


REPORT TO CABINET

6 May 2020

Subject:	Sandwell Green Space Strategy 2020-2030
Cabinet Portfolio:	Cllr. Maria Crompton – Cabinet Member Safer Communities.
Director:	Executive Director – Neighbourhoods – Alison Knight Director – Housing and Communities – Alan Caddick
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Key Decision:	
Cabinet Member Approval and Date:	Cllr. Maria Crompton – 14 April 2020
Director Approval:	Alan Caddick
Reason for Urgency:	Urgency provisions do not apply
Exempt Information Ref:	Exemption provisions do not apply
Ward Councillor (s) Consulted (if applicable):	Ward Councillors were invited to the Friend/Community group drop-in session for consultation
Scrutiny Consultation Considered?	Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board has been consulted on 30 January 2020
Contact Officer(s):	Helga Lutz

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the Green Space Strategy 2020-2030, as set out in Appendix 1.
2. Agrees that a further report be submitted setting out action plans for specific recommendations and a Parks and Green Space Investment strategy, outlining external and internal funding opportunities and requirements.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the strategic directions for the management and maintenance of green spaces in Sandwell and seeks approval for the Green Space Strategy 2020-2030 (see Appendix 1) to help deliver positive and sustainable outcomes for green spaces, parks and associated facilities and resources in Sandwell.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030

The implementation of the Green Space Strategy (GSS) will help to sustain, improve and maintain our parks and green spaces in Sandwell. The strategy contributes to all of the ambitions within Vision 2030 in a range of ways through providing space to play, be active, learn and have fun. The strategy is also in line with the recently adopted Corporate Plan. Parks and green spaces are vital resources in helping to support healthy living and provide extensive local community-based opportunities for leisure recreation and sports.

Parks have a history of supporting the attractiveness and use of towns and they are great places for cultural activities. The national Green Flag Award for parks demonstrate excellence and the strategy commits to enhancing such places for all residents and visitors in Sandwell. It will provide opportunities to create new and safe places for play and improving environmental and social benefits for the communities served by parks.

It supports the ambitions of the Sandwell Vision 2030 through the following links:

Sandwell 2030 Ambitions	Green Space Strategy Links
<p>Ambition 1 Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children are given equal opportunities through access to space to play, be active, take part in sport, learn and have fun;• All residents will have access to high quality green space close to where they live;• All residents will have access to a green space within 400 metres of where they live.

Sandwell 2030 Ambitions	Green Space Strategy Links
<p>Ambition 2</p> <p>Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green spaces will be safe and accessible local community facilities; • Green spaces will provide accessible and local facilities for people and families to be physically active; • Green spaces provide 'breathing spaces' that support good mental health; • Programmes will be delivered to increase levels of physical activity for people and families to participate in sport and to be physically active; • Active travel routes through green spaces contribute to healthier communities.
<p>Ambition 3</p> <p>Our workforce and young people are skilled and talented, geared up to respond to changing business needs and to win rewarding jobs in a growing economy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green spaces will be used as local and accessible venues for people and children to develop that enhance employability; • Green spaces will support the delivery of accredited sport and fitness programmes; • The Council will offer Apprenticeships, Traineeships and work experience places in grounds maintenance and in Sandwell Valley Country Park (SVCP) to develop skills and experience. This is delivered in partnership with various colleges; • The Council will work with local businesses to improve green spaces.
<p>Ambition 4</p> <p>Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green spaces will be promoted as excellent venues for learning outside the classroom; • Green spaces will be promoted as places for community learning; • Programmes of formal and community learning will contribute to raised educational attainment.
<p>Ambition 5</p> <p>Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green spaces provide accessible and safe venues that lead to greater community cohesion; • Green spaces provide spaces where local communities can work together to improve their local environment; • Well valued and well used green spaces make a positive contribution to neighbourhoods and reduce anti-social behaviour.
<p>Ambition 6</p> <p>We have excellent and affordable public transport that connects us to all local centres and to jobs in Birmingham,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green spaces provide excellent active travel routes to schools and neighbourhood facilities; • Green and blue corridors provide traffic free routes.

Sandwell 2030 Ambitions	Green Space Strategy Links
Wolverhampton, the airport and the wider West Midlands.	
<p>Ambition 7</p> <p>We now have many new homes to meet a full range of housing needs in attractive neighbourhoods and close to key transport routes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New development offers opportunities to create new green space to address deficiencies; • New development offers opportunities to enhance existing green space; • High quality green space contributes to attractive and sustainable communities; • High quality green space enhances land and property values.
<p>Ambition 8</p> <p>Our distinctive towns and neighbourhoods are successful centres of community life, leisure and entertainment where people increasingly choose to bring up their families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality green spaces improve environmental quality and can help attract new residents, new businesses and tourism / day visitors. • Heritage parks and green spaces contribute to local distinctiveness and make neighbourhoods more attractive.
<p>Ambition 9</p> <p>Sandwell has become a location of choice for industries of the future where the local economy and high performing companies continue to grow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality green spaces can help attract inward investment; • High quality green spaces contribute to healthier and happier workforces.
<p>Ambition 10</p> <p>Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandwell's green spaces win national awards (Green Flag Award / People's Choice Award) and improve the reputation of the area and Council; • SVCP is a Visit England quality assured visitor attraction • Sandwell's green spaces attract external funding from national funding bodies; • Sandwell Park farm is approved by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust • Sandwell's green spaces provide opportunities for local people to come together and deliver environmental improvements.

Parks and Green Space strategy ambition:

Sandwell is a place where everyone has access to high quality green spaces that contribute to creating a sense of place, to the quality of life and the environment, and improves health and wellbeing

This ambition will support the vision 2030 and the Corporate Plan

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The primary purpose of the Green Space Strategy 2020-2030 (GSS) is:
- to provide a strategic approach to the management of green spaces;
 - to enable the sustainable use of the natural environment in order to benefit the environment; and
 - to improve the quality of life and health and wellbeing of residents, workers and visitors as well as improving the local economy.

- 3.2 The previous Green Space Strategy covered a period of ten years to 2020.

Much has changed since the original strategy was developed in 2010 including:

- The current review of the new Black County Plan and local planning policy
 - Green space improvements and investment has improved the quality of many spaces
 - Greater community involvement has had a positive impact on green space
 - Some loss to development and also the creation of new spaces
 - The economic and funding environment is very different following reducing support from central government and austerity policies
 - Other policies and strategies have changed – the health and wellbeing agenda is increasingly important and alignment with new priorities is required
 - New opportunities such as those offered by the Commonwealth Games that will be partly hosted by Sandwell in 2022;
 - Renewed international and national focus on climate change and the commitment in 2019 by the UK government to become carbon neutral by 2050.
- 3.3 The Green Space audit (GSA) 2018/19 with the associated Borough and Town reports informed the development of this strategy. The audit provides baseline information on quantity, accessibility, quality and value of green spaces within the borough (attached in appendix 2). This GSA is the third such audit for Sandwell Council, revising and updating the earlier audit developed in 2013 and 2006. This report sets out the methodologies used in undertaking analysis of the quantity, quality, value and accessibility of green spaces in Sandwell Borough

along with the respective findings. This report also includes the results of the consultation undertaken as part of this study and at all stages, comparisons have been made to the findings of the previous Green Space Audits.

- 3.4 The Sandwell Green Space Strategy has been further informed by a number of consultation processes in 2019 with a range of audiences and stakeholders, which has been outlined in section 5 of this report. The consultation reports have been attached in Appendix 3.
- 3.5 Furthermore, the following drivers for change have been considered:
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Communities and Local Government, 2012
 - Sport England: Towards an Active Nation, Strategy 2016-2021
 - A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018)
 - Black Country Core Strategy (currently being replaced by the emerging Black Country Plan - adoption in 2023.)
 - Movement for Growth: The West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan (2016)
 - Birmingham and the Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan 2010 (BAP)
 - Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area Ecological Strategy 2017 – 2022; Wildlife Trust for Birmingham & Black Country.
- 3.6 The strategy is linked to a number of other strategies and plans developed in Sandwell. The Green Space Delivery Board, made up of a wide stakeholder group, will ensure that appropriate references are made to these reports and that the action plans will support the delivery of:
- Designation of Nature Conservation Sites - approved 7 August 2019 and any other previous designations previously approved
 - Sandwell Playing Pitch Strategy Refresh Needs Assessment Report and Strategic Document (October 2018) - approved 30 October 2019
 - Climate Change Strategy (draft) - approved 8 January 2020
 - Sandwell's Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan – approved 5 Feb 2020
 - Corporate Plan - The Sandwell Plan 2020 - 2025 and Budget – approved 19 Feb 2020
 - Cultural Prospectus – approved 18 March 2020

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The Sandwell Green Space Audit (GSA) Borough Report and the final draft of the Green Space Strategy has been 'signed off by the GSA/GSS steering group.
- 4.2 The GSS analysis and recommendations are based on the research carried out; on the consultation undertaken with a range of stakeholders; and the findings of the Green Space Audit including quantitative and qualitative aspects of the green space provision in Sandwell. The analysis and recommendations are set out under a number of themes:
- Strategic Approach
 - Environment
 - Place
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - Community
- 4.3 The Green Space Strategy (GSS) is attached in Appendix 1, which includes the GSS action plan which contains a total of 52 recommendations.

4.4 **Next Steps**

- In terms of delivering this strategy and monitoring its implementation it is proposed that a Green Space Strategy Delivery Board is established, which will bring together service areas from across the Council. This Board should formally report to the Political Champion and Cabinet member (these may be one and the same) on a quarterly basis. Membership of the Strategy Delivery Board should include Parks, Sandwell Valley, Strategic Asset Management, Housing, Planning, Public Health, Grounds Maintenance, Sport and Leisure, Landscape Architect Service area, Highway, Children's Play and Youth Service, Cemeteries and Crematoria Service, Town Teams and representatives from the third sector and voluntary sector. This should be chaired by the appropriate Director.
- Alongside the appointment of a political champion it is proposed to establish high-level representation for the green space agenda on the Health and Wellbeing Board, ensuring joined-up working within the council.
- We will ensure that the implementation of the Strategy is cognisant of the other relevant strategies and corporate initiatives – Corporate Plan, Vision 2030, the Climate Change Strategy, Cultural Prospectus and the Inclusive Economy Deal; and that there are complimentary initiatives and approaches developed.

- The strategy has been developed in the context of reduced and limited financial resources going forward. Recommendations focus on more joined-up activities within the council and with external partners. Action plans will be developed for specific recommendations, identifying budget requirements and possible internal and external funding opportunities. This will be the baseline for a forthcoming Parks and Green Space investment strategy, which will be presented to Cabinet at a later stage.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 5.1 A steering group was set up to guide the GSA and the GSS. Members included the Director of Housing and Communities, Service Managers for Commercial Services and Tourism, Culture and Leisure and representatives from the following service areas – Planning and Regeneration, Parks and Grounds Maintenance, Sandwell Valley and Countryside Management, Sports and Leisure, Public Health, Play Service (Childrens Service), Urban Design and Building Services, Strategic Asset Management, Town Team. At various stages the Bereavement Service provided further input.
- 5.2 A number of consultation processes were carried out in 2019 with a range of audiences and stakeholders, including:
- A Household Survey for completion by residents. This was distributed by post to a random sample of 10,000 households stratified by Town. It was publicised on social media that the survey was also available online for anyone interested in the Green Space agenda for Sandwell to complete, including elected members. A total of 1315 responses were received between 25 February and 17 March 2019;
 - Go Play Survey – A survey of children aged 9-10 years, which included questions about use of green space as well as broader questions about leisure and play opportunities. A total of 688 responses were received;
 - A Community Group Survey to community-based organisations with an interest in parks and green space in Sandwell with ten responses;
 - A series of four stakeholder workshops were held. These were based around: staff and partners, biodiversity, income generation and funding opportunities, health and wellbeing. Key stakeholders were invited to these workshops including cabinet members.
 - A drop-in consultation session at West Bromwich Town Hall for friends' groups, residents' associations, sports groups and elected ward members representing local residents.

5.3 The consultation results indicated that green space in Sandwell is well used. The majority (96.4%) of respondents to the Household Survey said they visited green space in Sandwell, with over two thirds (67.9%) of respondents visiting at least weekly. This represents an increase compared with the previous survey (in 2013), when 51.7% visited at least weekly. Moreover, a fifth (21.6%) of children who responded to the Go Play Survey said they would go outside to play or hang out with friends most days. Sandwell Valley Country Park was the most frequently used space cited by 19.1% of Household Survey respondents.

5.4 The consultation reports are attached in Appendix 2.

5.5 The Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Community Scrutiny Board was consulted on 30 January 2020. The Scrutiny Board considered the proposals for a revised Green Space Strategy. The previous Strategy was approved in 2010 for the 10-year period ending 2020. The board was made aware:

- That there had been significant change since that time, including reductions to parks funding at national and local levels and new priorities such as climate change, biodiversity and the benefits green space has for health and wellbeing.
- That the revised Green Space Strategy would also support all of the ambitions of Vision 2030.
- That extensive consultation had been carried out including a residents survey, Go Play survey of children aged 9-10, survey of community groups, workshops with stakeholders and a public drop-in session.
- That an audit of existing green space in Sandwell had been carried out, which indicated that Sandwell had less publicly accessible green space than its neighbouring Black Country authorities. However, while quantity of green space had reduced per 1000 population (mainly due to population growth), the overall quality of sites had been sustained.
- Approximately one-quarter of Sandwell was green space, but this varied by town
- That a set of recommendations had been developed across five themes following the consultation and the audit, which were as follows:
 - A Strategic Approach;
 - Environment;
 - Place;
 - Health and Wellbeing;
 - Community.

The scrutiny members highlighted the following points:

- That it was not just the presence of Green Space that was important, it was the confidence of local communities to access and make use of the sites. Perception of anti-social behaviour, crime and safety could act as a barrier to people making use of their local sites;

- That funding for parks and open spaces across Sandwell was not felt by members to be equal;
- That a detailed Action Plan would be prepared once the Green Space Strategy was approved;
- That a festival was due to use Sandwell Valley as its venue, which would bring 20,000 people in to visit;
- That there was an officer working group with the Canal and River Trust looking at the waterways in the borough and how to encourage their use and develop a Canals and Waterways Strategy.
- That members felt it was important to encourage Friends groups for parks and green spaces to foster a sense of local ownership and pride in sites

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS.

- 6.1 The council could decide not to support / approve a new Green Spaces Strategy 2020-2030. However, this would not support the delivery of the ambitions and aspirations set out in the Sandwell Vision 2030 and in the Corporate Plan.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council will need to review its green infrastructure assets and develop a medium to long term investment strategy to ensure that resources are used most effectively. This investment strategy will consider needs identified through the Green Space Audit and Strategy as well as the Playing Pitch Strategy and Sport and Active Recreation Strategy. The strategy will consider opportunities presented by the Walking and Cycling plan, through the climate change strategy, the cultural prospectus and the forthcoming Canal SPD. It will also be informed by the preparation for the Commonwealth Games and the legacy outcomes from the hosting of this international event.
- 7.2 External funding or funding from internal service partners will be required to deliver some elements of the GSS. Other resources will be sought through the review of the Planning Obligation SPD process or through the adoption process for newly-developed recreational green space sites.
- 7.3 The 2010 Green Space Strategy was adopted following a review and restructure of service areas delivering parks management and grounds maintenance operations. A single “Green Budget” was created, which was held by the inhouse Grounds Maintenance Service rather than a parks management ‘client’. However, since this time there have been significant changes to the Council structure and to the level of staffing and

financial resources available. The speed and scale of change has meant that current structures and budgets are no longer aligned. This Green Space Strategy recommends that a review of organisational structures and the alignment of budgets is carried out as a priority measure to facilitate the implementation of the wider recommendations of the GS strategy.

- 7.4 Levels of funding for parks and green spaces have reduced significantly over the last ten years across the country. The State of UK Parks¹ research found that 92% of park managers reported cuts to their revenue budgets over the past three years. The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) identified that funding for neighbourhood services such as parks and open spaces fell by 27% in England, Wales and Scotland over a nine-year period (2009/10-2017/18). Revenue funding for parks and green spaces at Sandwell Council has been significantly reduced and is now less than half (48%) the level of 2010/11 as a result of the impact of austerity and spending cuts. Overall, the scale of reduction in Sandwell has been greater than the national average. As a consequence, income streams for parks and green spaces need to be reviewed and additional sources of funding explored to complement and offset reduced levels of core funding.
- 7.5 Reduced staffing and financial resources has meant that a number of policies and strategies relating to parks and green spaces have now come to the end of their timeframe or have expired. Changing legislative frameworks, legal precedents, standards, guidance and codes of practice, alongside other factors now mean that many of these policies and strategies require reviewing and updating. By updating these strategies and policies, as outlined in the GSS action plan, further resource implications will become clearer.
- 7.6 The development of a business plan for Sandwell Valley will provide the opportunity to further develop the offer at this regional attraction, which ensures greater financial sustainability for the service.

Recommendation – Strategic Approach

The recommendation under the Strategic Approach theme heading of the GSS is to implement the strategy effectively with political support and revised organisational structure, along with the aim to consider the strategic resource implication in order to increase the offer and uptake of facilities.

¹ HLF (2016) State of UK Parks

These are as follows:

Ref	Recommendation – Strategic Approach
1	Appoint a political champion for parks and green spaces.
2	Establish a Green Space Strategy Implementation Group.
3	Review the organisational structures relating to green space services and how budgets are managed / aligned, taking into account the impact of legislative changes
4	Review existing greenspace policies and underpinning strategies in line with this revised Green Space Strategy
5	Develop a medium to long term investment strategy for internal and external funding relating to parks and green spaces.
6	Review financial management arrangements to ensure that there are clear incentives for services areas to achieve greater income generation
7	Develop a business plan for Sandwell Valley (& Dartmouth Park) to improve the visitor offer and to achieve greater financial sustainability.
8	Ensure that the proposals with the agreed Cultural Prospectus around events and tourism and leisure are reflected in the proposed actions plans for the implementation of the Green Space Strategy.
9	Develop an overall marketing plan for parks and green spaces in Sandwell that seeks to encourage use by all sections of the community.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Environment Bill was introduced on 15 October 2019. This legislation will create legally-binding environmental improvement targets. A new independent Office for Environmental Protection will be established to scrutinise environmental policy and law, investigate complaints and take enforcement action against public authorities, if necessary, to uphold the environmental standards. The Bill also places the bold ambition of the flagship 25-Year Environment Plan on a statutory footing and goes beyond the key government commitments outlined earlier this year by confirming powers to enhance nature and habitats and combat the devastating effects of plastics on the natural environment.
- 8.2 The Environment Bill 2020 also introduced the requirement for the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies across England. Local Nature Recovery Strategies are intended to help local authorities and other public bodies identify priorities and opportunities for conserving and enhancing nature. Furthermore, there is an increased emphasis on protecting and enhancing biodiversity through development.
- 8.3 Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before, in part by requiring a 10% uplift in total biodiversity value on development sites where ecology and

habitats has been lost. It relies on the implementation of a mitigation hierarchy to avoid, mitigate or compensate for biodiversity losses. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs consulted on the proposed policy in 2019 and Biodiversity Net Gain is a core element within the Environment Bill 2020. Once the Bill is adopted into UK law, Biodiversity Net Gain will be integrated into the planning system.

- 8.4 Another key driver at national and international level is climate change. During the development of this strategy the UK Government has committed the UK to become the first major economy to pass a net zero emissions law that would cover all greenhouse gases by 2050. Net zero means any emissions would be balanced by schemes to offset an equivalent amount of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, such as planting trees or using technology like carbon capture and storage.
- 8.5 The following legislation and frameworks were considered as part of the development of the green space strategy:
- National Planning Policy Framework, Communities and Local Government, 2012
 - Sport England: Towards an Active Nation, Strategy 2016-2021
 - A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018)
 - Black Country Core Strategy (currently being reviewed and to be renamed as the Black Country Plan - adoption in 2023.)
 - Movement for Growth: The West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan (2016)
 - Birmingham and the Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan 2010 (BAP)
 - Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area Ecological Strategy 2017 – 2022; Wildlife Trust for Birmingham & Black Country
- 8.6 Consideration needs to be given to the Council byelaws relating to parks and green spaces, which are out of date and do not cover some newer activities (such as use of unmanned aerial vehicles / drones and barbecues) and limit some activities such as cycling and active travel that are now seen as activities that should be promoted. These byelaws should be reviewed and updated

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out by the service area for the proposals. No adverse issues have been identified that impact on a particular group and therefore a full EIA is not required

- 9.2 Some of the action points identified within the GSS action plan will improve accessibility of green spaces to a wider audience.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 There are no specific data protection measures to consider. All data relating to the matter is maintained in accordance with the Data Protection measures previously implemented by the Council

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 The Council will continue to work with the Police and other partners to address anti-social behaviour in parks and green spaces as part of a wider neighbourhood approach to community safety. The Council will promote its own reporting mechanisms for residents alongside the numbers for Crime Stoppers and the West Midlands Police.
- 11.2 The Council byelaws relating to parks and green spaces are out of date and do not cover some newer activities (such as use of unmanned aerial vehicles / drones and barbecues) and limit some activities such as cycling and active travel that are now seen as activities that should be promoted. These byelaws should be reviewed and updated. In recent years the service areas managing green spaces have relied on the enforcement of powers accredited to the Warden Service in line with legislation, namely the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 and the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.
- 11.3 The recommendation related to crime and disorder are outlined in the Place theme heading in the GSS and the identified actions are shown in section 14 - impact on council land - within this report

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

- 12.1 The implementation of the strategy will be ensured by the creation of a GSS Delivery Board, which will steer, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the action plan.
- 12.2 The strategy has been developed in the context of reduced and limited financial resources going forward. Recommendations focus on more joined up works within the council and with external partners. Action plans will be developed for specific recommendations identifying budget requirements and possible internal and external funding opportunities and requirements. This will be the baseline for a forthcoming Parks and Green Space investment strategy which will be presented to Cabinet at a later stage

Recommendation - Environment

To improve environmental sustainability and protection of parks and green spaces the strategy outlines the following recommendations:

Ref	Recommendation - Environment
10	Ensure that biodiversity and wider environmental issues are recognised within the Sandwell Vision.
11	Sandwell Council is developing a Climate Change Strategy to enable a co-ordinated approach to global, national and local environmental issues (including air quality)
12	Create a working group to establish the natural capital of parks and greenspaces in Sandwell.
13	Through the planning process seek to protect designated green space provision across the borough.
14	Continue to work at a sub-regional level with respect to green space planning and development.
15	Adopt local quantity standards for green space provision which seek to protect green space and balance this with the need to deliver housing and employment land.
16	Seek to address deficiencies in the quantity, quality and accessibility of green spaces through the development and management process.
17	The Green Space Audit classified spaces as low or high quality and low or high value. Develop an action plan for low quality / low value green spaces.
18	Further develop plans for new cemeteries & crematoria to meet the needs of the bereaved families.
19	Review the future demand for allotments and community garden sites and develop a strategic plan to meet these needs.
20	Review the Planning Obligations SPD in order to set out what planning obligations will be sought to make planning applications acceptable
21	Repeat the quality assessment as necessary in order to measure progress and maintain a robust evidence base.
22	Actively seek and engage in opportunities to protect and increase the biodiversity within the borough
23	Improve and extend green corridors to support biodiversity.
24	Review grounds maintenance opportunities to support biodiversity and to create more semi-natural green space.
25	Develop a strategic approach to managing the Black Country / Millennium Forest.
26	Deliver "A tree for every child" programme.

Recommendation – Community

In addition, the work planned with the community and third sector will support the sustainability of the green environment and assist with the financial sustainability of the strategic direction.

These are as follows:

Ref	Recommendation - Community
45	Continue to promote and support community based organisations that are working to improve Sandwell's parks and green spaces
46	Seek to build capacity to develop and strengthen the Sandwell Green Spaces Forum (GSF).
47	Seek to increase the number and range of volunteer roles within parks and green spaces across the borough.
48	Develop pilot projects focused on community food production and community gardening.
49	Work with partners, businesses and community groups to identify additional funding sources for parks and green spaces.
50	Adopt a partnership approach with community, voluntary and commercial partners to develop enhanced facilities (including commercial entities) and to consider community asset transfer where this may offer an appropriate long term solution
51	Support the Big Local Partnerships to develop a masterplan for their local green spaces and deliver the identified improvements.
52	Adopt a partnership approach with community, voluntary and commercial partners to enhance the events and activity programmes within parks and green spaces

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 13.1 There is now a compelling body of evidence on the value of parks and green spaces in improving physical health and mental wellbeing and in bringing people together to improve community cohesion.
- 13.2 Within Sandwell there is significant health inequality. Approximately one third of the borough's residents are inactive compared to a quarter of the population nationally. People living in deprived areas are twice as likely to be physically inactive as those living in more prosperous areas. People in lower socio-economic groups are less likely to make healthy lifestyle choices, such as taking regular exercise and regularly eating fresh fruit and vegetables.

- 13.3 The Council will seek to create better links between green spaces through linking green corridors and linear walkways and ensure that Parks and green spaces provide the opportunity for traffic-free routes to move around and access neighbourhood facilities.
- 13.4 Urban trees play a pivotal role in creating healthy and economically successful communities and places for people and wildlife to live. Trees bring nature to the heart of our urban communities, help clean and cool the air, reduce flooding, and improve people’s physical and mental health. There are a range of policies and grants to encourage the planting and sustainable management of trees in rural areas, but there is a need for more policies to enhance the protection of trees in urban areas.

Recommendation – Health and Wellbeing

The recommendations under the Health theme heading within the GSS aim to improve the health and wellbeing of Sandwell’s residents and visitors. These are as follows:

Ref	Recommendation – Health and Wellbeing
39	Appoint a champion for parks and green spaces on the Health and Wellbeing Board.
40	Create improved green infrastructure to support active travel through Sandwell Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (SCWIP)
41	Develop additional programmes of sport and physical activity in parks and green spaces to improve the health and wellbeing of target groups.
42	Support the implementation of relevant actions from the Physical Activity and Sport strategy once formally adopted by the Council.
43	Develop an action plan for the Commonwealth Games legacy that increases participation / use of parks and green spaces.
44	Support the implementation of the recommendations within the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS).

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

- 14.1 The recently approved ‘A Tree for Every School Starter’ cabinet report (30 October 2019), which is part of the proposed action plan for the GSS, outlines the need that the selected sites for woodland planting will require a form of protection for the lifetime of the woodland. Sites will be carefully selected to ensure that they are suitable for protection in perpetuity and do not form part of any future development areas.

Recommendation – Place

The recommendation under the Place theme heading within the GSS are targeted to improve the welcoming aspect and the management sustainability and protection of parks and green spaces.

These are as follows:

Ref	Recommendation - Place
27	Ensure that the contribution offered by parks and green spaces to the cultural and tourism offer is recognised and harnessed.
28	Continue to achieve the Green Flag Award for key parks and greenspaces across the Borough.
29	Review and update management plans for all key parks and gardens, review asset information for all other sites and link to standard maintenance protocol / site improvement plans
30	Use the green space site management planning process to create more accessible and inclusive green spaces and facilities.
31	Review standards and ensure appropriate litter management is delivered across all parks and greenspaces.
32	Review planned preventative management for facilities in parks and green spaces.
33	Develop a planned approach to raising the quality of the lowest quality spaces (with a focus on high value low quality spaces and low quality green spaces in wards with the least amount of provision; and wards with the poorest health outcomes).
34	Adopt a neighbourhood approach to addressing anti-social behaviour in parks and green spaces.
35	Work in partnership with the Safer 6 (community safety) campaign and engage with specific projects.
36	Ensure that children and young people have good access to green spaces near where they live.
37	Work with Highways, Transportation, Planning and Public Health to improve key pedestrian and cycle routes for children and young people to allow them to safely access green spaces
38	Ensure that green spaces are multi-functional, which encourage informal sports and play and is inclusive and meet the needs of a wide range of audiences.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 The current coronavirus pandemic has shown that more than ever, parks are a lifeline for our wellbeing.

15.2 Parks and green spaces provide excellent, accessible and convenient locations for sport, recreation, play and leisure activities that encourage people to adopt more active lifestyles. As such they are important assets

and infrastructure in supporting the delivery of public health improvements. This Green Space Strategy supports the principles behind the development of a Sport and Active Recreation Strategy and recognises the opportunities to participate in the delivery of future programmes to improve levels of physical activity.

- 15.3 Increasing physical activity levels and the resulting health, social and economic benefits will contribute significantly to the achievement of the Vision 2030 and its ten ambitions and support the Corporate Plan
- 15.4 This Green Space Strategy identifies the role that green space plays in contributing to pressing environmental challenges relating to climate change, air quality and biodiversity.
- 15.5 The Green Space Strategy identifies the resources required and legal implications involved in ensuring we have a striving and engaged community, which can enjoy outdoor pursuits.
- 15.6 The Council will create a GSS Delivery Board to oversee and steer the implementation of the Green Space Strategy. The Board will oversee the future approach to our green spaces and ensure that all the recommendations set out in the strategy are actioned so that local people can maximise the benefits of our excellent green spaces; that improve their health and well-being and improve their life chances.

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 16.1 Green Space Audit Borough report 2019 provides all quantitative, qualitative, value and consultation considerations. The report is attached in appendix 2 'Sandwell Green Space Audit final v3'

17 APPENDICES:

17.1 Appendix 1 – Green Space Strategy 2020-2030

17.2 Appendix 2 - Sandwell Green Space Audit final v3

17.3 Appendix 3 - Consultation reports

- Biodiversity and Countryside Workshop Report
- Friends Forum_Community Drop-In Session Report
- Health & Wellbeing Workshop Report

- Income Generation & Funding Workshop
- Staff and Partners Workshops Report

Director Alan Caddick
Director for Housing and Communities