

Committee:	Date:
Open Spaces and City Gardens	12 May 2017
Subject:	Public
Draft City Gardens Management Plan 2017-2022	
Report of:	For Decision
Superintendent of Parks & Gardens	

Summary

This report sets out the background to, and production of, a draft City Gardens Management Plan 2017-2022 (attached at Appendix 1). It sets out the vision, objectives and priorities for the management of the City Gardens section for the next five years and has been prepared by the City Gardens team in consultation with other stakeholder departments.

Members are asked to agree to the draft Management Plan being made available for public consultation.

Following consultation, any proposed changes to the draft text and format will be brought back to Committee for approval and formal adoption.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Agree the draft text of the City Gardens Management Plan 2017-2022, attached at Appendix 1, and that this be made available for public consultation.

Main Report

Background

1. The aim of the City Gardens Management Plan 2017-2022 is to describe the role and function of the City Gardens team in managing City of London Corporation managed open spaces in the Square Mile, which in turn supports the aim of the City of London Open Space Strategy vision:

“The creation of a network of high quality and inspiring open spaces which helps ensure an attractive, healthy, sustainable and socially cohesive place for all the City’s communities and visitors.”

2. The City Gardens team oversees approximately 200 planted areas of City Corporation owned or managed open space within the Square Mile. This includes parks, gardens, churchyards and highway plantings. Approximately 80% of the sites are less than 0.2ha in size.

3. The City of London is a unique and intensively used urban environment. A little over one square mile in size, this densely developed area is one of the world's leading financial, business and maritime centres. Offices make up over 70% of all buildings in the City and on weekdays 454,000 workers, of whom the majority commute from across the South East, join the 8,300 residents of the Square Mile. In addition there are over 11 million visitors to the City each year. As a result green spaces are used intensively during the week and this gives rise to a unique set of challenges for their effective and sustainable management. In order to guide the vision, objectives and priorities for these spaces, a draft Management Plan has been prepared by the City Gardens team.
4. Over the last 26 years the City Gardens team has continued to be successful in regional and national campaigns such as the Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in Bloom, London in Bloom and Green Flag. External judges, recruited nationally, visit the City each year to assess the gardens against the RHS criteria. The City Gardens Management Plan provides additional evidence and information on how the gardens are managed. Improvements recommended in the judges' feedback over the past five years have been incorporated into the action plan, subject to funding constraints.
5. Over the past five years the City Surveyor, via the Building and Repairs Maintenance Budget, has spent £107,892. Work has included repairing and restoring railings, paving and other infrastructure contained within City Gardens.
6. Over the same period the City Gardens team has also delivered a range of volunteer opportunities together with the Friends of City Gardens, who were established in 2013. The Friends Group has not only increased the number and diversity of volunteer engagement and activities but has enabled the section to deliver activities to school children and further develop City in Bloom.
7. A diverse programme of events activities has also taken place attracting workers, residents, families and school children. An events policy was introduced in 2015 to encourage wider participation and income for the section. Events have included: the annual Open Garden Squares Weekend in June attracting over 6,000 people; an open air film screening; an annual programme of walks and talks delivered by both the City Gardens guides and the City Gardens team; a City Centre exhibition attracting over 40,000 people in 2016; and small wedding and birthday celebrations. All have been well attended by local people and workers with positive feedback.

Current Position

8. The preparation of the draft Management Plan has provided an opportunity to review and build upon the previous 2011-2016 Management Plan, setting out how the City Gardens will be managed and the projects that are proposed for the next five year period.

9. The draft Management Plan incorporates three action plans that contribute towards the Green Flag Award criteria, the benchmark national standard for publicly accessible parks and green spaces in the United Kingdom. These are:

Action Plan 1: Horticulture and open space management

- A welcoming place – creating spaces where people are invited into a cared-for environment.
- Healthy, safe and secure – understanding users’ needs for safe-to-use facilities and activities.
- Well maintained and clean – ensure issues of cleanliness, maintenance and litter management are addressed.

Action Plan 2: Environmental responsibility

- Environmental management – ensure that environmental impacts are managed and energy, resource and waste are minimised.
- Biodiversity, landscape and heritage – ensure appropriate management of conservation and natural features, wildlife, landscape, buildings and structures.

Action Plan 3: Community involvement and communication

- Community Involvement – understanding the needs of the community, involving them in the decision making process and providing opportunities for active participation.
- Marketing and communication – understanding who the main user groups are and using appropriate interpretation to communicate with them.

10. As well as explaining how the City Gardens will be managed in the future, the draft Management Plan provides information on progress made as a result of the previous Management Plan 2011-2016. Using the criteria outlined in paragraph 9 as headings, a table has been produced showing a summary of objectives and activities that have been achieved.

11. Key internal stakeholders have been consulted throughout the preparation of the draft Management Plan. In order to ensure the plan is robust, it now needs to be consulted on more widely.

Proposals

12. It is proposed that stakeholder consultation takes place during the months of May and June 2017, with the aim of collating and incorporating comments and reporting back to your Committee in July 2017, with a proposed final draft for adoption.
13. Consultation will be undertaken to ensure stakeholder involvement and will include:

- City of London Members;
- Other City of London key stakeholder departments;
- Garden users, through an 'advertising campaign' on noticeboards, email newsletters and through the extensive database of contacts that have expressed interest in the City Gardens over many years (held by the City Gardens section)
- Hard copies of the draft plan deposited at the City libraries;
- Contacts within neighbouring boroughs;
- On-line through the City Gardens website.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

14. The production of a draft Management Plan with the aim of improving how we care for, and manage, our open spaces contributes to the City's Corporate Plan 2015-19, notably under Key Policy Priority KPP5: Developing and improving the physical environment around our key cultural attractions; and providing safe, secure, and accessible Open Spaces.

Implications

15. Many associated actions will be funded by the City Gardens Local Risk budget, currently £1,014,000 per annum. The City Surveyor's Department will continue to restore and repair railings, pathways and memorials from the centrally funded Additional Works Programme and the Building Repairs and Maintenance budgets.
16. A number of activities and actions will be supported and delivered in partnership with the Friends of City Gardens and other stakeholders at no cost.
17. The draft Management Plan recognises the challenges faced by the City in the current fluctuating financial climate and seeks to address these in a realistic way. It recognises that Open Spaces revenue budgets are fully committed and consequently improvements can only occur if new and innovative ways of securing finance are explored, including through S106 planning obligations, the Community Infrastructure Levy and other funding streams.

Conclusion

18. The production of a revised City Gardens Management Plan has helped identify a wide range of information on the day to day operations as well as policy guidance in key areas, and a clear vision for the City Gardens for the next five years and beyond.
19. The completion and adoption of a comprehensive City Gardens Management Plan will be an important milestone in the ongoing development and improvement of the City's green spaces. The consultation process will ensure colleagues and the community will have an opportunity to influence the final plan.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Draft City Gardens Management Plan 2017-2022

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