

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	28 th July 2005
Subject:	Harrow's Green Belt Management Strategy
Responsible Officer:	Anna Robinson, Director of Strategy
Contact Officer:	Trina Taylor
Portfolio Holder:	Education and Lifelong Learning Planning, Development and Housing Environment and Transport
Key Decision:	No
Status:	Public

Section 1: Summary

Decision Required

Cabinet is asked to approve the proposed draft Harrow Green Belt Management Strategy in order that consultation and engagement with residents, volunteers, community groups, key stakeholders and internal departments can commence.

The draft Harrow Green Belt Management Strategy is a working document that will, following consultation, be brought back to Cabinet for approval. Effective consultation and engagement will lead to a widely owned best-practice strategy and management plan for Harrow's green belt.

Reason for report

A Harrow Green Belt study was carried out by Land Use Consultants on behalf of Harrow Council, involving wide consultation with green belt interest groups, residents, Ward Councillors and Portfolio Holders.

The findings of the study have informed this draft Green Belt Management Strategy, which advises of the significant environmental, social and cultural benefits the Green Belt offers.

The priorities have been worked up with Portfolio Holders and are subject to consultation, availability of resources and finalised costings.

The Green Belt Management Strategy supports Harrow's corporate priorities:

- Strengthening Harrow's Communities
- Valuing Harrow's Customers
- Harrow – a true learning community

Benefits

Benefits arising from the development and approval of Harrow's Green Belt Management Strategy include:

- Identifies key areas that need investment to improve the quality and accessibility of the Green Belt
- Improves a valuable Green Belt resource through effective management and improved maintenance
- Protects valuable green belt habitats
- Takes account of the priorities identified by residents, volunteers and community groups
- More appropriately targeted resources

Cost of Proposals

The Harrow Green Belt Management Strategy contains a list of prioritised actions against the agreed strategies. These priorities will be refined during the wider consultation process and outline costings will be presented with the finalised strategy document.

It is recognised that this is a long-term strategy and that the delivery of the actions listed will be subject to availability of resources and income from other sources.

Further to the proposed consultation and community engagement exercises it is intended to refine the priorities within the parameters of the Council's medium term budget strategy to ensure maximum benefits from finite resources.

All costs will be contained to existing Urban Living budgets.

Risks

The risks associated with this report are:

- There are limited resources to achieve all of the actions proposed. The actions will need to be further prioritised and refined through the consultation period
- The role of the voluntary sector, volunteers and partners is paramount in the implementation of the strategy. It is therefore essential that the voluntary sector is involved throughout the consultation and implementation process
- The costs of the proposals in the strategy are likely to be in excess of budget availability and effective prioritisation will be needed

Implications if recommendations rejected

There will be no clear direction or strategic planning for the future investment in and management of the Green Belt .

The benefits of Harrow's Green Belt to the whole community will not be maximised

There will be a lack of community ownership, which will restrict the strategies effectiveness and ability to be implemented.

Section 2: Report

Brief History

In October 2004 Harrow Council commissioned Land Use Consultants to survey and make recommendations on Harrow's Green Belt. The attached strategy has been developed from this work.

The Strategy's overall aims are to:

- Provide a framework to guide Harrow's future decisions on the use and management of the area
- Meet the recreational needs of Harrow's residents and visitors
- Make Harrow a more attractive place in which to live and work, and for visitors and wildlife

The production of the strategy involved an assessment of the landscape and land uses of the Green Belt including history and policy context of the area, primary surveys on landscape and ecology and current and future role of farming within the Green Belt. A three-stage consultation process was also adopted to engage with the local community, key stakeholders, local ward Councillors and Portfolio Holders.

The proposed vision for the Green Belt arising from consultation was;

'To make Harrow's Green Belt more attractive for people and wildlife and to maximise the environmental, educational, and health benefits of managing a strategic open space on London's northern fringe'.

Findings

Harrow's Green Belt is a multi functional area with a diversity of land uses. Agriculture represents the most common land use in the study area covering around 41%, two thirds of which is tenanted land owned by the council. The second most common use of the land is residential, covering 14% of the study area.

Twelve strategic objectives for the Green Belt Management Strategy were proposed. These objectives addressed the main benefits of the Green Belt as identified through the consultation process, and through consideration of relevant national, regional and local policies.

Management

Land Use Consultants recommended that the Council engage a suitably qualified Green Belt Officer to take the lead and responsibility for implementing the strategy and deal with the many varied issues facing the area as a whole. The lead officer would work closely with the volunteer sector and wardens and co-ordinate a Harrow Council Green Belt Working Group.

Prioritisation and Costing

Harrow Council has utilised and adapted the Land Use Consultants Green Belt Management Report into a Council Strategy and Action Plan which outlines the direction and aspirations for the future management of the Green Belt, with plans for feasibility and business case analysis studies into the more ambitious proposals. The actions have been prioritised in terms of the finite resources available.

Consultation

A series of actions have been discussed with the Portfolio Holders and a time bound plan has been produced. The consultation process will take on board the principles of good community engagement procedures.

1. Cabinet Meeting	28 th July 2005
2. Consultation with the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum and other key stakeholders	August/September 2005
3. Consultation with the Cultural Strategy Forum	September 2005
4. Publication of Green Belt Management Executive Summary	October 2005

Financial Implications

The current report is for consultation only and costs will be meet from existing resources.

A further report detailing cost implications will be produced as the strategy develops.

Legal Implications

None at this stage

Equalities Impact

Where appropriate, highlight how this decision contributes to the corporate equalities plan, achievement of level 3 of the equalities standard, or the race equality scheme.

Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents

Appendix 1 – Proposed Harrow Green Belt Management Strategy (circulated in the Supplemental Supporting Documents Pack)