports to the Communities and Place Committee.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- Green Estate Development Strategy 2013-2023

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

- All