

## Programme of Improvement of Green Spaces within the Borough

### Theme - External Funding:

#### 1. Riverside Park Development

A partnership between the Council, National Trust, Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust (who own Dunston Staiths) and Newcastle University is exploring options and opportunities to enhance and revitalise Riverside Park and Dunston Staiths. The partnership has grown from the Vision document for the park produced by Colour Architects, and a need for a sustainable future for Dunston Staiths.

We are awaiting the outcome of a Community Renewal Fund (CRF) bid which will cover spatial masterplanning, scheme design and costing, business planning, and community and audience development. Separate to this, we have secured funds via Newcastle University to map stakeholders and develop a common vision. Newcastle University are leading a research project to examine carbon neutral modular construction which would be showcased through development in the Park and on/around Dunston Staiths. Northumbria University are sourcing funding to follow up the successful Creative Mapping in Gateshead project to help the creative community address impact of Covid-19. An extensive programme of events is in development around the Park and Staiths, around the art pieces, the heritage, the nature and opportunities for health and wellbeing. Work is progressing to link the Park into the Town Centre and Metrogreen areas, and to housing sites at Askew Road and Clasper Village.

At present there is no back up plan for the necessary spatial planning, scheme development and business planning needed, should the CRF bid be unsuccessful.  
Contact officer: Clare Richardson

#### 2. Trees – NE Community Forest

A successful bid was submitted to England's Community Forests and DEFRA to establish the [North East Community Forest | Newcastle City Council](#) (NECF). The initiative, in which Gateshead Council is a lead partner, will support the delivery of increased tree planting and woodland creation across the NECF area to deliver environmental, social and economic improvements. This will be achieved through the development and implementation of a Community Forest Plan, the establishment of a NECF team, access to increased Government funding (e.g. Trees for Climate), and extensive engagement with local communities, businesses and public and private landowners.

The Partnership aims to deliver 500ha of new tree planting by 2025, with a long-term goal to increase canopy cover across the NECF area to 30% by 2050. This planting season, the partnership will deliver 25ha of new tree planting, of which c.5ha will be in Gateshead – locations to be determined. Funding had also been secured to deliver the planting of nearly 350 new standard and heavy standard trees, of which 76 will be in Gateshead. To date the NECF has secured over £800K for tree planting projects this planting season.

Contact officer: Neil Wilkinson

#### 3. Trees – Whitehills

Groundwork Trust in partnership with the Council was unsuccessful in consecutive bids to DEFRA's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. Despite receiving positive feedback and both

bids scoring highly, the programme is known to have been heavily oversubscribed and very competitive. It is now the Council's intention to deliver a pared-down but significant programme of environmental improvements on site in 2021/22 using existing internal resources and external funding through the North East Community Forest (NECF). The measures include access improvements, including the resurfacing of public rights of way, the removal of fly-tipping, habitat restoration and enhancement, boundary treatment works and woodland creation. Options are currently being explored to bridge a funding gap for boundary treatment works to defend the site against motorbike disorder which is seen as a major barrier to local residents accessing and enjoying the site.

Contact officer: Neil Wilkinson

#### 4. Tyne Estuary Partnership

The partnership submitted an Expression of Interest to Defra Investment Ready Fund, they are awaiting feedback from Defra whether they have been successful. However, Groundwork Trust, with support from the other members of the Tyne Estuary Partnership, including the Council, has been successful in securing over £800K in funding through the Green Recovery Challenge Fund for the Revitalising Our Estuaries project

From 2021, the project will see Groundwork working with its partners to deliver an ambitious programme of environmental improvements and community engagement across six of the region's estuaries, including the Tyne.

Contact officer: Neil Wilkinson

### **Theme – Investment / Service improvement:**

#### 5. Allotments

In November 2020 the management of the council's allotments became part of the remit of Public Health and Well-being. With this transfer a dedicated Allotments officer was appointed, Collette Davies. Collette brings 12 years of allotment management expertise.

##### Waiting lists.

There is a significant demand for the council's 1200 allotments in Gateshead. In December 2020, there were 1123 waiting list applications across all sites. A review of this process shows there are currently 1051 residents remaining on waiting lists, this includes 253 new applications received from December 2020 to date.

There have been 115 waiting list applicants assigned to a new allotment between December 2020 and Aug 2021. Where possible larger plots are being split into more manageable sizes in order to reduce waiting lists.

The Council is progressing the procurement a new allotment management system. This software will improve the effectiveness of service and will speed up the process of offering plots.

Historically unlettable plots are being identified with a view to bringing them back into lettable condition. Overgrown plots are being offered out with a rent free period as an incentive to accept.

The Allotments Officer has contacted any outstanding invoices, and where appropriate issued notice to quit. This has allowed waiting list applicants to be allocated plots in the

newly vacant plots. Regular site visits to ensure current tenants are complying with their Tenancy agreement.

#### Allotment fires

During the first national lockdown the Council took the decision to issue a blanket ban on allotment fires, recognising that fires were more likely to result in complaints with residents confined to home. Allotment Associations who manage allotments on behalf of the Council generally choose to forbid fires between April and October. The Council manages approximately 50% of allotments directly. On these sites there is no restriction on fires. Tenancy agreements do however inform allotment occupiers that they should be considerate when having fires.

Historically there been always been complaints relating to fires. The Council is now also progressing actions to reduce air pollution and tackle climate change. It is timely to consider the banning of fires on allotments and OSCs views on this would this are welcomed.

Contact officer: Collette Davies

#### 6. Bridle paths and PROW additional funding

The additional funding this financial year will be used for the resurfacing and improvement of approximately 3600m of bridleway. The works planned are as follows: -

<b>No.</b>	<b>Path No</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Details of work</b>	<b>Programmed</b>
1	Lamesley 72	Access from Kibbleworth Bank.  One section towards Greenford Lane and one section towards Kibblesworth Bank.	Resurfacing  Drainage	September
2	W300	Path through Sunnyside Park	Resurfacing	October  Post nesting season
3	Felling 44	Lingey Lane to Leam Lane	Timber pin edge  Resurfacing  Drainage	October/November
4	Felling 41	Whitehills	Resurfacing  Access upgrades  Drainage	Awaiting quotations  Works to be completed by end February 2022
5	Felling 42 & 43	Whitehills	Resurfacing  Access upgrades  Drainage	Awaiting quotations  Works to be completed by end February 2022

6	Felling 44	Lingey Lane to South Tyneside boundary	Resurfacing Drainage	October/November
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Contact officer: Zoe Jones

#### 7. Cycle path cleansing and winter maintenance scheme

A full-time member of staff has been recruited into this new post and scheme which will include the targeted removal of encroaching vegetation, fly-tipping, grass cutting and removal of glass and debris on the borough's main cycleways. The scheme will also include operations over the winter period to clear cycleways of snow and ice using a brine derived product and applied using bespoke machinery. The scheme will be supported, when needed, from our other specialist teams to help with the removal of waste, vegetation and tree maintenance etc. The presence of invasive weeds will be recorded and passed to the appropriate team to arrange scheduled treatment. The cycle network is vast and spreads across the borough and will be a challenge to service it all, but we will be directing the service to those cycleways which are well used and have generated complaints from users in the past.

Contact officer: David Charlton

#### 8. Dog warden

With only one Dog Warden covering the whole of the borough it can be a challenge to address issues such as dog fouling and irresponsible dog ownership.

The priority of the Dog Warden is to remove stray dogs from the street and with approximately 200 collected per annum, this ensures our open spaces and highways are kept safer and cleaner. Most of these dogs are reunited with their owners.

Whilst the Dog Warden will patrol hotspots as much as possible it is also vital to promote responsible dog ownership through community engagement. This is delivered through the following ways:

- Attending local community events held in parks such as, Chase Park Dog Show where the Dog Warden engaged with community groups and dog walkers;
- New signage designed and ordered for fixed play area, advising owners to keep their dogs out;
- 30,000 dog poo bags handed out to dog owners this year.

Contact officer: Kevin Hills

#### 9. Environmental Investment Scheme

The Environmental Investment Scheme is a 3 year project to invest resource into designated areas and locations to not only improve the current infrastructure and street scene landscape but also to reduce demand on future street scene services and revenue budgets. The improvements will help areas to 'Thrive' and attract inward investment and involvement by local communities.

The scheme commenced in April 2021 and improvements so far have included extensive vegetation, shrub and tree maintenance and weed control. To date, 23 large schemes have been completed and a full programme is planned. Photographic evidence is recorded for each project and is available on request. Future schemes will also include deep

cleansing of paths and decorative surfaces, detritus removal, graffiti and flyposting removal and improvement to street furniture such as litter bins, grit bins. To assist with climate emergency objectives, tree planting will also be supported.

7 local people have been employed on the scheme for a 3-year period with 5 Horticultural apprenticeships being created within the team. Local voluntary groups and schools are being encouraged to support the initiative and help ensure a legacy. A joint working group has been established to help work with councillors and partners to identify suitable task areas and to help change behaviour towards littering and flytipping. The team are also working with our Natural Environment team on site selection and support for tree planting and Walking with the Wounded charity who will help to plant the trees (separate report provided on this).

Contact officer: Phil Hindmarsh

#### 10. More and Better Woodlands & Trees

A new Woodland Officer post is to be created to drive forward the Council's ambitious tree and woodland planting proposals, and to secure the improved protection, restoration, enhancement and positive management of the approximately 900ha of woodland already owned by the Council. In comparison, Durham County Council which covers an area of 862sq./miles, compared to Gateshead's 55sq./miles, owns/is responsible for approx. 1800ha of woodland; that's just 10% of the total woodland resource of the County. Having regard to the Gateshead: More & Better Woods Action Plan, the Woodland Officer will work closely with other Council services and external partners to secure the necessary permissions and funding required to successfully deliver the creation of new woodland on Council land where it will deliver the greatest benefit. They will also lead on the production of a UK Forest Standard approved Woodland Management Plan for the Council's existing circa. 900ha woodland estate, providing access to funding to deliver much needed improvements for both people and wildlife. Once established, the Woodland Officer will also work closely with the new North East Community Forest team to coordinate efforts to maximise opportunities for sustainable woodland creation on private land, helping bolster the efforts of the Council in achieving the planting of 100,000 trees by 2030 and increasing woodland cover within the borough from 15% to 17% (approx. 250ha) by 2050.

A job description and person specification for the Woodland Officer post has been produced. This has been issued to HR to progress. Appointment of the Woodland Officer is anticipated to take place this Autumn/early winter.

Contact officer: Neil Wilkinson

#### 11. Open space and parks events

Community and commercial events in parks and on open spaces can bring many benefits to the local community, the council and the areas they are held in. They promote community cohesion, help local businesses and initiatives, bring visitors into the area and also maintain a vibrancy and presence in parks, encouraging their greater use. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, teams in Street Scene and the Events team worked closely together with community groups, charitable organisations and commercial enterprises to bring a wealth and range of events to our parks and open spaces, with over 100 events held in 2019. Events ranged from food markets, races and charity runs, fetes, smaller group events, funfairs and remembrance events to major events such as the Tour of Britain. There were plans to increase this further until Covid struck in 2020 which led to the cancellation and postponement of a large number of the established and proposed new events.

The events and hospitality industry have been one of the most affected by the pandemic and as lockdown measures and restrictions eased during 2021, there has been a significant resurgence in holding events albeit in a revised and Covid secure format. The teams have continued to work with events' organisers to help ensure that events can recommence and in a safe manner and the number of events held and proposed in our parks is continuing to grow significantly. It is unclear what future impact Covid may have but when restrictions allow, we will continue to promote our parks and open spaces as attractive and safe locations to hold events.

Contact officer: Chris Strong

## 12. Parks maintenance fund, fixed play facility renewals and parks and countryside sites improvement plans

Three new capital and revenue fixed term funding investments have been allocated from April 2021 for parks, and parks and open spaces car park improvements and maintenance. A summary of the funding is detailed below. This is in addition to existing capital funding for fixed play renewals also included below.

Project Title	Brief Project Description	Contact Name	Capital Funding	Revenue Funding	Total Capital Funding	Total Revenue Funding									
			21/22	21/22	22/23	22/23	23/24	23/24	24/25	24/25	25/26	25/26	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Additional Capital and Revenue funding</b>															
Improvements to Access Roads and Car Parks	Improvements to access roads, car parks and parks and open spaces to encourage their use.	Kevin Hills	100	30		30				30			30	100	150
Parks and Open Spaces	Investment in parks and open spaces, promoting health and wellbeing.	Kevin Hills	340	-	370	-	370	-	360	-	360	-	1,800	-	
Parks' Maintenance	Revenue funding to maintain current facilities at an acceptable and safe standard.	Kevin Hills		150		150		150		150		150	-	750	
<b>Existing Capital Funding</b>															
Fixed Play Facility Renewals	Programme of renewal and replacement of fixed play equipment throughout the Borough.	Kevin Hills	350	-	350	-	350	-	-	-	-	-	1,050	-	
<b>Total</b>			<b>790</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>2,950</b>	<b>900</b>	

Detailed proposed and ongoing spend for the 3 new and 1 current funding streams have been identified (although not all funding has been allocated at this stage to provide a contingency for unforeseen urgent works during the remainder of the year and further refinement of cost estimates). Works have been collated in response to councillor and public requests, inspection records for the facilities and the level of use and priority of the sites. Works commenced in April 2021 and include renewal of existing fixed play equipment, a range of improvements in parks infrastructure and facilities and repairs and renewals of parks' car parks and access roads and paths.

Whilst the additional annual funding is extremely welcome, it is not sufficient to satisfy all requests and demands although the 5 year timescale for the funding will go a long way to improve existing facilities over this timescale. The funding has also been used as leverage in bids to help secure additional funding (Whitehills carbon park, Defra Treescape fund) and also working in partnership with other schemes and services including the Environmental Investment Scheme and the Public rights of Way service.

Contact officer: Phil Hindmarsh

## 13. Saltwell park concessions

Early Discussions are taking place with the service to engages potential suppliers in the future planned concessions for Saltwell Park. This will inform the specification for the tender process that will follow.

Contact officer: Andrea Tickner

#### 14. Web and ICT developments

Included in the Digitising Customer Experience (DCE) programme several new online services have been launched since June 2021 that allow the public to report environmental issues. These have included the reporting of graffiti, pests on open land, over hanging trees, damaged bins and littering. This is following the launch of the report fly tipping digital service which has proved popular with residents. In the last 12 months, the public have reported 9,885 incidents of fly tipping, 84% of which have been reported online. As the DCE programme continues, a system to report arboriculture issues will be going live in December 2021 with the following services to be scoped out over 2021/22 - fixed play equipment, grounds maintenance and damage to fence, walls or buildings in parks.

Contact officer: Roger Abbott

### **Theme - Partnerships & projects:**

#### 15. Angel of the North site development

Historic England outlined a proposal to designate the Angel as a listed building. In response, North of England Civic Trust were commissioned to investigate the significance of the Angel. This highlighted that the setting of the Angel, specifically the tree growth, significantly obscured the views of, and experience of the Angel. A view supported by the artist, Sir Antony Gormley. Southern Green was commissioned to examine the landscape setting and produced three options – do nothing, fully reveal the Angel and a hybrid. Subsequent to consultation with the Leader, Chief Executive and artist agreed the fully reveal option was the most appropriate.

Phase 1 - The Highways England scheme to widen the A1 between Birtley and Coal House roundabout has been approved and work started on site in July to prepare for construction. As part of this scheme parts of the woodland surrounding the Angel will be removed to allow for construction of the new road. In response to the proposal to reveal the Angel the scheme will replace the lost tree cover at the Angel with species rich grassland and shrubs. Replacement tree planting has been secured at Beggar's Wood resulting in no net loss of trees.

Phase 2 – the wider site (that not affected by the A1 scheme) – a partnership discussion between the Council, Highways England as majority land owner, and the artist is scheduled for the autumn to progress discussions.

Timeline – the A1 scheme is due to complete early 2024. The landscaping is the last element of works and the intention would be, working with Highways England, to secure the landscaping scheme across the whole Angel site as one scheme, by one contractor. The timing allows for public engagement and detailed discussions. A report is going to Environment and Transport Portfolio at start of October to progress this.

Contact officer – Clare Richardson

#### 16. Countryside sites management

To date Durham Wildlife Trust (DWT) owns, leases and manages an unparalleled seventeen nature reserves in Gateshead. This is more than in any other single local authority area, including County Durham. With the exception of three of these sites, all were previously owned/leased and/or managed by the Council.

The most recent sites to be transferred to DWT are Ousbrough Wood near Beamish and Shibdon Pond West Local Wildlife Site which adjoins Shibdon Pond SSSI (also managed by the Trust).

In 2021, DWT took a management interest in The Folly, Chopwell East Fields and land at Beggars Wood Recreational Ground. The Trust's Defra funded Healing Nature project is seeing the delivery of habitat improvements, community engagement and volunteering across these and two other Gateshead sites.

Previously the opportunity to transfer land to DWT was closely linked with those sites for which the Council had secured external grant income via Defra's Higher Level Stewardship scheme. More recently, however, it has been s106 monies secured for the delivery of offsite ecological compensation that has facilitated the transfer of sites and the delivery of biodiversity enhancements.

In addition to working with the Council, DWT also recently took on management responsibility for 13ha of ecological grassland, wetland and riverside habitat created/restored as part of the new development at South Follingsby, now occupied by Amazon. The Council was instrumental in facilitating the arrangement between the developer and the Trust; and is seen as an exemplar of best practice.

Again, with links to the planning system, the Council is now pursuing the transfer of its Burdon Moor site to DWT to ensure the successful delivery of a range of significant ecological enhancements, its long-term positive management and a reduction in the Council's maintenance liabilities, allowing it to better focus its resources on managing its remaining assets.

Contact officer: Neil Wilkinson

#### 17. Crawcrook park master plan

With support from the council, Our Villages community group commissioned Gradon Architecture to undertake an appraisal of the opportunity and preparation of a number of concept studies to enhance the public amenity of Crawcrook Park.

The appraisal takes into consideration other proposed housing developments outside the scope of the park. Consideration will be given to an integrated scheme which connects and "secures by design" with the park and its community activities.

Further discussions will take place with the council and Our Villages to consider the feasibility of the studies and develop a plan to improve the park using funding available for fixed play renewals along with funding obtained by Our Villages.

Our Villages have expressed an interest in a community asset transfer of the bowling pavilion and bowling green. The appraisal looks at how these areas can be developed to include refreshments and changing and welfare facilities. The council will continue to work with Our Villages in the development of their proposals and any asset transfer.

Contact officer: Kevin Hills

#### 18. Cross Council initiatives – housing

Street Scene services and The Gateshead Housing Company have for many years worked closely and in partnership. To improve this further and to support the re-integration of

housing services with the council, a joint working group was established including officers from a range of environment, waste and highways services and neighbourhood housing managers. Workstreams include; grounds maintenance, tree management, fixed play, pest control, waste collections and trade waste, highways. The cross-council teams have met regularly to identify opportunities for service improvement and to develop plans and implement the improvements on day to day issues. Some examples of improvements include:

- Waste/recycling (high and low rise blocks) - a number of schemes were approved to replace individual refuse/recycling bins with large communal alternatives. The reduction in the amount of bins has improved the appearance of the local environment; reduced the number bin thefts/contents strewn across estates; improved waste collection and recycling rates. It has also reduced bin arson/improved fire safety within the blocks.
- Pest control, repairs and housing colleagues have worked more closely to resolve issues. A more joined up approach to traditional pest control treatment, building repairs and resident engagement/education has been used. Learning is now being applied to inform future working practices and IT systems.

The teams will continue to meet and develop service improvements as part of each workstream.

#### Estate Walkabout Programme (tenant engagement on estate development)

122 estate walkabouts were carried out in Apr-Jun 2021 (69% with customer involvement). A total of 1321 issues were identified, and actions put in place to resolve – the most common related to overgrown/untidy gardens (566), fly tipping (220), trees (114), pavements (89). Issues relating to graffiti, grass cutting, street lighting, general repairs, unauthorised alterations and vehicles nuisance were also identified and responded to. Estate walkabouts will continue and increase in numbers and customer involvement as Covid restrictions continue to ease.

#### Pooled Funding

Housing and Street Scene colleagues continue to work closely together utilising existing sustainable community fund, responsive grounds maintenance and arboricultural budgets to tackle environmental/estate-based issues. Throughout the year, a number of initiatives have taken place including:

- Small fencing schemes to improve security, protect green spaces, provide defensible space.
- Estate clean ups – one off initiatives to incorporate litter picks, removal of fly tipping.
- Creation of seating, tables, patios, planting areas, mini allotments in communal spaces, particularly around multi storey and older persons accommodation.
- Designing out environmental problems by removing/building walls, fencing, planting areas etc.

Contact officer: Phil Hindmarsh and Neil Bouch

## 19. Enforcement

The Council currently takes enforcement action through its private sector housing powers and selective landlord licensing to ensure residents do the right thing in terms of waste. As part of the selective landlord licensing scheme, there was a recent campaign and focussed work on a particularly problematical back lane in Bensham. This has included face to face contact with every household within the area and revealed a majority of residents support

enforcement action against neighbours. This has yielded promising results 4 weeks into the scheme, with clean yards and lane for the first time in years.

The planning and highway enforcement team have been working full time on COVID business enforcement from March 2020 until July this year but additional resources have been recruited recently in an attempt to work through the backlog of cases until March 2022. Cases are being prioritised on the basis of risk to public safety and it is estimated it will take some time to recover to the pre pandemic service. The environmental enforcement team was disbanded and there is currently no enforcement of littering instead funding has been made available to directly clean any problem areas. Teams across the Council work together to try and address issues where they can and are reviewing what improvements may be necessary to provide a service in the future given changing behaviours.

Contact Officer: Elaine Rudman

## 20. Environmental Volunteers

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Street Scene supported around 35 environmental voluntary groups with around 400 active members. Groups were wide ranging and varied from parks' friends of groups, gardening and litter picking groups to special interest groups. Groups were coordinated by the Technical & Development Officer in Street Scene along with support through the council's volunteering offer. Volunteers received assistance from operational teams by providing advice, loan of equipment, sacks, gloves and waste collection.

The outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020 meant that almost all volunteering initiatives had to cease and this situation continued through most of the year and into 2021. With the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions, volunteering support has gradually resumed, and the Technical & Development Officer has worked closely with groups to identify and implement volunteering tasks in a Covid secure manner. Some examples include;

- Countryside volunteers continue to run small self-led task days including litter picks, minor fencing repairs, scrub clearance.
- Friends of Groups have resumed meetings and activities such as the Saltwell Park User Group and small events such as Love your Parks week, heritage and nature walks, volunteer 'try it' sessions, and general park improvement tasks.

The Technical & Development Officer continues to support the establishment of new groups e.g. Friends of Calderwood Park and acts as a point of contact for anyone or group interested in starting a new volunteering group.

It is unclear what further challenges Covid will bring but the team continue to encourage and support volunteering groups where activities can be safely undertaken. Volunteering has many benefits for the environment and the individual and community and our aim is to grow this further. Should volunteering return to pre-Covid levels and with the aim of growing the number of groups, the challenge will be to find the resource to adequately support groups in terms of coordination and technical support.

Contact officer: Kevin Hills

## 21. Friends of Ferndene park/ Brighten Ryton

The groups are currently working towards a community asset transfer of the bowling green and pavilion within Ferndene Park, Ryton with support from the council. The premises are

to be used as a community facility for the provision of bowls and additional activities for park users.

The Friends of Ferndene Park group undertake general grounds maintenance within the park including grass cutting, litter picking, flower/shrub maintenance. The group work with the council on any proposed improvements or suggested changes to the management of the park. The council has been working closely with the group and with their help we have recently refurbished the fixed play provision in the park.

The Lawn Tennis Association are working with council officers to develop a Parks' Tennis Strategy for Gateshead. Local Tennis coaches have engaged with the group this year to launch free coaching activities in parks across the borough. The council are supporting the group to provide a new information board in Ferndene park so the group can raise awareness and promote their activities.

Contact officer: Ian Stevenson and Kevin Hills

## 22. Joint working initiatives - External partners

- **North East England Nature Partnership (NEENP)**

Following recent personnel changes and a perception that it is a failing partnership, the NEENP is to undertake a review of its aims, governance and funding arrangements. Among the issues being considered is the role of the NEENP, emerging interest from the LEP in unlocking environmental funding, the future Environment Bill, and the potential sharing of resources with other groups such as the North East England Climate Coalition.

- **North East England Climate Coalition (NEECCo)**

North East England Climate Coalition (<https://neecco.org.uk>) is a cross-sector initiative bringing the region together to tackle climate emergency, reverse ecological collapse and deliver an urgent and just transition. Gateshead Council is an active member and sits on the Agriculture and Land Use (led by North East England Nature Partnership) and Housing Retrofitting (led by Northern Housing Consortium) workstreams.

- **Northumbria University**

Working with the Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences on potential research projects.

- **National Trust**

The Council is working closely with the National Trust (NT) to reinvigorate Riverside Park and Dunston Staiths. NT are providing experience and expertise to the Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust and Council to develop the Staiths and Park as a visitor attraction, and lessons learnt from their Future Parks programme. They are actively leading on stakeholder engagement across both sites.

- **Durham Wildlife Trust (DWT)**

The Council continues to work successfully with DWT across a number of areas including project development and delivery (e.g. Healing Nature), the transfer and management of Council sites, the delivery of ecological compensation relating to the planning system, and the development of emerging strategies incl. More and Better Woods Action Plan.

- **Woodland Trust (WT)**

Further to the recent transfer of Council land to the WT for the creation of a new community woodland near Path Head, and previous support given by the Council to extend the Trust's flagship 90ha Hedley Hall Wood site; the Council continues to work closely with the WT including in the development and delivery of new woodland planting sites.

- **Highways England and Anthony Gormley**

The Council is working closely with Highways England (rebranding as National Highways) and Antony Gormley's Studio to examine the opportunities to redesign the landscape setting of the Angel of the North. The partnership will extend as discussions progress to include wider stakeholders including Durham Wildlife Trust and Historic England.

- **Land of Oak and Iron Trust**

The Land of Oak & Iron Trust is an independent charitable organisation, working closely with the Land of Oak & Iron partnership which the Council is a member of. The trust aims to promote, celebrate and protect the heritage, culture and landscape of the Land of Oak & Iron

- **Forestry Commission (FC)**

The FC are providing increasing technical and funding support to the Council both directly and through the North East Community Forest partnership. Officers have recently met with the FC to discuss the development of a whole estate Woodland Management Plan for the circa. 900ha of existing Council owned woodland.

- **Tyne Catchment Partnership (TCP)**

The Council is an active member of the TCP which provides a forum for partner organisations to share information, develop strategies and take action to tackle issues including water quality, flood risk and ecological function. The Council is also represented on the River Team and River Don sub-catchment groups and the Tyne Estuary Partnership.

Contact officer: Neil Wilkinson

## 23. Motorbike disorder on open spaces

### Hotspot locations:

We continue to experience reports of motorcycle disorder across the Borough – with hotspot locations identified at Windy Nook and Whitehills, West Gateshead and within areas around Beacon Lough and Harlow Green. All locations are vast open spaces with most complaints coming during the early evening and on a weekend. We are unable to use physical deterrents across every hotspot location within the Borough; nor are Police able to have a presence at each site; however, we work in an intelligence-led way to ensure resources are deployed to areas of greatest harm. In some circumstances, motorbikes will be used to commit more serious offences and crime and be used to facilitate drug supply; however, most cases reported in Gateshead relate to general ASB and noise nuisance.

### Actions Taken:

Some of the actions undertaken to address the concerns include:

- Forcewide media releases to communicate the dangers of motorbike disorder and encourage intelligence from residents to help identify those responsible for committing the ASB. We know that motorbikes are being stored in homes, garages and sheds and local people will know who these people are.
- Deployment of high-powered cameras/CCTV to help identify offenders using motorbikes at hotspot locations.
- Created a database of offenders to capture intelligence and information on anti-social motorbike use across the Borough. This includes details around date, time, description of offender and access points into sites – and helps us to build up a broad picture of trends and patterns to help deploy our resources.
- Information is shared with partners (including housing) to identify if there are any tenancy enforcement aspects that can be considered to further deter offending behaviour.
- Police have issued Section 59s and seized motorbikes where they have evidence of repeated use to cause ASB.

- Disruption tactics have been deployed at petrol stations (including test purchases using the Police cadets – which has resulted in filling stations being given verbal warnings by Police). Training package and education materials have also been rolled out to petrol stations within East and West Gateshead to help minimise the potential for sale of fuel to young people.
- Signage has been provided at filling stations and if anyone attempts to purchase fuel using a jerry can, they are required to provide photographic ID, set out what they intend to use the fuel for and provide an address. This information is collected by Police and used to identify repeat buyers and can be cross-referred to the day/times of incidents etc.
- Dedicated Police action has taken place at various hotspot locations within the Borough. This has included high visibility patrols and attempts to identify and catch perpetrators.
- A Members Seminar was arranged earlier in the year to provide an update to Councillor and to highlight activity that is being carried out by Police. Councillors requested Police and Crime Commissioner to review Force Policy relating to pursuit of offending vehicles and a response has been provided by Northumbria Police.

#### Next Steps:

We will continue to monitor the level of ASB caused by motorbikes through our weekly Operational Tasking Group and will include ongoing dedicated patrols and operations within hotspot locations. It is often difficult to eradicate motorbike disorder, but we will continue to work in a problem-solving manner to help identify actions that can be done to protect victims, deter perpetrators and make it difficult to access appropriate land. We are working closely with neighbouring local authorities and Northumbria Police to explore if it is viable for the creation of a dedicated site to attract motorbike users to help reduce the level of ASB caused within our communities.

Contact Officer: Adam Lindridge

## 24. Sports pitches management

As part of the 2019/20 budget setting process the consultation included a proposal to remove the maintenance of the council maintained bowling greens and sports pitches across the borough. Following the consultation, alternative savings were identified and reserve mitigation funding was approved for a period of 3 years. Therefore, the budget has remained the same from 2019/20 to allow time to develop a plan which would include an exit strategy and a proposed sustainable model by 2022. This plan would include further rationalisation of stock, asset transfer and investment in other facilities to increase usage and generate income to mitigate the subsidy. The plan would also ensure that resource was retained to support the playing pitch provision within existing council leisure facilities.

The plan was progressing well up to March 2020 and Phase 1, which included the reduction from 26 to 14 maintained bowling greens and the transfer of management of Pelaw and Marley Hill bowling facilities, was completed. Phase 2, which included the closure or reduced maintenance of sites that were unused was completed with the exception of the asset transfer of the bowling green at Ferndene park, Ryton which was delayed.

Phase 3 was to be implemented by March 2021 (although later extended to September 2021) and aimed to address the future of the remainder of the bowling greens including the self-management option. Phase 4 was to be implemented by March 2022 and aimed to address the future of the remaining playing pitch stock (football, rugby and cricket).

Progress on the delivery of Phase 3 & 4 of the plans has continued to stall significantly due to the impact and disruption caused by Covid-19 during 2020 and 2021. Neighbourhood Management and Sports Development teams leading on supporting asset transfers and working with sports clubs have been diverted to alternative and essential Covid response

duties. For long periods, sports clubs have been inactive or it has not been possible to arrange meetings and site visits with club representatives due to restrictions or safety concerns. Many of the club representatives have not been able to engage in virtual meetings due to a lack of access or ability to use video conferencing. Other technical issues have also arisen on several sites which require further work to resolve.

The project team is currently evaluating the current position and will be seeking a steer from Cabinet members in the coming weeks on the next steps and timescale to complete the last phases of the project.

Once the project is completed, existing sports pitches will be provided and maintained in a financially viable manner with many of facilities managed by the clubs. Unused football pitches will be maintained to open space standards enabling the continued access by residents for dog walking and exercise. Alternative community and commercial uses are being sought for closed bowling greens and pavilions and there is currently interest at a number of sites. The completion of the project will help safeguard the future of sports pitch provision in the borough whilst offering greater opportunity for community buy-in and involvement in local sporting facilities

Contact officer: Chris Strong

## 25. Team Valley Flood Alleviation Strategy

The project will provide increased flood protection for the Team Valley Trading Estate (TVTE): more than 700 businesses employing 20,000 people are located on the TVTE. The project comprises a mix of engineered and natural flood management (NFM) measures and has been given outline business case approval. The Environment Agency (EA) is progressing detailed designs and full business case approval (to be submitted in November 2021).

### Eslington Park

Daylighting of approximately 150m of the culverted section of the River Team and removal of the weir to reduce flood risk, improve fish passage, biodiversity and public amenity. Low carbon designs for replacement footbridge and new cycle bridge are being investigated. Network Rail is undertaking bridge repairs at same location. The works are scheduled for completion in Spring 2022 with EA works commencing immediately thereafter.

### Black Burn - Watergate Forest Park

Increasing flood storage capacity within existing lake. The EA is investigating the possibility of increasing the lake volume (by 25,000 m<sup>3</sup> above the natural ground level) under Reservoirs Act 1975. The increased lake would result in additional legal maintenance requirements for Gateshead Council. A survey is scheduled for October to calculate volumes. Computer modelling to design the lake outfall (orifice size) is also in progress. Additional flood storage sites on or near Black Burn is being investigated.

### Lady Park Burn

The existing trash screen at Lady Park Burn culvert will be replaced and upgraded and potential bunding works are being assessed.

### TVTE

Proposed flood walls near the northern section of Queensway are under review (alignment and height) to ensure channelled flood water does not damage Lobley Hill Road bridge. Assessments are ongoing to determine the requirement for interventions to aid fish passage in Kingsway Culvert, and feasibility for baffles to control flow. Proposals for potential surface water management measures (put forward by Gateshead Council flood risk officers) will be assessed.

#### Flood warning service

Proposals are in the early stages of scoping for a potential flood warning service for residential and non-residential property owners/tenants.

#### NFM options

Options are currently being investigated for:

- Lamesley – river realignment/re-naturalisation and the introduction of features to reduce flood risk and to enhance biodiversity (challenges include archaeology);
- Coltspool Burn – enlarging the existing pond;
- Hedley Hall Woods – culvert removal, leaky dams and wetland creation;
- Urpeth Woods at Bewick Main Caravan Park – watercourse realignment/re-naturalisation (constraints include an existing Northumbrian Water public sewer)

Contact Officer: Neil Wilkinson

#### 26. Walking with the Wounded

Walking with the Wounded have a health, wellbeing and community based volunteer programme to generate engagement, reduce social isolation and create a healthier environment in the region.

They work in partnership with Newcastle Council and they are looking to develop similar arrangements with Gateshead to deliver their OP-REGEN programme. As part of the programme, the Growing Together initiative aims to develop a long term volunteer programme linking with the council's tree planting objectives. Growing Together will create a focus to engage marginalised veterans and families to engage with and embrace the outside space they live in.

Walking with the Wounded are keen to explore further how they can help engage members of the armed forces community and have an impact on areas within Gateshead. We are supporting them by facilitating space for them to operate and identifying areas for tree planting.

Contact officer: Kevin Hills

### **Theme - Policy Development:**

#### 27. Biodiversity net gain

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a measurably better state than before. It requires developers to provide an increase in appropriate natural habitat and ecological features over and above that being affected in such a way that the current loss of biodiversity through development will be halted and ecological networks can be restored.

The Chancellor's 2019 spring statement indicated it will be mandatory for all development in England to deliver BNG. The requirement will come into force following a two year 'transitional period' after the Environment Bill for England receives royal assent.

BNG still relies on the application of the mitigation hierarchy to avoid, mitigate and/or compensate for biodiversity losses. It is additional to these approaches, not instead of them. It involves the use of a metric as a proxy for recognising the negative impacts on habitats arising from a development and calculating how much new or enhanced habitat, and of what types, is required to achieve net gain.

The National Planning Policy Framework and Local Plan policy MSGP37 already support the requirement for new development to deliver net gains for biodiversity. Many developers are now incorporating net gain into their development proposals and the Council is receiving an increasing number of planning applications supported by a BNG assessment.

Where it is not possible to achieve BNG onsite within the red line boundary, developers are increasingly asking the Local Planning Authority for support in delivering 'offsite' measures to address the net gain requirement. Whilst the Council has suitable land on which to deliver offsite BNG measures, and in doing so secure wider environmental benefits including carbon sequestration, flood reduction, improved air and water quality, and public amenity, the process involved in identifying a site, developing an appropriate scheme of measures, and costing those measures can be very time consuming. This can result in lengthy delays in the determination of planning applications. It is therefore proposed that a set tariff, secured via a s106 agreement, be charged where a developer is seeking to buy biodiversity credits from the Council. The monies would then be used by the Council, working with an appointed delivery partner, to implement a biodiversity offset that provides the required number of biodiversity units of the required habitat types. At the same time the Council, working with its partners, will identify opportunity areas for the delivery of BNG and develop a pipeline of net gain projects. This links with the anticipated development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

Contact officer: Neil Wilkinson

## 28. Health and wellbeing review – future opportunities

### **Green Social Prescribing**

Research and the personal experience of many people during the pandemic has shown that spending time in the natural environment can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety, and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity, and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

Green social prescribing is the practice of supporting people to engage in nature-based interventions, based on what matters to them. Activities include both green and blue environments and people can be linked to a range of activities, including local walking schemes, community gardening projects, conservation volunteering, green gyms, and arts and cultural activities which take place outdoors.

There is an opportunity for Gateshead to further explore the role of green social prescribing and to link to existing programmes such as the 'Feel Good in the Forest' programme ran by the Active Forests Co-ordinator in Chopwell Wood, to look for opportunities in other areas of Gateshead.

### **Community Led**

Support engagement across the Council and the community to understand the actual and potential local benefits of green space and reveal the diverse ways green space is thought about and used in each of our wards. This will help us understand the range of benefits green space delivers to our communities in Gateshead and will provide insight for planning future work with partners.

### **University Project - Quantifying Open Spaces**

Current work involves Public Health supporting planning colleagues on a quantifying open space project with Northumbria University. This involves developing measures related to open space which looks at the health and wellbeing of the catchment population around an open space site, and a site-specific quality measure. The results will provide some indication of the relative need for quality open space and the quality of the site itself (indicating the contribution the site has to health and wellbeing, or the potential it could have if it was enhanced). This tool can support the development of opportunities highlighted.

Contact officer: Andy Graham

## 29. Planning tools/ initiatives

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) are a new system of spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. The requirement for there to be LNRSs, what they are and how they should work will be established by the Environment Bill once it completes its current passage through Parliament.

LNRSs will cover the whole of England and be split into roughly 50 areas, often likely to be at county-level. The area covered by each LNRS will be set by the Defra Secretary of State, who will also appoint a "responsible authority" for each to lead its preparation. LNRS boundaries will be based on local government boundaries to enable close connection with the land use planning system.

The Defra Secretary of State will also produce regulations on the process for preparing, publishing and reviewing a LNRS and guidance on what each Strategy should contain. The regulations will set the requirements that all "responsible authorities" must follow when preparing and updating their Strategy and the guidance will describe in greater detail what they should be seeking to produce.

The Government's overall ambition is that LNRSs will be a powerful new tool that will help the public, private and voluntary sectors work more effectively together for nature's recovery and enable collective effort to be focussed where it will have most benefit. Key to achieving this will be creating genuine local collaboration with a partnership of organisations and individuals working closely with each "responsible authority".

The regulations and guidance have an important role in establishing this, and in making sure LNRSs are shaped to work with the funding mechanisms and decision-making processes that will drive their delivery. While LNRSs will identify opportunities for habitat creation and improvement that will underpin the Nature Recovery Network (NRN) and the use of nature-based solutions to address wider environmental issues, they are not in themselves a delivery mechanism.

In anticipation of the Environment Bill the Council has been working with its neighbours south of the Tyne to agree common criteria for mapping the key ecological components of a

NRN. This has resulted in the production of a new Wildlife Corridor Network for Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside; and reflects similar work undertaken by Durham County Council. The Council will continue to work with neighbours in preparing the evidence base required to help inform the LNRS process. The Environment Bill is expected to receive royal assent in the autumn.

Contact officer: Neil Wilkinson