

# Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

23 February 2023

<b>Subject:</b>	Green Spaces Strategy and Nature Reserves Progress Report 2023
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Borough Economy Alice Davey
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Assistant Director (Borough Economy): Green Spaces, Green Services, Visitor Services, Events Matthew Huggins

## 1 Recommendations

1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon:

1.1.1 The progress report against the green spaces strategy (up to November 2022). An up to date progress report will be presented at the meeting, showing where each programme of works is at as of 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 The Green Spaces Strategy and Implementation Plan 2022 – 2025 was approved by cabinet and implemented by officers from June 20<sup>th</sup> 2022.

2.2 As part of this, the Council have published for the first time a transparent programme of works and commitments for the financial year 22/23, and committed to regular public updates on this.

2.3 A commitment within the Green Spaces Strategy objectives has now been implemented: the improvement of working relationships with Friends Groups, with a new partnership agreement in place so that ways



of working are set out. This was consulted upon with Friends Groups and a report attached outlines the process followed. The majority of existing Friends Groups have adopted this partnership agreement formally.

2.4 As part of the commitments for 22/23 financial year, there are future strategies and works in progress that we would welcome the input of Scrutiny into. These include:

- a. Allotments Review and Strategy
- b. Safer Green Spaces Strategy
- c. Green Spaces Improvement Plans
- d. Further improvements to the transparency approach to sharing information on our works and progress, and engaging residents, community groups, friends groups, businesses, Members and other departments in the further improvements to green spaces in Sandwell.

## 4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The Green Spaces Strategy and Implementation Plan 22 – 25 set out a three-year approach and objectives to improving our quality and value scores across all our Green Spaces. This cover report does not set out in detail each of the strategy elements; this is attached.

4.2 The Council have since published a detailed programme of works for all financial commitments toward the improvement of green spaces in Sandwell in 22/23 financial year. This is available online for the public here:

[https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/33356/green\\_spaces\\_programme\\_of\\_planned\\_works\\_november\\_2023](https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/33356/green_spaces_programme_of_planned_works_november_2023)

4.3 The programme of works for 22/23 set out an ambitious programme of investment, which included:

- a. Almost £4.5 million of works for 22/23. This is on track to be delivered.
- b. 41 major works in safety and enhancements in play areas, including the addition of 1 new play area and 43 play areas with easygate repairs.



- c. Refurbishments and improvements to 7 skateparks and BMX tracks in the borough.
- d. At least 10 major green space projects, including multi-million pound projects concluding or starting in West Smethwick Park, Lightwoods House and Park, and Britannia Park.
- e. New Multi-Use Games Areas as part of the Jubilee Astro Turf and Small Sided Playing Pitches projects in West Smethwick Park and Jubilee Park.
- f. Refurbishments and safety improvements to 9 outdoor gym sites.
- g. £303,000 of improvement works to nature reserves.

4.3 The Council have published a progress report on the Green Spaces Strategy and programme of works for 22/23 in November 2022. This is available online for the public here:

[https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/download/2924/green\\_spaces\\_strategy\\_progress\\_report](https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/download/2924/green_spaces_strategy_progress_report)

4.4 The Council completed a review of the ways of working with Friends Group with the objective of improving this, providing ways of working that align with other Council's approach, and to encourage and support new Friends Groups to form for a variety of green spaces. The progress on this work and the new ways of working for Friends Group is available online for the public here:

[https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200249/parks\\_in\\_sandwell/4939/friends\\_groups\\_in\\_sandwell](https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200249/parks_in_sandwell/4939/friends_groups_in_sandwell)

4.5 As part of the Green Spaces Strategy Commitments, the Council is working with officers and consultants to:

- a. Complete a review of the allotments provision, and a strategy to come to Cabinet in 2023 to improve the provision of allotments, and to pilot community allotment and food growing initiatives. All allotments groups and plot holders have been able to take part in a recent consultation, and a workshop with Cabinet is being organised for June to review proposals for the improvements of allotments provision in Sandwell.
- b. Complete a review of 202 green spaces, including amenity green spaces and those spaces with the lowest value and quality scores. Work is



currently ongoing to work with community groups, residents, Members, friends groups and council officers to complete an improvement plan for each of these green spaces, which includes:

- Mapping and recording the assets on these green spaces.
- Reviewing the quality and value scores from the most recent 2018 green spaces audit, with recommendations for how we can improve these for the green space.
- An audit of the use of the green space, including improving the use for amenity leisure space, food and wildlife education, and conservation.

We anticipate that the completion of these improvement plans will be delivered in April 2023, from which further proposals can then be made for improvements to be implemented over the coming years.

4.6 A key commitment within the green spaces strategy was to develop a volunteering and education and outreach offer to support the improvement of our green spaces, and to promote green space and conservation education. We have now appointed an Education and Outreach Manager, two education and outreach officers, and an interim Volunteer Development Officer to start this work. A programme of education and outreach and volunteering in green spaces will be presented to Cabinet in the summer of 2023.

4.7 Whilst the Council have been more transparent than before with the programme of works and setting out our progress against what we committed to, there are further planned improvements to this transparency. This includes:

- a. Publishing a Green Spaces Annual Report, showing the progress in 22/23, and highlighting best practice and the excellent work of our communities, residents, businesses, Members, and officers across the borough in improving our green spaces (due in May 2023, following the Purdah period).
- b. Sharing information available online with Members at Ward Level, so that works can easily be identified for Members for their ward.
- c. Greater levels of engagement with Town Leads and Ward Members in the development and implementation of future programme of works, and guided by the Improvement Plans for green spaces.



- d. The development of a Green Spaces Development Seminar for Friends Group in March 2023 to support with fundraising skills, volunteer development and management, and marketing and publicity.

4.8 We welcome the support and input from Scrutiny to further these objectives and improve our green spaces.

## 6 Appendices

- a. Green Spaces Strategy and Implementation Plan 22 – 25
- b. Green Spaces Progress Report Nov 2022
- c. Green Spaces Programme of Works 22/23
- d. Cabinet Member Friends Groups Report October 2022
- e. Friends Groups Partnership Agreement

## 7. Background Papers

None.

