

PARKS & OPEN SPACES – MANAGEMENT, RECENT WORK & ACCREDITATIONS

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To provide updates on the management and improvement of AVDC parks and open spaces by the Community Spaces Team since the last report on this subject to Environment Scrutiny Committee in September 2011. The report also updates Members regarding actions taken against the Improvement Plan (2011/12 – 2014/15) which was provided as part of the September 2011 report (see Appendix 1a).

2. Recommendations/for decision

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| 2.1 | That Members note the achievements to date and comment upon the new Improvement Plan (2015/16 – 2017/18) provided in Appendix 2. |
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3. Executive summary

- 3.1. The last report of this nature was submitted in September 2011. Consequently this report covers a period of 3 years and 4 months.
- 3.2. Substantial year on year savings and income generation continue to be made through continuous improving and the New Business Model programme.
- 3.3. Performance and progress achieved since September 2011 is provided within this report and summarised in the actions included in Appendix 1a.
- 3.4. Current and future actions are provided in Appendix 2.
- 3.5. Since September 2011 there have been continued efforts to secure external funding with a total of £4,360,312 secured for capital improvements.

4. Value for Money

- 4.1. The Community Spaces Team provide value for money through continuous improvement to find better ways of working to deliver services. Below lists some of the changes and achievements during the last 3 years, some of which are linked to our New Business Model programme.
- 4.2. Year on year saving of £200,000 through the merging of the street cleansing and horticulture contracts, January 2013 to January 2020.
- 4.3. Full review of the teams aims and objectives to ensure officers are focussed on delivering the horticulture and street cleansing contract and project management of improvements to parks and open spaces.
- 4.4. Replacing the previous Recreation Officer post with a more flexible Projects Officer, who is able to undertake a variety of tasks and not focus on just play area improvements. The main influence of this change was the completion of the play area replacement programme in 2013.
- 4.5. Ongoing development of the tender evaluation methodology used to procure parks infrastructure, to ensure the most economically advantageous tenders are identified.
- 4.6. Changing our focus to repair existing infrastructure rather than allowing it to deteriorate to the point of costly replacement.
- 4.7. Review of sports pitch provision to ensure supply aligns with demand and to improve cricket provision at Alfred Rose Park by removing football pitches from that site.
- 4.8. Transferring the booking of sports pitches to our contractors on line system has freed up a significant amount of officer time enabling the redundancy of 1 post.

- 4.9. A value added item of the horticulture and street cleaning contract provided a review of our sports pitch provision by the Institute of Groundsmanship. This has led to a temporary reduction in our specification providing much needed savings.
- 4.10. Identifying opportunities to generate income including liaising with the Communities Team on fees for events and supporting them to enable AVDC events such as the National Playday, parkrun, and sports activities.
- 4.11. Close working with Legal & Estates to enable the license, lease and sale of AVDC land where appropriate.
- 4.12. Where possible avoiding the adoption of recreation land from new developments, which would increase our costs and liabilities, by liaising with parish/town councils or other interested parties.
- 4.13. Since September 2011 a total of £4,360,312 external funding has been secured, this includes the following contributions:
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| £4,274,507 | Section 106 developer contributions for leisure infrastructure across the district. (A 10% project management fee is claimed on projects carried out by AVDC officers to cover officer time and resources). |
| £35,000 | SITA Trust towards Cottesloe Green ball court. |
| £32,000 | WREN towards Bridge Street play area. |
| £10,000 | Sport England towards irrigation of Alfred Rose Park's cricket pitch. |
| £ 8,805 | England & Wales Cricket Board towards Alfred Rose Park's synthetic cricket wicket. |
- 4.14. Working in partnership with Bedgrove Residents' Association through 2014 saw the installation of a wheelchair accessible picnic table & benches in the play area. A memorial bench was also installed in Bedgrove Spinney, both providing funded by the Residents' Association. Unfortunately the Residents' Association funded wooden youth shelter was relocated to Bedgrove Junior School due to ongoing vandalism and repair costs to the Council.

5. New Business Model

- 5.1. In addition to delivering the action plans included within this report, the below initiatives linked to parks and open spaces are included in the New Business Model programme. The Community Spaces manager was seconded to the Engine Room Team during 2014, providing minimal support to Senior Officers during this period. The team's contribution to the NBM programme has includes:
- 5.1.1. Collaboration with Engineers and Leisure Facilities to convert the Vale Park bowls green to 2 floodlit third generation synthetic sports pitches. These 5-a-side pitches can be used for league football matches. This has reduced our contract costs to maintain the bowls green and generated income from the sports pitches, which are managed and maintained as part of the Aqua Vale Leisure Centre. The bowls green was provided for use free of charge.
- 5.1.2. The review of the planning service has prompted us to self challenge on the contribution we make to the service when commenting on planning applications that include recreation facilities. Instead of providing each developer with detailed comments a generic response is provided that covers the relevant guidance and advise that the developer considers this. Unless it is in our interest do so then

developers are being advised that open space will not be adopted by us, as this avoids an increase in our costs and liabilities.

- 5.1.3. Staff reduction in the team is now complete for the current workload, changes since 2011 include the below, (part of which contributes to the NBM programme):
- Merging of the Green Spaces Delivery Team and part of Contract Services (x1 Contract Services Manager post redundant).
 - Cessation of the park warden service (x2 part time posts redundant).
 - Cessation of the park gate keeper role (x2 part time posts dismissed and posts deleted).
 - Horticulture Street Cleansing Contract monitoring (x1 full time post redundant, x1 left, post deleted).
 - Fly Tipping Enforcement (x1 part time post retired, post deleted function covered by Waste Partnership for Bucks).
 - Market operatives (x3 part time posts TUPE transferred to Horticulture Street Cleansing Contract).
- 5.1.4. Savings on the Horticulture and Street Cleansing Contract by challenging the contractor to contribute towards our NBM programme. To date the contractor has provided year on year savings by utilising used vehicles and machinery on this contract.
- 5.1.5. Review of the Horticulture and Street Cleansing Contract prior to re procuring this service to fully consider contract costs verses in-house.
- 5.1.6. Ongoing review of sports pitch provision and consideration of providing flood lit full size third generation synthetic pitches instead of costly grass pitches.
- 5.1.7. Review of AVDC amenity land ownership with a view to leasing land in rural areas where our ownership is limited, there is no development potential of our land, and where Parishes are already successfully maintaining their own amenity land.

6. Inform and Engage

- 6.1. The project plan used by the team includes engagement with local Members and stakeholders such as residents groups, PCSOs and adjacent land owners. We continue to inform local residents about major or sensitive project proposals before they commence so they have the opportunity to pass comment which we are then able to address before the project starts.
- 6.2. The past play area installations are good examples, where all residents living within the catchment zone of the play areas, local Members, and stakeholders were informed and children at local schools consulted on their preferences which were then included in the design process. This leads to greater community support for the projects and communities take more ownership of their spaces demonstrated through less incidents of vandalism.
- 6.3. The new play areas at The Coppice in Aylesbury and Bridge Street in Buckingham are great examples of how engaging the community in the design of these new play spaces results in high quality facilities, which are widely supported and in turn improve community cohesion and reduce anti social behaviour.
- 6.4. Residents are also informed about smaller projects such as footpath improvements through on-site signage and local ward Members and stakeholders are emailed so they are also aware.

- 6.5. When appropriate official openings were held at the new play areas and other major improvements with AVDC's Chairman leading the proceedings supported by local schools, stakeholders and residents' associations.
- 6.6. A number of press releases have been issued over the past 3 years which highlight our achievements in parks and open spaces, and these have been published by local newspapers, Vale Times and promoted on radio. These include:
- Green Flag Awards.
 - Play area improvements.
 - Vale Park LED lighting (joint press release with Bucks CC).
 - Vale Park drainage.
 - Vale Park 3G synthetic pitches.
 - Alfred Rose Park & Cottlesloe Green ball courts.
 - National parkrun events at both Riverside Walk, Aylesbury and Buckingham
 - Annual reminders on who cuts the grass.

7. Build Trust and Confidence

- 7.1. Green Flag Awards are a national accreditation that set the benchmark for parks and open spaces. The annual judging process of parks alternates from year to year between a formal visit by judges and a 'mystery shopper' visit. The aim of the unannounced 'mystery shopper' visit by judges ensures the quality is maintained throughout the year and not just for a preannounced judges visit.
- 7.2. A Green Flag Award for our parks is a good indication that the team is managing sites effectively and that the horticulture and street cleansing contract specification is of sufficient quality. Two sites are entered annually, and this requires a detailed management plan for each site, these are published on our website.
- 7.3. The Green Flag ceremonies have been held at Vale Park and Bedgrove Park with the flags being raised by the Chairman and attended by all involved in contributing to the quality of the sites.
- 7.4. Bedgrove and Vale Parks have been awarded a Green Flag Award since 2008, with the exception of 2012 when we failed to secure an award for Bedgrove Park, as the judge considered the management plan to be in need of a thorough review.
- 7.5. All newly installed AVDC play areas have a Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) post installation inspection and subsequent annual RoSPA inspections. Our contractors also carry out weekly inspections. RoSPA also risk assess all of our larger open spaces. Throughout all these processes, any identified risks are assessed and acted.

8. Improve Key Sites

- 8.1. The following is a list of completed projects since September 2011, in addition to what is listed in the Improvement Plan (2011/12 – 2014/15) in Appendix 1a:
- Alfred Rose Park – ball court, cricket pitch irrigation and synthetic wicket installation and removal of the Manor Road sheltered entrance.
 - Bedgrove Park – access improvements to wildflower meadow, restoration of entrance stone calligraphy, additional seating.
 - The Coppice, Aylesbury & Bridge Street, Buckingham - play area improvements and substantial repair of footbridge from Bridge Street skate park to Cornwall's Meadow car park.
 - Closed Churchyards – management plan completed (published on website) for sites that AVDC has a statutory obligation to maintain, included a review of maintenance operations.

- Cottesloe Green – installation of a new ball court.
- Edinburgh Playing Fields – footpath improvements and removal of redundant, dangerous and unsightly ball stop fencing.
- Hulcott Closed Churchyard – lynch gate restoration carried out, worked in conjunction with Historic Buildings Officers and Engineers.
- The Mount – WW1 memorial bench installation.
- Riverside Walk, Aylesbury – access and footpath improvements enabling the national parkrun event to take place (over 100 runners weekly), whilst repairing existing infrastructure.
- Southcourt Community Centre - outdoor play space improvement.
- Stoke Mandeville Stadium - access, parking and lighting improvements.
- Swan Pool – replacement and improvement of synthetic sports pitch surface.
- Vale Park – lighting, footpath improvements, drainage, bowls green conversion into two third generation synthetic football pitches (generating income as part of the New Business Model).
- Walnut Tree Meadow, Wendover – access improvements.
- Whitehill Park – ball court, resurfacing all footpaths, car park and landscaping improvements, additional boundary fencing; all helping to increase usage and reducing anti social behaviour.

8.2. The following is a list of current and proposed projects also listed in the Improvement Plan (2015/16 – 2017/18) Appendix 2:

- Alfred Rose Park – play area replacement and relocation, access/footpath improvements, additional/improved seating, improve visibility into park, consider lighting through park.
- Bedgrove Park - footpath improvements from Finmere Crescent entrance, consider park circumnavigation path.
- Bowlers Field - park creation feasibility study.
- Bridge Street, Buckingham - new skate park.
- Closed Churchyards – establish process for memorial testing.
- Hulcott Closed Churchyard – resolve ongoing issues linked to the retaining wall (leaning into neighbouring property).
- Embleton Way, Buckingham – improvements (incl. pavilion use & play/sports facilities).
- Heartlands, Buckingham – footpath improvements.
- Meadowcroft – synthetic pitch feasibility study.
- The Paddock, Bedgrove – install bridge & footpaths over brook to link open space to adjacent housing, (dependent on Environment Agency consent).
- Play area replacement programme to commence c.2018.
- Riverside Walk, Aylesbury – continued footpath improvements.
- St Mary’s Closed Churchyard, Aylesbury – structural survey of brick pillars.
- Vale Park – tree planting, new skate park, entrance improvements, enable junior parkrun event, additional seating, Bearbrook access feasibility study.

- Walnut Tree Meadow – continued access improvements.
- Walton Court Playing Fields – footpath/access improvements.
- Whitehill Park – lighting of main routes through site.

9. Change Lives for the Better

- 9.1. The Community Spaces Team have continued to work with colleagues from across the council to support events hosted by both AVDC and the community including the National Play Day in Vale Park, and weekly ‘parkrun’ at both Aylesbury’s Riverside Walk and Buckingham’s Heartlands. Our role ensures sites are in good order and we provide officer or contractor support required to enable events.
- 9.2. Officers have commented on numerous planning applications covering recreation and horticulture. This work also involves supporting the Green Spaces Team Senior Officer, who negotiates with developers on the amount of S106 and open space that is provided. This work can be extensive especially for major development areas.
- 9.3. Healthy relationships have been developed between parish/town council clerks and other external organisations, e.g. RAF, throughout the district through the administration and advice provided in relation to section 106 funded projects.
- 9.4. The team continues to work with the Community Safety Team to improve the safety of our parks and open spaces, and community events.

10. Resource implications

- 10.1. Other than contributing to the councils savings requirements there are no new financial implications for AVDC resulting from the proposals within this report.
- 10.2. The delivery of several improvements is dependent upon securing external funding including, S106, Lottery, WREN, SITA Trust, VAHT, etc.

11. Response to Key Aims and Objectives

- 11.1. The proposals in this report support the following objectives:
- Improved resident satisfaction with the local area.
 - Increased public satisfaction with council managed parks and open spaces.
 - Delivery of the Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011).

Contact Officer
Background Documents

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Green Spaces Plan – improving parks and open spaces (2011)
AVDC Green Infrastructure Strategy

Appendix 1a: Community Spaces Team Improvement Plan (2011/12 – 2014/15)

KEY: N/R = Not Required ✓ = Action complete	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Value for Money				
Apply for external funding when opportunities arise	✓	✓	✓	✓
Review & merge the street cleansing & horticulture contracts, procure new service to commence January 2013	✓	✓	N/R	N/R
Inform and Engage				
Commission AVDC Parks and Open Spaces Survey	N/R	✓ ¹	N/R	N/R
Organise official opening of major capital improvements	✓	✓	✓	✓
Submit 4 articles per year for inclusion in the Aylesbury Vale and County Times	✓	✓	✓	✓
Build Trust and Confidence				
*Apply for Green Flag Award for Bedgrove Park	✓	✓	✓	✓
*Apply for Green Flag Award for Vale Park	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improve Key Services				
*Implement phase 5 Vale Park (lighting & railings restoration)	N/R	✓	✓	N/R
Implement programme of S106 funding capital improvements	✓	✓	✓	✓
*Improvements to 3 play areas per annum	✓	✓	✓	N/R
Promote the Aylesbury Vale Play Strategy	✓	X ²	X ²	X ²
Update the Aylesbury Vale Play Strategy	✓	✓	N/R	N/R
Change Lives for the Better				
Integrate horticulture and street cleansing contracts with the aim of providing a Ward based service	✓	✓	N/R	N/R
Support Parklife event in Vale Park	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support national Play Day, 'Play in the Park' event	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support the Events Procedure to increase community use of AVDC parks and open spaces	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Actions support the adopted AVDC Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011)

✓¹: Carried out by Communications & Marketing as part of the 'Living in Aylesbury Vale' consultation.

X²: Aylesbury Vale Play Strategy; not promoted post 2011/12 but referenced in relevant funding applications.

Appendix 1b: Green Spaces Team Improvement Plan (2011/12 – 2013/14)

KEY: N/R = Not Required ✓ = Action complete	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Value for Money			
Apply for external funding when opportunities arise	✓	✓	✓
Provide a minimum of 300 volunteer days per annum	✓	✓	✓
Support the Aylesbury Riverside Walk Volunteers Group	✓	N/R	N/R
Inform and Engage			
Produce 4 press releases per year on volunteer opportunities within parks and open spaces	✓	✓	✓
Promote the Aylesbury Vale Green Infrastructure Strategy	✓	✓	✓
Submit 4 articles per year for inclusion in the Aylesbury Vale and County Times	✓	N/R	N/R
Improve Key Services			
Contribute to action plan included in the Aylesbury Vale Green Infrastructure Strategy 2010-2026	✓	✓	✓
Promote Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership and Regional Bucks Biodiversity Action Plan	✓	N/R	N/R
Sit on Steering Group of the Grand Union Triangle Project, partnership with Bucks GI Consortium and British Waterways	N/R	N/R	N/R
Update the PPG17 Audit	✓	✓	N/R
Wetlands and Watercourses Project; Reed bed at Riverside Walk, Aylesbury as part of 'Play on Birds' project	N/R	N/R	N/R
Work with the Environment Agency on watercourse enhancements	✓	✓	N/R

Appendix 2: Improvement Plan (2015/16 – 2017/18)

KEY: N/R = Not Required ✓ = Action complete	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Value for Money			
Apply for external funding when opportunities arise			
Close working with Legal & Estates to enable the license, lease and sale of AVDC land where appropriate			
Where possible avoid the adoption of recreation land from new developments			
Inform and Engage			
Organise official opening of major capital improvements			
Promote major capital projects through press releases			
Build Trust and Confidence			
*Apply for Green Flag Award for Bedgrove Park			
*Apply for Green Flag Award for Vale Park			
Improve Key Services			
Alfred Rose Park – create and implement improvement Master-plan (incl. play area replacement & relocation, access/footpath improvements, additional seating, improve visibility into park, consider lighting)			
*Bedgrove Park – Create and implement improvement Master-plan (consider circumnavigation path, additional seating/bins, Bedgrove Brook improvements)			
Bowlers Field park creation feasibility study			
Bridge Street, Buckingham new skate park			
Closed Churchyards – resolves issues at Hulcott, structural testing of brick pillars at St. Mary's, Aylesbury, and implement memorial testing procedures.			
Heartlands, Buckingham footpath improvements			
Implement Embleton Way improvements (incl. pavilion use & play/sports facilities)			
Meadowcroft Synthetic Turf Pitches feasibility study			
The Paddock, Bedgrove Park – install bridge over brook and footpath, (dependent on Environment Agency consent)			
Produce play area replacement programme			
*Riverside Walk footpath improvements			
S106 - implement programme of funding capital improvements			
* Vale Park - implement continued phased improvements (incl. Tree Planting, Additional seating, Entrance			

KEY: N/R = Not Required ✓ = Action complete	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
improvements, new skate park, Bearbrook access feasibility study)			
Whitehill Park lighting			
*Walnut Tree Meadow continued access improvements			
Walton Court Playing Fields footpath improvements			
Change Lives for the Better			
Liaise with Community Safety Team to reduce risk of anti social behaviour at parks and open spaces			
Support the Events Procedure to increase community use of AVDC parks and open spaces			
Support Parklife event in Vale Park			
Support national Play Day, 'Play in the Park' event			

*Actions support the adopted AVDC Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011).