

TITLE OF REPORT: Protection of Green Assets

REPORT OF: Colin Huntington, Strategic Director, Housing, Environment & Healthy Communities

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the current voluntary and other initiatives and arrangements to help protect green assets across the borough. It also highlights future plans and challenges in protecting Gateshead's green spaces and assets.

Background

1. Following the wider OSC review of the Programme of Improvement of Green Spaces in Gateshead in October 2021, OSC have requested as part of their 2022-23 work programme a further report on the current arrangements to protect green assets.
2. This report provides a full update on initiatives and arrangements to help protect green assets including voluntary group support and formal arrangements with charitable and non-charitable organisations, associations, sports clubs and individuals.

Gateshead's Green Spaces and Assets

3. The borough of Gateshead stretches almost 13 miles along the south bank of the River Tyne and covers 55 square miles, making it the largest of the five Tyne and Wear authorities. Around two thirds of the borough is rural. The definition of green spaces and assets referred to in this report includes;
 - general open green spaces owned or managed by the council across the borough, including estate greens,
 - 28 parks and 120 fixed play sites, with a range of facilities, managed by Gateshead Council,
 - over 20 Countryside sites including meadows, woodlands, local nature reserves and sites of special scientific interest, and
 - the green spaces owned and/or managed by our partners such as Durham Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission, local conservation groups, the National Trust and Woodland Trust,
 - 51 council owned allotment sites (1168 allotment plots) and also including 31 allotment sites managed by an allotment association,
 - 9 bowling green, 16 football, 3 cricket and 1 rugby facilities operated by sports clubs.
4. *Appendix 1* to this report provides the detailed update on the current voluntary and other initiatives and arrangements to help protect green assets across the borough and also future plans and challenges in protecting Gateshead's green spaces.

5. Due to continuing austerity measures, the council finds itself unable to maintain its green assets and facilities to the standards it once did and has increasingly looked to support from volunteers and various organisations to help in this task.
6. Members will see from the breadth and depth of activities covered in Appendix 1, that there is a significant amount of work underway and planned across the borough to support and protect our green assets.
7. Members should also note that there are significant challenges in fostering, supporting and sustaining these arrangements and relationships. Identifying and establishing new groups can be resource intensive. Voluntary groups require significant and frequent support and their structure and sustainability can be fragile at times. Charitable and other organisations also require significant cross-council support particularly where responsibility for assets is transferred and managed by the volunteers or organisation.

Recommendation

8. It is recommended that the Housing, Environment and Healthy Communities OSC:
 - (i) consider the update provided and invite views and comments from Members on the current arrangements to protect our green assets as outlined in Appendix 1,
 - (ii) identify any areas they feel they require more detail and/or have further suggestions for opportunity and improvement.