

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 25th September 2008

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - Environment

SUBJECT: Improvements to Borough's Parks and Open Spaces.

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Following on from a report submitted to this Board on 22nd June 2006, to seek agreement from the Board that the next phase of major refurbishment of key Borough Parks and Open Spaces will be as listed in section 2.1.
- 1.2 To seek endorsement from the Board for the continuation of small scale improvements to the Borough's parks, playgrounds and open spaces by using existing funding, section and funding from external bodies such as WREN.
- 1.3 To seek approval from the Board for the extension of the current standing list for landscape consultant's.
- 1.4 To provide information to the Board about the numerous improvement projects that have been carried out, the improvements in quality and the awards secured since the creation of the Landscape Services Division in 2000.
- 1.5 To outline the strategy with regards to retention and expansion of Green Flag Awards.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) **That those sites listed below represent the priorities for the next phase of major park refurbishment:-**
 - a. **Spike Island/St Helens Canal**
 - b. **Runcorn Town Park**
 - c. **Runcorn Hill Park**
 - d. **Crow Wood Park**

That existing budgets and monies from external funding bodies (subject to an annual review and by this Board and agreement with relevant Portfolio holders) be used to upgrade the above sites to improve the 'liveability' of local areas,

contribute to the governments 'Cleaner, Greener' agenda and provide a wide range of facilities for local people and visitors that promote healthy lifestyles and wellbeing.

- (2) That other small-scale landscape improvements continue to be undertaken, following discussion with the relevant Portfolio holder, through the use of existing revenue and capital funding, through section 106 agreements and through funding from external bodies such as WREN. A report will be submitted once per year to the Executive Board Sub, which will show a list of small-scale improvements for information along with a list of potential future projects and demonstrate that monies are still available for continuation and new schemes.
- (3) The Operational Director - Environmental and Regulatory Services be authorised to extend the contracts for Term Landscape Consultancy to The Environment Partnership (TEP) and 2020 Knowsley for a further three years, and that in light of the exceptional circumstances, namely an unforeseen large volume of landscape design and implementation work and in accordance with Procurement SO 1.6, Standing Orders 3.1- 3.7 and 3.10 be waived on this occasion in view of 1.6 (b) 'where compliance with Standing Orders is not practicable for reasons of urgency which could not have reasonably been anticipated' in that a large portfolio of recently confirmed landscape schemes, including the Runcorn Town Hall Park works, and need completing in a short space of time to meet funding deadlines and Members' and Community expectations.
- (4) The Operational Director - Environmental and Regulatory Services is authorised to recruit a Temporary Assistant Landscape Architect for a two year period, with costs to be covered by the fee elements of the landscape schemes over the next two years.
- (5) The Board note that since the creation of the Landscape Services Division in 2000 there have been 187 separate improvement schemes completed, or currently with contractors on site (See Appendix 1). Quality of management and maintenance has improved to such a degree that the Council now has 10 Green Flag Award Parks. Since 2000 the Landscape Services Division also gained Beacon Status in 2002 for 'Improving Urban Green Spaces', it was twice the winner of APSE Service Team of the Year Award in 2003 and 2004 and it was runner up for this award in 2005. The Division was a runner up for APSE Most Improved Council in 2006 and the winner of this award in 2007. The Division has also won a Green Apple Award for its work at the Hale Duck Decoy in 2004, Best Environmental Planning Project for Wigg Island in

2004, a Green Heroes Award for working with volunteers in 2007 and a Best Partnership Award for the Phoenix Park Pavilion in 2007.

- (6) **The Board note and approve that Halton Borough Council currently ranks joint 5th (with Tameside MBC) nationally in the number of Green Flag Awards that it holds. As stated in the Environment and Regulatory Services Departments Service Plan the Landscape Services Division will seek to retain all of the present Green Flag Awards. In addition further bids for Green Flag Award's will be made over the next four years usually at the rate of one additional bid per year. The intention is to position Halton amongst the top three performing authorities regionally. Additional parks that could be considered for Green Flag Awards include Birchfield Gardens, Crow Wood Park, Hale Park and Town Park.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Environment and Regulatory Services Departments, Landscape Services Division is responsible for the management and Development of the Borough's 'Natural Assets' (its Parks, Open spaces, Nature Reserves, Waterfront Areas and Children's Playgrounds) all the Council's landscape strategy and policy work and the design and construction of new landscape schemes in the Borough. Since 2000 much of the Council's green infrastructure has been substantially upgraded. Parks such as Hough Green Park, Rock Park and Victoria Park have undergone major refurbishment and improvement works. New parks such as Phoenix Park and Wigg Island Community Park have been created. Sports pitches have been upgraded with new drainage and improved facilities. In total, over 180 environmental improvement schemes of various sizes have been carried out (*see appendix 1*). It should be noted that since 2002 over 500,000 Daffodil bulbs and 26,000 Bluebell bulbs have been planted throughout the Borough making a significant visual impact. During the same period 50,000 trees have also been planted many as part of the National Tree week initiative that takes place in November of each year. Ten Green Flag Awards have resulted from these investments and visitor satisfaction with parks is 94%. Due to commence in the financial year 2008/9 will be major refurbishment work at Hale Park and Runcorn Town Hall Park. Even after the completion of these sites there will still be a number of key areas of parks and open space that need to be upgraded the major sites being those listed in 2.1.
- 3.2 Workload in the Landscape Services Divisions Landscape Design and Conservation Section has risen dramatically over the past ten years, with an average of £1.88 Million of implementation work per annum over the past three years. A further increase is anticipated

over the next two years, with funding having recently been made available for improvements to Runcorn Town Hall Park, a major regeneration of the Borough's Play Areas through the 'Play Builder' programme, and a possible programme of bowling green refurbishment. In addition, there is the on-going landscape work in connection with Castlefields Regeneration, 3MG and Widnes Waterfront, there are a number of Section 106 funded schemes which need completing, and a major grant has recently been awarded from Heritage Lottery Fund for improvements to Hale Park. The estimated value of the workload over the next two years is £4 million, based solely on those schemes, which are already approved, or confidently expected to be approved.

- 3.3 There is currently a core staff of three qualified Landscape Architects (including the Principal Landscape and Conservation Officer, whose role is to co-ordinate the work of the Section). In order to manage the work, which could not be resourced in-house, an extensive tendering and assessment exercise was undertaken in 2005, and two Term Landscape Consultants were appointed for a three year period. During that three year period 20/20 Knowsley were involved in ten projects and have been paid fees totalling £171,688 and TEP have been involved with seven projects and have been paid fees totalling £95,517.
- 3.4 The initial period of the Term Consultancy will shortly be completed, and the two consultants, TEP and 2020 Knowsley, have performed well during the period. Due to the large volume of landscape work which has arisen recently, much of which was unforeseen and requires completion in a short period of time, and the length of time and resources involved in tendering and selecting new consultants, it is requested that the services of these two consultants be retained for a further three years. Further details are given in the attached Business Case (Appendix 2)
- 3.5 In addition, in order to manage the large volume of work, consideration will be given to employing a Temporary Assistant Landscape Architect for two years to provide extra capacity in the design team. The post would be funded by the fee element of the additional work, which will be forthcoming during the next two years.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Within the Corporate Plan, 2006-2011, the value of Parks and Open Spaces is recognised under Halton's Urban Renewal Area of Focus 12, Further improvements to Parks and Open Spaces support's the Council's efforts to deliver urban renewal and a better quality of life in Halton.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no other implications.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The above proposals will deliver improvements that will directly impact on the lives of Children and Young People in the Borough, as they will deliver improved facilities for these age groups.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Improvement of parks and open spaces will create more jobs directly and indirectly. Staff with a high level of horticultural skills will be required to maintain sites and business opportunities could be created for the provision of refreshment facilities.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Improvement of the Borough's Green Infrastructure will make a beneficial contribution to the health of the Borough's citizens as such improvements have proven to lead to increased patronage of sites. More people will enjoy walking, sporting activities, using play facilities and taking part in other cultural events.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Increased patronage of parks and open spaces has been proven to reduce crime anti social behaviour. Improvements to parks and open spaces will bring about increased patronage.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Improvements to the Borough's Green Infrastructure will further improve the image of the Borough and contribute directly to its Urban Renewal.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

There is a potential risk that projects may not proceed which would result in a lower level of fees to offset salaries. However the current secured projects would cover the cost of the temporary landscape architect. If other fees were not forthcoming the term consultants would simply not be commissioned to do any work.

There is the potential that even more projects will come forward for implementation which would even greater strain on internal

resources. In this case more use of term consultants would be made.

Therefore the proposals contained within this report offer no significant risk.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

There are no equality and diversity issues.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act.

Appendix 1 – Landscape Services Division – Site improvement projects 2000 – 2008.

Ref. Scheme	Brief Description	Completed
L05 Dukesfield	Footpaths and Play Area	2002
L08 Upton Rocks	Play Area, Skate Park and other landscape works	2005
L10 Wigg Island Phase 1	Footpaths, planting and other landscape works	2001
L10 Wigg Island Phase 2	Footpaths, planting and other landscape works	2004
L10 Wigg Island Visitors Centre	Visitors Centre	2007
L13 Weates Close footpath link	Footpath	2002
L24 Victoria Park - HLF scheme	New pavillion, bandstand, lake, fountain, footpaths, gardens etc.	2008
L25 Victoria Prom	New play area, railings, pathworks etc	2002
L27 St Johns Brow	New paving, planting	2002
L30 Halebank Rec	BMX area	2000
L32 Lytham Rd Woods	Woodland planting	2000
L35 Windmill Hill MUGA	MUGA	2000
L39 Old Chester Road, Daresbury	New path and entrance	2002
L40 Dukesfield Allotments	Refurbished allotments	2000
L44 Hough Green Park Play Area	New Play Area and artwork	2001
L45 Upton Play Area	New Play Area and artwork	2001
L49 Prescott Rd Playing fields	Car park and kickabout pitch	2001
L50 Play Areas	Improvements to various play areas	2003
L51 St Martins School	Woodland planting and footpath	2002
L53 Grange Nursery	New garden	2001
L54 Park Primary	School ground improvements	2001
L56 Ditton School	New school ground	2001
L58 Parker St Play Area	Refurbished play area and artwork	2002
L59 Runcorn Town Centre footpath links	Footpaths	2001
L61 Runcorn Hill Bandstand	Bandstand and paving	2004
L62 West Bank Playing Field	New school football pitch	2002
L64 Streets Ahead	Tree planting, garden improvements, streetworks	2005
L66 Lamsickle Lane Play Area	Play area	2002
L68 Murdishaw West primary	School ground improvements	2002
L77 Weston Nature Garden	Wildlife area	2004
L78 Hale Road Flats	New play area, MUGA, garden	2003

Ref. Scheme	Brief Description	Completed
L79 Widnes and Runcorn Cemeteries	New plots, drainage, footpaths	on-going
L85 Victoria park Skate Park	Skate park and fencing	2002
L87 Hough Green Park Ballcourt	MUGA	2002
L88 St Maries Park	Play area, MUGA, pathworks	2005
L89 Rock Park Phase 1	Play area, skate ramp, MUGA	2003
Rock Park Phases 2&3	Railings and walls	2004
L90 Town Hall Pond	Improvements to pond	2002
L93 St Paul's Church	Garden and railings	2003
L95 Strategic Routes	Bulb and tree planting, woodland management	2005
L96 Slaters Meadow	Wildflower meadow and footpaths	2003
L99 Palacefields Primary School	School ground improvements	2004
L100 Lugsdale Rd community Centre	Safer surfacing, garden	2003
L101 Palacefields / hallwood Park MUGAs	MUGA and surfacing	2003
L102 Castle Rise Play Area	Play Area	2005
L103 Holloway Gardens	Garden around memorial	2003
L105 Lilac Crescent	Wildflower meadow	2005
L107 portland St	Tree planting, fencing, seeding	2003
L109 Victoria Park Toddlers play Area	Play area	2004
L110 Widnes Waterfront Phase 1	Planters, tree and shrub planting, grass	2006
L112 Crow Wood Park	Paths, MUGA, skate area, shelter, new entrance	2005
L115 All Saints Church	Footpath works	2005
L123 Ditton Nursery	Garden, footpaths, canopy	2004
L125 Castner Ave	Play area	2005
L126 Clinton Woods	Footpaths	2004
L127 Phoenix Park	Play area, boulder, skate park, footpaths	2006
L129 Ridding Lane	Small MUGA	2005
L131 Widnes Warth	Footpaths, boardwalk, artwork	2006
L134 Oxmoor LNR	Footpaths, wetland creation, reed planting	2005
L135 Victoria park Junior Play Area	Play area	2005
L137 Wood Lane Ball Court	MUGA	2005
L138 Halebank Ball Court	MUGA	2005
L142 Astmoor lane	Footpath works	2006
L143 Ditton Library	Small garden, soft play area, water feature	2006
L144 Sports Pitch Improvements	Drainage and renovation to Runcorn and Widnes pitches	Substantially

Ref. Scheme	Brief Description	complete Completed
L146 Victoria Park Boulder and MUGA	Climbing boulder and MUGA	2007
L147 Friendship Garden	Garden with artwork	2006
L149 Hale Park	Lottery scheme: play area, footpaths, MUGA	2005
L150 Six Acre Lane	Play area	2007
L152 Tanhouse Lane	Tree and shrub planting, footpath / cycleway	2007
L155 Dennis Road	Tree planting and bollards	2006
L157 Roehampton Drive	Grassed games area	2006
L159 Norton priory Field Phase 1	Footpath / cycleway, fencing	2007
L159 Norton priory Field Phase 2	Woodland planting, tree planting, wildflower meadow, fencing	2008
L162 Runcorn Hill Tennis Court	Resurfacing, fencing, lighting	2006
L164 St Michaels Garages	Resurfacing, fencing	2008
L166 Russell Road	MUGA, fencing	2007
L168 Runcorn Hill Restoration	Proposed lottery scheme	2007
L169 Widnes Waterfront Phase 2	Planters, tree and shrub planting, grass	2008
L170 Cavendish Road Play Area	Play area	2007
L171 Hale View Play Area	Play area	2007
L173 Grange Community Centre	Improvements to MUGA	2007
L175 Speke Road Woods	Footpaths, wetland creation	2007
L178 Castle Rise MUGA	MUGA	2008
L179 Runcorn Town Park	Footpaths, fencing, improvements to model railway	2008
L182 All Saints School	School ground improvements	2007
L183 Watkinson Way Roundabout	Tree and shrub planting, gabion walls, mounding, footpaths	Currently on site.
L186 Pickerings Pasture Footpaths	Footpath improvements	Currently on site.
L187 Murdishaw Community Centre	Garden area, planting, footpaths	
L189 Caldwell Rd / King George's Play Area	Play area improvements	2008
L190 St Augustines School	School ground improvements	
L191 Wilmere Lane Playing Fields	New entrance and car park	2008
L192 Palacefield Moat	Footpaths	
L193 Daresbury Nature Area	Footpaths, wetland creation	
L194 Moss Bank Park	Footpath / cycleway, planting, new entrances, fencing	Currently on site.

L197	Ditton Road	Management of existing planting, tree and shrub planting, turfing	2008
L198	Upton Rocks Pond and Road	Wetland creation, roadside planting	
L199	Runcorn Hill Footpaths	Footpath works	
L200	Spike Island Masterplan	Play area, MUGA, new parking area, heritage trail	
	Ref. Scheme	Brief Description	Completed
L201	Bongs / Halton View	Entrance improvements	
L202	Waterloo Road	Seating area, garden, artwork	
L203	Town Park Lake	Refurbishment of lake and footpaths	
L204	Runcorn Town Hall Park	Play area, skate area, MUGA, tree planting, pond improvements	
L205	Electronic bollards	Automatic controls at various site entrances	
L206	Big Lottery / Playbuilder Play Areas	Major programme of play area refurbishment	
L208	Nortonwood Lane	Fencing	
L209	Wigg Island Tower Hide	Bird hide	Currently on site.

Appendix 2 – Business Case for Waiving Tendering Standing Orders

BUSINESS CASE FOR WAIVING TENDERING SOs

Value for money and Competition

The Landscape Section went through an extensive tendering and assessment exercise in 2005 to establish Term Landscape Consultants. All the suitable Landscape Practices within a 15 mile radius of Halton were invited to submit a tender. The tenders were assessed by a Panel of Officers from Landscape Services and Major Projects. The Executive Board Member for Environment Leisure and Sport was also invited to attend. The tenders were assessed on the basis of :

- Cost:- percentage fees and hourly rates (40%)
- Staff:- number, experience, capacity, other services (20%)
- The Practice:- experience of relevant schemes, quality of work (20%)
- Health and Safety :- including CDM (5%)
- Local Knowledge:- work in Halton, and other Local Authorities (10%)
- Managing the workload:- how they would manage the commission (5%)

The two consultants who were selected both submitted competitive percentage fee rates which were 5% below the recommended rates suggested by the Landscape Institute. Both consultants have agreed to maintain their rates as submitted in the 2005 tenders, with just an annual allowance for inflation for hourly rates based on the Retail Price Index. No new Landscape Practices which fulfill the specified criteria have opened since the original tendering process.

Value for money can also be demonstrated by the fact that both consultants have extensive experience of working in the borough and are familiar with local sites and issues.

Transparency

The tendering process is transparent and documents are available for inspection through the appropriate channels at Landscape Services Offices, Picow Farm Depot. Information on the running of the contract will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the Council's Audit process.

Propriety and Security

Standard Council contract documentation was built into the contract and only staff with a need to know have information about the contract.

Accountability

Accountability will remain with the Operational Director of Environmental and Regulatory Services.

Position of the contract under the Public Contracts Regulations 2006

The contract is subject to Public Contracts Regulations 2006