

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure
DATE	20 th April 2010
DIRECTOR	Gordon McIntosh
TITLE OF REPORT	Open Space Audit
REPORT NUMBER:	EPI/10/042

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report presents the results of an Open Space Audit carried out for the City during 2009 and 2010 and proposes that these results are used to inform the development of an Open Space Strategy. A review of the adopted Open Space standards for residential development on greenfield sites has also been undertaken and revised standards are presented in this report for approval for consultation with stakeholders.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Members:

- a) Note the results of the Open Space Audit
- b) Support the recommendations arising from the Audit, which are:
 - i) To prepare an open space strategy and detailed action plan.
 - ii) To update the Open Space Audit database annually and carry out a full review five years from now to coincide with the review of the Local Development Plan.
 - iii) Involve stakeholders in the development of the open space strategy and action plan, through workshops or other forums as appropriate.
 - iv) Develop new standards for the provision of open space in future developments, including appropriate requirements for developer contributions where on-site provision is not possible.
- c) Approve the new proposed draft Open Space Development Standards for consultation

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Open Space Audit 2010 was funded through existing revenue budgets, mainly taking the form of staff time. The Audit does not have significant resource implications, however the forthcoming Open Space Strategy may. The Strategy could offer an opportunity to reduce revenue expense by reviewing open space provision and management in line with the Audit findings and customer satisfaction information. Such financial implications will be reported to Committee in due course and discussed with stakeholders throughout the Strategy's development. Maintenance of future sites will be considered as part of

the consultation on the new standards and through the preparation of the Open Space Strategy.

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Open Space Audit, and the Strategy that it will be used to inform, link with the Vibrant, Dynamic and Forward Looking commitment to “adopt and implement policies which safeguard Aberdeen’s green belt and green wedges”. It will also assist the Council in delivering the Single Outcome Agreement’s National Outcome 12 - “We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and enhance it for future generations” and contributes to several other outcomes such as No. 6 – “We live longer, healthier lives”, No. 7 – Tackling inequalities, No. 10 – “We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need” and No. 11 – Strong, resilient and supportive communities.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The Audit has taken equalities issues into consideration and an Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment will be undertaken during the development of the Open Space Strategy.

6. REPORT

Background

Planning Advice Note (PAN) 65, Scottish Planning Policy and the Aberdeen Local Plan 2008 require that an audit of open or green space is undertaken. A comprehensive audit should be used to take a strategic approach to the management, enhancement and development of open spaces.

The data gathered throughout the Open Space Audit will inform the development of an Open Space Strategy and the Local Development Plan. A draft Open Space Strategy will be prepared, with input from key stakeholders through a number of workshops, with the intention being to report this to Committee by summer 2010.

In May 2009 a working group was established, made up of key internal and external interests, to take forward a comprehensive Open Space Audit. The approach that was adopted focused on making the most of relevant data that had already been collected as part of previous projects, identifying any gaps and seeking resource-efficient means to fill these gaps while following national best practice guidelines and meeting the requirements of national and local policy.

The Open Space Audit assesses the quantity, quality and accessibility of the open spaces of Aberdeen, which have been digitally mapped using GIS (Geographic Information System) and assigned a land use type, in accordance with PAN 65 guidance. The quality of each site has been assessed against criteria developed in accordance with guidance from Greenspace Scotland. A community engagement exercise was undertaken from December 2009 to January 2010, aiming to capture the public’s views on open space provision, quality and accessibility. A questionnaire was promoted on the Council’s website, and paper copies were distributed to all of the city’s public libraries and

The Point. Posters advertising the project were put up at public events and in park notice boards. The survey ran for seven weeks and a total of 125 responses were received. This fairly small sample size does present a limitation to the interpretation of the results, however the responses are useful and give some indication of public opinion. Further details are provided in the draft Open Space Audit 2010, which is included in appendix A. Due to their size, the Audit Report's appendices are available by email or in the Members' Library for financial and environmental reasons.

Results

The Audit has identified 3471 hectares of open space. The largest category of open space is woodland (801Ha or 23%), followed by open, semi-natural ground (760Ha or 22%). Amenity open space is third largest, covering 649Ha or 19%.

Dyce, Bucksburn and Danestone (768ha) and Lower Deeside (677ha) wards have the most open space while Hilton and Stockethill (50ha) and George Street and Harbour (47ha) have the least. The average across all of the wards is 289 hectares. The community engagement carried out as part of the Audit showed that the greatest demand for more open space related to the city centre, with 14% of respondents indicating that more open space is required there. Of those respondents who indicated that more open space was required in their area, the second highest, after the city centre, was the Sunnybank / Froghall / Powis area, which falls within the Tillydrone, Seaton and Old Aberdeen and George Street and Harbour wards. Community engagement also highlighted that there is a demand for more green corridors, play spaces and allotments throughout the city. The consultation indicated that natural or woodland areas have the highest level of use, public parks and gardens second, and green corridors third. Those who responded to the consultation use allotments least, tennis and bowling greens second least and golf courses third least.

Major and neighbourhood parks are not equally distributed across the city, with central, historic parts of the city generally having very good access to these open spaces. Households in wards around the outside of the urban area are further than the recommended 1500 metres from major parks and 600 metres from neighbourhood parks.

The city's public parks and gardens score highest in terms of quality. Amenity open spaces score poorly. The community engagement carried out as part of the Audit broadly concurs with this conclusion. 60% of respondents rated public parks and gardens as good or excellent, whereas respondents were least satisfied with amenity open space – 35% rated it poor or fair.

The highest quality open spaces are found in Hazlehead, Ashley and Queens Cross and Torry and Ferryhill wards, whereas Northfield and Hilton and Stockethill have the poorest quality open space sites.

Conclusions and recommendations

The areas of the city where the quantity of open space is lowest tend to be densely developed areas where the scope for creating new open space is likely

to be limited. The protection of existing spaces here is therefore particularly important and there may be opportunities to enhance their quality.

Northfield has amongst the least amount, as well as poorest quality, open spaces of all of the city's wards and could therefore be seen as a priority for action. The Audit results are being used to inform a community-led project in partnership with Aberdeen Greenspace to improve the open spaces in the area, utilising external grant funding. The project will take the form of a pilot, which could then be rolled out to other areas lacking in and/or with poor quality open space.

Much of the city's open space, particularly in the more recently developed areas, takes the form of amenity open space. This type of open space also scores poorly in terms of quality and achieves a poor level of customer satisfaction. Amenity open space tends to consist of areas of grass with few features and facilities and is costly to maintain. There may be an opportunity through the forthcoming open space strategy to review the management of amenity open spaces and consider the possibilities for developing amenity open space into alternative, and more publicly desirable types of open space.

Development of amenity open space could be addressed in future through the alteration of the adopted standards for open space in greenfield sites. Revised standards for open space in new developments could also encourage the creation of more green corridors, play spaces and allotments, demand for which was apparent in the community engagement. The Scottish Government's new Designing Streets policy statement may be of relevance in relation to the development of transport amenity open space.

The distribution of major and neighbourhood open spaces should also be addressed by revised standards for development. Large open spaces may need to be taken forward through masterplanning, in line with the Local Development Plan.

Where it is not possible to increase the amount of open space in areas of the city where the Audit has shown that the provision of open space is low for example, where land is densely developed, developer contributions from brownfield development will be sought to enhance the quality of nearby open spaces.

As a result of the Open Space Audit, it is recommended that:

- a) An open space strategy and detailed action plan is prepared.
- b) The Open Space Audit database is updated annually and a full review carried out five years from now to coincide with the review of the Local Development Plan.
- c) Stakeholders are involved in the development of the open space strategy and action plan, through workshops or other forums as appropriate.
- d) New standards for the provision of open space in future developments, including appropriate requirements for developer contributions where on-site provision is not possible, are developed.

Revised standards for the development of new open spaces

Proposed new standards for the development of open space in new residential developments on greenfield sites are included as appendix B.

The existing open space standards and associated guidelines, adopted in 2001, require 2.8 hectares of open space per 1000 people and include a suggested breakdown of 1.6 hectares of sports pitches and playing fields, 0.3 hectares of equipped children's play space, 0.5 hectares of informal / amenity open space and 0.4 hectares of natural wildspace per 1000 population.

In more recently developed areas of the city the current quantity of open space appears to be adequate but the types of open space that have been developed and their quality is not always appropriate or adequate. Therefore the proposed revised standards do not suggest altering the 2.8 hectare per 1000 people total but include quality and accessibility standards in addition to quantity. The proposed revised standards refer to a hierarchy of major, neighbourhood and local open spaces. Standards are also provided for specific types of open space - Play Space, Outdoor Sports Areas, Natural Greenspace and Green Corridors and Allotments or Community Gardens. The aim of the revised standards is to encourage the development of some larger parks, as well as the types of open space that people want to see provided and less (usually small areas of) amenity open space.

The quality standards proposed in appendix B refer to Green Flag 'good' standard. Green Flag is a quality standard for parks and open spaces recognised and in use throughout the UK. The accessibility standards proposed have been established through a combination of best practice guidelines, benchmarking with other local authorities and considering the results of the community engagement undertaken as part of the Open Space Audit.

Key maps from the Audit, an example of which is provided in appendix B, will also be supplemented to the standards, which will take the form of Supplementary Guidance in the Local Development Plan. This will encourage the provision of new open spaces in new developments that are relevant to existing provision in the surrounding area and local demand.

Where it is not possible to meet the standards for the provision of new open space within a development site, a contribution from the developer towards the provision of new open space in the vicinity of the site, or the enhancement of existing open spaces will be necessary. Developer contributions in relation to the provision of open space will be expanded upon in Supplementary Guidance. Similarly, the provision of open space in brownfield developments is more likely to necessitate contributions towards the enhancement of open space.

It is proposed that consultation on the revised open space standards takes place over the coming months with key internal and external stakeholders, before being integrated with the Local Development Plan through Supplementary Guidance.

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8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Draft Open Space Audit Report 2010 (Appendix A)
Proposed Revised Open Space Standards in Residential Development on
Greenfield Sites (Appendix B)
Draft Open Space Audit Report 2010 Appendices (Members' Library or available
by email)