

# Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**12 October 2023**

<b>Subject:</b>	Green Spaces Annual Report 22/23 and Programme of Works Progress 22/23
<b>Director:</b>	Alice Davey Director Borough Economy
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Matthew Huggins Assistant Director Borough Economy

## 1 Recommendations



- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the Green Spaces Annual Report 22/23 and the Programme of works progress 22/23.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Green Spaces Strategy 2022 – 25 set out an approach for Cabinet to approve and publish an annual report and an annual programme of planned works for green spaces.
- 2.2 The planned programme of works includes all funding sources, whether Council funded or externally funded.
- 2.3 The programme of works are organised by priorities (1 – 3), with a focus on completing priority 1 works as approved in the Green Spaces Strategy 2022 – 25. The recommendations for the programme of works are based on these priorities, with those most impactful on the health and safety of green space users being the focus.



### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people Play areas and outdoor sports provision is improved.
	Strong resilient communities People have access to quality green spaces

### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The overall quality score for Sandwell, taken from the Green Spaces Audit in 2018, is 34/100 – which is mostly consistent with the previous two Green Spaces Audits. The Green Spaces Strategy 22 – 25 set out a plan to focus on improving green spaces with poor or very poor status.
- 4.2 The Council have commissioned improvement plans for 202 green spaces, 189 of which are now completed. These list all works in the three priority groups, as well as aspirational improvements for the green space. Work is now taking place to review these plans in detail, and to develop a five-year programme of works based on these with options for consideration by Cabinet in Autumn 2023.
- 4.3 The Green Spaces Strategy 22 – 25 also committed to complete an annual report, showing the progress against the published programme of annual works and the objectives set out within the strategy. The annual report for the municipal year 22/23 is attached in appendix A.
- 4.4 The Green Spaces Annual Report 22/23 shows that 90% of planned works were completed within the municipal year. Where works have not yet been completed, this is because of contractor delays or seasonal based work requirements and will be completed in 23/24. These works are listed in Appendix A1.
- 4.5 As well as the programme of works, progress has also been made against Green Spaces Strategy Objectives. These include:
- Opening a new Cabin Snack Shack at the Adventure Playground, Sandwell Valley.
  - Opening a new Wagon Coffee Bar at the Forge Mill Farm Play Area entrance, at Forge Mill Lake.
  - Opening a new Café at Dartmouth Park Pavilion.



- Opening a new Café at West Smethwick Park Pavilion
- Completing works on £5.2m of National Lottery Heritage Fund and SMBC funded improvement works at West Smethwick Park, including opening a brand-new Pavilion for community use.
- Securing £85,000 of levelling up funding for Black Patch Park improvements, to take place in 23/24.
- Securing £1.37m of UKSPF funding for green space improvements at Forge Mill Farm and The Railer, linked to education and outreach.
- The appointment of an education and outreach team and a volunteer development officer, to support green space improvements.
- The launch of an education and outreach offer and classroom visits, starting with Forge Mill Farm and countryside education.
- A new Trees Strategy, with a commitment and funding to inspect and complete remedial works in red risk areas – which includes all our green spaces.
- A review of allotments provision commissioned and completed, due for Cabinet decision making process in 23/24.
- £156,000 funding secured from English Cricket Board for the improvement of 12 sites.
- Work began on the Sandwell Valley Urban Bike Track, a £630,000 project jointly funded between Sport England, Sandwell Council, and Birmingham Council.
- Completion of a pilot for the Environment Response Team with over 160 green space sites cleared to date. Hot Spot Solutions Team permanently established to continue this work.
- Consultation on Friends Groups Ways of Working and new agreements in place between groups and the Council, with quarterly meetings and additional supports.
- Built facilities review started on green spaces-built facilities, due for completion in 23/24.

4.6 In relation to improvements in our approach to transparency around programme of works for 23/24, including feedback from the last Scrutiny session on the Green Spaces Strategy, this year we will:

- a. In Oct be sending out ward / town level information about programme of works for 23/24.
- b. Establishing 'volunteer days' where communities and their representatives and other stakeholders (including staff) can work with green spaces and green services team to complete volunteer actions as identified in the programme of works.



- c. Send out a member questionnaire on the programme of works for 24/25 to seek input into this from ward members.

## 5 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The resources are those available within the budgets set by the council, S106 for relevant sites, capital reserve funds for relevant sites, and other external funding.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	The Council has a legal obligation and under the Health and Safety Act (1974), along with other Acts, to keep assets and property owned by the Council safe. This includes play areas and green space facilities. The programme of works are prioritised based on their potential impact on the health and safety of users.
<b>Risk:</b>	Risks include not being able to complete the full programme of works because of weather, contract delays, or resource issues. In this case, the programme of works will be continued to the following year.
<b>Equality:</b>	The targeting of green spaces with the lowest quality scores are in some of the most deprived areas of Sandwell. This gives access to green space for Sandwell residents who need it most.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	The improvement of gym equipment, biking equipment, and other green space improvements significantly impacts health and wellbeing.
<b>Social Value:</b>	We will increase the use of local traders where possible for work that is contracted out for the programme of works.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	The maintenance of our green spaces contributes to biodiversity in the Borough and the maintenance of our conservation.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	Activities and events in Green Spaces will be targeted to children looked after by the Council, including the provision of free tickets to children looked after and care leavers.



## 6 Appendices

Appendix A - Green Spaces Annual Report 2022/23

Appendix B - Green Space Programme of Works 2022/23 progress

## 7. Background Papers

Green Spaces Strategy and Implementation Plan 22 - 25

