

## PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

**Subject:** New Models of Greenspace Management – An Investigation into a Community Greenspace Trust

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 15 January 2013

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Vincent

**CMT Member:** Anthony Payne (Director for Place)

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**Ref:** KD/ Greenspace Trust

**Key Decision:** No

**Part:** I

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### **Purpose of the report:**

This report sets out a recommended process for investigating the cost, benefits, opportunities and risks of developing a Community Greenspace Trust. Green spaces provide a significant opportunity to place communities at the heart of decision making, informing service delivery. This is a key component of the Cooperative Council approach to engage with customers to deliver services in a way that best meets the needs of our communities. There is already well developed interest and action across the City with local groups becoming more involved with the enhancement and maintenance of green spaces. The potential to build on the interest shown by local people and the opportunities the growth agenda provides in delivering new and enhanced green spaces provides an exciting opportunity to investigate the option of creating a Community Greenspace Trust. The investigation would test whether a Community Greenspace Trust could deliver a new model of management that:

***“places communities at the heart of decision making of an organisation dedicated to the management of high quality green spaces that deliver benefits for people, wildlife and businesses.”***

The report recommends a 10 month investigation to assess all elements of developing a Community Greenspace Trust including potential governance arrangements and the responsibilities and accountabilities any new organisation must deliver. Fully evidenced recommendations will then be presented in a future report to Cabinet.

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### **Corporate Plan 2012-2015:**

This report directly supports the Cooperative Council aim of putting people in control of public services. There is already interest across the City from local groups wanting to be more involved with the management of natural spaces. This proposal would investigate the option of putting them in control of the service provision on key green space sites.

The proposal also supports the City vision by helping to deliver a high quality of life for all through the provision of high quality green spaces that directly respond to the needs of local people. It supports Plymouth City Council's corporate plan as the delivery of high quality green spaces is a key part of delivering the growth agenda and the development of sustainable communities.

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### **Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land**

To deliver the investigation into a Community Trust for natural spaces and enable evidenced recommendation on whether it would deliver the required outcomes, a number of Council Services will need to be engaged. This will have resource implications for Planning Services, Street Scene Services, Finance, Legal, Land and Property.

There will be a small financial implication to deliver the investigation, estimated at £10,000, which will be used to engage external expertise with previous experience of developing Community Trusts to support the analysis and review of different options. This will be funded by the Place departmental consultancy budget (this has already received Place DMT approval) and Natural England.

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### **Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management and Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion:**

Delivery and maintenance of high quality green spaces will help to ensure the aim of creating sustainable communities and providing a high quality of life for everyone is delivered. As key community assets, that will be controlled by local people, the additional benefits of delivering these green spaces will include community cohesion and an enhancement of the well being of residents, both of which are also key elements in how the city proposes to tackle child poverty.

Enhanced working between Plymouth City Council services and the community on green spaces will ensure engagement with people of different ages, backgrounds and interests. The establishment of a Community Forum to support the work to investigate the development of a Community Greenspace Trust will ensure that local people can inform and engage with the process.

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### **Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

1. Instruct officers to investigate the potential of developing a Community Greenspace Trust.

**Reason:** To enable a full investigation into the cost, benefits, opportunities and risks of developing a new model of management for green spaces that will place communities at the heart of decision making. This will include an assessment of potential governance arrangements for the Trust and responsibilities and accountabilities any new organisation must deliver against. Fully evidenced recommendations will be presented in 10 months to inform further debate on this proposal.

2. Agree the creation of a Community Greenspace Forum to support and inform the work to investigate a Community Greenspace Trust.

**Reason:** To ensure that communities have a key role in the investigation and new ways of working on green spaces.

3. Agree to the inclusion of Central Park and Derriford Community Park as part of the investigation and any other strategic level green spaces if it is demonstrated that this would add value to the work.

**Reason:** To enable the investigation to assess the added value of a Community Greenspace Trust that manages multiple sites if further discussion with adjacent Local Authorities demonstrates the value of additional sites being assessed as part of the investigation.

**Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:**

A lack of support for the investigation into the development of a Community Greenspace Trust would prevent a full exploration of the potential benefits it could deliver. Without the full investigation it would be impossible to determine the full costs, benefits, opportunities and risks of a Community Greenspace Trust and the actions that would enable the proposal to become a reality. Effectively this would maintain the current arrangements for the management of all open spaces. There would also still be need to investigate a method of sustainably managing new strategic level green spaces proposed as part of the growth agenda.

**Background papers:**

- **Plymouth Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan – June 2010, Plymouth Green Infrastructure Partnership**

<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/greeninfrastructureproject/gideliveryplan.htm>

**Sign off:**

Finance	Place F PC121 3 008.17 1012	Leg	JAR/ 1585 6  TH00 66	HR	MG 12/ 10- 001	Corp Prop	N/A	IT	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating SMT Member: Paul Barnard, Assistant Director for Planning											
Have you consulted the Cabinet Member (s) named on the report? Yes											

## An Investigation into a Community Greenspace Trust

### I. Summary:

- I.1 High quality green spaces are an essential component of sustainable communities providing areas for recreation, relaxation, social cohesion, food growing and play. The protection and enhancement of green spaces are therefore an essential element of the growth agenda that the City Council has been pursuing since the adoption of the Plymouth Core Strategy. Plymouth is very fortunate in having an enviable natural resource and this should be used to its maximum benefit to support the City's growth agenda and local communities.
- I.2 Green spaces also provide a significant opportunity to place communities at the heart of decision making, informing service delivery. There is already well developed interest and action across the City with local groups becoming more involved with the enhancement and maintenance of green spaces in the form of Parks 'Friends of' groups, allotment groups and stakeholder forums set up to inform the delivery of the new strategic Parks. The potential to build on the interest shown by local people and the opportunities the growth agenda provides in delivering new and enhanced green spaces provides an exciting opportunity to investigate the option of creating a Community Greenspace Trust. The investigation would test whether a Community Greenspace Trust could deliver a new model of management that:
- “places communities at the heart of decision making of an organisation dedicated to the management of high quality green spaces that deliver benefits for people, wildlife and businesses.”***
- I.3 There are significant advantages in enhanced community ownership of green spaces including:
- Opportunities to place communities at the heart of service delivery embedding the principles of a Cooperative Council;
  - Access to additional funding streams to help resource enhancements and maintenance works;
  - Development of new community engagement schemes such as membership;
  - Opportunities to enhance the involvement of local people in the management of the natural spaces through extensive volunteering schemes;
  - The opportunity to establish a dedicated resource to enhance and manage natural spaces that responds directly to the needs of local people.
- I.4 An initial investigation has been undertaken into how other Local Authorities and organisations have transferred the responsibility of green spaces to communities. This coupled with a requirement to deliver the benefits detailed above has led to the proposal that a more detailed investigation should be conducted into the development of a Community Greenspace Trust for the Plymouth area. This investigation will test the opportunities and risk of this model of management. The key risk that will need to be assessed is whether a sustainable business model can be developed to support a new organisation dedicated to managing green spaces.
- I.5 An opportunity to investigate and test this new model of management is available as a result of the growth agenda. Proposals to deliver a new Community Park at Derriford and the enhancement of Central Park in line with the Area Action Plan (AAP) provides the opportunity to investigate a new approach that would provide communities with independent management of green spaces.

- 1.6 Derriford Community Park has been previously identified (through the AAP) as being managed by a Community Trust once established. Central Park is the focus of a master plan to deliver significant enhancements and the inclusion of the Park within the investigation would reaffirm the Council's commitment to this Park as a key area of green space for the City's people. Bringing these Parks together under a single programme of investigation will have the added benefit of not only assessing the suitability, costs and benefits of managing these sites individually under a Community Trust model, but also identifying any added value of having a single management model for multiple sites within or in the vicinity of Plymouth. Additional strategic parks proposed in areas adjacent to the City, that have also been identified to be managed by a Community Trust when established, could be included in the investigation following more detailed discussions with adjacent Local Authorities.
- 1.7 A focus on these sites will enable a full investigation into:
- Sustainable business models for each of the sites and a comparison of the added value of managing them collectively;
  - Different models of governance for the Community Greenspace Trust and the cost, benefits and opportunities of each option;
  - The risks of developing a new Community Greenspace Trust to manage new and enhanced green spaces and how these risks could be mitigated;
  - An assessment of the social, economic and environmental implications of developing a Community Greenspace Trust;
  - The implications of developing a new Trust with regards to current arrangement for managing Council owned green space.
- 1.8 It is proposed that a 10 month project is initiated that conducts a full investigation into all the options and produces evidenced recommendations on whether the development of a Community Greenspace Trust will deliver the key outcomes detailed above.
- 1.9 It is vital that communities are engaged with this work from the beginning and it is therefore proposed that a dedicated Community Forum is established to inform the investigation over the 10 month project. The project will also investigate other options for the Council and communities to work together on other natural spaces across the City.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 To support the growth of the City a number of new Community Parks and the enhancement of other strategic Parks are proposed. These green spaces will become important community assets providing social, economic and environmental benefits helping to contribute towards the delivery of the City's vision. The delivery of these assets is guided by the Plymouth Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan adopted by the Council in March 2010, and led by the Green Infrastructure Team based within Planning Services.
- 2.2 An important aspect of planning new and enhanced green spaces is identifying and securing a long term maintenance model which will be financially sustainable, provide significant public benefit and will ensure the sites continue to be an asset for the City and its residents in the future. As part of the investigation into the delivery of these sites it was identified that an exploration into new models of management that could provide long term sustainability would be beneficial. This investigation would also enable an assessment of how communities could be more involved with delivery of services related to green spaces in line with the Cooperative Council approach.

- 2.3 An initial investigation into the opportunities a new model of management could provide has identified a number of potential benefits including:
- The ability to raise additional money, access additional funding streams and enable more resources to be directed towards the high quality maintenance of green spaces;
  - The opportunity to place communities at the heart of decision making;
  - The opportunity for asset creation directly linked to green spaces to enable revenue generation to support the sites;
  - The ability to engage directly with communities through memberships, cooperatives and other mechanisms.
- 2.4 Through an initial investigation and review of how other Local Authorities and organisations have enabled new models of management it has been identified that the development of a Community Greenspace Trust could deliver the benefits detailed above. To determine whether this option would be viable and beneficial in Plymouth a full investigation is needed.
- 2.5 A new Community Greenspace Trust would need to demonstrate significant community value as well as being financial viable before any further action to create a new model of management was progressed.

### **3. THE INVESTIGATION**

- 3.1 To test the proposal for a Community Greenspace Trust to manage new and enhanced green spaces a full investigation into the cost, benefits, opportunities and risks needs to be conducted.
- 3.2 To enable the investigation to be manageable and ensure all aspects of the new model of management can be tested it is recommended that it is focused on a small number of green spaces in the first instance. This will ensure that the investigation can be completed within 10 months and will result in fully evidenced recommendation for future actions.
- 3.3 To ensure the investigation tests the key aspects of whether this new model of management will result in significant benefits and therefore justify its creation it will be tested against a number of key points.

The investigation would test:

- The ability of the Trust to place communities at the heart of decision making and enable local people to directly engage with green spaces and their future management;
  - The business models and determine whether the Trust could be financially sustainable;
  - Whether a new entity that manages a number of green space sites would result in significant added value when compared with existing management options;
  - What the implications are for the Council if certain green space assets were transferred to a Trust;
  - What are the risks involved with establishing a Trust to manage certain green space assets.
- 3.4 The investigation will cover all aspects of the costs and benefits of developing a Community Greenspace Trust to test these points. This will include an exploration of:

**Governance** – The Community Greenspace Trust could be established and governed following a number of models such as a Community Interest Company or a Company Limited by Guarantee and a register charity, to name just two optional models. The investigation

would review each of the establishment options and associated governance structures to determine which option would be most beneficial for a Community Greenspace Trust in the Plymouth area.

**Business Models** – Derriford Community Park has an outline delivery plan that identifies that if it is delivered in line with the masterplan it will generate sufficient revenue to support the management of the Park and its assets. This work will be further refined during the investigation period. A business plan for Central Park will need to be developed to determine the revenue generating potential of the green space and the level of ongoing financial support the Council would need to provide if it was transferred to a Trust to manage. This work will then feed into a business model for the whole Trust to determine any added value and/or financial savings of managing multiple sites following a new model of management.

**Social, Economic and Environmental Costs and Benefits** – To ensure a balanced and informed recommendation is provided on whether to pursue the creation of a Community Greenspace Trust a detailed analysis of the costs and benefits will be conducted. This will provide clarity over the risks and opportunities and ensure a full assessment of all the implications is provided.

**Lessons Learnt from Other Authorities** – The experiences and lessons learnt from other Local Authorities that have undertaken to transfer green spaces to community ownership will be explored. This will enable an understanding of the benefits of a successful community green space transfer and how this was achieved. It will however also be important to understand where things have not worked so well and how we can learn from these experiences.

3.5 To manage the process and enable detailed testing of options it is recommended that the initial investigation is limited in scope to a small number of green spaces. These spaces have been identified for inclusion because:

- They have been previously identified as being managed by a Community Trust once established;
- The site identified for significant enhancement works within a statutory planning document;
- They have the ability to include revenue generating assets that can help deliver financial sustainability.

3.6 The sites recommended for inclusion are as follows:

**Derriford Community Park** – Is a 147ha Community Park identified within the Derriford and Seaton Area Action Plan (AAP) to support the growth of northern Plymouth. A masterplan has been developed for the Park after consultation with stakeholders and was highly supported. The AAP sets out the requirement for the Park to be managed by a ‘not for profit’ Community Trust once delivered.

**Central Park** – The enhancement proposals for Central Park are set out in the Central Park AAP, adopted in 2008, and the Central Park Masterplan that was approved by Cabinet on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2011. The Park already provides multiple benefits for local people and there is existing interest from communities to be involved with its enhancement and management. The inclusion of the Park within the investigation would reaffirm the Council’s commitment to maintaining this area of green space for Plymouth’s people.

- 3.7 There are other large scale Community Park's proposed within the vicinity of Plymouth to support growth aspirations. It would be beneficial to include these in the investigation process to test the value of a Community Greenspace Trust that manages strategic level sites in and around Plymouth collectively. This will be discussed with adjacent Local Authorities as part of the investigation process.
- 3.8 The scope of the investigation detailed above will result in an evidenced report back to Cabinet in November 2013. It will provide all the information needed to inform further decisions on whether a Community Greenspace Trust should be created and the sites that it could manage.

#### **4. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

- 4.1 The development of a Community Greenspace Trust must result in increased engagement with local people to meet it's over arching purpose. To ensure that communities can engage in this process at the earliest stage it is proposed to establish a 'Community Forum' to inform the investigation. The Forum will meet a minimum of 3 times during the 10 month investigation. The terms for reference of the group and its composition will be determined within the first month of the investigation works.

#### **5. WORKING WITH ADJACENT LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

- 5.1 As detailed in point 3.7 above there are other new Parks proposed within very close proximity to Plymouth that have been identified as being managed by a Community Trust once established. To test the full range of opportunities a Community Greenspace Trust could deliver it is recommended that further discussions are conducted with South Hams District Council to determine if other Parks could be included within the investigation. It is recommended that delegated authority is provided to the Portfolio Holder for the Environment to agree inclusion of any additional Parks if there is evidence that it could benefit the full investigation of options.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 This report recommends that a full investigation is conducted to determine if a Community Greenspace Trust could deliver the joint benefit of placing the community in control of services related to green space and delivering long term sustainable management of these important City assets. A new model of management that provided these benefits would deliver an innovative step change in the approach to these key green spaces. The investigation, when complete, would enable a more informed decision to be made on whether the concept of a Community Greenspace Trust could be turned into a reality that delivers significant benefits for the City and its communities.