

Frequently asked Questions and Answers

Q: Why has Knowsley Council made the decision to look at a new way of funding and managing public parks and green spaces in Knowsley?

A: Because of the significant and unrelenting cuts that the Government has made to local services. The Council's budget has been cut by £100m (around 50%) since 2010 – in fact, Of the 353 local government councils in England Knowsley Council has been the worst affected by central Government's public sector austerity policy; which equates to a cut of £485 per person in the borough. As a result the total funding shortfall for Knowsley's public parks and green spaces from April 2019 is circa £1.3 million per annum. The Council is working hard, in these exceptional circumstances, to meet its responsibilities to sustain, improve and promote the Borough of Knowsley. In meeting these responsibilities the Council must consider new ideas and take very difficult – and at times contentious – decisions.

The lack of funding for our parks is exactly the reason why we have been forced to look for a new approach so as to protect our parks for the future.

Q: Why can't things stay as they are?

A: Doing nothing is not an option – the budget for parks runs out on 31 March 2019 so a new way forward is needed from 1 April 2019. If the Council doesn't act now, it's inevitable that all parks will fall into a state of rapid decline – or even close.

Q: What has the Council approved?

Q: On 9 January 2018, the Council's Cabinet approved the recommendations of the Knowsley Parks and Green Spaces Review Board and agreed that a detailed Business Case should be drawn up during 2018 to test the Board's proposals, in particular those for:-

- a) The establishment of The Knowsley Parks Trust on the basis that it:-
 - Is an Independent Trust - a Company Limited by Guarantee and a Registered Charity;
 - Has Founding Members and Trustees; and,
 - Holds a Trading Subsidiary (e.g. Knowsley Parks Services Limited).

- b) The generation of an endowment which could be used to fund the majority of the expenditure associated with an alternative funding model, specifically through the suggested sale for new housing development of up to 10% of the Borough's parkland (17 sites) over a 15-year period in order to protect the majority of parks (144 sites) forever. In this regard, the Cabinet published the names of 17 sites in response to the public demand to know as early as possible which parks were being considered for surrender under such a model. It was also essential to identify those sites in order to progress the preparation of the Business Case.

- c) The exploration of other funding/income generation opportunities which could contribute to the funding of Knowsley's parks and green spaces.

Q: Has Knowsley Council made a final decision yet?

A: No. The Council is currently preparing a detailed Business Case which will be reviewed by the Council's Sustainable Borough Scrutiny Committee in June/July 2018 and considered (final decision) by Cabinet in November 2018. There is a lot more work to be done before the Council makes a final decision over this matter.

Q: What is a Business Case?

A: This is a detailed technical analysis of the proposal which will consider all legal, financial, land and property, governance and staffing issues to ensure the Council makes a fully informed decision.

Q: What are the next steps?

A: Over the coming months the Council will undertake the following work:-

- The Outline Business Case will be presented to Knowsley Council's Sustainable Borough Scrutiny Committee in June/July 2018 for review, comments and assurance.
- The Outline Business Case will then be developed into a Full Business Case during July to November 2018 which will establish the Project's necessary commercial arrangements and financial requirements.

Q: How does the proposed Knowsley Parks Trust meet with Knowsley Council's strategic objectives?

A: Knowsley Council is striving to promote the borough as a location of choice for families and businesses. Such growth is fundamental to the future success of Knowsley as central Government expects the borough to look after itself financially. The proposed Knowsley Parks Trust will enable the sustained provision of the good quality public green spaces that will contribute significantly to achieving this growth priority, whilst also delivering necessary savings through an alternative delivery model founded on Co-operative Principles.

Q: How did the Council identify the 17 parkland sites for surrender?

A: The method used can be found using the following link:-

<http://knowsleynews.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Identification-of-Parks-Summary-03.01.18.pdf>

Q: What work will Knowsley Council undertake to further evidence the suitability of the 17 parkland sites for development?

A: As part of its Business Plan the Council will prepare Development Briefs for each of the 17 parkland sites to determine whether:-

- a) They can be appropriated to alternative use (e.g. taking into account any covenants / conditions);

- b) Their development complements the Council's Local Plan and regeneration strategies (e.g. housing, highways and economic growth); and
- c) The developer market is interested in purchasing them.

Q: How will local infrastructure be able to accommodate the new housing developments proposed from the sale of the 17 parkland areas?

A: Local infrastructure is certainly an important consideration which will inform the Council's decision-making process associated with any and all future planning applications.

Q: Can the Council use income from the sale of land it owns, that is not parkland, for development to avoid the sale of the 17 parkland areas?

A: No. The Council does not have any unallocated funding from these capital receipts. All of this forecast income have been allocated to investments that the Council has agreed including Prescott's Shakespeare North Playhouse, improvements to schools and school playing fields and the regeneration of the Borough's town centres. If any additional capital receipts are realised in future years, the Council will need to direct them towards its statutory services e.g. children and adult social care and other priorities that secure the financial future of the Council.

Q: What involvement do Knowsley's parish and town councils have in this proposal?

A: Knowsley's five parish and town councils lease 20 public parks and green spaces from Knowsley Council, six of which are included in the 17 identified by Knowsley Council for surrender. They have been asked by Knowsley Council to be part of the collaborative and strategic solution it is seeking to protect the network of parks and green spaces across the borough.

Five members of the Knowsley Parks and Green Spaces Review Board were drawn from the parish and town councils (one per council). These councils are now being consulted on as to their involvement, or not, in the proposed solution.

Q: What confidence can be provided that the proposed Knowsley Parks Trust will operate in the best interest of Knowsley's parks and green spaces, and the communities that use them?

A: The Business Case that the Council is preparing will fully explain how the Trust would be established, its charitable objectives, governance arrangements, business plan and finance strategy. Therefore, the Business Case is critical to demonstrating to all interested parties the credibility of the Trust to provide the services and outcomes it would be set.

Q: Where do I go for more information?

A: Lots of information is available on the Council website www.knowsley.gov.uk , www.knowsleynews.co.uk and www.knowsleyparksboard.co.uk.