

Cabinet – 17 September 2008

Successful Green Flag Awards

Portfolio:	Councillor Harrison, Leisure and Culture
Service:	Leisure, Culture and Lifelong Learning – Greenspace Services
Wards:	Palfrey and Willenhall South Wards
Key decision:	No
Forward plan:	No

1. Summary of report

The Green Flag Award is the national and internationally recognised quality standard for parks and greenspaces

The report is to agree the Council's future approach to Green Flag awards building on the successful achievement of Green Flag Awards for Willenhall Memorial Park and Palfrey Park in 2008.

The report also explains the importance of the Green Flag Award to Walsall's parks and greenspaces in recognising the high level of standards provided by Walsall Council at the two parks and the involvement of the local community in their management, maintenance and development.

The achievement of the Green Flag Awards has created a bench mark of excellence for Greenspace Services to sustain at the two parks and work towards achieving for the Councils other premier greenspaces

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That Cabinet acknowledge Greenspace Services success in achieving a Green Flag Award for Willenhall Memorial Park in 2008 and in Palfrey Park retaining the first Green Flag Award achieved for Walsall's Park and Greenspaces in 2007; and thanks the Friends groups for their contribution to this success.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agrees future applications for the Green Flag Award for the Council's other premier parks and greenspaces as set out in the Council's adopted Greenspace Strategy.

3. Background information

- 3.1 At the Cabinet Meeting in November 2006 the Council approved the Greenspace Strategy for Walsall's parks and greenspaces. The strategy was the culmination of a considerable amount of research and community consultation.
- 3.2 The production of the strategy represented a milestone for the strategic delivery of the service setting the scene for the management and development of greenspaces for the 5 year period of the plan (2006 – 2011) and recognised the importance green space played in the Councils regeneration framework and its contribution to the health and well being of the community.
- 3.3 Included amongst the priority actions agreed within the strategy was to work towards the principles of the Green Flag Award for the Council's 25 premier greenspaces and the achievement of Green Flag Awards for specific sites within the 5 year period of the strategy.
- 3.4 The Green Flag Award was first established in 1996 and is administered by the Civic Trust on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DLGC) and CABI Space. The award has been recognised as the principal quality standard and a means of recognising and rewarding the best green spaces in the country.
- 3.5 Green Flag award Applications from local authorities must be received by the Civic Trust during January. The assessment is a two part process which includes a desk assessment for the parks adopted management and maintenance plan and secondly a site assessment which is undertaken by highly experienced judges.
- 3.6 The assessment considers 8 key criteria which is in turn broken down into a further 27 individual aspects. The key criteria include:
- A welcoming place
 - Healthy safe and secure
 - Clean and well maintained
 - Sustainability
 - Conservation and heritage
 - Community Involvement
 - Marketing
 - Management

This links closely to the achievement of the Councils corporate priorities.

- 3.7 Judging takes place between March and June annually and the awards are given on an annual basis and winners must re-apply each year to renew their Green Flag Award Status.
- 3.8 To be successful parks and green spaces must score a minimum of 50% on the desk assessment and 60% in the field evaluation with a combined score of 66 or above.

- 3.9 Palfrey Park scored in the bracket range 75 – 79 for the combined desk and site assessment and Willenhall Memorial Park scored 66 – 69 for its overall combined score.
- 3.10 In 2008 742 green spaces across the country have received a Green Flag Award with Walsall Council contributing 2 awards towards the total achieved nationally.
- 3.11 Essential to the achievement of a Green Flag award is the development and delivery of a comprehensive Management, Maintenance and Development Plan (MMP) for the individual green space site.
- 3.12 The production of MMP's for the Council's 25 premier green spaces is also one of the key agreed actions arising from the Green space strategy. Management and Maintenance Plans guide the holistic management, maintenance and development of the park they are written for.
- 3.13 Palfrey Park and Willenhall Park were the first two premier park sites to be covered by 10 year Management, Maintenance and Development plans and they have provided the template for the production of future plans in regard to the remaining premier green spaces.
- 3.14 The target during the 5 year lifetime of the GSS is to achieve the production of 23 MMP's. 3 plans are currently being produced for George Rose Park, Holland Park and Reedswood Park and an outline 10 year Management and Maintenance Plan has been produced for Walsall Arboretum as part of the successful Stage 1 Application to the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 3.15 Both Palfrey and Willenhall Memorial Park since Grounds Re-integration in 2006 are directly managed and maintained by Walsall Council Greenspace Services and both parks have recently completed a long term restoration and regeneration programme with part funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund Urban Parks Programme.
- 3.16 A key to the success of these two park sites and the achievement of the Green Flag Award is the active engagement and involvement of the local community which is represented through the individual friends groups, namely the Palfrey Park Friends and Users Association and the Friends of Willenhall Memorial Park – both groups have since their formation worked tirelessly in partnership with the Council to raise standards and the profile of the parks in the local community. This has contributed greatly to the development of a sense of civic pride.
- 3.17 The success of achieving the Green Flag Award at Palfrey Park and Willenhall Memorial Park supports the DCLG's commitment as part of a public service agreement target (PSA8) to ensure that the number of Local Authority Areas with at least one Green Flag Award standard Space increases to 60% by 2008.
- 3.18 Representatives of Walsall Council Greenspace Services, the local community and the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Lifelong Learning collected the awards at a Green Flag Award Ceremony held in July this year at Liverpool.
- 3.19 The achievement of the award for both parks will be celebrated through the flying of the Green Flag from flag poles in each of the sites.

4. Resource considerations

4.1 Financial:

The ability to achieve and retain Green Flag awards and sustain the high levels of maintenance and service provision required on the identified premier parks will have financial and resource considerations necessitating realignment and focusing of existing resources. Any reduction in resources will have a direct impact on the Services ability to achieve future Green Flag Awards and retain existing awards.

4.2 Legal: There are no legal implications

4.3 Staffing:

The Green Flag award is considered a high accolade particularly within the Service and is a direct reflection of the hard work, dedication and professionalism of both officers, managers and operational staff and an example of close collaborative team working.

Greenspace services has been successful in achieving these awards within the existing staffing establishment. The criteria requires high levels of both staff presence and maintenance and, therefore, future applications will likely require the re-alignment of staff and resources to Green Flag parks.

5. Citizen impact

Both Willenhall Park and Palfrey Park have active Friends Groups who are engaged in park activities but also represent the community directly contributing to and influencing their development and management. This is an essential criterion considered within the Green Flag assessment. In addition the Green Flag requires the production of Development and Management Plans for each park. In building up these plans extensive consultation is undertaken with the Local Community to ensure that the park meets and directly reflects local needs, develop a sense of community ownership and civic pride as well as reducing barriers to entry and increasing use and value.

6. Community safety

Safety and security are key evaluation criteria considered within the award application and it is important to demonstrate that this is being addressed. Personal safety and the fear of crime along with anxieties relating to littering, anti-social behaviour, dog fouling, dog control and graffiti have been identified as key barriers to the use of parks. The need to address these issues is the main influencing factor in the proposed restructuring of the Greenspace Ranger and grounds maintenance operations and reflects the Council priority to increase the presence of staff in parks. The recent delegation of environmental enforcement powers to the Parks Ranger role is a key process in the review of the service to more effectively deal with anti social activity.

The process of establishing management and development plans for the premier parks and engaging the community in this process is essential in helping to creating a safer park environment, increasing use and numbers within green spaces, developing a sense of ownership, meeting local need and value and achieving high standards of maintenance.

7. Environmental impact

Parks and green spaces have been recognised as contributing greatly to the health, well being and quality of life of those who live and work within the borough. Essential within the Green Flag criteria is demonstrating environmental sustainability particularly with regard to the use of pesticides, renewable products, recycling, water and energy use, reduced emissions and minimising adverse environmental impacts.

8. Performance and risk management issues

The Green Flag Award is the principal quality standard its successful achievement and the commitment to future applications will improve the Councils performance in the provision of high quality, well maintained green spaces facilities and services which meet local need, provide a safer environment and contribute greatly to the well being and quality of life of the local community.

9. Equality implications

Essential to the Green Flag award process is the production of development and maintenance plans for the individual Green space sites. This involves extensive consultation with local residents, community organisations, friends group engagement, minority groups and elected members. In addition a comprehensive access audit is produced and incorporated within the overall plan and its actions. This ensures that both maintenance and future development reflects local need, reduces barriers to entry and maximises community access to the green space environment and facilities.

10. Consultation

Community engagement and involvement in the management, maintenance and development of green spaces is an essential criteria considered within the Green Flag assessment. In addition the Green Flag requires the production of Development and Management Plans for each park. In building up these plans extensive consultation is undertaken with the Local Community to ensure that the park meets and directly reflects local needs, develop a sense of community ownership and civic pride as well as reducing barriers to entry and increasing use and value.

Background papers

Walsall Council Greenspace Strategy 2006 – 2011

Palfrey Park 10 Year Management and Maintenance Plan 2006 – 2015

Willenhall Memorial Park Management and Maintenance Plan 2008 – 2017

Palfrey Park and Willenhall Memorial Park Green Flag Award Submissions and Judges Feedback Sheets 2008

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05 September 2008