

## **Parks and Open Spaces Strategy – 2022 – 2027**

### **Executive Foreword**

Parks provide a vital opportunity for our residents to enjoy the outdoors. Green spaces are central to the council's vision of offering health and wellbeing to all. They provide a calm environment for all generations to relax and exercise. Sustainable habitats provide an abundance of wildlife. The Council works closely with some energetic and dedicated volunteers in Friends Groups across the district and we are proud of the great contribution they make. Over many years we have committed to our vision to develop our parks to a high standard and have made some considerable achievements; great opportunities for sport and leisure at Hartham Common, majestic and historic landscapes at Pishiobury Park and natural environments at Southern Country Park. We have some first class play areas which are regularly reviewed and updated. We will continue to keep parks in the forefront of our minds, reflecting on their considerable contribution to helping us through some difficult times during the Covid epidemic and through our response to managing the impacts of climate change.

This strategy will operate closely alongside the Council's wider plans outlined in our corporate objectives and specifically supporting our Environmental Sustainability, Cultural Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Strategies.

There are still some major projects to complete such as the improvements to Castle Park in Bishop's Stortford supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The next five years will be committed to ensuring our parks remain fit for purpose to accommodate a higher volume of use as our District grows. We are aware of the problems that need tackling such as the increase in littering, these will be managed with a resilience to find effective and positive solutions.

The Council, like many authorities across the country, no longer receives its Revenue Support Grant from central government and therefore needs to manage its resources effectively. Our aim is to deliver cost effective services and explore inventive solutions which ensure our parks can continue to meet the needs of our communities whilst generating sustainable income.

Our Parks will be **ACE; Attractive and Accessible** to all, managed with a **Commercial** influence and **Engaged** with their users whilst considering the **Environment** and will continue to contribute to the wellbeing of our residents.

*Cllr Eric Buckmaster*

*Executive Member for Wellbeing*

## Introduction

Our parks provide a wide range of leisure opportunities and habitats from small local play areas to wide open spaces for walking and playing sports. The following video provides a very brief insight into their diversity demonstrating why we are proud of the progress made to provide such attractive places to visit.



**Figure 1 Strategy Introduction video**

East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) has a strong history of providing high quality and well maintained parks and open spaces. Our corporate objectives over many years have recognised our green spaces as key assets able to deliver a wide range of benefits.

Our parks often form the heart of our communities. They have not stood still, we have invested and grown them to ensure they remain relevant and able to meet the wide needs of which they are capable.

Parks and Open Spaces provide us with places to enjoy the open air, to keep fit and to play. They offer a brief escape from the hustle and bustle of normal life. There are many studies<sup>1</sup> that explore their benefits, demonstrating how important they are to our wellbeing from physical exercise, relaxation, play and socialising and connecting with nature.

We understand what parks can offer the community and in preparing this strategy, outline how our parks have been brought to life and maintained at a standard of which we are proud. We also look forward by setting out our key objectives and focus over the next five years to ensure our green spaces continue to thrive.

## Our Vision

***"Our Parks and Open Spaces are highly valued by residents and used more and more to promote health and wellbeing and our sustainability ambitions.***



**Figure 2 Southern Country Park main pond area**

## Reviewing our Achievements

We must take stock of our achievements to guide new directions and inform decision making.. New play areas, access enhancements and conservation initiatives have invariably been made possible through grant funding contributions, effective tendering and in-house project management.

The Council has delivered a wide range of development projects over the last eight years. These include simple refurbishment of small play areas, protecting woodlands, creating meadowland, improving access and transforming spaces.

Explored below are some key improvements in the context of our Green Space management plans recognising that facilities installed 20 years ago must be re-assessed periodically to be sure that they still meet needs. We have carried out audits that assess play value, check physical condition and monitor whether there are now better ways to deliver interesting and vibrant parks and play areas.

Our Green Space Action Plans<sup>2</sup> have used fundamental criteria laid out by the Green Flag Award<sup>3</sup> initiative to raise the standard of parks across the country We have used these for the last 20 years as a structure to guide our projects and maintenance regimes.

Projects are prioritised from the findings of audits to ensure open spaces with a lower profile are not left behind. Whilst balancing the right investment opportunities from a diverse range of contributions and the timing of projects we have created a wide network of parks and open spaces for our community.

This snapshot of development projects provides examples of work carried out under six of the key Green Flag criteria, drawing out successes that inform the direction of this new strategy.

### 1. A welcoming Place

*Creating a space which, through its visual appearance, range of facilities, standards of maintenance and ease of access, makes people feel that they are in a cared-for place.*

We have developed a new play space to welcome visitors to Hartham Common in Hertford as part of a high profile replacement project. This had been anticipated for a number of years but could not be justified until other play sites had been brought up to an acceptable standard. It was prudent to wait for an opportunity to deliver something special. Planning contributions from local developments bolstered the Council's own capital investment alongside support from the local community to crowd fund enough for a "gold standard" design.



**Figure 3 Hartham Common - prior to new play area**



**Figure 4 Hartham Common new play area**

Increased awareness of the project through working with local users in this way provided further opportunities to engage with local businesses and the media. A shared ambition with residents helped to create a design that met everybody's needs and to deal proactively with challenges along the way.

The resulting space offers an incredible range of play experiences promoting inclusivity and exceptional landscape design. It transforms what was previously a tired park entrance into an inspiring and welcoming gateway. These images from before and after show the wide range of play value that has been achieved and the space now welcomes visitors with open arms.

## 2. Healthy, Safe and Secure

*Understanding users' needs, encouraging them to enjoy healthy activities using appropriate, safe-to-use facilities and activities, and to feel personally safe and secure.*

Good access has been a key consideration in the development of many of our parks:

- Bishop's Park - new car parking and safer routes to walk
- Pishiobury Park – disabled access parking, woodland walk and boardwalk
- Southern Country Park – hard surface paths and boardwalk across lake

Trinity Close is a much smaller park in Bishop's Stortford which had a reasonably good range of play equipment but was ready for a makeover. The site had some access issues that were not going to be easy to resolve. It had previously experienced some problems with antisocial behaviour which to some extent had been resolved by clearing vegetation to increase natural surveillance from surrounding properties. When funds became available through planning contributions from an adjacent development, we were able to make best use of some additional capital investment to launch a visionary project.



Figure 5 Trinity Close new play area

This involved substantial changes to the topography of the site and considerable upheaval for the very supportive local community. The resultant play space, now with an area in which the local community will be able to hold events, and with access not seen before, has been warmly received.

The Council is committed to the health and wellbeing of its residents.

- Fitness zones at Bishop's Park
- Marked running tracks
- Active Friends Groups
  - having significant positive influence on anti-social behaviour, communication, wildlife... our eyes and ears in the park
  - community cohesion with local people working with the Council to develop parks.
  - a working presence in our parks, sharing our plans with visitors and letting us know what is important to our customer from first hand interaction on site
  - opportunities to work in teams, develop friendships and keep healthy
  - organising events for the wider community

### **3. Well Maintained and Clean**

*For aesthetic as well as health and safety reasons, issues of cleanliness and maintenance are addressed*

We have developed systems of well-considered and connected maintenance. Experience learnt from delivering good quality maintenance through successive grounds maintenance contracts and investment in procurement specialists resulted in the successful re-tendering of the main contract in 2020 which now incorporates:

- Delivering a full tree maintenance service
- Working closely with our tree risk inspection management provider
- An holistic open space and play inspection and maintenance regime
- Flexible litter picking and collection services

### **4. Environmental Management**

*Ensuring the way the site is managed has a positive impact on the environment, locally and globally, both now and for the future.*

Green spaces can really come alive when they have the benefit of two key ingredients; interested residents and healthy habitats.

Southern Country Park in Bishop's Stortford is a prime example of this:

Handed to Council by developers as a well maintained and tidy park but somewhat bland and sterile. We worked with local people to develop a greenspace action plan in partnership with CMS which resulted in the formation of the enthusiastic and active Friends of Southern Country Park. That management plan explored what could be done to improve the park and how residents felt about this. It created an agreed action plan of the higher priority works for a five year period. The Friends group were empowered to work with us to seek further investment and to carry out long term tasks alongside Council developed projects that progressively transformed the environment and won a Green Flag Award. These tasks included:

- Defra funded lake marginal planting
- Environment Agency funded fishing platforms
- Boardwalk across pond gabions to improve access and safety funded through planning contributions
- woodland thinning
- tree planting
- hedge laying
- pond restoration
- managing fish stock



**Figure 6 Southern Country Park Friends group**

Transformed habitats across the park created a more diverse and abundant wildlife, this in turn encourages even more reason to protect and improve

## 5. Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage

*Attention to the appropriate management and conservation of natural features, wildlife and flora; landscape features; and buildings and structures.*

Pishiobury Park in Sawbridgeworth had a similar trajectory:

Early intervention by the Council to invest in a Historical Landscape Character Assessment of the park, informed the first greenspace action plan.

Support from local people consulted through developing the plan resulted in the dedicated and committed Friends of Pishiobury Park working with us to achieve some important improvements:

- reforming woodland to achieve visible enclosure of the landscape
- Restoration of the English landscape (created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century)
- Creation of ponds
- Return of grazing, supporting rare breed livestock and a diverse grassland habitat
- Archaeological exploration of the park's history
- annual events
- repurposing of the Osier beds
- boardwalks to discover hidden areas and to cross wet areas in the winter

Local Nature Reserve status and a protected historical landscape emphasised the need to conserve and develop the park's biodiversity and fascinating history.



**Figure 7 Pishiobury Park cattle at Love Parks Week event**

We have made a lot of improvements to our open spaces by increasing meadowland areas, protecting reed beds, altering our grass cutting regimes to leave longer grass areas, creating wildlife areas, improving our management of woodlands, increasing wetland areas and improving the management of chalk banks.

### **6. Community Involvement**

*Understanding the community; a park seeks to serve and actively involve people in making decisions about the site's development; providing opportunities for active participation in site projects; and ensuring that there is appropriate provision of recreational facilities and activities for all sectors of the community.*

All our Friends groups are examples of how we work directly with residents to develop our parks. The Friends of Castle Park in Bishop's Stortford is one of our newer groups who have already been involved in a wide range of activities:

- created as part of the development of the National Lottery Heritage Funded project to transform the park they have
  - provided hands on support to develop events and inform the direction of the project
  - organised annual events
  - carried out youth engagement
  - supported archaeology projects
  - improved wildlife habitats through Groundworks partnership
  - planted trees
  - run health walks / HSBC Breeze Rides
  - supported Parkrun

Each year the Council celebrates Love Parks Week at the end of July with events in two of our major parks, Pishiobury Park and Southern Country Park. This wouldn't be possible without the dedicated support of our Friends groups. The events invite our residents to come and have fun and have grown each year, promoting our parks and providing us with an opportunity to reflect on how important the connection between the community and our parks really is.

We believe these 6 fundamental criteria underpin how our parks and open spaces should be managed. However, given the changing climate and priorities we need to bolster our commitments when looking to the future. The

following sections of this strategy will illustrate the change in policies that we need to adapt to and build upon these foundations.

## **Strategic Context**

- **The Corporate Plan**

The Council's overarching corporate aims<sup>4</sup> are captured in four priorities:

- Sustainability at the heart of everything we do
- Enabling our communities
- Encouraging economic growth
- Digital by default

The Council and partners have developed various plans and strategies which help to steer delivery of these corporate objectives and should be considered in the context of developing our parks:

- **East Herts Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan**

This strategy is being developed from the current working project Action Plan (below). It will be a succinct tool to guide the authority and will contain environmental target KPIs, (net gains for example) some of which are likely to be delivered through parks and open spaces over the next 5 years.

- **Hertfordshire Climate and Sustainability Partnership's (HCCSP) Biodiversity Action Plan**

The HCCSP represents the ten district and borough councils of Hertfordshire, the County Council, and the Local Enterprise Partnership. It formed in 2020 and identified four priority areas upon which to focus its collaborative efforts : Water, Biodiversity, Transport, and Carbon Emissions. Four subgroups were tasked each with the development of a Strategic Action Plan. The Biodiversity Subgroup has been preparing a working draft with an overarching aim to halt and reverse biodiversity declines across the county. This includes an audit of open spaces across the district which will have a bearing on parks and open spaces providing opportunities to work in partnership over some shared objectives.

- **Planning strategy (SPD) and Local Plan**

Opportunities through planning contributions (section 106 agreements) will continue to be important and future changes to these landing within the timeframe of this strategy may require some inbuilt flexibility.

- **East Herts Cultural Strategy 2021-2025**

The Council is currently consulting on this strategy. The vision it offers has considerable synergy with the aims set out to manage our parks: *East Herts will lead the way in demonstrating that when residents, community organisations and the creative industries come together extraordinary, surprising and delightful things can happen that enrich and enhance everyone's health, wellbeing and sense of inclusion.*

It emphasises that partners can contribute to this in a number of roles; enabler, innovator, partner and provider. Our parks have rich opportunities for cultural activities and bringing people together with aspirations to have a positive impact on health and wellbeing.

- **East Herts Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2023**

This strategy focusses on areas that can be assisted greatly through the delivery of parks for people. Wellbeing is closely connected to our health and is associated with a sense of purpose and contentment; it often relates to our values and beliefs. The Council is committed to helping individuals, families and communities look after their health and wellbeing.

Parks can offer access to events and activities for different ages; buggy fitness, local woods activities, cycle rides, community games, Get Park Active Events, scooting and walking.

- **East Herts Physical Activity Strategy**

The Council is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of its community and enhancing the quality of people's lives. We recognise that sport and physical activity is key to achieving this. We want every member of our community to have the opportunity to participate in physical activity in the way they choose. This might include walking in open spaces, cycling to work, playing sport with friends or going to a gym.

From a national perspective this documents also has some relevance:

- **England Tree Strategy**

This has now gone through consultation and the final Strategy is expected to be published in Spring 22. The Council aims to develop a separate Tree Strategy that will reflect on this, explore the services we provide and plan how will continue to care responsibly for a trees and woodlands.

## Looking to the Future

Our ongoing ambition will be for our parks and open spaces to be **ACE; Attractive and Accessible, Commercial and Environmental and Engaged**, inspiring others to partner with us to make them even better places to live and work in.

With these core aims, we will focus on our parks being:

### Attractive and Accessible to all

Promoting equality and access for all whether its walking in our open spaces, accessible equipment in play areas or learning more about historic monuments in our parks and open spaces. We will:

- provide access to more information about our parks and open spaces online and promote the “park herts” web tool
- ensure our parks and open spaces are clean and welcoming with appropriate infrastructure to rest and move around them safely
- review our litter and dog waste provisions and look at ways to maximise the service efficiently whilst aiming to tackle the problems of littering
- ensure we protect our natural assets- biodiversity and sustainability

### Commercial

Finding ways to keep our parks financially sustainable, we will:

- work with local providers to secure income through hiring out our open spaces for vending, physical activity and events
- maximise the use of our open spaces to commercial providers to generate income
- source external funding to enhance our parks and open spaces
- manage the grounds maintenance contract efficiently and grow its capacity to deliver improvements
- seek further opportunities to engage the community in crowd funding to support specific site improvement projects
- explore alternative delivery models working with the local community

### Environmental and Engaged

Looking to our residents, we will:

- act upon recommendations from an independent audit of our parks that finds opportunities to improve habitats and increase biodiversity

- plant trees effectively informed by inspection data and the habitat audit
- identify locations within residential areas on Council owned land where tree planting can be increased
- develop a scheme to offer residents the opportunity to fund the planting of a native tree in predetermined locations informed by the two previous initiatives
- develop verge/pollinator/wildflower initiatives
- provide electric hook up points that ice cream vans can plug into in our parks, providing ice creams without noise and air pollution
- communicate with our customers effectively and promote positive messages
- continue to commit to events such as love parks week
- work with providers to promote activity in our parks and open space which support health and well being
- continue to support our Friends of Parks groups to
  - help us improve and develop our parks
  - provide opportunities for residents to socialise, keep fit and look after their health and wellbeing
  - contribute actively to the maintenance of our parks
  - engage with visitors positively on our behalf and help us to monitor our parks
- find ways to support smaller groups of volunteers where there may not be sufficient activity to create a fully-fledged Friends Group
- welcome community groups and organisations to support our objectives
- Secure economic vibrancy in our parks by increasing footfall and engendering a sense of ownership

Working closely with our residents will be important as we move forward. Local people have demonstrated to us through their interest in our parks and through the increased usage that they value these special places. Our message through this Strategy is that we need to nurture that support further by enabling people to get more involved, with a common aim to make them special places to visit.

The experience of managing parks through the Covid pandemic has brought many challenges but it has also introduced some of our open spaces to residents who had previously not been minded to visit them.

The unprecedented level of use may begin to decline as people return to other forms of leisure and take exercise in other ways but we anticipate that many new visitors will continue to return.

Managing this increased level of use has helped us to review what elements of our parks are most important to our visitors and how we can ensure that they continue to meet our needs.

### **Core Aims – some more detail**

- **Accessibility**

We have learnt that our residents have recognised the significant opportunity that our parks offer for leisure and for our wellbeing, we must ensure that the infrastructure is reviewed and adjusted to cope with the increased future use.

Moving forward, we need to manage and control access at peak times. This may require the widening of pinch points and improved grass reinforcement to support car access to suitable areas for temporary parking. Our clients offering boot camps and events will benefit from this. During busy periods these routes might facilitate different entrance and exit points to manage congestion and will need well designed infrastructure to safely combine cycle and pedestrian access alongside vehicles where necessary.

Some parks with strong heritage or biodiversity value such as Pishiobury Park for example will be unsuitable for expanding hard surface networks. Whilst visitors should be encouraged to wear appropriate footwear, there may still be opportunities for resolving pinch points to facilitate social distancing. The ongoing Lottery funded project at this park includes work to improve the signage at the park's extremities. Ensuring visitors can find our parks is something that we can do more of.

The Council is also supporting the new web based tool for residents to find and navigate parks in the County; ParkHerts<sup>5</sup>.

- **Communicating with our customers**

We consistently offer useful advice about our parks and open spaces through our consultation events and deal promptly with customer enquiries. However, we could make it easier for customers to find out how we manage our services and what we can and can't do to help.

To make it much easier for customers to find answers without needing to ask and wait for a response, we will develop the Council's web based service to answer "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQs). This will include answers to questions relating to overhanging trees, memorial benches and the scattering of ashes along with some detailed explanations of how we manage shrub pruning adjacent to people's properties and whether we allow drones in our parks.

We will also use this opportunity to bring together some policies and working procedures into one easily accessible format. The council has expressed an informal position for example on wild animals in circuses, memorabilia in parks and the use of helium balloons and sky lanterns. These will be formalised as part of the Council's adoption of this document. The FAQs are developed using the Operating Policies and Guidance listed in Appendix 1 and will be made available as a searchable tool on completion of the final approved version of the strategy.

We will work with our contractor to offer a web based facility for customers to find out about grass cutting in their local area. This area of service has always been of considerable interest to residents. The system will offer a postcode search of the grass cutting programme to inform residents when to expect the next visit.

As we improve our parks further, creating new features, updating existing ones and exploring how we manage them we will continue to develop our ideas and commitments through Greenspace Action Plans offering residents the opportunity to get involved.

Parks need to be used and cherished by local people. Community awareness of our open spaces and what they offer can result in a healthy partnership between the Council who manage these assets and the residents who enjoy them.

This is demonstrated strongly in our Friends of Parks groups where residents are able to influence how our parks develop, take an active role in their maintenance and help the Council to forge stronger relationships with the wider community. Where anti-social behaviour has once been a feature in some of our parks, this has improved with the positive presence of these groups. The Council will continue to provide resources to support volunteers who get

involved through these groups and who also play an important role through other activities such as litter picking.

We aim to welcome visitors to our parks without unnecessary restriction by encouraging responsible behaviour.

Our observations are that park users are more likely to comply with sensible guidelines that they understand and can relate to. Where there is a specific issue we may target campaigns to that area but try to avoid generalised actions where there is no evidence of a problem. A sensible approach to dog fouling should foster peer pressure from dog owners for compliance.

An example of this is the way we aim to deal with issues relating to dogs. We work with dog trainers to help educate visitors and have installed dog training areas without banning dogs or installing prohibitive signs

Encouraging parents and young people to use play areas responsibly is another example of sensible communication, creating safe yet challenging play but without the need for restrictive regulations. "Keep off the grass" signs are not going to help us engage in a positive way with our customers.

- **Attractiveness**

There has been an unprecedented increase in the number of residents from East Herts and beyond visiting our parks during the pandemic (2020-2021). This is likely due to the constraint on residents from enjoying any other form of exercise or leisure activity. It is very encouraging that we are able to welcome so many new visitors to our parks but this has created some issues.

The amount of litter being dispensed into litter bins and being dropped across our sites has increased dramatically.

We encourage people to take litter home and with the support of organisations such as the Keep Tidy Britain Group who understand how to 'nudge' better societal behaviours. Other organisations such as The National Trust for instance do not provide litter bins on all their sites, preferring visitors to "take your litter home and leave no trace of your visit". We will continue to explore campaigns that go to the heart of the littering problem for those that choose to litter.

Our grounds maintenance contractor has diverted considerable resources into additional litter picking and increased the number of visits to empty litter bins. Many of our bins are emptied on a frequency basis and we have increased this

frequency where possible. Some litter picking is carried out on a performance basis to ensure that high profile parks are litter picked as often as necessary to meet the given standard. There is however, a limit to the level of resources available to respond to pressures such as these where the whole service across all parks has been affected.

Going forward, we will be auditing our litter and dog bin service to ensure that it is fit for purpose, offers value for money and can adapt to any future ongoing increases in need. This may result in larger bins or a different style of bins.

We will review all the agreements we have with towns and parishes to empty bins on their open spaces, ensuring that there is consistency in relation to their location, purpose and funding. There may also be some bins on privately owned ground or on the highway that should perhaps not be managed by East Herts Council at all.

We will ensure that our cross cutting services coordinate litter picking and bin emptying services and engage positively and supportively with residents or community groups wishing to litter pick as volunteers.

We are committed to delivering attractive enhancements that signpost our facilities and offer a welcome to visitors with colourful planting. This includes our annual bedding schemes and containers, wild flower displays at high profile locations, herbaceous beds and an ongoing review of our shrub borders. These all combine to offer a mix of summer and winter colour.

- **Commercial**

We will continue looking after our parks to a high standard but need to recognise that the natural deterioration of assets requires a process of replacement and renewal. This can be delivered through a broad mixture of in-house and external opportunities.

The Council aims to continue allocating resources to keep the district attractive, clean and tidy and to protect investments already made to improve our parks. We will continue to seek sustainable funding from granting bodies such as the Environment Agency, Heritage Lottery Fund and other partner agencies. We will ensure businesses that benefit from the investment in delivering high quality parks are engaged to contribute toward their upkeep through initiatives such as vending outlets and events.

The Council welcomes local community groups and charities to book our parks and open spaces. We ask for evidence of a well-run and safe event before authorising any activity. Companies or charities proposing larger events that require input from officers and have an impact on an open space are required to pay a contribution to the significant costs of developing and maintaining our parks to a standard that offers such a useful and attractive resource.

Contributions from developers through the planning system (section 106 agreements) should continue to be directed toward the Council's portfolio of assets such as our open spaces to ensure their quality is maintained..

We believe there are a number of commercial opportunities we can explore for our parks and open spaces to ensure we are able to maintain standards of operation. The strategy will provide us the impetus to focus efforts in this area.

- **Engaged and Environmental**

The Council values the support it receives from the community both through volunteer work and through active engagement with our processes of consultation to develop our services.

We will continue to work with providers to promote activity in our parks and open spaces which support health and wellbeing and to commit to events such as "Love Parks" week in Southern Country Park, Castle Park and Pishiobury Park.

We support the parish and town councils by sharing our experience in managing play areas and particularly through an opportunity to benefit from our county wide procurement of annual play inspections.

The Council has made substantial improvements to the biodiversity of our parks through a range of initiatives including the creation of wild flower meadows, ponds, good woodland management and tree planting. These have largely been as a result of our commitment to responsible maintenance. It is now time, to approach this ambition in a more focussed and measurable way.

We will be working with other authorities through ParksHerts to consider what scope there may be for collaboration between authorities over verge/pollinator/wildflower initiatives. The Countryside Management Service are working on our behalf to identify opportunities for improving biodiversity across specific district portfolios. They will be carrying out an audit of our open spaces

to pinpoint actual improvements that could be made; finding open spaces, or parts of open spaces that might for instance have grassland or woodland that could be improved. This data will be sense checked regarding any practical issues or future plans; for instance where grassland has been identified for other requirements such as additional football pitches.

This supports wider initiatives being delivered by the County Council through Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) sub group for Bio-diversity bringing a level of consistency to work across the County and exploring a base line for improvements.

The Council plants trees as part of an ongoing annual programme and is conscious of campaigns to increase tree cover by specific amounts.

East Herts as a district currently has approximately 10% tree canopy cover (4,728 ha) although this does not include small wooded areas and sites less than 0.5 ha. The Council is proud of the work it has already undertaken in terms of tree planting and management of our open spaces. Indeed over the last few years, through our Greenspace Action Plans, we have already undertaken considerable planting programmes in our open spaces, whilst at the same time attempting to maintain a balance to allow the continued multi-purpose use of these areas. We have more than 70,000 trees in our tree stock. These trees are located in a variety of settings such as woodland copses, hedgerow trees, enclosures around major parks such as Pishiobury Park, a community woodland at Hartham Common, an extension to the woodland at Balls Wood and considerable planting schemes at Southern Country Park.

However, as the Council owns comparatively little land it is not possible for us to commit to planting significant new wooded areas ourselves unless some of that land currently used for other leisure purposes is given over to tree planting, this would be detrimental to our fundamental offer of recreational and sports facilities. Any purchase of new land is beyond the remit of this strategy.

The Council firmly recognises the need to work with other partners to encourage them to plant more trees not only for the purpose of carbon capture but also air quality and the general social benefits trees so clearly provide. We therefore expect to work with relevant partners where possible to consider options for planting additional trees on suitable land that they may manage.

We will continue to plant trees informed by the open space audit and by our risk management tree inspection programme which tracks potential opportunities to replace trees that have been lost for safety reasons. Whilst many of our larger open spaces have less capacity now for additional trees after several years of tree planting, we will begin to assess and plant in smaller Council owned spaces in residential areas where there is sufficient space.

We aim to set up a map supported web page for residents to express their interest in funding some of these new trees to help increase this valuable contribution to sustainability and climate control. This may be to remember a loved one or simply to demonstrate commitment. Volunteer planting will still be undertaken by our Friends Groups



**Figure 8 Buryfield Local Park**

## Key Actions

The strategy is supported by an annual action plan that will be revised in line with the Council's corporate plan refresh.

| Ref                              | Action   | When    | Who                   | Resource               |
|----------------------------------|--|---------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Accessible and Attractive</b> |  |         |                       |                        |
| 1                                | Create and maintain a comprehensive library of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)   | 2021    | EHC                   | Operations             |
| 2                                | Work with our contractor; to offer a web based facility for customers to find out about grass cutting in their local area  | 2022    | EHC                   | Glendale               |
| 3                                | Promote the "park herts" web tool  | 2022    | EHC                   | Comms                  |
| 4                                | Work with providers to promote activity in our parks and open space which support health and well being  | 2022-27 | EHC                   | Operations / Providers |
| 5                                | Complete litter and dog waste bin review   | 2022    | EHC                   | Operations             |
| 6                                | Coordinate litter functions across services  | 2023    | EHC                   | Operations / Waste     |
| 7                                | Take the lessons learnt through developing our major and larger parks to smaller open spaces, ensuring that the Green Flag concept of a good park is used to continue developing a network of accessible and attractive green spaces across the district | 2022-27 | EHC                   | Operations             |
| <b>Commercial</b>                |  |         |                       |                        |
| 8                                | Work with local providers to secure income through hiring out our open spaces for vending, physical activity and events  | 2022    | EHC/<br>Provider<br>s | Operations / Providers |
| 9                                | Explore alternative delivery models  | 2022    | EHC                   | Operations             |

| Ref                              | Action   | When    | Who            | Resource              |
|----------------------------------|--|---------|----------------|-----------------------|
| 10                               | Review all third party users and identify potential users to ensure that access improvements meet needs and to secure appropriate financial contributions toward maintaining parks as an asset | 2023    | EHC            | Operations / External |
| <b>Environmental and Engaged</b> |  |         |                |                       |
| 11                               | Continue to provide support to our Friends of Parks groups through our partnership arrangements with the Countryside Management Service  | 2022-27 | EHC / CMS      | Revenue Budget        |
| 12                               | Actively work to find ways of delivering the maintenance of our parks and open spaces to improve biodiversity and sustainability   | 2023-27 | EHC            | Revenue Budget        |
| 13                               | Act upon recommendations from an independent audit of our parks that finds opportunities to improve habitats and increase biodiversity   | 2022-27 | EHC / CMS      | Operations / External |
| 14                               | Plant trees informed by inspection data and the habitat audit  | 2022-27 | EHC / CMS      | Revenue Budget        |
| 15                               | Identify locations within residential areas on Council owned land where native tree planting can be increased and develop a scheme to offer residents the opportunity to help fund this        | 2023    |                | Operations            |
| 16                               | Develop verge/pollinator/wildflower initiatives  | 2022-27 | EHC / CMS/HC C | Operations / External |
| 17                               | Provide electric hook up points that ice cream vans can plug into in our parks, providing ice creams without noise and air pollution   | 2022    | EHC            | Operations            |
| 18                               | Manage and develop the grounds maintenance contract efficiently  | 2022-27 | EHC            | Operations            |
| 19                               | Deliver Lottery funded improvements at Castle Park, Bishop's Stortford   | 2021-23 | EHC            | NLHF / Capital / CMS  |
| 20                               | Apply for National Lottery Heritage Fund grant to improve Hertford Castle Grounds  | 2021    | EHC            | Operations / CMS      |

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Some national studies relating to Parks and Open Spaces

<https://www.parksmanagement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Revaluating-Parks-and-Green-Spaces-Report.pdf>

[https://www.parksmanagement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/improving\\_access\\_to\\_greenpace\\_2020\\_review.pdf](https://www.parksmanagement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/improving_access_to_greenpace_2020_review.pdf)

<https://www.parksmanagement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/the-value-of-public-space1.pdf>

<https://www.parksmanagement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/recreating-parks.pdf>

<https://www.parksmanagement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/managing-public-parks-during-covid-19-final-1.pdf>

<https://www.parksmanagement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/making-parks-count-compressed-document.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Green Space Action Plans

<https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/sports-leisure-parks/how-we-look-after-our-parks-open-spaces>

<sup>3</sup>Green Flag Award

<https://www.greenflagaward.org/>

<sup>4</sup>Corporate priorities

<https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/about-east-herts-0/vision-and-corporate-priorities>

<sup>5</sup>ParkHerts web based tool

<https://www.parksherts.co.uk/>

<sup>6</sup>Planning for Dog Ownership in New Developments: Reducing Conflict – Adding Value

<https://documents.hants.gov.uk/ccbs/countryside/planningfordogownership.pdf>

## **Appendix 1** - Operating Policies and Guidance

See separate document