

WIRRAL GREEN AND OPEN SPACE STRATEGY KEY STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP, 25TH APRIL 2013

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

1. Introduction

A key stakeholder workshop was held on 25th April 2013 at Birkenhead Town Hall as part of the preparation of the ten year Wirral Green and Open Space Strategy for 2013-2023. The workshop was attended by more than 100 people representing a wide range of key stakeholders. These ranged from Parks Friends groups to sports clubs and partners, nature conservation partners to Councillors. It also included Council staff including Parks and Countryside Rangers, Maintenance staff and Development Team and from other teams including Planning, Climate Change Strategy, Sports Development, Tourism, Highways, Community Safety and Heritage Strategy. The workshop featured eight discussion groups, comprising a cross-section of stakeholders, who focused on the following four topics, assisted by facilitators:

- What should the ten year vision for Wirral's Green and Open Spaces be?
- What will be the roles of the Council, Friends Groups, Volunteers and other partners in Wirral's Green and Open Spaces over the next ten years?
- What health and education benefits should green and open spaces deliver and how?
- What economic, environmental sustainability and biodiversity benefits should green and open spaces deliver and how?

2. Key messages from the workshop

2.1 Vision and Strategic Priorities

- Safe places
- Accessibility
- Health, education and economy role of green and open spaces
- Inter-generational cohesion
- Involve communities and volunteers
- Engage with local businesses
- Sustainability
- Excellence and exemplars
- Benchmark best practice
- Core Council role includes facilitating and communicating with Friends groups
- Partnership working
- Inspire
- Motivated well-trained staff
- Maintain, renew and enhance
- Realism and viability, informed by evidence and trends
- Effective use of technology
- Affordable
- Achieve a balance
- Diversity spectrum, from 'wilder' to more formal spaces
- Achieve a legacy

2.2 Green and open spaces are important infrastructure that supports the economy

- Quality place help to attract investment
- Visitor economy supported by diverse mix of green and open space attractions
- 'Staycation' visitor facilities
- Skills training
- Sponsorship
- Develop income generation e.g. cafes
- Sustainable business model

2.3 The importance of safe green and open spaces, well used and well maintained, year round

- Maximise positive usage where there are under-utilised sites or times such as weekend evenings, including through activities and events
- Provide welcoming and vibrant places with the right facilities that can be realistically maintained to a high standard to draw people in
- Balance usage with avoiding overloading the most popular sites and sensitive habitats e.g. coastal

2.4 Maintain and protect an accessible network of green and open spaces

2.5 Inspire and achieve excellence. Wirral Standard, based on Green Flag criteria

Possible additional criteria detail could include:

- Health project criteria
- Playground standard

2.6 The importance of green and open spaces for health

- Physical, mental and social health benefits
- Different age groups
- Volunteers
- Healthy food
- Support for people with learning disabilities
- Air quality
- Sports participation rates
- Informal exercise
- Sport including golf (including entry level), cycling, bowls, football, walking, running, orienteering
- Fitness equipment trails are proving popular in attracting users into parks
- Link to health targets
- Important for mobility, balance, circulation, tackling isolation

2.7 The importance of green and open spaces for education

- Link to school curriculums
- Eco Schools
- Forest Schools

- Horticultural and sporting education
- Possible code of conduct for parks use
- Disseminate information e.g. notice boards and websites
- Accreditation

2.8 Engage different generations

- Intergenerational events and activities

2.9 Need for clear understanding of customer needs

2.10 Importance of Biodiversity

- Biodiversity duty and statutory requirements for SSSIs and European designated sites
- Habitats e.g. for bees, birds, amphibians and other species
- Priority habitats include coast, heathland, wetlands, meadow, woodland

2.11 The roles of Council, Friends and Partners going forward

Key functions = delivery, funding, coordination, communication and training

Wirral Council's role

- Strong support for providing maintaining green and open spaces as a core function
- Possibly greater commissioning role in future
- Monitor, report on and deliver agreed performance standards
- Communicate with Friends groups
- Support and facilitate Friends groups, Friends Forum, Parks Steering Group, Partnership and Performance Board
- Support establishment of new and continuation of existing Friends groups
- Important to have clear lines of communication and points of contact
- Prepare site management plans in conjunction with the local community
- Efficient working with well-trained and motivated staff effectively deployed and supported with IT and machinery resources
- Staff and information sources such as website and notice boards to act as 'connectors' so people know what groups, facilities and activities exist in and around parks
- Need for realism and stable business model based on ten year budgetary outlook
- Manage expectations
- Set future fees and charges strategy
- Coordinate training
- Communicate e.g. roles, scope and insurance
- Source funding
- Develop a 'menu' of volunteering opportunities

Friends Groups and Parks Partnerships' roles

- Some Friends groups would be reluctant to take on ownership or maintenance of sites

- Input into performance monitoring as a 'critical friend', for example through a Partnership and Performance Board
- Help set priorities
- Link together different user groups within parks, act as a 'voice' for users
- How to ensure friends are as representative as possible of their communities?
- Established Friends groups to help to 'buddy', mentor and support new Friends groups for sites or groups of sites
- How to sustain and build capacity?
- Access funding for projects
- Income generation
- Bring added dynamism
- Help develop projects and secure funding for them
- Some groups are 'lower key' than others, have different roles, e.g. some are active in hands on tasks, others focus on fundraising
- Allotment groups would like to join Friends Forum

Partners' roles

- Consensus that the role of partners, Friends and volunteers will increase over time, both due to budgets and need
- Funding
- Evidence base to support investment
- Provide technical expertise
- 'Critical friend' role in performance monitoring and input into service planning
- Possible transfer of some sites to partners to manage, while Council retains core site management function

Volunteers roles

- Undertake tasks from a 'menu' of opportunities from 'hands on' conservation, planting and maintenance tasks to fundraising and support
- Work with partners e.g. Wirral Conservation Volunteers and VCAW

2.12 Environmental sustainability

- Sustainable drainage solutions including for pitch and park drainage
- Addressing climate change
- Exemplars of good practice
- More environmentally friendly operations e.g. efficient machinery, composting
- Exemplar buildings

3. How will the workshop findings be used?

The workshop comments will help shape the vision, strategic priorities and content of the Wirral Green and Open Space Strategy. They will be used in conjunction with other evidence, for example the Wirral Parks User Survey 2012 and Wirral Visitor Study 2011, and other consultation and engagement activity being undertaken for the Wirral Green and Open Space Strategy. These include questionnaires undertaken in 2013 about quality and quantity standards in parks. People aged under 25 were under-represented among respondents to the User Survey and the key stakeholder workshop so some of these additional activities will include younger people to ensure a cross-section of views. The draft Wirral Green and Open Space Strategy will go out to public consultation in Autumn 2013.