



EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	Open Spaces Development Initiatives
Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date:	12/3/18
Is this an Executive Decision:	NO
Is this a Key Decision:	NO
Is the Report Confidential:	NO
If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A LGA 1972:	n/a
<p>Essential Signatories:</p> <p>ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN THE NAME OF A HEAD OF SERVICE</p> <p>Monitoring Officer: Angela Wakefield</p> <p>Date Signature</p> <p>Chief Finance Officer: Sal Khan</p> <p>Date Signature</p>	

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

Date: 12th March 2018

REPORT TITLE: Open Spaces Development Initiatives

PORTFOLIO: Cultural Services

HEAD OF SERVICE: Mark Rizk

CONTACT OFFICER: Michael Hovers Ext. No. x1776

WARD(S) AFFECTED: Wards within Burton and Uttoxeter

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. This report seeks to define a quality and standards framework for parks and open spaces through the use of the Keep Britain Tidy, Green Flag initiative and the Royal Horticultural Society's, It's Your Neighbourhood, Parks programme (RHS Parks).

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report sets out a simple standards framework for Council-run open spaces that advocates the use of the independently judged Green Flag and RHS Parks awards to measure quality. Using a tiered approach it is recommended that two parks are entered into Green Flag (The Washlands and Bramshall Road Park) as two premium parks, with a second tier of local/community parks judged and graded through the RHS Parks Schemes. Introducing such an approach should help residents to understand the quality of open spaces in their respective neighbourhoods.

3. Background

- 3.1. Historically, ESBC parks standards have solely been measured using the Green Flag award scheme. Across the last decade the Council has targeted awards in 3 to 4 parks. These locations include Branston Water Park, Stapenhill Gardens, The Kingfisher Trail and Bramshall Park (Uttoxeter). No

evidence exists for the reasons behind the selection of these parks, and also the non-selection of other destinations, particularly more prominent sites such as The Washlands. The advent of the Washlands Project is an opportunity to correct this oversight.

- 3.2. Local community parks, whilst perhaps, less prominent have received no standard/award and the Green Flag criteria is considered to be too extensive for a small to medium sized public park. However, with the advent of the RHS Parks award, there is an opportunity to create a measure that enables the majority of East Staffordshire residents to know how the quality standard of their local park measures up.

4. Contribution to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1. Promoting Local Economic Growth

5. Open Spaces Development initiatives

Introduction

- 5.1. Within the last decade ESBC has strived to reach the gold standard for 3 to 4 parks in the Midlands regional Green Flag awards. Whilst this award is nationally recognised, the time and preparation required for producing a Green Flag entry is prohibitive, especially when considering that four detailed management plans have to be produced each year. Furthermore, it could be argued that this volume of work could be focused on more prominent green spaces such as the Washlands which has never been entered for an award.
- 5.2. Subsequently, this report makes recommendations for changing the number and location of Green Flag entries and seeks to establish the RHS Parks scheme as a barometer of standards in local/community parks across the Borough.

Green Flag- current context

- 5.3. Four parks currently attempt to adhere to the Green Flag criteria which includes eight elements:
 - A Welcoming Place
 - Healthy, Safe and Secure
 - Well Maintained and Clean
 - Environmental Management
 - Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage
 - Community Involvement
 - Marketing & Communication
 - Management
- 5.4. Adhering to this criteria requires the annual production of a detailed management plan for submission to the Green Flag judges. Whereas this is a time consuming exercise, the size and nature of some of the present Green

Flag entries make success in all categories difficult to achieve. Conversely, large important open spaces, with much to offer in each section have been omitted from the awards scheme.

Green Flag- 2019 and beyond

- 5.5 Consequently, it is recommended that ESBC entries are reduced from 4 to 2 locations. The proposed Open Spaces to remain under the Green Flag awards scheme are Bramshall Park in Uttoxeter and the Washlands in Burton on Trent. Bramshall Park can be considered Uttoxeter's premium park and is well regarded by the local community. The park also featured heavily in the National Judge's comments for the 2017 'In Bloom' awards.
- 5.6 Following on from the Bramshall Park entry is a recommendation to enter the Washlands for the Burton on Trent area. This Washlands submission would incorporate the Memorial Gardens, Abbots Garden, Library Waterfront, Regatta Fields, Stapenhill Gardens, Stapenhill Hollows, Stapenhill Woodland walk and the Centenary woodlands. Through the incorporation of these open space sites the proposed Green Flag submission would mimic the boundaries of the fledging "Washlands Project" and would provide a lasting legacy for that programme through the anticipated 'haul' of green flags over forthcoming years.
- 5.7 Expanding the Burton entry to incorporate the Washlands takes advantage of the rich and diverse nature of the park and the criteria provides a focal point for the ongoing management of the open space through the construction of the Green Flag Management Plan. Such a Management Plan could support the strategic aims of the Washlands Project over the next 5 years. This would incorporate key pieces of work such as the emerging Woodland Management Plan for the Centenary Woods and surrounding tree stocks.
- 5.8 Additional benefits to this proposed expansion are that the new larger Green Flag area will border the Town Centre creating a natural link between green space and the urban landscape of the Town. Such a situation would then dovetail with the aims and the objective of the Town Centre Regeneration Project.
- 5.9 Finally, having just two Green Flag entries reduces the resource demand due to the unique way parks are judged. Judging alternates each year between a full inspection and a 'mystery shopper' version. Subsequently, in year 1 whilst the Washlands receives a full inspection, Bramshall will get a 'mystery shopper' review, this then enables officers to focus time, effort and resource on the Washlands. Year 2 would see this situation reversed.

RHS Parks- context and 2017 trial

- 5.9 Traditionally, smaller community parks have received no award or recognition because their size and limited range of facilities have made them unsuitable for Green Flag. Furthermore, at a cost of £369 per park, entering would be a costly exercise for little demonstrable return. However in 2015, the RHS launched a parks scheme which provides a grading for parks based on their

well-established “In Bloom” format of gold, silver gilt, silver, bronze or certificate rating. Whereas the Green Flag criteria contains eight elements, the RHS award is simplified into 3 elements (Community, Maintenance and Environment) and the fee for entry is just £50. Resource requirements are also reduced as a detailed management plan is not required.

- 5.10 In 2017 the Open Spaces team trialled the RHS Parks award at six parks and open spaces in the Borough to gain a baseline indicator. No additional resource was put in or extra work under taken by the contractors. The only requirement was that an officer guides the judge/s around the Open Space. Consequently, the trial yielded the following results and awards

Fig 1: 2017 RHS Parks award trial results

Location	Community	Maintenance	Environment	Award
Branston Water Park	4	4	4	Bronze
Shobnall Leisure Centre	3	8	8	Silver
Stapenhill Gardens	6	9	9	Silver Gilt
Stapenhill Cemetery	8	8	8	Silver Gilt
Bramshall Park	8	8	8	Silver Gilt
Mill Hill Lane	8	8	8	Silver Gilt

- 5.11 RHS Parks results are accompanied by judges’ comments and recommendations. These scores provide a focal point for the Open Spaces team to review operational practices and specifications. As can be seen from the Branston Water Park result there is a need to consider the specification in this location. They also enable residents to see the quality of their nearest open space as verified by an independent RHS trained judge.

RHS Parks: Building on the trial

- 5.12 Scores for Community involvement have been low for some open spaces within the trial, this is for a variety of reasons. Those that have scored highly have a ‘Friends of...’ Group or have multiple local stakeholders that take an active interest in the park. The intention here is not for ESBC to lead on developing community involvement but rather opening up the possibility.
- 5.13 Bramshall Park ‘Friends of’ Group grew and developed organically from local residents’ passion for the open space and out of a desire to improve it for future generations. Since its inception the group has been a useful partner for consultations, carrying out site surveys and members often report faults directly to Open Spaces officers. Community participation has to be driven by local residents and not through the Council. Experience of other community programmes suggests that Council led schemes are more likely to fail as there is limited community “buy in”. Consequently, there is a risk that these scores remain low.
- 5.14 However, the intention is to focus Council action around Maintenance and Environment scores. From the trial it can be seen that 5 of the 6 scored highly

in these areas, suggesting the Council has a good specification level for the majority of parks and open spaces. The aim is not necessarily to reach gold standard but to give communities a clear measure of the standards on their nearest park.

5.15 Moving into 2018 it is recommended that this trial is expanded to incorporate 5 more parks from across Burton and Uttoxeter. The recommended sites for inclusion are:

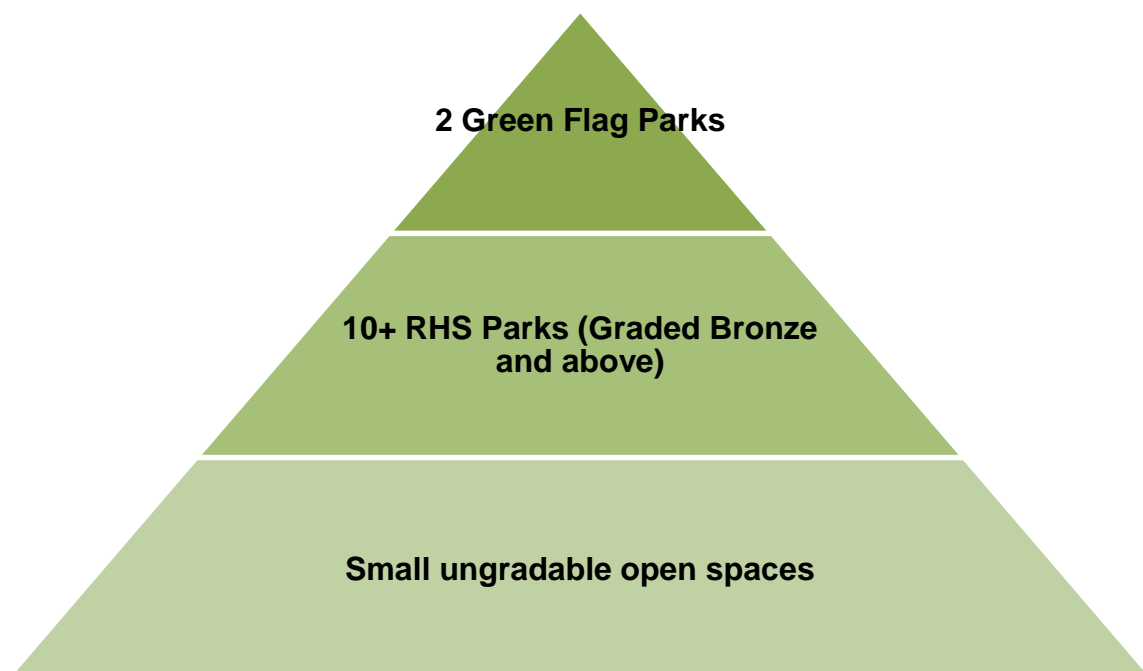
- Anglesey Community Park
- Eton Park
- Heath Road Community Park
- Pennycroft Community Park
- St Luke's Park (also known as Horninglow Community Park)

5.16 Selection of these parks has not been based on their quality or range of facilities but on their proximity to communities. Certain residents and community groups are restricted to the number and type of parks they can access. Therefore, the aim is to have a park/open space judged in each of the urban wards of Burton and Uttoxeter. Rural wards have not been included due to the limited amount of land in ESBC ownership, however open spaces in rural communities could be entered in 2019.

The Standards structure

5.17 Bringing together the Green Flag and RHS Awards would create a standards structure for parks and open spaces across the Borough which are independently assessed and judged.

Figure 2: The proposed Open Spaces Standard



7.4. The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

8. **Legal Considerations**

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:
Angela Wakefield*

8.1. There are no significant legal issues arising from this Report.

9. **Equalities and Health**

9.1. **Equality impacts:** The subject of this Report is [not] a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

9.2. **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

10. **Human Rights**

10.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report

11. **Sustainability** (including climate change and change adaptation measures)

11.1. Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures) N/A

12. **Recommendation(s)**

12.1. The proposed standards model for Open Spaces is approved.

12.2. A Green Flag Management Plan is produced to support the strategic development of the Washlands.

12.3. The Washlands is entered into the Green Flag awards for 2019.