

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Environment and Infrastructure Committee

5 September 2018

Community Greenspace – Working with Communities

Report by Executive Director (Housing and Environment) (Report No. 18/268)

This report provides an 18 month update on the previous Community Greenspace 'Working with Communities' report to the Environment Committee in January 2017. It outlines the considerable work undertaken to engage, equip and empower local communities to participate in activities such as paths work, project delivery and grounds maintenance.

1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 Public parks and open spaces managed by Perth and Kinross Council are of key importance to the quality of life and wellbeing of residents throughout the area. They continue to be a key indicator of the quality and character of an area or community, and directly contribute to a sense of civic pride.
- 1.2 The Council's 1,600 public parks and open spaces provide both amenity, and (being free at the point of use for informal recreation) provide the opportunity for everyone to enjoy healthier lifestyles. They range in size from parks of 'regional' significance, such as MacRosty Park in Crieff and the North and South Inches in Perth, attracting visitors from beyond Perth and Kinross; to smaller local including amenity areas, green path corridors and small play areas.
- 1.3 With continued pressure on Council resources, it is essential that we maximise the opportunities to work in partnership with our communities on the maintenance and improvement of greenspaces. Community Greenspace have a long, and sector leading, track record of doing this through:
 - 48 'Bloom' environmental groups participating in the Take A Pride In Perth and Kinross Campaign
 - 17 Paths Groups
 - Four 'Friends of Parks' groups
 - 8 community allotment associations, and
 - several local sports clubs.
- 1.4 The Bloom groups are the longest established of these partnerships, and have over 450 committee members. Together with hundreds of volunteers, they deliver over 20,000 hours of voluntary effort on an annual basis. This brings communities together, uniting them behind a single, common purpose; to make towns and villages better and more attractive places to live in and to visit. This creates a very strong sense of civic pride and identity in these communities, encouraging cross generational social interaction, and healthy

outdoor activities. Their success has been regularly recognised at regional and national level for almost 3 decades, through awards from Beautiful Scotland and Britain in Bloom competition awards. Perth and Kinross are sector leading in this within the UK, based on a strong partnership and mutual trust between Community Greenspace and the volunteer groups.

- 1.5 The Council is very fortunate to have so many volunteers committed to maintaining and improving greenspace. The challenge is now to both sustain and increase the level of activity. Starting at such a high level means we have good delivery models and years of experience to allow us to widen out the opportunities for participation. However, it also means that change will always be more incremental than revolutionary.
- 1.6 As reported to the Environment Committee on 11 January 2017; Community Greenspace – Working with Communities (Report No.17/3 refers). Community Greenspace was awarded £20,000 per annum for two years to undertake the “Engage, Equip, Empower” Transformation project. This led to the appointment of a part-time Greenspace Partnership Officer, who was tasked with:
- engaging with communities and partners to encourage them to take on maintenance of greenspace sites and encourage use of these sites
 - equipping communities with the relevant tools and training to undertake the maintenance
 - empowering communities to take on further sites.
- 1.7 In the last 18 months, the following has been achieved:
- **Perth Lade** – this was a key focus of activity, as it is an important and historic linear greenspace and off-road route, with several challenges in terms of litter, graffiti, dog fouling and other anti-social behaviour. With an additional revenue budget of £50,000 for 17/18, we were able to support a wide range of works to physically improve the Lade and foster community buy-in to encourage pride and on-going community action. A full summary and photographs of some of the activities can be found in Appendix 1.
 - **Rannoch Station** - The local community group have taken on the grounds maintenance at this site, which means that this has been able to be removed from the Council’s Grounds Maintenance squad’s work schedule. It also removes a 2 hour round trip travelling time as it is such a remote site. Officers have supplied the community group with equipment and training.
 - **Ratray Common** - Working with local councillors and residents on a review of shrub beds which have become a maintenance problem, we started with the removal of a shrub bed at Glendevon Court. The plan is to review all shrub beds in this area and remove beds of no amenity value,

focusing on the larger beds and re-planting/re-designing where required, with community involvement in each stage.

- Other sites which the Community Partnership Officer has been working with communities on include:
 - Hill Church, Blairgowrie
 - St Michael's Churchyard, Crieff
 - Open spaces, Balbeggie
 - Burnbank Meadows, Kinross
 - Blairgowrie Riverside
 - Letham (Dalreoch area)
 - Abernethy Housing area beds – partnership maintenance
 - Working with Alyth In Bloom on various sites
 - Pitlochry Recreation Park beds
- The Greenspace Partnership Officer, through working closely with communities, has saved the Council recurring and non-recurring maintenance costs, and facilitated almost 2,000 hours of volunteer time. If the Council provided that number of hours of service, the cost equivalent would have been around £30,000.

1.8 In addition to the work of the Greenspace Partnership Officer, the Community Greenspace team has also had several notable successes in partnership working with our communities, including:

- **Pitlochry Recreation Park** – this was a two phase major refurbishment of the main park in Pitlochry to replace ageing play equipment and dilapidated viewing terraces. The local Pitlochry User Groups (PUGS) contributed significantly to this project - £15,000 to the £103,000 playpark upgrade and £87,000 to the £187,000 terraces upgrade project. Further details are included in Appendix 2.
- **North Muirton Community Play Park** – This project was chosen by the community to be funded from £220,000 held by North Muirton Community Council for participatory budgeting. It delivered the community aspiration for a robust but exciting new play park in an area which had suffered from vandalism, was detrimental for the community, and a burden to the Council in terms of repairs. Photographs of the works are shown in Appendix 2.
- **Blackford Community Park and Play Area** – Partnership working took place with the local community who were proactive and keen to improve their local worn out play park. In response to this, Community Greenspace were able to allocate £50,000 of capital funding for play area upgrades. With the support of elected members, the Blackford Improvement Group was formed to help design the park upgrade and raise funding. The additional £78,000 of funding which they raised enabled an additional zip wire and a more exciting rope climbing unit to be included, which would

not have been possible through Council funding alone. Photographs of the works are shown in Appendix 2.

- **Path Group Development** – The Council has reduced the capacity to maintain the extensive path network in Perth & Kinross to the standards users would like. Many paths are on private ground so there is an increasing need to work together with communities to keep the path network maintained. There is a growing network of volunteer paths groups across Perth and Kinross who, with our support, are engaged in fundraising and carrying out practical work, to keep the paths in their local area open. For further information see Appendix 2.
- **MacRosty Park All Abilities Equipment** – the extension of the existing popular play area included a new area specifically aimed for use by children and adults with restricted mobility. The project was requested, and fully funded, by the Friends of MacRosty Park group, which has raised £121,000 to install 5 large items of play equipment and 4 sensory panels. A plan of the proposals is included in Appendix 2.
- **Take A Pride in Perth and Kinross** - in addition to the ongoing success and major contribution of the 48 'In Bloom' Groups to their communities across Perth and Kinross, the groups and their unique 'umbrella' Association continue to deliver projects in partnership with the Council. Current and recent projects include Aberfeldy Lower Birks upgrade, Brickhall Community Garden in Bridge of Earn, Coupar Angus Burn and the Burrell Square Highland Coos in Crieff (see Appendix 2).
- **Community Environmental Challenge Fund (CECF)** – the CECF is a highly successful Council initiative, with up to £10,000 available to community groups to improve their local environment. A total of £100,000 of funding has been made available annually since 2011/12. A wide range of projects have been delivered and for every £1 spent at least a further £3 has been added from other funders or 'in kind' contributions. The outcomes of this fund are reported separately to Committee – the most recent being to Environment and Infrastructure Committee on 23 May 2018 (Report No.18/176 refers).

2. PROPOSALS

2.1 Given the success of both the work of the Greenspace Partnership Officer and the Community Greenspace Team as a whole, it is proposed to continue and expand the work being done within the resources available. In addition to sustaining the support for the large number of diverse groups working in virtually every community in Perth and Kinross, the following community partnership projects and initiatives are planned:

- **Crieff To Comrie Off Road Path** - in partnership with Crieff Community Trust and key stakeholders, it is proposed to materialise the long term vision of a multi-use path for walkers, cyclists and equestrians between Crieff and Comrie. The path would have local and national significance;

and also wide-ranging benefits for health and well-being to the local economy.

- **St Fillans Community Play Area** - This project, developed by the St Fillans Community Trust with support from Community Greenspace, aims to provide a themed play area within St Fillans which is currently lacking in play equipment. The Community Trust has successfully fundraised to enable it to deliver this ambitious project, with LEADER funding and a grant from PKC Community Environment Challenge Fund, together with a contribution from Community Greenspace. Officers have worked closely with the group and agreed the specification and design of the equipment, and will undertake the maintenance of a defined area within the playpark, with the Community Trust maintaining (and insuring) the equipment outside the area that the Council is responsible for.
- **Management Plans for Kinnoull Hill Perth, The Knock Crieff, Birks of Aberfeldy and Rumbling Bridge** – this will focus on the upgrade of key countryside sites in Perth and Kinross, which are of both local and visitor importance. These sites will benefit from greater investment to do justice to the high quality and potential of these natural assets. Site based management plans have/are being developed through local community and stakeholder group engagement.
- **Westbank Enterprises and Shrub Bed Review** – A new specialist Horticulture Squad has been set up with the plant nursery staff based at Westbank in Perth, managed by Community Greenspace. This compliments the Greenspace Infrastructure Squad also based at Westbank, and the Council's Community Payback Team. The Horticulture Squad will coordinate the plant supply and distribution of bedding and hanging baskets for the Council and community Bloom Groups. Collaborative working will be undertaken to widen the range of services and community benefits being provided at Westbank.
- **Accessible play parks** – we will continue to work with communities to maximise the availability of play parks suitable for all abilities. This will continue the additional funding of £150,000 awarded by the Council in June 2018, with opportunities for communities to leverage additional funding from other sources.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Partnership working between the Council, communities and the third sector is well established in Perth and Kinross and forms a strong foundation to build upon. Continuing pressure on public finances and a drive towards community empowerment and asset transfer means the Council needs to sustain the current level of partnership working, and maximise the opportunities for expanding this approach.

3.2 The Council will continue to seek opportunities to improve efficiency and ensuring that resources are targeted at community's priorities. This can only be achieved through effective partnership working which ensures local communities have an attractive, accessible environment that residents, visitors and business can enjoy and be proud of. This, in turn, leads to social confidence, healthier lifestyles and strong, vibrant communities.

3.3 It is recommended that the Committee:

- i. notes the progress made in the last 18 months
- ii. requests the Executive Director (Housing & Environment) to bring forward a further report on work undertaken in 18 months time.

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Approved

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	None
Workforce	None
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	Yes
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	Yes
Strategic Environmental Assessment	None
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	None
Legal and Governance	Yes
Risk	Yes
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	Yes
Communication	
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan

1.1 The proposals relate to the delivery of the Perth and Kinross Community Plan/ Corporate Plan in terms of the following priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

2. Resource Implications

Financial

2.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. No saving is allocated against this project. It focuses on cost avoidance by being aimed at small community greenspace sites to reduce maintenance operations and create capacity for future site adoptions.

Workforce

2.2 There are no workforce implications arising directly from this report.

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.3 The proposals have been assessed in terms of the requirements to manage the Council's Greenspace assets in a sustainable long term way. This will allow the areas of more importance to communities and the overall environmental quality of Perth and Kinross to be maintained to the best possible standard.
- 2.4 There are reputational risks to the Council of reducing maintenance in areas of public open space for which the Council has responsibility. The approach in this report will allow officers to continue to communicate with communities to ensure grounds maintenance resources are prioritised to areas of greatest community benefit.

3. Assessments

- 3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. The proposals have been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:
- (i) Assessed as not relevant.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.2 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.
- 3.3 This section should reflect that the proposals have been considered under the Act and no further action is required as it does not qualify as a PPS as defined by the Act and is therefore exempt.

Sustainability

- 3.4 Through this approach the creation of small scale community gardens, allotments, orchards etc. will be considered in order to reduce the Grounds Maintenance asset stock in order to reduce maintenance operations and create capacity for future site adoptions.
- 3.5 This will include engaging, equipping and empowering local communities to participate in activities such as paths work and grounds maintenance.

Legal and Governance

- 3.6 The governance for the Transformation aspects of project will be monitored through the Transformation governance process.

Risk

3.7 Please see key risks below:

Risk of Council reputation in reduction of grounds maintenance operations	2	4	<p>Establish & maintain open dialogue with communities, user groups and media throughout the process to ensure that the reasons for the project are explained and understood.</p> <p>Ensure a fair distribution of projects across communities.</p>
Risk of inequality of provision within and between communities	2	2	<p>Work with local elected members and communities to ensure a fair distribution of projects across communities.</p> <p>Unplanned reduction in resource should be avoided as there is a risk of increasing inequality.</p>
Risk that communities are not engaged, equipped or empowered locally to participate in activities such as paths work and grounds maintenance.	1	2	<p>Provision of adequate staff time to engage with communities.</p> <p>This will allow officers to continue to communicate effectively with communities to ensure grounds maintenance resources are prioritised to areas of greatest community benefit.</p> <p>This will build on the strong network of Bloom Groups and other community groups, many of whom have accessed the Community Environment challenge fund and other external funding sources to manage, enhance and maintain public open spaces.</p>

4. Consultation

Internal

4.1 The Head of Legal and Governance and the Head of Democratic Services were consulted in the preparation of this report.

External

- 4.2 This report reflects on the high levels of community engagement and partnership working being fully embedded in the core business of the Community Greenspace Team and partner bodies and advocates for the continuation and development of this approach.

5. Communication

- 5.1 As part of the project a communications plan will be drafted in order partnership with local landowners and communities to maintain public open space

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 2.1 Report to Environment Committee entitled Community Greenspace Working with Communities on 11 January 2017 (Report No 17/3)
- 2.2 Report (Private) to Environment, Enterprise and Infrastructure Committee entitled Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust - Service Level Agreement review 2016/17 and Proposal 2017/18 on 14 June 2017 (Report No (17/217)
- 2.3 Report to Environment, Enterprise and Infrastructure Committee entitled Perth and Kinross Outdoor Access Forum Annual Report 2016-17 on 6 September 2017 (Report No 17/274)
- 2.4 Report to Environment, Enterprise and Infrastructure entitled Community Environmental Challenge Fund Update on 23 May 2018 (Report No 18/176).

3. APPENDICES

- 3.1 Appendix 1 – Perth Lade Community Engagement Projects
- 3.2 Appendix 2 - Community Greenspace Partnership Projects