



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITY**

to
**COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE
21 NOVEMBER 2017**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT / FRIENDS GROUPS AND MANAGEMENT PLANS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members that Officers will be seeking details from organised Community and Friends groups, and will report back to this Committee in Spring 2018 with suggestions as to how Maldon District Council (MDC) may better engage with these groups, stakeholders, and the wider public, both resident and visiting.
- 1.2 To advise Members that Officers will be creating and populating new template documents to be used as a basis for writing new Management Plans for MDC owned Parks and Open Spaces. Initial priority sites for creation/completion of these Management Plans will be Riverside Park (Burnham-on-Crouch), Burnham-on-Crouch Cemetery and Maldon Cemetery.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) that all formalised Community and Friends Groups who are regularly involved in the use or management of Council assets – including community buildings, Parks, and leased/licenced areas - be required to submit written annual summaries of their activities for the period of April 2013 to March 2017;
- (ii) that Officers review and collate information received, prepare an update report and recommendations for the Community Services Committee meeting in March 2018;
- (iii) that Members agree that Officers will have draft Management plans available for Committee cycle in March 2018 for Member discussion and comment. Draft plans then to be available for Public Consultation through engagement activities and stakeholder consultations, with view to final five year Plans for period April 2019 – March 2024 being published in autumn 2018.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 Community Engagement/Friends Groups

- 3.1.1 A number of community assets and open space managed by MDC have associated 'Friends' or Community management groups. These groups have developed over

time and have been useful source of ‘local’ information and feedback with regard to the use, management, and ‘issues’ with regard to their areas of interest.

- 3.1.2 These groups have historically been a source of consultation, partnership working, project development and delivery, including attracting external funding and engaging the local community and general public
- 3.1.3 Officers fully appreciate the valuable resource that these groups and volunteers can represent, however at the same time are concerned that some sites have no such representation, other groups are facing dwindling support / membership, and that some are in no way fully representative of the wider interest and user groups for the sites which they are associated with.
- 3.1.4 In the last five years, Officers have also observed some groups close entirely and others struggle to maintain membership / interest in their original purpose. Some of those groups that Officers continue to engage with have – by necessity – had to reduce their focus and activities due to lack of support / membership, demand, or awareness of that group. Others have become in effect lobby groups with little or no productive engagement with either MDC, the community outside of that group, or the general public.
- 3.1.5 MDC is facing increasing demands and limitations of stretched resources not least financial but also in terms of Officer time / workload. To best direct these and partner resources there is a need for a clear understanding of the most effective pathways to achieve clear, productive, and accomplished outcomes.
- 3.1.6 In order to assist with directing MDC resources to better engage with community and friends groups, it is essential that we have up to date and detailed information from such groups. Summaries to be requested of groups would include information such as the number of members, how regularly they meet and their stated aims.
- 3.1.7 It is expected that some areas / sites may have ‘new’ interest groups or organised activities taking place within them who may also wish to register their interest and/or submit information to Officers for consideration and inclusion in future development of Community and Public engagement. Such groups will be requested to submit such information as they are able to or is relevant in line with 3.1.6 above.
- 3.1.8 All such submitted information will be reviewed and collated by Officers with a view to seeking opportunities for more effective working; development of capacity and potential for community / Friends groups; and opportunities for creating new networks for common interests, achieving objectives and sharing information and resources.
- 3.1.9 As an example, within Promenade Park an established network of wider interested groups would have ensured a better representation and return of ideas / concerns with regard to stakeholder conversations such as the recent Central Area Masterplan and Waterfront revival activities.

3.2 Management Plans

- 3.2.1 Currently none of the Council's Parks and Open Spaces have up to date Management plans which reflect the objectives and vision of this Authority for its management of these sites. Key sites such as the Cemeteries (whilst having plans and regulations for burial plots, memorials, and scattering of ashes) do not appear to have ever had a holistic Plan for their management as landscapes or as public open spaces. The majority of Parks sites which had written plans ran from 2007 - 2012, with a few having had minor updates to 2014.
- 3.2.2 The production of Management plans for Riverside Park, Maldon Cemetery and Burnham-on-Crouch Cemetery are Key Corporate Activities.
- 3.2.3 Due to its more complex nature and the varied demands placed up on it, Officers are currently developing a Masterplanning strategy for Promenade Park, which will be separate to and carried out in more detail than a standard Management Plan.
- 3.2.4 The framework / template that Officers are developing for these plans is proposed as follows:
- Executive summary of site, vision, and broad objectives;
 - Full five year plan (*format to be in-line with Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) / Green Flag Award standards*) with 10 - 20 year horizon targets / projects included;
 - Detailed Annual Action / Works programme and budget.
- 3.2.5 The development of draft plans will involve a full review of available historical files and information, cross-department liaison as to compliance and complimentary strategic direction and documents, Member engagement as to vision and objective setting, and (where appropriate) public consultation and input. Once finalised, these plans will be returned to Community Services Committee for approval prior to publication.
- 3.2.6 Park and Open Space management plans should be public documents, open to scrutiny and comment, giving clear messages and direction, and yet also be flexible enough to accommodate changes in circumstance before the end of their 'life' (e.g. funding, environmental, etc.). They should also be useful and useable documents on an Operational level, giving clear guidance and direction to staff for the short, medium and long term aspirations and resultant actions to be taken with any given site.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 There is a requirement for MDC to hold current and accurate information on all of its Friends and Community groups in order to ensure that we can prioritise engagement and resources within our Parks and Open Spaces, as well as opportunities for wider community engagement.
- 4.2 Requests for summaries from formalised groups to include details of their membership numbers, regularity of and attendance at their own meetings, Constitution (if applicable), activities, organisation of events and attendance at other

events, sources of fundraising and amounts, and any other significant information regarding the group's purpose / activities.

- 4.3 Information to be requested of Groups following approval by the Community Services Committee with target date for returns of Friday 26 January. Information to be reviewed by officers and update report and recommendations to be submitted to Community Services Committee for March 2018 meeting.
- 4.4 Officers to develop draft plans for three Key Corporate Activity (KCA) sites for early summer circulation to Members for comment. Public consultation to follow during peak visitor season to ensure maximum coverage and input from sites users. Final draft review suggested prior to publication in autumn 2018 for each site.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS

- 5.1 This links with the following corporate goals:
- Helping communities to be safe, active and healthy;
 - Protecting and shaping the District;
 - Delivering good quality, cost effective and valued services;

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Potential for increased engagement and representation from local community and visiting public in future consultation, activities/events, and management of MDC owned Parks, Opens spaces and Community resources.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – The Council provides services to the whole District and strives to ensure that none of those with protective characteristics stated within the legislation are adversely affected. By gaining accurate information with regard to current interest / Friends / Community Groups, we will gain a better understanding of how representative such groups are of the resident communities and visiting public.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – No corporate risks are identified through this report.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – None.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Officer time for processing of received information and communication / engagement with established and new groups to ensure quality and consistent data is being received.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None.

Background Papers: None.

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