

Scrutiny Review of the Future of Countryside Sites

	Recommendation	Link officer	Anticipated completion date / completion date	Evidence of Progress Presented to Committee 12 December 2016	Assessment of progress Categories 1 - 4	Evidence of Progress Presented to Committee 12 June 2017	Assessment of progress Categories 1 - 4
1	An overall strategic plan and updated site management plans for countryside sites should be prepared, reflecting the Council's broad strategic objectives and should aim to target capital and revenue resources effectively in light of revenue restrictions.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Draft strategic plan prepared by 31 July 2016 <i>(original date: 31 Dec 2015)</i>	Work is on-going to develop plan. A revised target date of April 2017 will ensure the plan is informed by a new Open Space Assessment (currently being carried out as part of the evidence base review for the Local Plan), and enable proposals to be fully integrated with the revised Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan.	3	A new Open Space Assessment has now been completed and will inform the preparation of the final plan. This will also reflect the new partnership arrangements at the Borough's country parks (see Recommendation 3 below).	3
		Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Initial site/habitat management plans prepared by 31 March 2016	Implementation on-going.	1	Habitat management works carried out during 2016/17 included: Grassland management: cut and baled 10ha at Wynyard Woodland Park, 8.4ha at Billingham Beck, 7ha at Cowpen Bewley, plus smaller sites near River Tees and Honey Pot Wood. Other work included volunteers cutting and raking wildflower banks / meadow areas at Wynyard and Cowpen Bewley Woodland Parks. Woodland management: thinning woodland compartments at Honey Pot Wood and Stillington Forest Park. Water bodies: control of invasive species at Wynyard Woodland Park and Cowpen	1

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						Bewley ponds.	
2	External funding for physical improvements to countryside sites should be sought where these are in line with the Council's strategic objectives and taking into account implications for future revenue funding.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	On-going – March 2018	<p>Environment Agency-funded plans for creation of wet woodland at Wynyard Woodland Park have been implemented (summer 2016), following on from previous works to remove and thin areas of coniferous woodland.</p> <p>Environment Agency funding also earmarked for works at Six Fields, to create areas of water-dependant habitat (subject to local consultation and any necessary approvals).</p>	2 (on-going)	<p>Wynyard Woodland Park: A draft plan for the development of the core area of the country park has been prepared and funding being sought from Heritage Lottery Fund for conservation of key features and interpretation.</p> <p>Wet woodland and approx. 30no. ponds and scrapes created as part of woodland restoration project, part-funded by Forestry Commission.</p> <p>Six Fields: Detailed proposals being developed and Environment Agency funding committed to support implementation.</p> <p>Stillington Forest Park: £18k funding secured from Banks Group through Lambs Hill Wind Farm development.</p>	2 (on-going)
3	The Council should continue to explore opportunities for external partners to carry out management functions and deliver associated services at countryside sites.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Partners to be finalised by 31 May 2016 (original date: 31 March 2016)	<p>Having invited expressions of interest in the various country park buildings two proposals are now being taken forward:</p> <p>Wynyard Woodland Park: an arts collective will utilise the railway carriage and part of the former station house, with the aim of delivering community arts</p>	3	<p>Wynyard Woodland Park: Planning approval secured for conversion of the railway carriage to cinema, to be operated by arts collective 'Missing Piece'. Awaiting completion of necessary works, but progressing lease for part of Station House to allow community arts activities to commence.</p> <p>Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park: Former visitor centre to be leased to Billingham</p>	3

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				<p>activities and operating a small-scale cinema.</p> <p><i>Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park:</i> Billingham Environmental Link Project and the Friends of Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park will work together to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manage the visitor centre; • promote community; participation in projects; • deliver events and activities. <p>Work on-going to develop a partnership agreement with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust in respect to Black Bobbies Field and Bassleton Wood & the Holmes (both Local Nature Reserves).</p>		<p>Environmental Link Project.</p> <p>Billingham Beck Valley Country Park: National charity Autism Initiatives has expressed interest in using the former visitor centre as a base for their clients. Discussions are on-going but the centre could be run as a social enterprise, offering day provision for individuals with autism as well as delivering activities and services which will benefit other park users.</p> <p>Grassland management: meadow areas at Wynyard Woodland Park and Billingham Beck are now under legal agricultural licences with local farmers (allowing cutting, baling and cattle grazing).</p> <p>Work on-going to develop a similar agricultural licence arrangement for Six Fields, allowing the same farmer to cut The Holmes and Honey Pot Wood as a reciprocal agreement.</p>	
		Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Projects / activities to commence on a pilot or permanent basis. On-going - March 2018	Subject to the necessary agreement projects / activities would commence in 2017/18.	3	Subject to finalising the above agreements / leases it is anticipated projects and activities will commence in 2017/18.	2 (on-going)

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4	Where resources allow, the Council and its partners should continue to encourage community and volunteer involvement in countryside sites, helping to support the positive management and development of these assets and benefiting the individuals involved.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Continue and further develop volunteer programmes. On-going – March 2018	On-going	2 (on-going)	The Council's volunteer work teams continue to undertake management works at main sites. 1328 volunteer attendances from Jan to Dec 2016 (an increase on 1266 attendances in 2015) Other volunteer projects were delivered through Tees Health at Wynyard Woodland Park (228 attendances in 2016).	2 (on-going)
		Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Identify opportunities for wider community participation. On-going - March 2018	Groups continue to be active on several sites. In addition to those previously listed various groups are involved in projects on SBC sites under the Wild Green Places programme, coordinated by Tees Valley Wildlife Trust. To ensure the future roles and responsibilities of community groups are clearly defined the Council's Events and Business Support team are developing a generic 'contract' or 'partnership agreement' for groups organising projects or activities on SBC sites.	2 (on-going)	The Wild Green Places programme, led by Tees Valley Wildlife Trust continues to support community groups in caring for local green spaces. Groups at Norton and Roseworth have been most active under this programme. A draft 'Licence to Occupy' has now been developed which can be adapted for any groups wishing to undertake similar activities on other green spaces, subject to Council approval. In addition 16 events were held at country parks during 2015/16, including trail races, orienteering and school visits, attracting between 10 -150 participants per event.	2 (on-going)

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5	All the council's countryside sites be promoted and, where possible, used to host a range of recreational, cultural and educational activities, maximising economic, social, health and environmental benefits.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Develop a consistent approach to signage with draft concepts / designs by 30 Sept 2015	Proposals for new and improved signage at Wynyard Woodland Park have been developed. To be implemented in 2017/18 subject to funding.	2	New signage at Wynyard Woodland Park to be incorporated into a wider project to improve access around car park / station house and interpret site's heritage.	2
		Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Utilise a variety of media to promote, and provide information about, countryside sites. On-going – March 2018		2	SBC web pages on country parks and nature reserves updated during 2016/17. Draft 'Out and About' leaflet prepared, including information on selected sites and access routes. Due for publication during 2017/18.	2 (on-going)
		Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Further develop events/activity programmes. On-going – March 2018	Additional events and activities to be delivered linked to Recommendation 3	2 (on-going)	Additional events and activities to be delivered linked to Recommendation 3	2 (on-going)
6	Explore the possible use of modern technology to enhance visitor experience at, or about, the various countryside	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Identify potential opportunities and project proposals by 30 June 2016	No progress to date	3	Consideration has been given to possible use of an augmented reality app developed by Sprytar. The Council will continue to consider this and other options.	3

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	sites e.g. QR codes on information boards and signs that allow mobile devices (phones, tablets) to deliver additional information.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Implement projects on a pilot or permanent basis. On-going-March 2018	No progress to date	2	No projects agreed at this stage.	2

Assessment of progress:

1	Achieved (Fully)
2	On Track but not yet due for completion
3	Slipped
4	Not Achieved