

AT A MEETING
of the
GREEN SPACES WORKING GROUP
held at The Council House, Walsall on
Thursday 2 March 2006 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor Kath Phillips (Lead member)
Councillor Beeley
Councillor Towe
Mrs Rose Martin (Friends Group Network)
Mr Mike Roseblade (Friends Group Network)

ALSO PRESENT

Tim Challans
Sam Mills
Andy Dennis
Pat Warner
Nikki Ehlen

APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence were received at this meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest identified at this meeting.

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 6 DECEMBER 2005.

Members received the minutes of the Working Group meeting held on 6 December 2005, which was tabled at the meeting: -

(see annexed)

AGREED:

That the notes be received and noted.

**PROGRESS ON CURRENT POSITION OF THE WORK GROUPS
DELIBERATIONS**

Pat Warner advised the panel of the current position of the work group since the commencement of the review on the Green Spaces Strategy.

Members were reminded that the working group had been established to consider feeding into the work that had commenced on the Green Spaces Strategy for the borough. The panel had raised a number of questions in relation to the consultation conducted in drafting the strategy. This highlighted some areas in need of further investigation, but recognised that these areas fell outside the brief of the consultants appointed to prepare the strategy.

Members were further advised that their input had been recognised and work to address some of the key points which had been raised will be built into the strategy.

Members noted that the panel would need to consider recommendations following the conclusion of the review and would need to consider whether the process followed in drafting this strategy had been fit for purpose and fulfilled the brief given to the consultant.

Members recognised that they would also need to consider whether the green spaces strategy was fit for purpose; whether it addressed the issues raised by the working group that were originally outside the consultants brief and whether it would effectively deliver and improve services for the people of Walsall. The potential for continued monitoring of the implementation of the green spaces strategy throughout the next municipal year was also recognised.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GROUNDS MAINTENANCE AND GROUNDS PSE

The briefing note prepared by Sam Mills was submitted: -

(see annexed)

Sam Mills presented members with a document setting out the list of parks which were currently managed by green spaces services and which referred to another 26 sites which were being maintained by Street Pride. He clarified to members that the green spaces services was the old parks and amenities services. He said that the 10 parks listed on the document before the meeting were the 10 premier parks within the borough. Of the £2million spent on parks maintenance overall, £500,000 was used by green spaces services and the remaining £500,000 was used to pay the contracts for the street pride services provided to the other 26 sites.

Tim Challans said that part of the budgeting process was to look at better ways of achieving the services being provided for parks within the borough. He continued that more effective methods of dealing with these services will be examined and the needs of each park will be assessed with a view to improving the overall provision.

In answer to a question from members, Sam advised that the strategy will have details of the sizes of parks but will not cover details of the contents of the parks in terms of shrubs etc. He said that as soon as this sort of detailed review is complete it will be possible to assess the actual costs for each park.

Councillor Phillips said that it would be advantageous to ascertain details of the other 26 parks which are not under the management of the green spaces services.

Sam Mills advised the panel that a list of these parks could be made available together with the specifications and the costs involved as soon as possible.

Mr Roseblade enquired about the play equipment and the maintenance of this equipment within the parks. Councillor Phillips was of the view that information relating to the maintenance of play equipment should be made available and passed to members of the Friends of Parks Organisation.

Tim Challans advised that although there are outstanding issues to be resolved, it will be possible for this authority to achieve green flag status with at least one park by 2008.

The working group thanked Sam Mills for his presentation and commented that it looked forward to receiving the information in respect of the maintenance of the 26 parks under the management of Street Pride.

UPDATE TOWARDS THE PREPARATION OF THE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY

Sam Mills presented the position statement prepared by Adrian Spray, the consultant appointed to prepare the Green Space Strategy: -

(see annexed)

Sam advised the panel that the purpose of the report was to update members about the progress on developing Walsall's Green Space Strategy. He said that 50% of the strategy was already complete and the other 50% was currently being consulted with stakeholders. An action plan will be put together when the consultant has completed the document and it was anticipated that the draft strategy would be submitted to cabinet in June 2006.

He said that to date an audit and assessment report had been prepared following the audit of the sites within the borough and how accessible they are against the green flag standard. He said the assessment document had been prepared and broken down into local neighbourhood partnership areas, a copy had also been placed on the website.

Sam said he could provide members with a copy of the criteria used to assess the green spaces sites against green flag standards.

Members confirmed that they would wish to receive a copy of this criteria submitted to the working group as soon as possible.

The panel also agreed that they would wish to see a copy of the audit assessment report placed in each group room for members information.

Sam further advised the panel that each Local Neighbourhood Partnership would also be provided with a copy of the audit assessment report relating to their partnership.

Consideration was also given to the preparation of the Draft Supplementary Planning document which was presented by Andy Dennis.

Andy advised the panel that the draft supplementary planning document had been produced by the Council's Physical Regeneration Strategy Team, assisted by the Green Spaces Team and the consultants, based on the findings of the audit and assessment stages of the green spaces strategy.

He said the event to develop the SPD, which was held at the Art Gallery in January 2006, had been a very fruitful consultation process. Comments had been received from organisations such as, Sport England, the PCT and house builders.

He said that the draft SPD would be on public deposit for consultation until 24 February 2006 and the aim of this is to strengthen the document making it a more robust one for submission to cabinet in April.

Councillor Phillips enquired about the changes which had been made to the document from the consultation process.

Andy confirmed that a number of amendments had been made to the document, one referred to more precise reference to greenways and also relating to the standards to be accepted for playing fields. Andy further advised that any plans that are submitted for new estates will involve an enhanced section 106 agreement, the cost of which had now been increased to an average of about £960.00 per bedroom to be provided by the developers for the provision of community facilities including green spaces in the locality of the development.

In answer to a further question, Andy confirmed that in order to fund improvements to borough wide green space as a result of any new development within the borough up to 20% of the section 106 agreement provided by all the developers currently developing new sites within the borough would be taken to fund such facilities.

Members discussed the issue further and a suggestion was made that Local Neighbourhood Partnerships could be provided with the information relating to the provision of section 106 agreements. It was also suggested that consideration should be given to checks being made on the providers of the section 106 facilities to ensure that the agreement is being complied with adequately.

Councillor Phillips enquired whether any action had been taken to ensure that green spaces which have been provided subject to section 106 agreement at new development sites are not then sold off to private residents to be included as part of their private gardens.

Andy confirmed that the Unitary Development Plan provides protection against such possible occurrences, but that the decision is ultimately made by the Development Control Committee.

In summary the working group AGREED:

That the summary of the Green Spaces Strategy should be presented to this working group at its next meeting prior to submission to the Community Organisation Panel on 5 April 2006.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Councillor Phillips suggested and the members agreed that the next meeting of the working group should take place on the 23 March 2006, subject to any clashes being checked to enable the panel to review the summarised strategy and to prepare a review document for submission to the panel at its meeting on the 5 April 2006.

There being no further business this meeting terminated at 7.05 p.m.