

Report title	Open Space Strategy and Action Plan	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Stephen Simkins Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration	
Originating service	Planning	
Accountable employee	Ric Bravery Tel Email	Strategic Health Lead 07773 189238 Ric.bravery@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	City Housing and Environment Leadership Team	6 January 2022
	Regeneration Leadership Team	11 January 2022
	Public Health Leadership Team	12 January 2022
	Strategic Executive Board	10 February 2022

Recommendation for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the commissioning of a new Open Space Strategy and Action Plan.

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to note:

1. The importance of cross-directorate working to the successful implementation of the Open Space Strategy and Action Plan.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To advise Cabinet of the background to the required update of the Open Space Strategy and Action Plan.
- 1.2 To advise Cabinet of the proposal for joint funding of the update by the Regeneration, City Environment and Public Health Directorates.
- 1.3 To seek approval of the commissioning of a new Open Space Strategy and Action Plan.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The importance for health and wellbeing of accessible green space close to people's homes has been highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic, as have the inequalities in access to open space across different communities. The importance of community spaces is recognised in the recent Levelling Up White Paper which proposes to produce a new Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships and states that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will include improved access to green space within its projects, alongside the new £30 million parks fund. The White Paper also proposes to empower local leaders and communities to reimagine their urban green space and improve access for communities which lack green space.
- 2.2 The city benefits from an adopted Open Space Strategy and Action Plan, which provides an overarching strategy for the management of our green spaces and a detailed delivery plan to implement the key recommendations. The current Open Space Strategy and Action Plan was approved by Cabinet in June 2018, as an update of earlier studies. The last full update dates back to 2008 with all subsequent updates being partial reviews of this work. A full update is now required.
- 2.3 It is estimated that a full update will cost around £35,000 to £40,000, including surveys of residents' post-Covid use of open space and consultation with stakeholders.
- 2.4 The Open Space Strategy and Action Plan provides an analysis of the amount and quality of various categories of open space in the city (such as parks, natural green space, provision for children and allotments). It also sets expected standards for the level and quality of provision of each category of open space and compares the level of provision against existing demand and predicted future demand. It then provides a strategic framework and action plan for the improvement of existing open space and development of new open space.
- 2.5 In doing so, the Open Space Strategy and Action Plan supports a number of processes. These include the assessment of proposals to dispose of existing open space, both privately owned and council assets. It supports the negotiation of developer contributions to compensate for the loss of open space and to meet the recreational needs of residents of new developments. These contributions may be invested in the improvement of existing open spaces or the provision of new open space, such as the new neighbourhood parks on the Goodyear site and at Ward Street, Ettingshall. The Action

Plan establishes investment priorities in different parts of the city on which to spend funds which become available as well as providing a basis on which to support funding bids.

- 2.6 The Open Space Strategy and Action Plan is critical for the operation of a number of service areas. These include City Planning, for which it provides part of the evidence base for new housing allocations in the emerging Black Country Plan, as well as the basis for negotiating Section 106 and other developer contributions for open space. For City Development it ensures the provision of open space infrastructure to support regeneration in areas such as the Canalside Quarter. For Environmental Services the Open Space Strategy and Action Plan is vital in identifying priorities for management of, and investment in, the city's open spaces as well in providing an evidence base for funding bids. Similarly, for Leisure and Wellbeing and Public Health Partnerships, it supports partnership working, management of and investment in open spaces and sports facilities and the submission of funding bids. For City Assets the Strategy and Action Plan informs the management of corporate assets, in particular open spaces.
- 2.7 The Council's Contract Procurement Rules require, for a contract of this size, that a minimum of four quotes are obtained. Budget Manager approval is sufficient to proceed for a contract of this size. The contract would, however, involve high profile surveys of residents' use of open space and consultation with stakeholders. The resulting Open Space Strategy and Action Plan would also have heightened importance in light of the increased attention being given to the importance of quality open spaces to: encouraging physical activity; promoting health and wellbeing; adapting to and mitigating against climate change; and tackling the national precipitate decline in biodiversity. Cabinet approval is therefore sought to carry out the review and consequent surveys of residents and stakeholder engagement.
- 2.8 The Council is currently in the process of reviewing its Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan, a parallel document which performs a similar role for the sports pitches in the city and will inform elements of the Open Space Strategy and Action Plan. This review will also provide part of the evidence base for the Black Country Plan and support management and investment decisions.
- 2.9 It is estimated that the work will take approximately six months to complete and Cabinet will be asked to formally adopt the Strategy and Action Plan in order to give it full status.
- 3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.**
- 3.1 A draft brief has been produced and discussions have taken place with other councils and with Sport England which have informed an estimate of costs and timescales.
- 3.2 Part of the work would include a survey of residents' use of open spaces and consultation with key stakeholders.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 Option one would be not to review and update the Open Space Strategy and Action Plan. This would result in an out of date plan, no evidence base to support the open space policies in the emerging Black Country Plan which would leave it subject to challenge, insufficient information on which to base decisions about the management and investment in open space and a lack of evidence on which to base developer contributions and funding applications.
- 4.2 Option two would be to review the standards and recommendations in the Open Space Strategy and Action Plan without revising the evidence base. This would result in inaccurate decisions being made on the basis of out of date information and again would leave the Strategy and Black Country Plan open to challenge, as well as making developer contributions harder to negotiate.

5.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 5.1 As outlined above, the reason for the decision is to provide an up to date Open Space Strategy and Action Plan for the city to support the management of the city's open spaces including decisions on disposal, investment, developer contributions and funding bids. Not to make the decision would leave the city without an up to date Strategy and Action Plan, leaving its management, investment and funding decisions without an adequate evidence base and subject to challenge.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The costs to support the Open Space strategy are estimated to be in the region of £40,000 which will be funded from the existing revenue budgets for Regeneration, City Environment and Public Health in financial year 2022-2023.
[VS/02032022/Q]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications from the proposal provided procurement rules are followed.
[TC/23022022/B]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 There are no equalities implications from the decision to proceed with the review of the Open Space Strategy and Action Plan. Equalities issues, including considering the implications of the Strategy and Action Plan for groups with protected characteristics, will be considered in finalising the brief for the project.

9.0 All other implications

- 9.1 A revised Open Space Strategy and Action Plan will have positive benefits for health and wellbeing, promoting biodiversity and for climate adaption and mitigation. It will support

the provision and improvement of public, accessible open space close to residents' homes, the importance of which have been highlighted in the Covid-19 Pandemic.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 City of Wolverhampton Open Space Strategy and Action Plan Update, June 2018