



Service Delivery

8 July 2014

Matter for  
information and  
Recommendation

Title: **Greening of the Borough Update**

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report covers the progress on the Greening the Borough (GoB) Strategy to date and development at Brocks Hill. This follows on from the reports of 11 July 2013 to Service Delivery and full Council 29 April 2014.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That members note the progress made.
- 2.2. That members endorse the way forward for the Strategy and project development work.
- 2.3. That members endorse developments and proposals within the Brocks Hill Centre and Country Park.
- 2.4. That members recommend that the Borough Council pledges support to the National "Project Wild Thing and Wild Network". **Appendix A.**
- 2.5. That members note progress and work across the Borough through the Clean and Green team.

## 3. Information on Some of the Key Outputs and Projects Identified in Greening of the Borough (GoB)

- 3.1 A communication plan for GoB has been established. This is primarily through a regular media release campaign. This achieves positive press copy and radio interviews around activities. Recent coverage has included the award of Natural England's Country Park Accreditation to Brocks Hill (only the second site in Leicestershire). Public talks have been written and delivered to six community groups, county networks and stakeholder platforms. A further five are booked. A simplified public version of the Strategy will be launched by the end of 2014. This will be supported by a programme of community presentations (including all resident's forums), alongside staff and member training, linked to this strategy and environmental awareness.
- 3.2 Significant networking has been undertaken to establish community opportunities to engage with Strategy aims. Links have been made to local Lions, Civic Societies, Multicultural Forum, local churches and Oadby Launde Rotary (who are volunteering at Chicken Alley). Core organisational relationships are now established with the Soil Association, who are leading on a Food for Life programme in the County (working in the Borough in 2015/16); The Conservation Volunteers (who are now based at Brocks Hill offices and also applying for grants to develop an edible food trail around the Borough) and the Wildlife Trust (with OWBC continuing support to the Green Wedge Watch Group and establishing a new lease for their management of Lucas Marsh Nature Reserve). Working with staff from the Wildlife Trust, there is now a borough-wide biodiversity recording programme for Local Wildlife Sites.

- 3.3 A site visit and expert assessment was commissioned from the Natural Death Centre. This highlighted the Natural Cemetery proposal for Brocks Hill was not viable as proposed. Reasons included existing land drainage, site usage and the initial design being untenable. A pet cemetery would be cost prohibitive (due to annual licensing) and subject to the same concerns regarding land drainage.
- 3.4 To meet the GoB strategy commitment to trees within the Borough, officers have been working to support Management team on establishing a new Arboricultural Officer role. This would work within the Clean and Green team and Planning. Tree Warden meetings have been re-established each quarter, working with the county scheme co-ordinators. Over 2,000 trees have been planted as copse and hedgerow at Brocks Hill . Three specimen Jubilee trees were planted at Uplands, Coombe and Blaby Road Parks. These were funded by the Stepping Stones Project following applications jointly with the Tree Wardens. Trees and shrubs donated by the public, and from the established Tree Warden nursery, have been used to gap fill hedgerow around the Borough.
- 3.5 Highway tree planting on the A6 has been investigated. Work is cost prohibitive and will not be supported by County Highways. Additional proposed schemes are awaiting decisions from County.
- 3.6 Biodiversity surveys of Fludes Lane are completed for spring seasonal recording. A volunteer is recording butterflies on site. Input has been sought from the local Police and Clean and Green team for an updated conservation management plan for the area. Bridge improvements have been assessed, with work done for one and a rolling programme proposed to improve safety on others. It is proposed to re-establish a community conservation group in the late autumn. Staff are working with LCC regarding the requirement for a footpath diversion, so the definitive map actually follows the actual path.
- 3.7 Volunteering has been promoted for biodiversity, conservation roles and Centre support functions at Brocks Hill, with new volunteers recruited. A successful volunteering fair was run in conjunction with Voluntary Action Leicestershire during National Volunteer Week. This was attended by 20 youth, health and well-being and environmental groups, as well as groups from the voluntary community sector. Next year's event has been booked due to the success. Volunteer litter pickers are assisting with maintaining parks and green spaces. Conservation volunteering will be progressed at Clifton Bridge and Pochins Bridge in coming months.
- 3.8 A metalwork butterfly sculpture is being commission by the Friends of Brocks Hill for the front of the building. This will be under-planted with butterfly attracting plants, to provide an area of high visual impact and outstanding interest.

#### **4. Brocks Hill Country Park and Centre**

- 4.1 Infra-structure developments at Brocks Hill have progressed. Planning permission has been granted for the barn, which will provide storage and training space for site tenants, The Conservation Volunteers. Brocks Hill Centre has been connected to the main sewers and the bio-disc decommissioned due to it being at end of life and increasing maintenance costs. Rain water harvesting is being re-instated for the site. Drainage and footpath improvements across the site are now completed, with positive customer feedback. A new footpath is being laid from the main circuit to Glenmere School to improve conditions for the walking school bus programme. A full assessment of technologies at the site has been completed,

with evaluations of costs and payback times to get all technologies working. Discussions are underway with regard to a company replacing the wind turbine at Brocks Hill.

- 4.2 The construction of the Jubilee Amphitheatre/Outdoor performance space has recommenced. Results of soil compaction tests are due by the end of June, along with construction drawings. This will be a simpler design that reduces the need for concrete. Once an amendment to planning is received, the project can be completed. Sleepers purchased will be used for benches on site.
- 4.3 A revised habitat management and development plan for the site and Centre has been completed. This was the basis for Green Flag Award and Natural England Country Park Accreditation submissions. A new seasonal pond and wetland scrape have been created in the top field. This field has also been sown with wild flower seed, funded by Stepping Stones. Conservation volunteering days on site have been increased, supported by the appointment of an assistant ranger. Brocks Hill Conservation Volunteers (midweek and the new weekend group) are donating approximately 300 hours a month. Employee volunteering has been promoted, with volunteers from British Gas and Charnwood Foods working on site. Companies pay for this opportunity for their staff.
- 4.4 On June 2<sup>nd</sup> the Café came under an interim management arrangement with SLM. Opening hours have increased on weekdays and by two hours at weekends. These will be subject to review as sales patterns become clearer. The café now serves hot and cold food.
- 4.5 A formal working arrangement has been established with Woodlark Forest School to deliver complimentary activities on site. A percentage payment on numbers attending will be received. New adult country craft, bush craft and natural history identification courses are being promoted. A number of natural history events are being delivered by volunteers from local county naturalist groups with no trainers charge. Family activities have been increased during school holidays, with new volunteers helping with prep work. New events linked to the arts are proposed for the autumn following trials.
- 4.6 The new vision for Brocks Hill was adopted at full Council April 2014. This will see the site develop as “a home for natural history”, with all activities aiming to inspire a connection to the natural world. The Centre will also be a hub for volunteering, training and information, inclusive community engagement and multi-cultural celebration. This will be delivered alongside health and well being objectives, addressed through informal recreation. This vision has been endorsed through the external funding received from the Edith Murphy Foundation.
- 4.7 Brocks Hill Budgets
  - Income is profiling as meeting and exceeding targets (although activities, courses and shop sales are weather dependant trends). New shop stock with adult and higher priced gifts has been positively received.
  - Running and development costs are being off-set by grants. For example, the Friends of Brocks Hill have been awarded £1500 from Charnwood Foods which will pay for materials for the dog-walking shelter, a need identified from customer consultation and the Friends Group.
  - Donations have increased due to the installation of an external donations post purchased by the Friends. This is financially tracked independently with income feeding back into the site budgets.

- Talks and tours are an area of growth with new talks on developments at Brocks Hill and Greening the Borough being positively received.
- Grants and donations from charitable trusts are offsetting costs and developments. A relationship has been established with the Edith Murphy Foundation following the initial donation of £25,000.
- Efficiency savings from wider procurement are reducing running costs of Brocks Hill, from site codes and Borough corporate codes.

4.8 Project Wild Thing is a film led movement to get more young people (and their parents) outside and reconnecting with nature. It has led to a growing movement of organisations and individuals who are championing children to be nature connected and to play outdoors. A collaboration and network has formed that includes the National Trust, RSPB, Play England, NHS Sustainable Development Unit, Woodland Trust and many others including local authorities and conservation agencies. This is now known as the Wild Network.

Children have never been more disconnected from the natural world. The roaming distance that children play from their home has shrunk by 90% in 30 years with time spent playing outside down 50% in just one generation. At the same time study after study shows time spent outside in nature increases happiness, health and wellbeing in children and adults.

In recent years the rapid spread of screen technology in homes and on mobile technologies, is also distracting from creative outdoor play. Project Wild Things concept is to initially swap screen time for some Wild Time.

Brocks Hill Country Park links:

- Brocks Hill's Country Park catchment is over 90% of the population of the Borough.
- It is a robust site for outdoor play, with natural play equipment, den building and meadows and woodlands to explore.
- With an existing family profile it is ideally placed to develop a role.
- We are increasingly being approached to deliver den building, bush craft and wild experiences within the Country Park.

It is recommended Oadby and Wigston Borough Council pledges support via the online form and forum to The Wild Network. Mailings would come to the Country Parks and Environment Manager and be distributed as appropriate. Pledging support would involve no cost.

## **5. Clean and Green Team**

5.1 The provision of a piece of public art/heritage interpretation involving railway wheels at Blaby Road Park is near completion. The four railway wheels will sit on rail track and sleepers on the fence at the Park. The installation will include plaques giving information about the history of the railway.

5.2 Area and street scene improvements include:

- Cleveland open space planted with daffodils and crocuses.
- Supporting volunteers with management and work on the Blind Garden and Garden Close, Oadby.
- Support of groups of Pride of the Borough volunteers across the Borough.
- Peace Memorial Park enhanced through shrubs being planted.

- Volunteer litter pickers around the borough help residents to take pride in their area.
- Borough signs troughs and hanging baskets planted with summer bedding.

5.3 As part of the Clean and Green team work each month transects are walked to assess conditions with regard to litter and also detritus (such as waste leaves). These transects include housing, retail and commercial areas; main and rural roads, other highways and recreation areas. This is assessed against national standards for cleanliness. These are the standards set for N195b (now redundant.)

- In April 2014, Litter grades were 90% A standard and the remainder at a B+ standard.
- In May 2014, Litter grades were 60% A standard, 37% B+ standard and 3% B standard.
- In April 2014 period for transects, the detritus grade achieved was A 30%, 60 % B+ and 10% B.
- In May 2014 period for transects, the detritus grade achieved was A 10%, 57% B+, 23% B, 7% b- and 3% C.

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<b>Implications</b>	
Financial	The above schemes can be met within budgetary provision
Risk	All projects will be risk assessed; CR1 : Decreasing Financial Resources CR8: Organisational Change
Equalities (KG)	Volunteering is intended to reach out and engage all communities within the Borough promoting community engagement and cohesion
Legal (KG)	Need to ensure all arrangements in place are formalised into contracts or agreements

## Appendix A: Pledge of Support Wild Network



The Wild Network exists to champion and support connection with nature and wildness in children and young people.

The Wild Network mission is to support children, parents and guardians of children to roam free, play wild and connect with nature.

We believe all children should have the right to access the outdoors for play, learning, expression and development of healthy mind and body.

We encourage, provoke, nudge, support, innovate and campaign for children, kids and young folk to get up and outside.

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To wander freely

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To look up and around

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To find wonder, awe and empathy in all life

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To nurture, steward and protect

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To run, jump, climb, crawl and explore the world on our doorsteps

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To seek imagination in wildness

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To find inventiveness in the woods.

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To grow happy healthy minds and bodies.

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To find comfort in solitude.

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To become truly connected.

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Roam Free. Play Wild.

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