

Subject: Draft Open Spaces Strategy

Status: For Publication

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 6th June 2007

Report of: Head of StreetScene & Liveability

Portfolio Holder: Clean and Green Rossendale

Key Decision: Yes

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform members of the recently produced Draft Open Spaces Strategy detailing some of the key findings, priorities and future directions.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report are linked to and support the following corporate priorities:
- *Delivering quality services to customers (Customers, Improvement)*
 - *Delivering regeneration across the Borough (Economy, Housing)*
 - *Keeping our Borough clean and green (Environment)*
 - *Promoting Rossendale as a cracking place to live and visit (Economy)*
 - *Improving health and well being across the Borough (Health, Housing)*

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:
- Members should recognise that failure to deliver the strategy will lead to poor customer perception and limited improvement of open space areas

- The Open Spaces Strategy supports the Local Development Framework through Planning Policy Guidance 17, failure to implement the strategy could result in the Local development Framework not being fit for purpose
- The Open Spaces Strategy has direct links to the Play Strategy and therefore there is the possibility that failing to obtain the Big Lottery funding allocation of c£200,000 will seriously affect our ability to deliver in the coming years.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 In recent years there has been a decline in the availability of good quality open spaces due to a lack of investment. The government is now committed to reversing the negative impact this decline has on local communities by encouraging a strategic approach to the provision and management of open spaces.
- 4.2 There is a need to produce a structured approach to providing good quality open spaces throughout the borough based on need and priorities. It is also necessary to have a strategic approach to targeting resources into those areas where they will achieve maximum impact for the community. In producing this strategy we aim meet national, regional and local objectives when improving open spaces.
- 4.3 This strategy will aim to:
- Ensure that all open spaces meet the needs of the community.
 - Develop an understanding of the various types open spaces within Rossendale.
 - Determine their value to the community and produce an action plan for future improvements and management.
 - Set out objectives and policies that contribute to creating integrated good quality open spaces in Rossendale which meet the needs of the community and visitors to Rossendale.
- 4.4 In preparing the Open Space Strategy we have had significant consultation with the community involving children, young people, older people, ethnic groups, disabled people and voluntary / public organisations. Alongside these consultations a quantitative spatial analysis has been used including indices of deprivation and crime, the percentage of people without cars and the percentage of people without gardens. From these findings local provision will be examined and evaluated. The findings explore relevant links with current national, regional and local policy statements and identify new policies and action plans linked to the provision of open space for Rossendale, whilst linking to Rossendale's Local Development framework.
- 4.5 The Strategy identifies strategic options, some based on existing legislative protection, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's), and is based on the existing open spaces and facilities (the 'base resource'). It balances economic, social and environmental objectives in order to achieve the best possible long term use of land. The strategy has four basic components:

- a. Existing provision to be protected.
 - b. Existing provision to be enhanced.
 - c. Existing provision to be relocated in order to meet local needs more effectively or make better overall use of land.
 - d. Proposals for new provision.
- 4.6 The delivery of improved play in Rossendale can partly be covered using development agreements such as planning conditions, local area agreements and Section 106 'planning gain' agreements. They are all important additional sources of funding that should be maximised wherever appropriate. Planning Obligations (or section 106/s106 agreements) are an established and valuable mechanism for securing planning matters arising from a development proposal. They are commonly used to bring development in line with the objectives of sustainable development.
- 4.7 The Area Action Plans for Rawtenstall and Bacup & Stacksteads should justify the type and level of contributions that will be sought in each defined area. Relevant information regarding potential new sites for housing development in these areas is now integrated into the Open Space Strategy
- 4.8 The Open Space Strategy aims to follow this guidance and highlight areas to maintain and improve, cross referencing to other planning documents and enabling Rossendale Borough Council, developers and the community to clearly see where new development will have implications for Open Space provision. Residential development in some areas will have a greater impact on Open Space provision and access, than in other areas. This is quantified and methodologies suggested to enhance and not only meet appropriate Open Space standards but also contribute towards the remediation of any shortfalls highlighted in the Open Space and Play provision questionnaires.

Brief Summary of Findings

Whitworth

- 4.9 Whitworth is well served with sports pitches, located in the valley bottom adjacent to the river, between the main road and a parallel road. Some are privately owned but access seems to be unrestricted even though drainage is often poor and the river a physical barrier. Conforming play facilities are lacking in the far north and south of the Whitworth area. Knowsley Play Area is inadequate and its catchment area excludes many houses to the north, but open space access generally is good with the adjacent moorland and Cowm reservoir. Further south in Whitworth there is a proposed housing site adjacent to the Wallbank estate which will put extra demands on the lack of formal play facilities. The Spodden Valley is suggested as a local nature reserve and has recently had improved path access and interpretation, linking well with Healey Dell Nature Reserve and the new Waingap Woodland (including informal

adventure trail and kick-about area). In the far south of Whitworth, Station Rd/Broadley Play Area is having minor improvements which will mean that it will conform to a LEAP standard but its catchment area will still exclude coverage of the large Wallbank estate. Due to vandalism and a lack of capital expenditure in the past on play facilities, a play area was removed near this estate and a floodlit MUGA installed as an alternative to helping contribute towards youth diversionary activities. Linking all these facilities in the future may be the proposed Whitworth Cycleway, using the old disused railway where possible. Improving and funding these green routes will increase access to all neighbouring open space.

Waterfoot

4.10 Waterfoot has steeper valley sides than most of the rest of Rossendale, and other than Edgeside Park has very little other formal space with conforming play facilities. Some improvements have already taken place recently providing exciting new youth facilities but pitch, play area and tennis court renovations would enable them to sustain a greater intensity of use. Some existing woodlands have been managed recently providing both visual and actual improvements of benefit to the community. Other proposals for Staghills woodland and Lea Bank would mean that open space in this area would be mainly through the provision of accessible woodland. The completion of a green route to the south of Bacup Road, from Cloughfold to Waterfoot would also mean improved safe use and enjoyment of open space in this area. Recent suggestions for redevelopment of a redundant garage showroom may help with funding these improvements, both to the rear and in front of the brown field site.

Bacup

4.11 Bacup has more allocated planning space for either extant permission, recently completed or identified future sites than many other areas of Rossendale. This equates to approx 23ha of potential new housing development in the next 5 or 10 years in an area which is reasonably well covered with 'conforming to standard' play provision. However due to the valley and hill arrangement and the layout and social structure of some housing estates, there is very little movement of people using open spaces between zones, so best use of the facilities and catchment areas is not maximised. Generally children and young people from outside the Hawthorn Estate would not use those new NEAP facilities. Also, on the outskirts of Bacup there is the non-conforming Britannia play facility which will not cope with, nor adequately serve the extra influx of demand from the new housing development.

4.12 Bacup, Stacksteads and Waterfoot also have a lack of quality civic spaces adjacent to the street. This deficit can be really detrimental to an area and lead to a down ward spiral of disregard for street scene and increased youth nuisance, litter and graffiti. Infilling of house development in Stacksteads, bus turning bays in Waterfoot and traffic movement in Bacup have meant that there are very few areas left at present, which could be used for these civic spaces. It is suggested that new sites are set aside for these spaces after detailed CABE 'SpaceShaper' Street Audits are undertaken along with compliance with the

new government guidance on 'Making Better Streets'. Upgrading an LCC owned woodland and green space to a Local Nature Reserve in Stacksteads, at the top of Bankfield St, and gaining funding for it, would protect its uniqueness and encourage appropriate access and usage by local residents.

Rawtenstall

- 4.13 The Area Action Plan (AAP) for Rawtenstall allocates certain spaces for redevelopment and generally there is no obvious conflict with existing well used open spaces. Pedestrian and cycle movement is still difficult here and certain restrictions may apply in the future concerning the development of the Valley Centre. Whitaker Park is the main district park in Rossendale. Extra housing as suggested in the AAP will put additional pressure on Whitaker Park, existing, limited and rather poor civic spaces as well as the disjointed and limited green corridors. Redevelopment of the centre, especially considering the encouragement of visitors from outside the borough, specifically making use of possible new hotel facilities, the Adrenaline Gateway, the Valley of Stone attractions and the Panopticon Halo at Top o Slate in Haslingden should also consider ease of access to these facilities. S106 agreements should be used to benefit all these aspects and integrate the whole in to a bigger picture for improved tourism, being also of equal benefit to the residents of Rossendale. A potential green corridor route from a location adjacent to the old College/proposed new hotel site would help complete a link of the cycle network from Haslingden to Ramsbottom.

Haslingden

- 4.14 Has a real deficit of conforming play space. Further new development must contribute towards rectifying this deficit in the form of commuted sums for Play area improvements according to the Play Strategy priorities and action plan. A lack of amenity green space along Haslingden Road could be partially rectified by designating Sykeside Quarry as a Local Nature Reserve. Improved access from the Haslingden Road and the other side roads which border it, along with tree thinning, crown lifting, new steps, paths and signage would encourage access and utilisation by less able members of the public and inclusion in the safe routes to school network. A lack of amenity green space in Irwell Vale could be partially rectified in the future due to the proposed LCC Remade site at Irwell Mill and the existing green corridor route from Strongstry to Irwell Vale. The landscape around here is very rural with plenty of pedestrian routes, river walks and disused railways, some of which have already been improved to cycleways.
- 4.15 The Narrow Valleys which join these main towns generally present themselves as ribbon development with poor access to usable open green space and a lack of coverage from any nearby parks or gardens. Providing unique, well maintained and designed civic spaces at strategic points along these routes will encourage a sense of place, greater civic pride, increased community bonding and increased house prices generally. Improved access (gates, directions, reduction in overhanging trees, improved drainage and promotion of routes, and guided walks for hard to reach groups) and signage between the valleys and over the moor land will also open up open spaces not readily used at

present. The Singing Ringing Tree at Crown Point, just beyond the northern boundary with Burnley has recently been installed to much acclaim. Some new paths and publicity have increased usage of this elevated, windy but beautiful location and enabled more people to appreciate the hills around Rossendale. Another Panopticon landmark, known as the Halo, is being located on a recently remediated landfill site above Haslingden and this will, no doubt, also assist the regeneration of Rossendale and lead to improved access of similar linking facilities on foot and bicycle.

- 4.16 A comprehensive action plan and detailed recommendations can be found in the Open Spaces Strategy document. The action plan requires further development and is subject to consultation at neighbourhood level with members and residents. Similarly further recommendations regarding over provision of space and the possibility of land sales will be considered in more detail.

5. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

- 5.1 The report makes reference to an application for Big Lottery Funding and the potential to draw funding from future planning agreements to fund the strategy in part. In addition Members have previously agreed capital support to: playgrounds, parks pathways and playing fields over a five year programme. However, the total funding and its source required to implement the Open Spaces Strategy in full is not quantified nor identified.

6. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

- 6.1 This Strategy is important in the planning context (see paragraph 8.3 below).

7. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES

- 7.1 The Open Spaces Strategy contributes to the Young Peoples Block of the LAA to improve the life changes of young people through the improved health of children and young people.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The success of this strategy will help deliver various themes and actions within Rossendale Borough Council's core strategy.

- 8.2 This strategy will enable the council to:

- Ensure that all open spaces meet the needs of the community.
- Develop an understanding of the various types open spaces within Rossendale.
- Determine their value to the community and produce an action plan for future improvements and management.
- Set out objectives and policies that contribute to creating integrated good quality open spaces in Rossendale which meet the needs of the community and visitors to Rossendale.

8.3 This strategy will also assist the planning process in several ways. It will unlock funding and maximise the opportunity for improving open space provision where it is most needed. Whilst ensuring there is no duplication in areas where there is are sufficient service provision.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

9.1 That the Draft Strategy be approved as a way forward for improving open space provision with the Borough.

9.2 That Officers be requested to produce a delivery plan in line with programme management techniques.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1 Extensive consultations have place and the document is available on the councils website should anyone wish to make any further comments.

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Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Draft Play Strategy.	Online.
Open Space Audit	Online.
Draft Open Spaces Strategy	Online